

PUBLIC PEDAGOGY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE JOURNEY TO CREATING A
WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT
INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT LEARNING

by

Celina Bley, B.A., M.A.

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Committee Members:

Michael P. O'Malley, Chair

Joellen Coryell

Sarah Nelson

Robert F. Reardon

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DEDICATION

For Carmen and Olivia- the love of my life and my heart and soul; you know who is which.

For Bernhard, Tito and Tita- who lovingly nurture our girls, especially during my tumultuous journey away from them and towards a Ph.D.

For Hispanic women everywhere- when I began my graduate studies, and sadly still upon completion, there were not enough of us to have a “base figure to meet statistical standards for reliability of a derived figure” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0228.pdf>) in order to be represented as Hispanic women who have obtained professional or doctorate degrees. This is for all of us: nuestras mamas, tias, abuelas, amigas, y hijas. Juntos podemos mejorar nuestra realidad para un Mundo más acertado.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find out how a school system, as a site of public pedagogy, can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents support parental involvement.

Research Method

A qualitative method using a case-study approach was used. The within-site case was a public school district in Texas. Participants were parents, principals, and parent community liaisons of the district. Focus groups were used for all participants and data from the district parent survey and the researcher's reflection journal were used. Lichtman's (2006) three C's of data analysis (codes, categories, and concepts) were used on all data sets and were triangulated to increase trustworthiness.

Findings

The findings suggest that parents do associate a welcoming environment with parental involvement and support parental involvement. The results of this study strongly support the school district using a concept model, such as the one developed from this research, to design and improve on four measures to systematically create a welcoming environment. They are: systematic communication, customer service training, providing key personnel, and explaining organizational policies, guidelines, rules and norms.

Implications for Research and Practice

Recommendations for usage of the concept model are given as well as recommendations for further research into the role of the classroom teacher in providing a welcoming environment in order for school districts and campuses to effectively work together with parents to meet the needs of their children.

Key Words: parental involvement, welcoming environment, concept model, schools, Latino

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH TOPIC

This qualitative research study seeks to explore if parents connect a welcoming environment with parental involvement and how a school district can systematically create that environment. The study was conducted at a school district with a history of parental distrust where parent involvement strategies were part of a district-wide effort attributed to a change in leadership. After a year of implementing strategies, an initial parent survey found that of the 19% of district parents taking the survey, 94% felt welcome in the school (Appendix A). Few parents noted that they volunteer and six months after the survey data were collected many parents still noted during district parent meetings that they don't feel welcome or that they have a sense of unease at the campuses. This study seeks to find out how a district can work together with parents to create a welcoming environment, understand if parents support parental involvement, and discover if parents have a sense of belonging at the school. It is the goal of this study that the findings herein can lead to a systematic approach to parental involvement for school districts.

Background

The school district being studied has a documented history of parental distrust, is located in Texas and serves over 11, 800 students on 15 campuses in rural, suburban, and inner city areas. Students are classified as 85% Hispanic, 10% Black, 5% White, 86% Economically Disadvantaged, 34% Mobile, and 33% are English language learners. The school district has over 1, 450 employees of which over 722 are teachers. Of those teachers, 64% are White, 29% are Hispanic, and 4% are Black (Academic Excellence Indicator System of Texas, 2012).

After a change in leadership at both the school board and administrator levels, parental involvement decisions continued to be focused at the campus level and some school board members continued to note that parents did not feel welcome. The researcher in this study advocated for district level involvement by having parent community liaisons supervised by both a campus administrator and a district coordinator and not solely at the campus level. Some parent community liaisons had noted that they were being used more as an additional office assistant and not as a liaison working on behalf of parents. Permission was granted to include district-level coordination of the parent involvement efforts and dual supervision of the parent community liaisons and the researcher of this study thus began a district-wide parental involvement effort that includes planning and assessment of the district's parent involvement program.

Bias

Noting that said researcher above is myself, I have worked for the school district in this study for the past ten years. Before taking on the district-wide efforts in parental involvement my worked centered on coordinating the internal and external communications of the district and partnerships with external agencies who work to provide services to students and their families. My belief that I knew how to work to improve the parental involvement engagement program came from my studies in adult education, my studies through my doctoral program, and my experience in schools and with people.

I have worked as a public school administrator for the past 14 years and am, therefore, comfortable in schools. As an administrator I have a certain amount of positional power that allows me access to people, places, and data. As the director of the

district-wide parental involvement program I am able to program plan around current and relevant strategies that pertain to parent involvement and am able to directly affect movement in funding and support of these strategies.

I am also the parent of two elementary-aged children and play an active role in their education. Due to my full-time work schedule and research studies in a doctoral program I am rarely at my own children's school and practice home discussion as my main strategy of parental involvement. I personally believe that home discussion is the most important strategy a parent can utilize for parental involvement and advocate for it with friends, family, and the people I interact with in my communities.

Central Theme

The central theme of this study is parental involvement. Scholarly literature suggests that parental involvement does assist with student achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). One form of involvement by parents is home discussions and researchers have also found that schools have a marginal effect on home discussions as a form of parental involvement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996) yet these home discussions (which include parent aspirations and expectations) have the highest impact on achievement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). Those findings coincide with additional literature amongst scholars who believe parental involvement must be voluntary to be effective (Jeynes, 2012) and has the greatest opportunity for success where schools work with parents to become involved (Hughes & Black, 2002). While voluntary parental engagement (not a specific program promoted by a school) such as home discussion does have a major impact, school-initiated programs that are encouraged and developed by both teachers and parents also

see positive educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2012). School districts can work towards these positive educational outcomes and parental involvement opportunities beginning with providing a welcoming environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out how a school system can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents support parental involvement. If we cannot answer this question then we cannot improve on parent involvement. This is a practical problem that school districts must address as community and parent involvement are now part of the state accountability system (alongside both curricular and financial ratings) that was implemented in the summer of 2013.

Need for the Study

This study is quite timely in that parental involvement has been included as an evaluative tool under the new State of Texas accountability system. Under House Bill 5 that was passed by the Texas Legislature in 2013, a new section of accountability entitled: *Community and Student Engagement* was added that includes community and parental involvement as an indicator of which to rate school districts and schools (Texas Education Code, 2013). This rating of either: Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or Unacceptable must be determined by each local school district individually and the rubric used must rate both the school district as a whole and each individual campus within the school district. Each school district is required to form a local committee to develop criteria for this performance area (community and parental involvement being one of nine new indicators that each school district will be charged with evaluating) and post the ratings each year on their school district and campus websites. Community and Student

Engagement under House Bill 5 also requires the Texas Education Commissioner to report this rating alongside both the academic performance ratings and the district financial accountability rating.

This new law is a very large-scale real-world experiment that is taking place right now in education as the new law began with the 2013-2014 school year. Educators have been given the chance to seriously address the issue of accountability in order to prove that it can be done at the local level in a responsible and ethical manner. This is the first time in over two decades that local control has been given back to school districts to rate themselves. Since the inception of high-stakes testing in the State of Texas, public education accountability standards have taken a top down approach, using numerous quantitative metrics to measure student, campus, and district success (Texas Education Code, 2013).

In 1993, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 7, which mandated the creation of accountability standards that evaluated and rated school districts and campuses through statewide testing of all public school children. As Vasquez-Helig (2011) notes, this theory of high-stakes testing assumes that districts, schools and students held accountable to these measures would automatically increase scores because educators would give more effort, schools and districts would adopt more effective methods, and students, therefore, would learn more.

Since its inception, high-stakes testing critics have warned that these ratings would become the only tool students, teachers, campuses, districts, and even states would be rated on. They were correct and local school districts, parents, and educators started filing resolutions in 2012 asking the Texas State Legislature for locally set and

community based accountability standards on which to assess their schools and student success. The school district in this research study is no exception and, like many school districts in Texas, passed a resolution on September 18, 2012 asking for the legislature to re-examine the public school accountability. The school board noted, specifically that

...only by developing new capacities and conditions in districts and schools, and the communities in which they are embedded, and by engaging parents in meaningful ways as partners in this effort, will we ensure that all learning spaces foster and celebrate innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication and critical thinking....

and asked the Legislature to develop a system with multiple accountabilities (Appendix B).

The Legislature listened and the Community and Student Engagement accountability standard was instituted in the summer of 2013. Community and parental involvement, along with the fine arts, wellness and physical education, 21st century workforce development, second language acquisition, digital learning environment, dropout prevention strategies, educational programs for gifted and talented students, and record of district and campus compliance with statutory reporting and policy requirements became the nine engagement indicators used for school districts to evaluate and develop criteria in order to rate both the district and individual campuses.

School districts now have the chance to honestly evaluate their efforts based on local priorities within each measure, by designing a local committee of students, parents, community stakeholders, teachers, school staff, administrators, school board members, and the superintendent. This process of new accountability standards, when done in a

serious manner, can serve as a real alternative to the top-down, high-stakes, and one test fits all students standard currently in place.

School district leaders must hold one another accountable for these honest and real discussions that need to take place, rather than rubber-stamping excellence in all measures. The school district in this study is committed to trying to take this new endeavor seriously in order to prove to the legislature and the community that they can monitor themselves and accurately report to their stakeholders the essence of education within their district. Community and parental involvement was already a local priority that is now reflective of the State's initiative.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this study is how does a school district, as a site of public pedagogy, systematically create a welcoming environment that supports parental involvement?

The sub questions of the study are

1. What does it take to make a parent feel welcome?
2. What system characteristics support helping parents to feel welcome?
3. How do these characteristics support parental involvement?

Objectives of the Study

The researcher believes that a school system must work to address parental involvement by involving parents, which could include providing a more welcoming environment. The objectives of this study are to (a) understand what it takes to make a parent feel welcome, (b) determine how this can be designed on a systems level, and (c)

ascertain if there is a connection between the intensity of parental involvement and the presence of a welcoming environment.

Definition of Terms

Binary thinking- dualistic thinking that sees the world as having either one or the other such as black/white, have/have not, right/wrong, for/against, they/us, etc., (Lightfoot, 2004).

Cultural Responsibility- much of the literature suggests that parental involvement is influenced by factors such as family social class, level of parental education and achievement of students (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). This is an important fact for schools and teachers to take note of. Cultural responsibility allows for teachers and school staff to understand and respect the families where they are in order to support student learning, because if where they are does not match teacher or campus norms, distorted ideas on how to engage in parental involvement and limited roles for parents arise (Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Guerra & Nelson, 2010).

Deficit Thinking- as Valencia (1997) notes, educational deficit thinking is when school staff view poor and working class children and their families (often minorities) as primarily responsible for school failure because of their perception that students' life experiences within their groups will result in negative outcomes in life. Parents were described by school staff and teachers as either doing/not doing parental involvement when, in fact, many parents, when asked, were participating based on their own beliefs of what constitutes parental involvement (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004).

Home Discussion- a form of parental involvement where parents have home discussions with their child, which include parent aspirations and expectations. This form of parental involvement has been found to have the highest impact on achievement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012) because the traditional form of parental involvement, volunteering at the school, benefits the school and not the parents (Lightfoot, 2004).

Parent Community Liaison- a district-wide paid position in all schools that serves as a resource for schools and families in the establishment of effective home-school partnerships for student learning and achievement as defined by Sanders (2008).

Parental Involvement- a broad definition of parental involvement as issued from the United States government under United Code of Law (USCS 7801.32) is “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication, involving student learning and other school activities.” Lightfoot (2004) noted that the term parental involvement has social power implications that must be understood in order to “create truly transformative educational processes” (p. 92). Many of the definitions found in the literature that is used in schools also reflect White middle-class cultural capital, such as volunteering in schools or serving on a parent organization, which are not reflective of the school district community that is served in this study (Lightfoot, 2004). Jeynes (2012) defined parental involvement as “parent participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (p. 717).

Pedagogy- “the mechanisms and interactions that enable an individual’s capacity to learn” (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 143).

Public Pedagogy- “learning beyond formal school and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites and institutions such as libraries” (Sandlin, O’Malley, & Burdick, 2011, p. 339). Dentith and Brady (1999) further noted that public pedagogy can be situated within and beyond institutional structures.

Teachers- school personnel who hold a professional educator certificate and are primarily responsible for providing instruction to students in curriculum areas (Tacchi, 2013).

Title 1- federal legislation with the stated purpose "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (sec. 1001).

Voluntary Parental Involvement- parental involvement that does not take place as part of an identified school program, such as home discussion (Jeynes, 2012).

Welcome- the degree to which a parent or family is made to feel comfortable, that they belong, and that their opinions and beliefs are valued (Guerra & Nelson, 2010).

II. THE LITERATURE

How does a school district systematically create a welcoming environment in order to improve parental involvement? This study seeks to discover how a school system, as a site of public pedagogy, can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents respond to a welcoming environment with support of parental involvement. For this purpose, the literature will be broken down into four sections. The first section will focus on the theoretical framework of the study. The second section will outline the literature on parental involvement, the third section will address systems building in a school district, and the fourth section discusses trust. This review will conclude with a synopsis of knowledge learned from this literature review that is specific to the school district organization being studied.

Critical Public Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

This study will use the theoretical framework of a critically grounded public pedagogy as a lens to guide data collection and interpretation. Giroux (1992), a prolific scholar of public pedagogy, argued that the majority of learning takes place outside of the classroom and that educators and scholars must take note of the cultural and social implications of such teaching and learning in these very common public spheres. Critical theory is a theoretical framework that looks at how power is distributed across issues of difference such as race/ethnicity, culture, language, and gender, sexual identity, socio-economic status, and others. A critical public pedagogy offers a solid theoretical ground for investigating pedagogical dimensions and opportunities within the social institution of the public school.

Public Pedagogy

Public Pedagogy has been defined as “learning beyond formal school and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites and institutions such as libraries” (Sandlin, O’Malley, & Burdick, 2011, p. 339). Taylor, McKinley Parrish, and Banz (2010) also define it as a “third space” which meets the “human need to connect with others in settings that are neither home nor work” (p. 9). It is a particular form of pedagogy, itself defined as “the mechanisms and interactions that enable an individual’s capacity to learn” (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 143).

From the definitions listed above, public pedagogy can be thought of in concrete terms as learning in public spaces. Public schools are one example of democratic public spaces that represent a shared cultural commons, within which pedagogical processes far exceed the formal teaching and learning associated with the explicit curricula focused on student academic indicators. As a social institution, the public school acts as an informal site of learning for broader publics, including parents and families, community organizations, local citizens, and media, among others. The unique trajectory of inquiry opened in this case by a public pedagogy framework lies in its assumptions that 1) the school’s perspective and actions related to parental involvement is itself educative of larger constituencies and 2) how the educational meanings inherent in a school’s public pedagogy of parental involvement are internalized, reconfigured, and mobilized by public citizens, such as parents, needs to be understood (Sandlin et al., 2011). Thus, the public school setting becomes a space of inquiry in which the school’s pedagogical intent regarding parental involvement might be both illuminated and subsequently expanded and/or contested by parents who experience it.

Dentith and Brady (1999) noted that public pedagogy can be situated both within and beyond institutional structures. It is in the community that pedagogical effects take shape, and so the knowing and learning experienced by parents in relation to the school's pedagogy of parental involvement becomes a fertile area for social inquiry. Brady (2006) posits that learners in third spaces, such as parents located between the social institutions of the school and family as well as the socio-cultural dynamics of the larger society, are able to disrupt their own thinking and become critically reflective. This process allows learners to move beyond the reception of particular, institutionally generated understandings of parental involvement to the "more complex tasks of analyzing competing theories and reconciling them with one's own belief" (Ghaphery, 2000, p.156). In doing so, they empower themselves to not only know more, but to reflect on how the disruption of knowledge affects their everyday life and that of the institutions with which they are engaging.

Public Pedagogy in Schools

Brady's (2006) definition of public pedagogy clearly defines why this is a new and important framework from which to view schools and their work with parents:

Practiced within shifting and overlapping sites of learning, public pedagogy is grounded in an ethical commitment to critical democratic principles. Public pedagogy challenges the illusion of traditional educational reform and practice and introduces a discussion on the nature of *public*. Education in this context is public in two ways. First, it opens a space for contesting conventional academic boundaries and, second, it raises questions about the capacity for citizens to engage as critical educators in their present, everyday lives. (p. 58)

In public pedagogy, the public continues to shape the school in regards to parental involvement whether by active or passive actions. This study seeks to understand through the framework of public pedagogy how parents are experiencing the school's pedagogy of parental involvement, how parental perspectives might become educative for schools, and how these interactions transpire. This study explores, in part, how the schools teach parents about positionality, education, and equity and also how, or if, parental knowledges and learning might become educative. Brady (2006) posits "public pedagogy is a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination" (p. 58). Moving beyond traditional notions of educational reform, Brady's theorizing "contests conventional academic boundaries" by exploring the hidden curriculum of parental involvement and by prioritizing the reflective capacity of parents to act as "critical educators in their present, everyday lives" (p. 58). Brady further encourages that inquiry shift from viewing school leaders as individual actors with abilities and skills to that of collectively working "across differences and through strategic alliances" (p. 60). This study posits parents as constituents for developing strategic alliance across difference.

Problematizing and Limitations of Public Pedagogy

Much of the literature involving public pedagogy is critiqued for being too broad and lacking in theoretical clarity (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013) and researchers "fail to clarify how they are defining or conceptualizing what they mean by 'pedagogy'" (p. 142). This study is grounded in a particular construction of public pedagogy associated with feminist influenced perspectives regarding informal, collective social activism and its capacity to serve as a process of public intellectualism (Dentith, O'Malley, & Brady,

2014; Sandlin et al., 2011). Such a framework sees the school's understandings, statements and actions regarding parental involvement to be educative for teachers, parents, students, and others engaged with the school. It also values the possibility for parents to be critically engaged with these understandings, and to add, reshape, or contest them out of their own experiential learning. In some sense, this inquiry interrupts an unreflective pedagogical process and affords a structure to make the pedagogical relationship between school and parents more visible, mutual, and dynamic.

The public pedagogy literature also notes a problematic with a "rationale for the continued reliance on school-based meanings and mechanisms as heuristics for all sites of education" which "resides in the field's origin as a humanist project" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 146). On this matter, the researcher is aware that the understanding of pedagogy is deeply embedded in a humanist/modernist/rationalist view (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013) that relies on school-based meanings that dictate how pedagogy is conceptualized. The school district being studied asserts that parental involvement is important and seeks to create a welcoming environment. As this study seeks to understand how the school's vision aligns with parents' understanding of parental involvement, a public pedagogy lens affords a theoretical resource to engage but also transcend school based meanings in working to understand parents' conceptualization of involvement and their possibility as active agents in this pedagogy.

Critical Public Pedagogy

Critical theory looks at power and justice through social and historical structures. It supports the idea that through reflection that knowledge is co-constructed (Freire, 1997) and critical theory looks to study how societal constructs produce the knowledge.

Reality is at the center of knowledge in critical theory while the self and structures of oppression, dominance/emancipation and relations of power are in the periphery (Freire, 1997; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Critical theory looks at the dominant construction and then tries to deconstruct it, looking for meaning by asking what voices have been overlooked and why. Critical researchers seek to not only understand behavior, but to change a social phenomenon as well (Blake & Masschelein, 2003; Freire, 1997). Critical theory must be oriented towards “the emancipation of individuals in an egalitarian society” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 26). The feminist influenced social activism and public intellectualism strand of public pedagogy animating this inquiry is shaped in part by a critical theory that continuously seeks politically engaged educational communities that are oriented in critical democratic engagement (Brady, 2006; Dentith et al., 2014; Sandlin et al., 2011). In this study, critical dimensions of public pedagogy orient inquiry towards understanding how the dominant paradigms in schools create an environment that both students and families engage with on a daily basis. Specifically, the theoretical framework views the school’s notion of parental involvement as a dominant paradigm that educates its constituencies, and which must therefore be analyzed for emancipatory and/or oppressive dynamics.

Conclusion

St. Pierre notes that within critical theory, binaries (have/have not; us/them; rich/poor) have a role in knowing (St. Pierre, 2006). Critical theory recognizes first the initial binaries that exist, but it then moves beyond them to reflect on the power, justice and social issues involved. Public pedagogy seeks to understand how public spaces such as educational sites and institutional structures work to teach the public, and how the

intended educational meanings (both implicit and explicit) are internalized, reconfigured and mobilized by public citizens such as the parents in schools in regards to parent involvement (Sandlin et al., 2011). This study seeks to engage a critical public pedagogy framework as a lens for probing the pedagogical dimensions of schools' and parents' interrelationship around notions and practices of parental involvement. This theoretical investment is oriented toward building conceptual and pragmatic alliances across differences in order to strengthen the practice of parental involvement as a critical democratic engagement (Brady, 2006). The next section will review the current literature on parental involvement in schools.

General Methodology of Literature Review

The findings in this literature review include journal articles on qualitative and quantitative studies over the past two decades from 1993-2013, significant seminal pieces and other literature not found in journals, but in books and research reports. In order to narrow the literature from broad terms such as parental involvement, systems building and trust, literature that specifically addressed school districts in systems building, trust by parents, teachers and schools, and parental involvement with regards to the district's demographics were reviewed. The three sections of parental involvement, systems building in a school district, and trust are used because the findings in the literature note that they are interrelated when addressing the study of how a district can systematically create a welcoming environment for parents that affects parental involvement, and ultimately, student achievement.

Parental Involvement

The parental involvement section addresses four themes starting with the broad and ending with the specific. They are (a) history and definition of parental involvement, (b) importance of parental involvement, (c) different types of parental involvement, and (d) cultural responsibility. Each section also includes implications for organizational practice based on the findings.

History and Definitions of Parental Involvement

For over twenty years, parental involvement in schools has been studied in response to the notion that it is important to successful school outcomes (Epstein, 1987; Jeynes, 2012; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Epstein (1987) found that when schools, homes and communities worked together it benefitted children's learning and development. Jeynes (2012) found in his meta-analysis that parent involvement programs consistently were related to high educational outcomes and that the programs were associated with higher scholastic achievement compared to schools without the programs in place. Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, and Hernandez (2003) studied and found that teacher understanding of families also supports students' learning.

Various definitions of parental involvement are found in the literature, which mirror the definitions given from various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, campus administrators, district administrators, politicians and community members. Parental involvement can be defined from a broad to a specific perspective. A broad definition of parental involvement as issued by the United States government under the United Code of Law (USCS 7801.32) is "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication, involving student learning and other school activities." A

more specific definition of parental involvement is defined as home involvement, which includes *home discussions* where the activities of school are discussed and *home supervision* where the child's out-of-school activities are monitored (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

Lightfoot (2004) noted that the term parental involvement has social power implications that must be understood in order to “create truly transformative educational processes” (p. 92). Many of the definitions found in the literature used by schools also reflect White middle-class cultural capital (Lightfoot, 2004). This finding progresses into the subtheme below.

Language used to define parental involvement. A subtheme associated with the language used to define parental involvement emerged from the literature. Many scholars noted that much of the current terminology used to either define parental involvement or discuss it center the discussion using binary terms (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004). Binary terms were used in the language that described parents or their involvement efforts, oftentimes in metaphorical terms. For example, the literature described some parents as “empty” versus other parents who are “full” of knowledge. Parents who were “full” could offer their students “abundant” assistance while “empty” parents “can’t” (Lightfoot, 2004). Parents were often described by school staff and teachers as either being or not being involved. But, when the parents were asked, they said they were participating based on their own beliefs of what constitutes parental involvement (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004).

Implications for organizational practice. Lightfoot reiterated the findings of Bloch and Tabachnick (1993) that “writers on the topic of education too often express the

need for parental involvement without clearly defining what it is the term means” (2004, p. 91). Defining what all stakeholders view as parental involvement is key if a school district is going to lead efforts in this field (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Vazquez-Nuttall, Chieh, & Kaplan, 2006). Epstein et al. (2011) noted that school teams must meet regularly to organize around a common goal. Vazquez-Nuttall et al. (2006) found that schools should “identify lingual differences” (p. 98). Paying attention to the wording used within specific school setting when developing this definition is also key as even the best intentioned educators and scholars can get “pulled back into old ways of thinking by using language that has accrued power-laden meanings” (Lightfoot, 2004, p. 97).

Importance of Parental Involvement

The literature has overwhelmingly found that parental involvement does assist student achievement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). Desforges and Abouchar (2003) found in their literature review that “parental involvement has a large and positive effect on the outcomes of schooling” (p. 87). Fan and Chen (2001) found from their research of 25 studies that had empirical findings that there was a moderate relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. Jeynes (2012) followed up on Fan & Chen’s study a decade later with his own meta-analysis of 51 studies and found a significant relationship between parental involvement programs and academic achievement for both elementary and secondary students.

Researchers found that schools have a marginal effect on home discussions as a form of parental involvement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Desforges and Abouchar (2003) found in their review of the literature that home

discussions are spontaneous and entirely voluntary. Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) research suggests that schools have little effect on home climate. At the same time, they also found that home discussions (which include parent aspirations and expectations) have the highest impact on achievement, which correlates with the findings of other researchers (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). Jeynes (2012) and Fan & Chen (2001) noted specifically in their meta-analysis findings that these home discussions can be in the form of parent involvement such as shared reading and aspirations. This echoed Desforges and Abouchar's (2003) findings that "at-home involvement works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self-concept and high educational aspirations" (p. 86). These findings correlate with the literature that parental involvement should be voluntary to be effective and parents can be motivated to become involved (Jeynes, 2012). In his meta-analysis of 51 research reports, Jeynes (2012) found that "not only are voluntary acts of parent participation associated with positive educational outcomes but also in involuntary parental behaviors are as well, ones that are spawned by the encouragement of schools" (p. 730). This means that while voluntary parental engagement, such as home discussions, do have a major impact on school achievement, school-initiated programs that are encouraged and developed by both teachers and parents also see positive educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2012).

Jeynes (2012) further found that parental involvement assists in student achievement but also found those programs or strategies that may have the most impact. Those strategies are: shared reading programs between students and parents, an emphasized partnership between teachers and parents, parents checking homework and

communication between parents and teachers. This large quantitative study “supports the notion that school-based parent involvement programs can have a positive relationship with academic achievement and youth” (Jeynes, 2012, p. 729).

Implications for organizational practice. Parental involvement assists with student achievement, and organizations should note that there are two routes: (a) parental involvement at home that is voluntary, and (b) parental involvement at school that can be initiated and encouraged. These can become strategies for schools in their parent involvement efforts. What those efforts look like leads to the next theme.

Different Types of Parental Involvement

Joyce Epstein’s (2001) seminal work on parental involvement in 1995 describes the six types of parental involvement that are referenced throughout much of the literature preceding it to help schools, families, and communities. She noted that when these six types of involvement are selected and implemented, it activates the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Her spheres of influence are school, home, and community from which she argues are the “main contexts for children’s education and that greater collaboration by the people in these environments benefits children’s learning and development (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 466). The six types of parental involvement she developed are:

- I. Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- II. Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- III. Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

IV. Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

V. School decision-making and advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

VI. Collaborating with community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 55-56).

While Epstein's six-frame model is seen as a seminal piece and is referenced throughout much of the literature, other types of parental involvement have emerged, followed by questions about who benefits from the involvement. Volunteering in schools, such as in classrooms, on school projects, or for fundraising activities benefits the schools, but not necessarily the parents (Lightfoot, 2004). Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) found in their research of eighth grade parental involvement and achievement that volunteering efforts of parents had “negligible” effects on children (p. 138). This type of parental involvement is seen as individualistic. While this is a cultural norm for White middle-class families, it is not the norm in collectivist societies such as Latino, African-American and Asian cultures (Guerra & Nelson, 2010).

Other types of parental involvement that are becoming more common are parent involvement trainings and family literacy programs. While these can be beneficial, they are often framed in a manner that implies that parents do not have knowledge because they invite parents to come learn from a session organized by the school (Lightfoot, 2004). This implies that parents need to come and get information to be informed of the norms and values set by the organization. Lightfoot (2004) engaged in texts dealing with two contrasting groups and noted that parents in the literature can be framed as “empty

vessels who cannot help their children until filled with outside knowledge.” This reflects binary thinking about parents who are “empty and those who are full” (p. 93). He noted that middle class families were seen as overflowing and the low-income families were viewed as empty. It is key that the parents work together with teachers and school administrators to develop home-school partnerships for them to be reflective of the beliefs and values of both groups (Jeynes, 2012; Vazquez-Nutall et al., 2008).

Implications for organizational practice. School organizations need to be aware of the different needs and demographics at individual campuses. Using this as a starting point, teachers and administrators can best design, together with parents, a program that addresses and is sensitive to class, economic or cultural aspects of both the parents and staff. This finding progresses into the next theme of cultural responsibility.

Cultural Responsibility

Historically, in the research on parental involvement, there are some educators who do not value or hold a vested interest in parental involvement (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gonzales-DeHass & Willms, 2003; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that this often stems from cultural views that deem some parenting styles as subordinate. Gonzales-DeHaas and Willms (2003) found that educators could range from being “disinterested in encouraging parental involvement to downright hostility” (p. 90). Shartrand et al. (1997) found that “teachers do not systematically encourage family involvement” (p. 8) and “lack the confidence to work closely with families, especially if they have not had experience doing so” (p.9). More current research notes that despite recent literature and national efforts to attach federal money to parent involvement mandates, educator views still trend toward deficit thinking

that parents “don’t care” or “aren’t interested” (Eberly et al., 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Eberly et al. (2007) found in their study that “because some parents did not speak their language (English), many teachers blamed the lack of achievement of these students on parents ‘not caring’” (p. 189). Garcia and Guerra (2004) similarly found that many teachers, and administrators, have a general assumption that students of sociocultural variables do not enter school ready to learn because of their families. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) found many teachers believed that parents were not invested in their children’s education and used deficit words such as “lack,” “low,” and “no” to describe them.

Much of the literature suggests that parental involvement is influenced by factors such as family social class, level of parental education, and achievement of students (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Sacker et al., 2002). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found in their literature that parental involvement is influenced by three factors: family social class, the parents’ level of education, and the family’s level of material deprivation. Epstein (2001) also found that wealthier families engaged more in traditional parental engagement such as volunteering and assisting with homework. Sacker et al. (2002) found that social class inequalities in educational achievement were greater than those in psychosocial adjustment and continued to widen throughout the students’ time in the school system.

The influences of parental involvement as noted above are an important finding and should be noted by schools and teachers. They must understand and respect the families, as they are, in order to support student learning. If parents’ views on parental involvement do not match teacher or campus norms, distorted ideas on how to engage in

parental involvement and limited roles for parents arise (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Eberly et al., 2007; Trumball, Rothstein-Fish, & Hernandez, 2003).

In the research on parental involvement the theme of cultural responsibility was detailed with further research in regards to teachers understanding culture and Latino parental involvement that will be the addressed in the next two subthemes.

Teachers Understanding Culture

Souto-Manning and Swick (2007) noted that limited roles for parents could be quickly reached when school cultures affect beliefs. They add, “if the ‘norms’ of the school signal to parents that their roles are limited and do not involve leadership then teachers receive distorted messages about how to approach and develop meaningful parent involvement” (p. 187). In not understanding the culture of the students and their families, teachers can develop deficit views that center around negative beliefs about student learning which can lead to lower expectations (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Many teachers are unaware of this type of deficit thinking, and therefore fail to understand it exerts an influence on their own identity as teachers (Eberly et al., 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Garcia and Guerra (2004) noted that culture is the “context in which we all operate” and further note that teachers then “begin to use it to frame their perceptions about schooling and education,” (p. 162). Trumball et al. (2003) noted that this lack of understanding of oneself and the different beliefs, values, and goals among cultures are the largest barriers in parent-school communication that affect parental involvement.

Examining one’s own biases (Eberly et al., 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Guerra & Nelson, 2013) is key to crossing cultural boundaries, and can be facilitated through professional development for both teachers and staff. Eberly et al. (2007) found that there

was a “disparity between what teachers report about their awareness of culture, what they say about how culture influences learning, their actual practice in the classroom, and the topics about which they seek information” (p. 14). Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that teachers who looked at their own beliefs were able to “question and often reject their previously held negative views, and were more likely to recognize their role in student learning and success” (p. 164). Guerra and Nelson (2013) noted that school leaders should work with teachers to surface and explore deficit thinking.

Another theme central to understanding different cultures revolves around child rearing. Eberly et al. (2007) note that teachers must come to “examine their own cultural biases about ‘good’ child-rearing practices” because they must recognize that “their beliefs about good child-rearing practices are culturally bound and that there may be other, equally good ways” (p. 24). As Guerra and Nelson (2010) further noted from their review of the literature, parents of different backgrounds, languages and economic levels have high expectations and may support their children’s education in different ways from the traditional middle-class model that Lightfoot (2004) noted which is often used in the majority of schools where power dynamics are strong and the schools control aspects of program planning. Based on research findings about the importance of understanding culture in parental involvement, and the fact that the school district being studied is over 88% Hispanic, the next section will detail the research of Latino parental involvement.

Latino Parental Involvement

Hispanic or Latino definitions do not address recent immigrant status of parents. Public school districts are not allowed to collect data on the legal status of families. Nonetheless, the parent community liaisons at the school district being studied believe

that, based on their communication with families, as many as a third of the Hispanic population are recent immigrants (personal communication, 2013). The English language learners (ELL) percentage of students at 31% correlates with their beliefs. The literature on Latino families and/or immigrant families tell us that while there are many barriers that discourage Latino parents from participating in school partnerships (such as language and cultural barriers), it is possible for them to overcome these barriers and have relationships with the teachers and school administrators (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Researchers found that Latinos believe in many forms of parental involvement in non-traditional manners such as attending sporting events, other events outside of the school, seeing a teacher at the grocery store, and other activities where they value informal communication (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003; Vasquez-Nutall et al., 2006). These are opportunities for teachers and schools to communicate with Latino parents as they “may not see volunteering in classrooms and at other school-related activities as part of their role unless personally asked to do so” (Guerra & Nelson, 2013, p. 22). Another finding is that Latino parents believe that their biggest role as parents is raising moral and responsible citizens and that school work should be primarily the responsibility of the professionals who are there to teach their children (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Trumbull et al., 2003; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vasquez-Nutall et al., 2006).

Implications for organizational practice. Schools must be culturally sensitive to their communities in order to better understand the frameworks from which their parents understand. This means being open to new concepts of how parental involvement is

valued by different cultures, especially those that differ from a teacher's, administrator's, or staff member's own personal values. Deficit thinking can occur when teachers are asked to describe the parental involvement values of cultures other than their own, and training should be provided to organizations that have their employees working with multiple cultures. How organizations, specifically school districts, work to bring on this change is addressed in this section of this literature review.

Systems Building in a School District

Schools function on many levels. While they are organizations themselves, they are also part of a larger district organizational system. The district in this study has 15 campuses within one central organizational system. There are many strategies to build systems but the literature which looks at the whole system is the focus of this section because this project's ultimate goal is determining how a school district, as a whole, can systematically create a welcoming environment for parents that affects parental involvement, and ultimately, student achievement. The literature around systems building in a school district is focused into three categories. They are (a) systems building, (b) capacity building, and (c) organizational change.

Systems Building

Peter Senge (1990) noted that too often in building systems, organizations make changes only to certain parts without seeing the complex long term effects on the whole organization. Senge (1990) developed a systems approach specifically for schools to build learning capacity that involves five disciplines (his term), which are addressed in this next section. His book, *Schools That Learn*, is used as a field book for educators,

parents and, as he notes, everyone who cares about education. His disciplines will be outlined next and will include other literature that supports his data.

Shared vision. This first discipline involves the vision of the organization. It asks, “What do we want to create together?” (p. 7). Senge (1990) notes that a shared vision involves conversations which are crucial to building common understandings, shared commitments, understanding push-back, and valuing an agreed upon vision. Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) also add that identifying and valuing what the families want from the school as part of that shared vision is a principle needed in developing strong home and school relationships.

Mental modes. This second discipline looks at mental modes, which are deep-seeded beliefs, values, assumptions and mindsets that determine how people act and react. Senge (1990) notes here that the process of reframing one’s own assumptions and challenging the assumptions of others is key to change in this discipline. Guerra and Nelson (2013) attest to this point by noting that learning about deficit thinking and understanding how it is played out in school climates is key to changing a school culture that involves culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse stakeholders.

Personal mastery. Senge (1990) notes in this third discipline that self-awareness is key to understanding what we know about ourselves and how our behavior impacts others. He adds that this is the human reflection of change. How we react to our assumptions being tested and our values being challenged affect the degree of change we are willing to undergo. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) relay this message by asking educators “Do we foster an inclusive approach that values the richness and power of every parent and family?” (p. 190). Inherent in their question is the understanding that

parents, too, are part of this process and involving them as stakeholders to learn about their own assumptions and values is key for all stakeholders involved (Warren, et al., 2007).

Team learning. The fourth discipline notes that none of this work can or should be done in isolation. Team learning occurs when groups of people (teams) begin to think together by sharing their knowledge, skills, insight, and experiences (Senge, 1990). Through this teamwork and learning a shared vision can be created for change. Jenlink, Reigeleuth, Carr, and Nelson (1998) note that this type of mastery and willingness to learn how we impact others are imperative because all stakeholders are “responsible to and with others” in fulfilling commitments and meeting obligations (p. 221).

Systems thinking. This final discipline from Senge (1990) notes that systems thinking is the framework for viewing inter-relationships within complex systems and interactions in an organization. He notes that this framework is in direct contrast to a linear cause-effect chain of action. As such, it allows members in an organization to be acutely aware of subtle influences, intended or unintended consequences of change, and leads to the awareness of the organization as a whole system that is linked through various interconnection. Jenlink et al. (1998) note that these subtle influences can be discrete events and should be understood as important points during the systematic change efforts because they could become continuous events in the change process.

Senge’s (1990) systems thinking is based on “a growing body of theory about the behavior of feedback and complexity, the innate tendencies of a system that lead to growth and stability over time” (p. 8). Senge (1990), along with Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000) developed an entire book for schools that learn

as educators were asking how to implement his practices in schools that were direct reflections of the shifts in societal and family norms and values. They note that the “safest prediction is change” (p.10), and schools must continue to learn from stakeholders in order to continue to learn and change.

Senge (1990) places high value on understanding the multiple patterns and historical efforts of organizations in order to bring insight into successful change when an organization is involved in systems building. Exact strategies that are used in systems building are addressed in the following section.

Capacity Building

Capacity building means building and providing activities or tools for the organization to operate or move in the direction desired (Fullan, 2000). This can be done by providing resources, training, adopting policies, adding staff members, or other strategies that can strengthen the change. However, just because strategies are used does not mean that an organization will actually build capacity if the individuals and organizations responsible for the capacity building remain weak (King & Bouchard, 2011). There must be movement or growth toward the change by the persons involved in the organization. Leadership and organizational change that lead to capacity building are addressed in the following section.

Distributed forms of leadership. King and Bouchard (2011) note that distributed forms of leadership by those who influence, and are influenced by others, assist in capacity building. Distributed leadership allows for group collaboration in a common effort rather than an individual trying to oversee and design improvement efforts. King and Bouchard (2011) further argue that the idea of sharing the load in capacity building

brings a collectivist standpoint rather than an individual one. In regard to parental involvement, distributed leadership entails many people working collectively to improve parent and community relations ranging from and including all stakeholders such as a district level position, principals, teachers, campus parent community liaisons, and parents. Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, and the Center for American Progress (2012) argue that this practice would “ensure that community school principals are embedded in practice and policy, as well as in strategic-planning documents (p. 19).

Working together through distributed forms of leadership allows for program coherence and a component of capacity building, which King and Bouchard (2011) note is “the extent to which student and faculty programs at a school are coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time” (p. 656). Senge et al. (2000) note all systems and strategies, whether they are district-wide or specific to a classroom, are the first step of inquiry and should welcome critique. Leaders must understand that new programs and coherence of them should be designed as open and fluid, strengthened through the continued process of creation and change. Understanding how organizational change occurs will be addressed in the following section.

Organizational Change

This section will address change by organizational leaders because this project seeks to understand how a district, together with campus leaders and a specific district administrator charged with supporting campuses, can systematically change a school environment. The district administrator, together with the campus principal, jointly supervise campus parent community liaisons in an effort to assist with district-wide strategy implementation while working with individual campus goals and strategies.

Change led by organizational leadership. Bolman and Deal (2008) looked at how leaders can reframe organizations by understanding four frames of reference. Knowing these frames allow district administrators to navigate the political processes and understand the cultural realities of the organization and communities they serve. They note “organizational life is always full of simultaneous events that can be interpreted in a variety of ways” (p. 266). They argue that leaders must look at their perception of the situation and come to understand that the people they serve have a different perspective, usually found in one or two frames. Knowing these frames is important because leaders should understand that “their frame—not yours—determines how they will act” (p. 270). They further noted that leadership and change are critical to the development of individuals, organizations, and communities. The four frames of reference are structural, human resources, political, and symbolic and will be covered next.

Structural. The structural frame argues for “putting people in the right roles and relationships” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 47). School districts, for example, can use federal funding to pay for parent community liaisons. However, some schools do not use them to their full capacity, which interferes with the district’s ability to determine if the liaisons are in the right roles for the district, or if they are the right people with the capabilities to do the job. Having an over-arching district wide synopsis of the parent community liaison role requirements, rather than a singular campus based viewpoint, allows for a better opportunity to decipher if the right people are in the right roles.

Human resources. The human resources frame emphasizes “dealing with issues by changing people (through training, rotation, promotion, or dismissal)” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 47). This allows the leader to become supportive and empower employees

to be trained or promoted through participation of feedback and providing resources which can bring a sense of openness and feeling valued (Bolman & Deal, 2008). They also argue for an egalitarian workforce because it goes beyond practice, and moves into the beliefs of the workers in how the organization will run and why it is run. They note that when workers are part of the belief system of the organization and their beliefs are seen as valuable by the organization, they will instinctively know and will honor the beliefs of the organization. Valuing school personnel and their beliefs by asking for their input aligns with the literature on parental involvement, using parents as stakeholders, valuing their beliefs, and honoring their input (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Trumball et al., 2003; Warren et al., 2009).

Political. The political frame views organizations as “roiling arenas hosting ongoing contests for individual and group interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 194) and holders of power. Many school boards are comprised of parents, and the personal is political (hooks, 2000). School boards and parents have different views and ideas on how organizations can be run. It is through dialogue with school board members, parent community liaisons and parents on their ideas that districts can come to know their collective organizational belief system. Warren et al. (2009) argues that for strong home and school relationships, the amount of power differentiation between families and schools should be reduced.

Symbolic. The symbolic frame forms an “umbrella for ideas from several disciplines, including organizational theory and sociology” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 253) and focuses greatly on symbolic concepts and cultural forms. All school districts have cultural commonalities with a common thread running through the school system.

Asking parents and community members about themselves and what they deem important is an important tool in understanding their cultural symbols and forms of representation in the community and in the schools (Warren et al., 2009).

How an organization moves toward a system that builds on the knowledge of all stakeholders is key when building capacity and moving in a direction of progressive change. This review and understanding of fundamental frames and disciplines is vital to a school district looking to systematically approach a change for all schools. Using all stakeholders in this art of capacity building is pivotal to this type of organizational transformation.

Trust

Because this study looked at change, whether it is systematic by a school district, individually by a school staff member, or by parents, the issue of trust is critical in understanding the nature of school and parent relationships. If trust is not present, this could hinder the change process, yet the distrust of schools by both parents and teachers is also present in the literature. Trust can have many attributes, and is built on four criterion of “respect, competence, personal regard of others, and integrity” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Parents are less likely to trust a school if a school states that it welcomes parents but then falls short in customer service or does not have genuine opportunities for parents to be involved (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). School employees are less likely to trust efforts at change if the school/district and its leaders have not followed-through with former initiatives (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willms, 2003). The literature on trust is divided into three sections. They are (a) teachers’ trust of parents, (b) parents’ trust of schools, and (c) school employees’ trust of change.

Teachers' Trust of Parents

A study by Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) found that when teachers gave reasons for low performance by English Language Learners (ELLs) and African-American children, they cited “lack of parent involvement” or “no parent investment” and deficit words such as “low”, “lack” and “no” were used to describe parent involvement. They did not trust that parents knew how to enact roles ascribed to them by the school and suggested English classes to assist both the ELL parents and African-American parents because they did “not speak proper English” (p. 190). The expectation that parents should assimilate while blaming them if they do not leads to a lack of trust of parents by teachers when instead they could be “fostering an inclusiveness approach that values the richness and power of every family that would empower both parents and teachers” (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 190).

Guerra and Nelson (2013) found in their extensive literature review of Latino parent involvement that schools report a lack of parental involvement as one reason for why the achievement gap is not closing. This finding of their literature review spanning twenty years correlates with the disconnect between, and distrust of parents by teachers. Briggs (2004) found that by unintentionally failing to meet expectations traditionally held by schools of parental involvement, many parents are labeled as unsupportive of education, uncaring, and poorly educated. To further the problem of trust, Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, and Barron (2010) found that school staff believed that communities of diverse populations had bigger challenges than their White counterparts in parental involvement. All of these beliefs result in a lack of trust by teachers that parents, especially those from minority, immigrant, and economically disadvantaged families, will

be able or willing to help their children in their education (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willms, 2003). The next section will address parents' trust of school, especially in regards to these labels placed on them.

Parents' Trust of Schools

The school culture can also impact parents' beliefs (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that if there was a strong sense of trust at the school by parents and the community, then there would be more success of the school in educating students. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) further found that if school norms note that parents' roles are limited and teachers receive "distorted messages about how to approach and develop meaningful family involvement" schools then become a "self-fulfilling prophecy of very limited roles for parents" (p. 187). This affects the trust parents have of whether or not they are welcome if limited roles are provided. Parents that believe that their opinions or participation are not valued are hesitant to be active in their students' schools (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Bryan (2005) found that a negative relationship between parents and campuses in many (urban) schools exists because parents do not trust the schools, and campus staff do not trust minority and economically disadvantaged families. Lareau (as cited by Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007) found that previous negative experiences by parents and their own perceptions of racism were effects of low parental involvement. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) further noted that an "impact of collaboration failure is long-term and generational. Indeed, it may not be erased for a school until the next generation of children enter its doors" (p. 454). Johnson, Pugach and Hawkins (2004) found that

schools must work diligently to ensure that their actions and words are reliable for parents to trust actions put in place by the school.

School Employees' Trust of Change

Change is not new to education, but do school employees trust the change? Bryk and Schneider's (2002) definition of trust is based on four qualities: respect, integrity, competence, and personal regard. They used these four qualities to develop a framework that looks at the trust level of schools by all parties, not just teachers and parents. The framework notes elements of trust mean (a) teachers can voice their concern and administrators will heed what is being addressed, (b) principals will note that teachers care about the school and will seriously consider their proposals, and (c) all get involved in the community to go the extra mile for children. How that trust will be gained should be systematically developed. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) found that methodical efforts must be put in place to ensure implementation of strategic plans because "systematic failure results in a system and people not willing to retake the risks, reinvest the effort, or renew the trust" (p. 458).

Waugh (2000) noted that there is comparatively little theoretical, quantitative research with measures of teacher receptivity to system-wide educational change in a centrally controlled education system because "major, system-wide educational changes involving all teachers in their classrooms do not occur that often in a centrally controlled system, in spite of the common view that we are living 'in a time of constant change'". Waugh's findings suggest that with regards to parent involvement, strategies would need to involve all teachers and not just specific staff dedicated to working with parents.

Davies, Burch, and Johnson (1991) found that a missing piece is the classroom teacher in this initiative as they are the most important connection between the child and the family.

The issue of trust is imperative to understanding how to create a welcoming environment, and as Raffaele and Knoff (1999) found, will allow for important contributions to be shared by both parents and the schools. Mapp (2003) also confers this concept represented in the literature and notes that schools can obtain this by a three part joining process that welcomes parents into the school, honors their participation and connects caregivers with a focus on their children's learning.

Conclusion

The literature indicates that parental involvement does assist with student achievement (Epstein, 2001, Fan & Chen, 2001, Jeynes, 2012; Vazquez-Nutall et al., 2006). Research also shows that schools have a marginal effect on home discussions as a form of parental involvement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003, Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996), yet these home discussions (which include parent aspirations and expectations) have the highest impact on achievement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). The collection of this literature offers the complexities and opportunities associated with the concept of involved parents with schools. Those findings coincide with additional literature among scholars who believe parental involvement can be both voluntary to be effective (Jeynes, 2012) and where schools can work with parents to become involved (Hughes & Black, 2002). School-initiated programs that are encouraged and developed by both teachers and parents also see positive educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2012).

School districts can work towards these positive educational outcomes by building systems that are assembled on knowledge from all stakeholders. The understanding of all stakeholders' frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008) will allow district leaders and parents, alike, to know that everyone has different perspectives both at the systematic planning table and when implementing new efforts. Most importantly, the efforts must be sincere, and those involved must trust the changes taking place for a positive and welcoming environment to be possible. As Dodd and Konzal (2002) noted, "since no one knows everything or has all the answers, everyone needs to work together to find better ways to educate children. And everyone has knowledge to contribute to this ongoing process" (p. 290).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to find out how a school system can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents associate a welcoming environment with parental involvement. It drew on critical public pedagogy, to frame its questions and analysis about how a district can systematically create a welcoming environment and its effects on parental involvement. The methodology for this project was qualitative, with the project situated in a school district setting. This method was used because qualitative and culturally appropriate research is holistic, and it attempts to give a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationship of causes and consequences that affect human behavior (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984).

Case Study

The approach used was a case study because case studies allow for a focus on “in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” of a “system bounded by time and place” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Yin (2009) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context- especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). As Yin (2011) further notes, the research in a case study allows for the complex conditions of the context to be studied because they are an integral part of understanding the entire case. A case study also offers an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46).

The Case

As Stake (2006) notes “a case is an integrated system” that is studied to find out how it “gets things done” (p. 10). The school district being researched represents the case. Using a qualitative case study to explore how it interacts with participants (parents and school employees) allowed real experiences in real situations to be captured (Stake, 2006). “Case study issues reflect complex, situated, problematic relationships. They pull attention both to ordinary experience and also to the disciplines of knowledge” (Stake, 2006, p. 16). Understanding how a school district can create a welcoming environment from parents answers the how and why explanatory types of questions that are sought in case studies (Yin, 2011).

Within-site Cases

The within-site cases studied were the perceived environment and parental involvement program in one public school district in Texas. A case study about this environment and program (how can it become a welcoming environment, how does this environment relate to a parental involvement program) was optimal because it “is unique for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge to which we would not otherwise have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). The case study of the within-site cases of environment and parent involvement relied on the techniques used which are the direct observation of the events being studied and the persons involved in the events (Yin, 2009).

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of a case study are that it seeks to understand both the how and why of the objects of the study and requires an in-depth description of the social phenomenon

(Yin, 2009). Limitations of a case study are that because of the specificity of the case involved, generalizations are often weak (Stake, 2006) and one cannot fully correlate another case to it. Yin (2009) notes that the goal should be, therefore, “to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies” (p. 15).

Field Site

This study took place in a school district comprised of 15 schools in Texas. The school district had one child development center, eight elementary schools, three middle schools, one high school, one alternative high school, and one discipline alternative education center. Over 11,500 students attended school in the district the year it was studied and there were over 1,450 employees working in the district. Students were classified as 85% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 5% White. The socio-economic status of students was 86% of students were economically disadvantaged, 34% mobile, and 33% were English language learners. Of the 1,450 employees, 722 were teachers, with the following ethnicity distribution, 64% were White, 29% were Hispanic, and 4% were Black (AEIS, 2012).

Sampling Procedures

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used. This permitted ‘the inquirer [to select] individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study’ (p. 125). Participants in the study included principals, parent community liaisons and parents who had a child in the district. All participants must have been in the school district for a minimum of three years, and both the principals and parent community liaisons must have been in their position for a minimum of three years. This was important because the

efforts on parental involvement had changed over the past three years and historical context was important to study the case in depth (Merriam, 2009). Participants were three principals, three parent community liaisons and 18 parents. Typical purposeful sampling was used as it seeks to find participants who are “not atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). This was important because the study sought to generalize perceptions of principals, parent community liaisons, and parents within the school district.

Participants

The parents or guardians must have been adults with whom the children lived. The principals and parent community liaisons must have been in their position in the district for at least three years. Three principals, three parent community liaisons and six groups of three parents (for a total of 18 parents) were used to represent the district. The six groups of parents were distributed evenly across the three middle school zones of the school district. An English speaking and Spanish speaking group from each middle school zone were used in an effort to capture the various communities in the district. This allowed for two groups from each zone totaling six groups of three parents each. This correlated with the district demographics of 85% of students who are Hispanic and 33% who are English Language Learners. The study also sought to have principal and parent community liaison participants from the elementary, middle and high school campuses. Efforts to have an equal representation of male/female and White/Hispanic/Black participants were made.

Recruitment

Purposeful sampling was used as recommended for case studies (Creswell, 2007). The researcher decided which principals and parent community liaisons to ask to participate based on the work history and equal representation of all categories as noted before. Based on informal Superintendent Coffee Chats held at campuses, the researcher had access to parents who have made comments about the welcoming environment of the schools and those parents who also meet the criteria were asked to participate. This process continued until all parent participants were successfully recruited. Parents had the option to participate in the research at either the school or in a nearby location. Another location was given as an option because research has shown that some parents do not feel welcome at schools (Baker, 2000).

Principals who met the criteria were personally asked to participate, as there was no supervisory dichotomy between the researcher and the principals. A secondary researcher, one who has done training on collective parent involvement with the parent community liaisons and was trusted by them, conducted the focus groups with the parent community liaisons as the researcher dual-supervised the parent community liaisons and they had the right to give their answers without feeling forced to participate in an effort to get honest and rich answers. The secondary researcher was trained on how to conduct the focus group by the primary researcher in regards to the format of the questions being asked. Most importantly, the secondary researcher was trained to relay to the parent community liaisons that due to the fact that there are a small number of parent community liaisons, it could be possible for the researcher to identify their answers. She

noted that their answers were confidential in the data, however the primary researcher could be able to deduce who they are from the transcripts.

Procedures for Data Collection

Eight focus groups consisting of three persons in each group were sought to be conducted initially: the principals, the parent community liaisons, and the English and Spanish speaking parents from each middle school zone. The focus groups were set-up to answer and discuss five open-ended questions on school environment and parental involvement (see Appendix C). The focus groups were audiotaped in order to ensure that all participants were noted correctly during transcription. In total, the initial data collected sought to include eight focus groups of 24 participants.

Each focus group was asked to select a spokesperson to attend a follow-up meeting with the researcher to review the themes that arose from the data given. The primary researcher conducted the individual follow-up meetings to member check (Merriam, 2009) the data. The secondary researcher conducted the follow-up meeting with the chosen parent community liaison. The meetings were held either in person or by telephone depending on the availability of the person chosen to meet with the researcher.

There were a total of eight focus groups planned, and eight individual follow-up meetings to member check (Merriam, 2009) which ensured the internal trustworthiness of the data by soliciting feedback from some of the people interviewed. Other forms of data collected by the researcher included historical records. Historical records from past district parent surveys were collected and observations were maintained in a journal by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The researcher used secondary transcribers for all audio recordings from the focus groups. One secondary transcriber was used for the English focus groups and one secondary transcriber proficient in Spanish was used for the Spanish focus groups. Lichtman's (2006) three C's of data analysis (codes, categories and concepts) were used by the researcher. Lichtman (2006, p. 168) uses six steps in her process; they are:

Step 1: Initial coding. Going from the words or phrases in the responses to some central idea of the response.

Step 2: Revising initial coding.

Step 3: Developing an initial list of categories or central ideas based on the relationships of the responses.

Step 4: Modifying initial list based on additional rereading.

Step 5: Revisiting categories and subcategories.

Step 6: Moving from categories into concepts (themes) as they relate to the questions of the study.

Initial coding for all the focus groups were used, and then the list of categories or central ideas were developed. Each transcript for every focus group was looked at individually for codes and categories. After analyzing the categories or central ideas from each focus group, major concepts or central themes from the focus groups were determined in order to answer the research questions of the study. A model was developed to link the conceptual elements together in a meaningful way to understand the phenomenon. The model is a visual presentation fitting onto one page of how the concepts and categories are related to one another. This allows the researcher to support

the idea that “the category scheme does not tell the whole story- there is more to be understood about the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 189).

Trustworthiness

Triangulation was used as a means of increasing the “credibility” of the findings (Wolcott, 2005, p. 160), as it involved corroborating evidence from different sources to focus on specific themes or perspectives. The themes of the parents, principals and parent community liaisons were triangulated. Rich, thick description (Merriam, 2009) was used to describe in detail the participants and the setting under study. Finally, prolonged engagement and observation was used by the researcher who worked with the schools on a weekly basis in order to better understand the phenomenon of a welcoming environment and parental involvement. The themes, records, and observations were also triangulated to ensure that the findings were relevant and credible.

Evaluation Methods

All focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed. They were also reviewed multiple times before data analysis to ensure accuracy. The researcher noted thoughts after each focus group in a journal to ensure observations were not forgotten. The follow-up member-check meetings served as a form of evaluation to ensure that the themes that arose from the eight groups were true to the participants.

IV. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the data collected for this study in four sections. The first three sections contain data results and the fourth section presents the data analysis. The first section contains the data obtained from the focus groups. The data are divided by the focus group questions. The second section presents the data from the district parent survey. It will be divided by year as two years of data are presented. The third section contains the data from the researcher's journal during the data collection process of the study and the fourth section presents the data analysis organized according to the research questions.

The first three sections state how the data were collected and contain data results. Section four presents the data analysis and is divided by the coding results and research question from the study.

Focus Group Data

This section presents the information obtained from the eight focus groups. As proposed, eight focus groups were used in the study: one with three school principals, one with three parent community liaisons, three focus groups with three English speaking parents each, and three focus groups with three Spanish-speaking parents each. In one Spanish-speaking focus group, the third person was not able to make it at the last minute and, therefore, eight Spanish-speaking parents were participants. As proposed, all participants had been in the school district for a minimum of three years, and both the principals and parent community liaisons had been in their position for a minimum of three years. The six groups of parents were distributed evenly across the three middle school zones of the school district by having one English-speaking group and one

Spanish-speaking group per middle school zone. A total of 23 people participated in the research with eight people chosen to participate in a member-check after the data was gathered and categorized from the focus groups.

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used and both the principals and community liaisons were asked by the researcher to participate. This permitted ‘the inquirer [to select] individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study’ (p. 125). The researcher worked together with the parent community liaisons to invite the parents to participate based on those who had participated in Superintendent Coffee Chats. Efforts to have an equal representation of male/female and White/Hispanic/Black participants were made. Of the six school personnel who participated, four were women and two were men. Four were Hispanic, one was African-American and one was Caucasian. Of the parents participating all were women. Two male parents were asked to participate: one initially agreed but then could not attend due to work-related issues at the last minute and the other did not respond to the invitation. No other efforts were made to include a male participant as the wife of the participant who could not attend volunteered to participate which finalized the amount of parents needed for the focus groups. Of the nine English-speaking parents, seven were Hispanic, one was Caucasian, and one was African-American. Of the eight Spanish-speaking parents, all were Hispanic and five identified as being new to the United States.

All focus groups were held on school grounds and were audio recorded. Before each focus group began the researcher greeted the participants as they came into the room. She chatted with them unofficially and when all members were present she

welcomed them all to the group and introduced herself and had the focus group members introduce themselves. She then explained the purpose for the research study (public pedagogy in public schools, the journey to creating a welcoming environment for parents, and parent support of parent involvement), why each member was asked to participate (tenure as either principal, parent, or parent community liaison in the school district), and the estimated time frame it would take to complete the questions. The researcher then explained that the conversation would be audio recorded and showed the device that would be used to record the group. The researcher next discussed the importance of voluntary consent by the participants and then handed out the university IRB form, read it out loud, and then spoke about what it meant for participants. All participants were then asked if they had any questions before they were asked to sign the form. Once the form was signed the researcher asked for approval to begin with the questions and to turn on the audio device to begin recording (see Appendix C).

There were five focus group questions for each group (see Appendix C). Question one asked the groups what contributed to a welcoming environment in schools. Question two asked the participants how the school district contributed to a welcoming environment for parents. The third question differed for the principals and parent community liaisons from the parents. The principals and parent community liaisons were asked how parents were involved in their child's education and the parent focus groups were asked how they were involved in their child's education. Question four asked what schools can do to assist parents to help their children in their education and question five asked how schools and parents can work together for student success.

A secondary researcher conducted the interview and member check with the parent community liaisons. This was an important aspect from the University's Institutional Review Board to ensure that the participants (the parent community liaisons) had no repercussions for participating in the focus group, as the researcher is a dual-supervisor of the parent community liaisons. The secondary researcher was no stranger to the parent community liaisons as she had provided training for them within the past year of the focus group to many accolades by the parent community liaisons in the school district.

All member-checks (Merriam, 2009) from the focus groups, with the exception of that with the principal, were held over the telephone. The member-check with the principal was held in a face-to-face meeting. For the member-checks the participant who volunteered was reminded of the focus group date and time and the questions the researcher asked were reviewed. The categories that the researcher drew from the data were reviewed with the participant and the researcher asked for feedback and if the participant believed that the data accurately portrayed the answers of all participants to the questions asked during the focus group.

All focus groups were transcribed by secondary transcribers. One secondary transcriber was used for the English focus groups and one secondary transcriber proficient in Spanish was used for the Spanish focus groups. Before the coding process began, the researcher listened to the audio transcript of all focus groups (except for the parent community liaison focus group as noted for the University's IRB submission for minimizing risk for the parent community liaisons) to ensure that the transcripts

accurately matched what was said in the focus groups. All transcripts were then printed out on one-sided paper to begin the coding process.

The researcher used Lichtman's (2006) three C's of data analysis (codes, categories and concepts) and adopted her six-step process. The researcher conducted the entire coding process by hand. The focus groups were initially coded and revised. For this process the researcher read the transcript in its entirety as a quick-read through to remind the researcher which focus group was about to be coded. This allowed the researcher to recall the time, place, mood and feeling of the focus group participants. The researcher then began with the initial coding. This involved highlighting words or phrases in the responses to some central ideas of the responses from the participants. A list of the key words and phrases was developed on a separate page with each question from all focus groups having its own page. This page included tally marks next to key words or phrases that noted how many times they were used when answering each question. For the initial revision process, the focus group transcripts were laid out on the floor and key words and phrases were double-checked that including the adding or deleting of tally marks. This allowed the researcher to get a birds-eye view of the data. No key words or phrases were deleted from the initial coding process unless they were included by mistake on the coding sheet. Key words or phrases, for example, taken from one of the English-speaking parents' focus group transcript when asked the question of 'What contributes to a welcoming environment?' were: warm greeting, suggestion box, very nice, treated as human beings, treating everyone the same, not be accusatory, smile, friendly, acknowledgement, respectful, don't ignore, don't act like you are too busy, know stuff, and nice to kids.

As Lichtman (2006) notes, the third through fifth step of her six-step process includes developing an initial list of categories or central ideas based on the relationships of the responses (step three), modifying the initial list based on additional rereading (step four), and revisiting the categories (step five). In order to align with these steps, the researcher then developed an initial list of categories or central ideas based on the relationships of the responses and later revised them. For this process the researcher first had to gather the coding sheets for each question from all focus groups. There were three English and three Spanish focus groups from the parents. Therefore, the three coding sheets for each question were then consolidated into one coding sheet per question and per parent group: Spanish and English. This was done by using one of the coding sheets and adding codes or tally marks to codes that were already there from the second and third sheets to the first one. Consolidating the three coding sheets for every parent group for every question allowed for there to be one coding sheet for every group for every question. There were four groups (principals, parent community liaisons, English-speaking parents and Spanish-speaking parents) and six questions from every group for a total of 24 code sheets.

In order to develop an initial list of categories (step three of Lichtman's (2006) process), the researcher got out 24 new sheets of paper and listed all the codes or key words that had the most tally marks for all of the code sheets as an initial first start. These codes were words or ideas that were answered in the focus group. If a word or ideas was used more than once than a tally mark next to the work or idea was placed next to the word or idea (Appendix D). This researcher then added key words or phrases that had two or more tally marks. The researcher then re-read all the key words and phrases from

the codes sheet and specifically addressed each key word or phrase that only had one tally mark. If the researcher felt that the key word or phrase contributed to the central ideas of the answer of the groups, then it was included. If the researcher felt that it did not, then it was not included on the category sheet. For example, one parent during a focus group wanted to speak specifically on an incident that involved a misunderstanding with a cafeteria worker on the amount of money that was on her child's meal account. While the parent specifically spoke about the misunderstanding she did not, upon further questioning by the researcher, associate this incident with how she felt that the school communicates with or treats parents. The parent noted that she had misunderstood the conversation with the cafeteria worker and the parent stated that she was not complaining but merely wanted to share that this incident occurred. When the researcher asked how an incident like this could be prevented in the future the parent did not have a suggestion. This side story was not central to the answers given and for that reason, the contribution of key words such as 'misunderstanding' or 'conversation' when used for this specific scenario was not included in the category sheet. The researcher did, however, note this instance as a 'conversation misunderstanding' in the event that other instances of misunderstandings from conversations arose from the data in the other focus groups to see if a pattern of such misunderstandings took place, as that would have contributed to a data category in and of itself.

In order to move from key words or phrases used most frequently into categories the researcher then began grouping them together and circled ideas or relationships between the codes. For example, on Question One for the first question of 'What contributes to a welcoming environment in schools?' the key words that came out of the

principal focus group for that answer were: smile (x3), be nice, make them feel at ease (x2), a smiling face, kind eye-contact that makes them feel ok (x3). From those seven key words or phrases that were used ten times, the category of "Smile, make them feel at ease" was developed. These groups and relationships formed the categories and the amount of categories depended on the number of codes included on each category sheet, as every code was included in a category in order to ensure that the data was accurately represented. A concept map of this process for every question for every focus group (for a total of 24 lists of categories) is:

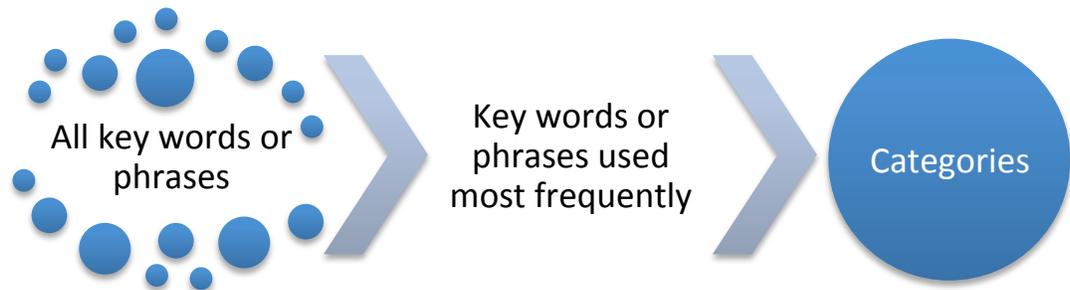


Figure 1. The coding process.

Listed next are the categories derived from the data from the focus group participants. They are divided by focus group question and group. Lichman's (2006) sixth step of moving from categories into concepts as they relate to the questions of the study will be discussed in the section under data analysis.

What contributes to a welcoming environment in schools?

Principals:

- Have answers
- Invite parents in consistently
- Have protocols for front office on how to find answers (use as problem solvers)
- Smile, make people feel at ease
- Provide friendly office staff
- Orient parents so that they know the school
- Speak the language the parent speaks

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Have information
- Speak the language the parent speaks
- Acknowledge people when they enter the front office (get-up, look-up, walk-up, tend to them)
- Smile
- Find answers to meet their needs
- Have a neat and clean environment

English Speaking Parents:

- Acknowledge each person
- Treat everyone the same and as human beings
- Have a front office staff who have a nice face, warm greeting, good mannerisms, respectful, friendly, calm, polite
- Don't have a front office staff who judge a person by how they look, ignore people when they walk in, look or act like they are too busy to help, are accusatory, get angry
- Have correct information
- Be respectful of both parents and students

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Harmony between teachers and students
- Have a front office staff who act like you aren't bothering them
- Communication
- Respect
- Have a person who makes you feel welcome (such as a parent community liaison) and invites you to come in

Figure 2. Categories for focus group question #1.

The categories in the focus group for question one varied from the school staff and the parents. Both the principals and the parent community liaisons categorized that the school staff should have information and be able to meet the needs of the parents such as orient them to the school, speak their language and find answers for them. Systems were discussed by the principals (such as having protocols to find answers to be problem solvers) and the parent community liaisons categorized that a neat and clean environment were important.

One category that was similar across the four groups was that of a general person who smiles, has a nice (welcoming) face, and makes a person feel at ease to welcome a person into the school. Parent categories described how persons should be treated (treated the same, not treated like the person is bothering someone), communicated with, and when in receipt of correct information as factors that contribute to a welcoming environment in schools. Parent community liaisons also noted that persons should be acknowledged and Spanish-speaking parents categorized parent community liaisons as a person who makes one feel welcome and as one who invites a person in.

The English-speaking parents had an entire category on what front office staff should not do (judge a person by how they look, ignore people when they walk in, look or act like they are too busy, be accusatory or get angry) when asked what relates to a welcoming environment in schools. This was a category that was found in all English-speaking focus groups, not just one. Only the parents categorized respect for students, with the Spanish-speaking parents noting that harmony between teachers and students contributes to a welcoming environment in schools.

How does [REDACTED] ISD contribute to a welcoming environment for parents?

Principals:

- Provides a parent community liaison
- Provides training for parent community liaison
- Gives community access to classes, meetings, or facilities
- Provides ESL classes
- Has information on community resources
- Hires problem solvers in the office
- Hires pleasant office staff

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Surveys parents
- Provides outside resources
- Provides parent classes based on what parents request
- Provides social events or classes
- Provides information in Spanish

English Speaking Parents:

- Hosts superintendent coffee chats
- Has family nights at campuses
- Provides parent community liaisons
- Surveys parents

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Updates information on website
- Provides a safe school by asking for an identification card
- Has coffee chats
- Has staff that speaks Spanish

Figure 3. Categories for focus group question #2.

The categories in the focus group for question two were the sparsest of all the focus group questions; it asked specifically what the school district does to contribute to a welcoming environment for parents. Principals had the most categories including hiring pleasant office staff and having problem solvers in the office, which was not noted by any other group. Both the principals and English-speaking parents categorized that the parent community liaisons helped contribute to a welcoming environment for parents. This aligns with the answers from the Spanish-speaking parents who categorized the same thing from question one in the focus groups.

Having social events (such as coffee chats) were noted by the parents and the parent community liaisons as a category that contributes to a welcoming environment. Both the Spanish-speaking parents and the parent community liaisons categorized being able to provide information in Spanish as a way the district contributes. English-speaking parents and the parent community liaisons categorized surveying parents and the principals and the parent community liaisons categorized providing parent classes as ways the parents feel welcome in the district's environment.

The principals categorized systems building activities such as providing training for parent community liaisons and having information available on community resources as contributing to a welcoming environment. The principals were also the only group who categorized giving the community access to classes, meetings, or facilities as contributing to a welcoming environment.

(For Principals and Parent Community Liaisons) How are parents involved in their child's education?

(For Parents) How are you involved in your child's education?

Principals:

- Schools should communicate role of parent as partner to help students
- Schools should have an academic intervention process
- Parents teach manners, language and how to get along in a family (child's first teacher)
- Schools go over expectations, targets, and direction

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Attend events and classes to learn from one another
- Volunteer
- Assist at events
- Send stuff to help with school activities
- Dads are being involved more

English Speaking Parents:

- Homework
- Take care of children at home (take baths, eat well, go to bed on time to be ready for school)
- Attend school functions
- Check grades, email, or call teachers

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Attend events/awards
- Are informed about what is going on at school
- Be sure the student's daily routine is kept at home
- Is the child's first teacher
- Check grades

Figure 4. Categories for focus group question #3.

The categories from the focus groups for question three differed greatly. Parents gave specific examples of how they help their children. English-speaking parents categorized checking homework, taking care of the children at home, attending school functions and checking grades, e-mail, or calling teachers as specific examples of how they are involved in their child's education. Spanish-speaking parents categorized attending events, being informed as to what is going on at school, ensuring that the child's routine is kept at home, and checking grades as how they are involved in their child's education.

Not one category was found in all focus group answers from all groups. Both the Spanish-speaking parents and the principals noted that the parents are the child's first teacher. Three out of the four categories from principal responses did not align with how parents categorized their efforts in their child's education, but rather categorized school efforts when responding to the question. Principals categorized that schools should communicate roles of the parent as a specific partner to help students, have an academic intervention process and go over expectations, targets, direction and how parents can support their children to become citizens who give and don't take from the community.

Parent Community Liaisons also categorized volunteering, assisting at events, and sending materials to help with school activities as how parents are involved in their child's education. Parent Community Liaisons categorized fathers as being more involved and coming onto campus more and the only category that was present in three groups (both parent groups and that of the parent community liaisons) was attending events.

What can schools do to assist parents to help their children in their education?

Principals:

- Have and teach consistent expectations
- Teach that the goal is to build strong and independent citizens
- Teach that without a foundation of character building and ethics you can't get to academics
- Teach parents about the 'required' partnership of working collaboratively
- Be the educational professional
- Be problem solvers

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Have events to do activities together
- Have conversations about expectations of parents
- Teach parents about how schools work
- Use simple terms
- Communicate via e-mail

English Speaking Parents:

- Contact parents as soon as there is an issue
- Be mindful of events at school
- Provide more communication on academics
- Have teachers input grades right away
- Provide more opportunities for parents to meet with teachers
- Tell the good, not just the bad, about student when discussing child with parents

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Make it easier to have a conference with teachers
- Provide group parent meetings about the class
- Have an open door
- Communicate using all tools on all events happening in the school
- Provide more Spanish communication
- Provide parent classes that help parents as parents

Figure 5. Categories for focus group question #4.

The categories from the focus groups for question four could be separated into two terms used: teach and communication as all of the categories fit into one of these two terms. English-speaking parents categorized that schools should contact parents as soon as there is an issue and not wait to see if it will get better, be mindful of events at school (such as not giving homework so that students can have a meal with their family and go to bed on time on event nights), provide more communication on academics (homework on the website was given as one example), have teachers input grades right away, provide more opportunities for parents to meet with teachers, and tell the good, not just the bad, about a student when discussing the child with the parents.

Parent Community Liaisons categorized holding events (such as a math or science family night) to do activities together, having conversations about expectations of parents (such as looking into tutoring, signing agendas, reading notes, knowing what is going on), teaching parents about how schools work because they don't know, using simple terms (no educational acronyms), and communicating via e-mail as what schools can do to assist parents in helping their children in their education.

Spanish-speaking parents' categorized easier methods to conference with teachers, providing group parent meetings about the class (such as what is going on in the classroom, what the class is about, and explaining the differences in curriculum) and providing more Spanish at school events and parent conferences and parent classes for parents as parents.

The principals categorized teaching parents about issues, expectation, and goals, being the educational professional and being problem solvers as methods for schools to assist parents in helping their children in their education.

How can schools and parents work together for student success?

Principals:

- Communicate consistently
- Build a system that goes back and checks on students
- Have events/parent nights/student showcases to build relationships
- Work so that parents understand school efforts
- Get buy-in from parents

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Provide parent classes/outside resources
- Give parent workshops on information
- Communicate to build relationships
- Tell parents the school expectations of home life
- Give parents the knowledge of knowing what questions to ask
- Communicate with parents about their role

English Speaking Parents:

- Communicate using all avenues
- Communicate the rules and why, check to see if they understand
- Use Spanish speaking parents as translators at conferences or events
- Use parents when they offer to help
- Support parents
- Provide classes (ESL, nutrition)

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Communicate & support parents in Spanish
- Explain in Spanish
- Be a humanitarian with students and families
- Use parents to help translate at conferences
- Use all avenues of communication
- Make events mandatory for parents
- Have more events so parents get to know one another and school staff to be a community

Figure 6. Categories for focus group question #5.

The categories for focus group question five all had communication as multiple categories for each group. Principals categorized consistent communication, parent community liaisons categorized communicating with parents about their role (that they are their child's first teacher) and to build relationships, and the parents categorized communication using all avenues (e-mail, text, phone, flyer, marquees) and in Spanish to support non-English-speaking parents on how schools and parents can work together for student success.

Principals specifically categorized working so that parents understand school efforts (schools are working for the kids to build a partnership with parents so the student will build initiative to do it on their own) and Spanish-speaking parents categorized a humanitarian effort with students and their families. English-speaking parents categorized that support of parents (so they are ready and equipped to intervene when a student is struggling) and providing classes as ways schools and parents can work together.

Both set of parents groups noted that the schools can use parents as translators to assist other parents. Parents categorized buy-in from parents as necessary because the more buy-in from parents the greater success a campus has in helping a student get to where he/she needs to be.

As in question number three, the parent community liaisons categorized telling parents about the expectation of home life (having family time, dinner time together, asking about homework) as a method of schools and parents working together to work for student success. Parents did not categorize this, but did categorize communicating why the rules are there and checking for understanding as a way schools and parents can work together.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Principals:

- More consistent communication from District
- More learning opportunities for parents through outside resources
- More customer service training for front office staff development
- Good customer service definition

Parent Community Liaisons:

- Cultural awareness is needed
- Customer service that provides an emphasis on knowing information
- No appointment required
- Communicate timely with parents
- Would like to see an easier process to volunteer

English Speaking Parents:

- More strategies for parents
- Schools make it hard for parents to come in
- Communicate with parents as an ally
- Acknowledge parents
- Share with parents the part that the student is missing
- Be realistic

Spanish Speaking Parents:

- Bullying
- School menus
- Teacher supervision of students

Figure 7. Categories for focus group question #6.

The categories for focus group question number six did not match any groups. The principals categorized more consistent communication from the district, more learning opportunities for parents through outside resources, more customer service training for front office staff development, and defined good customer service as someone who is calm, speaks the language and has answers to questions when asked if they had anything to add.

The parent community liaison categorized necessary cultural awareness training (for front office staff and teachers that teaches participants that people and parents do care), customer service that provides an emphasis on knowing information, no appointment necessary (such as don't make it a requirement to have to make an appointment to speak with a school administrator), timely communication with parents as necessary, and an easier process to volunteer as what they wanted to add for their final thoughts which all fell under the umbrella of how to make the school better.

The English-speaking parents categorized more strategies for parents to help their students at home, noted that schools make it hard for parents to come in, categorized acknowledgement and communication with parents as an ally, sharing with parents the part that the student is missing, and categorized being realistic (*"Why is it called homework if they do it in class? Why make parents buy something like a calendar that students never use?"*) when asked if there was anything else they wanted to add.

Spanish-speaking parents categorized bullying (students do not talk about it but it is happening), school lunch menus, and teacher supervision (they noted when teachers release students they congregate and talk to other teachers and don't watch the students) when asked if there was anything else they wanted to add.

Lithman's (2006) sixth step of moving from categories into concepts as they relate to the research question of the study will be discussed in the fourth section under data analysis. Listed next is the second section of data collected from the District's parent survey.

Parent Survey Data

This section contains the information obtained from the parent survey data as proposed in the study. This data was gathered from the annual parent survey offered by the District that was available via the District website. It was marketed as a parent survey but did not ensure that only parents participate. No demographic data on the participants who take the parent survey are collected by the District. These data were used by the researcher to triangulate (Wolcott, 2005) with the categories developed from the focus groups and the researcher's journal entries. The district gave the parent survey for the first time during the 2013-2014 school year and again the next school year during which this case study was taking place. One change of data collection used by the school district in the second year was that in an effort to push more electronic only communication with families, reduce printing costs, and reduce staff needed to manually enter the data from paper responses, the survey was only given out electronically. The first year the survey was sent home via paper copies (in school folders for the elementary schools and in report cards with secondary students) and communicated electronically. Due to the different types of data collection, the data are presented in three sets: all data from the first year (paper and electronic responses), electronic data from the first year (electronic responses from the online survey only) and data from the second year (only available online). There were four questions asked on the survey and they remained the same for

both years (APPENDIX A, E & F). The questions were 1.) do you feel welcome at your child's school? 2.) do you know about parent trainings or workshops offered at your child's school? 3.) do you volunteer at school or district events? and 4.) do you feel like you receive sufficient information regarding your child's education? Parents had a two week timeframe to submit the survey both years.

Year One Parent Survey Data: All

There were 1,712 participants in the parent survey in year one (2013-2014 school year). This survey was sent home via paper copies (in school folders for the elementary schools and in report cards with secondary students) and communicated electronically via the school district website, campus websites, the district list serve e-mail communication, campus list serve e-mail communications and via the social media tool Twitter. A two-week timeframe was given for parents to participate. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

Results of the survey indicate that 94% of the 1712 parents taking the survey felt welcome at school, 74% of the 1696 parents taking the survey stated that they knew about parent trainings/workshops offered at their child's school, 21% of the 1709 parents taking the survey stated they volunteered at any school or district events and 85% of the 1695 parents taking the survey stated that they feel like they receive sufficient information regarding their child's education (APPENDIX A).

Year One Parent Survey Data: Electronic Only

There were 274 participants that took the survey electronically (completed the survey online) in the first year. It was communicated electronically via the school district website, campus websites, the district list serve e-mail communication, and campus list

serve e-mail communications and via the social media tool Twitter. A two-week timeframe was given for parents to participate. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

Results of the survey indicate that 84% of the 274 parents taking the survey felt welcome at school, 75% of the 267 parents taking the survey stated that they knew about parent trainings/workshops offered at their child's school, 36% of the 271 parents taking the survey stated they volunteered at any school or district events and 65% of the 272 parents taking the survey stated that they feel like they receive sufficient information regarding their child's education (Appendix E).

Year Two Parent Survey Data

There were 473 participants that participated in the parent survey the second year. It was only sent out electronically in an effort to push more electronic-only communication with families, reduce printing costs, and reduce staff needed to manually enter the data from paper responses. It was communicated electronically via the school district website, campus websites, the district list serve e-mail communication, campus list serve e-mail communications and via the social media tool Twitter. A two-week timeframe was given for parents to participate. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

Results of the survey indicate that 78% of the 456 parents taking the survey felt welcome at school, 61% of the 458 parents participating stated that they knew about parent trainings/workshops offered at their child's school, 37% of the 460 parents participating stated they volunteered at any school or district events and 53% of the 473

parents stated that they feel like they receive sufficient information regarding their child's education (APPENDIX F).

Table 1
Parent Survey Results Years 1 & 2

Parent Survey Results	Year 1 Paper & Electronic	Year 1 Electronic Only	Year 2 Electronic Only
Total Number of Participants	1,712	274	473
% Felt welcome	94%	84%	78%
% Know about parent trainings or workshops offered at their child's school	74%	75%	61%
% Volunteer at school or district events	21%	36%	37%
% Feel like they receive sufficient information regarding their child's education	85%	65%	53%

The next section of data results presented is that from the researcher's journal.

Researcher's Journal Data

This section presents the data from the researcher's journal during the data collection process. As proposed, the researcher kept a journal with her during the data collection process and made notes during campus visits, before or after focus groups, and whenever a thought or idea presented itself during other parts of the researcher's day. The researcher coded the data from her journal and looked for relational patterns from other categories found in the focus group and parent survey data. This process entailed the researcher first typing out all her entries in the order of them listed in her journal. She chose to only include journal entries that related to the study, and not other entries that were used as reminders or ideas for the researcher that were not relevant to the data

collected from the study. She then printed out the journal entries and read them to remind her about the time, place, mood and feelings she experienced when she wrote the journal entries. The researcher then used different color highlighters to group entries that had relationship to one another. From these colored highlighted journal entries, categories were developed. All 15 journal entries were used in the development of the categories.

Three categories presented themselves: focus-group reactions, campus climate and personal observations. These categories from the journal entries were used by the researcher to triangulate (Wolcott, 2005) with the categories developed from the focus groups and the parent survey data, which is articulated in section four under data analysis. This section will provide journal entries as divided by the three categories.

Focus Group Reactions

The researcher had journal entries that were categorized as focus group reactions. Many were indicators of strong and visceral reactions after some focus groups. She noted that she had to focus on staying ‘neutral’ during the focus groups even when she knew the answers to the questions the participants had, were discussing, or when interpreting rules (parents) or best practices (principals).

“I had to meet with the parents after the focus group this afternoon in the parking lot because I felt bad about their perception of another campus not being welcome to them and it was not the campus’ fault- it was ours- the district administration!!! Yes, the campus did not allow them in without an identification card, but it was not a campus rule-it was a district rule!!!! I had to tell them that while, YES- that elementary did do that, the rules have since changed and their new school they attend is now allowed to let them in because the District rules now allow campuses to let them in. It was merely a

matter of timing. They moved schools and they interpreted the new school to be nicer to them because they let them in. I just didn't want them thinking that their former school was still doing this and I apologized on behalf of the district administration. That district rule definitely impacted parents and those campuses in such a negative light....sad"

"These parents said over and over that they want the teachers to communicate with them in a timely matter....not when the kids have been getting bad grades or acting up for two weeks. I, too, would want that for my own kids."

"Despite any differences they may have, these principals care about these students and this community. They genuinely want to serve and educate. How to best do that with parents is the variable."

"These parents want to learn how to help their children in their education, they just don't know strategies. And why should we expect them to know??- they aren't formal educators!!!"

Campus Climate

The researcher had journal entries that were categorized as campus climate:

"That school was dirty on the outside. The inside was clean but the trash outside of the building made us look trashy and like they/we don't care"

"This school has little artwork on the walls. I noticed it because many others all do. The artwork and pictures give the campus a warm feeling"

"These parents love the portable they are in. They own it like it is their own classroom. They clean it up and take good care of it. They have photos of themselves with their students who attend the school. I think they feel like they belong."

Personal Observations

The researcher had various journal entries that were categorized as personal observations. This was often where she reflected on herself and her role as both the researcher and as an administrator in the district being studied:

“Wow, one mother looked genuinely scared of me when I walked into the room. I have seen and spoken with her at parent functions at the campus before so I felt comfortable with her, and said- Are you scared? And she said Yes. And I said why? And she said, cause you are with the Administration! I asked her if she knew why the community liaison and I asked her to come share and she said yes. Then I said, but why are you scared? And she said, I don’t know, I just worry. After the interview I asked her if she was ok or if she was still scared or worried and she said no, she just had never been asked those types of questions before. That makes me sad, but HOPEFUL!”

“I’ve been thinking about this whole critical pedagogy and Freire thing. It says we are either oppressed or an oppressor. That is deep. I mean, I have at times viewed my navigation through life as someone who is or has been oppressed because of my skin color and gender. But my role as an administrator has made me an oppressor. We oppress parents with our rules and policies and by following them, I am on the other side. I’m an oppressor. I can no longer speak for or on-behalf of these parents as I have assumed I can because of my similar upbringing of being poor, female, and colored. Why? Because in this role as an Administrator I am not oppressed. I realize as an Administrator I fall on the side of an oppressor...”

“We got back the survey results today of the parent survey- they were very low which I can conclude that, as the parents stated in their interviews, they want multiple

forms of communication- not just electronic only. We can't assume as a district that everyone will take the survey online, when clearly the response rate was about 4xs more when paper surveys were also used. Lesson learned- the hard way."

Data Analysis of Research Questions

This fourth and final section contains the data analysis of the research questions. The aim of this section is to analyze the data as it relates to the question of how the public school, understood as a complex site of public pedagogy, engages an educative practice of encouraging parental involvement and how that practice is received, engaged, or contested by differing groups of parents. The analysis will be holistic (concerned with the complete system) and culturally appropriate as it will attempt to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationship of causes and consequences that affect the human behavior of those found in this qualitative study (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984).

The analysis will layout the relationship patterns found in the data via interpretive commentary by the researcher. Contextual information will be used to add meaning and clarify the significance. The analysis will include insights from the research literature that includes theoretical framing. The first section of the data analysis will address the data categories found in the focus group data and the movement into concepts. The second section will address the themes that emerged from the data analysis and triangulation of the themes with the parent survey data and researcher journal observations data. The third section will address the research questions asked in this study. As proposed, a visual model of the themes as they relate to one another within the theoretical framework is presented in the fourth and final section of data analysis in order to better understand the phenomenon presented in this case study.

Focus Group Data Categories

Lichman's (2006) sixth step of moving from categories into concepts was done in the study using data from the categories found in the focus groups. The six category sheets by focus group questions that were developed were then taped up on a wall by the researcher and read and re-read multiple times a day over a period of three days to see what ideas popped out. Any ideas were written on the sheet such as "school staff answers vary greatly from parents" (for question number three) or "looks like one way communication from schools when parents are requesting two way" (for question number four). After this period the researcher then used the advice of Rossman & Rallis (2003) to "think of a category as a word or phrase describing some segment of your data that is explicit, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes" (p. 282, emphasis added). Richards & Morse (2007) further note "categorizing is how we get 'up' from the diversity of data to the shapes of the data, the sorts of things represented. Concepts are how we get up to more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs" (p. 157). Using this guidance, the researcher then wrote frequently occurring patterns she observed from studying the data from the focus groups. Ten patterns emerged and are explained in detail next.

Parent contact. Parents overwhelmingly noted that they wanted to be contacted by the schools and as frequently and using as many tools as possible. Principals noted making contact to invite parents into the school and that having staff on hand in order to answer parent questions is important. A person who specifically addresses direct contact with parents (such as the parent community liaison) permeated the focus group data across all focus group answers as how and who makes a parent feel welcome. Parents

asked for informal and formal contact such as parent conferences and social events that allow for parents to meet the teachers. Parent contact in a language that parents understand (in this case study, Spanish) was also requested during teacher conference and during school events. Parents requested positive feedback and not just the negative when contacted directly. Principals and parent community liaisons echoed this pattern of parent contact as they noted several instances to communicate with parents on what the school's roles, rules and expectations of parents are. Principals noted consistent communication as contact with parents was a way in which schools and parents can work together for student success. This followed the pattern of parents noting that they wanted to be communicated with and seen as an ally of the school. English speaking parents also noted that the schools contact parents to conduct surveys.

Expectations. The expectations of both the parents and the schools were noted by all focus group participants. The principals noted that they go over expectations, targets, and direction of how parents can support children. Parents noted that they expected two-way communication with the school, quick contact from the school when there is an issue, and communication in a language that they understand in order to better support their children. Parent community liaisons noted that schools can assist parents by having conversations about the expectations of parents and by teaching parents how schools work or function. Principals also followed this pattern of noting that teaching goals and 'required' partnerships was an expectation of how schools can assist parents to help their children in their education. Parents echoed one another's expectations of having an open door for parents and a staff that was welcoming to every person who enters the campus.

Working together. Across all the focus group data all participants noted that they need to work together. Principals and parent community liaisons noted that schools can work together with parents to teach them about the school and campus expectations, policies, guidelines, and norms. Parents echoed that they want communication from teachers so that they can address any issues directly with their children but that they have to work together with the schools. Parents noted specifically that they want to work together with the teachers. Parent community liaisons noted that schools can work together with parents to have events and activities and parents noted that parents can work together to support one another in areas such as translating at parent conferences or at the events. Parents also noted that they work together with schools by checking homework and grades and calling or e-mailing teachers when they hear of an issue with their student.

Two-way communication. Two-way communication was a pattern that arose out of the parent focus group data. Parents noted that they wanted to work together with the teachers on the academic progress of their children. They noted that they do communicate with the schools but request that the schools communicate back with them in a timely manner. Parent community liaisons noted that parents have informal two-way communication with one another and work to learn from one another. Principals noted that by providing a parent community liaison and having an office staff who was able to provide answers for parents that they were providing two-way communication for the parents. They also noted that building an academic system that goes back and checks on students allows for two-way communication for parents and students to work together for student success.

Warm and welcoming front office. Across the focus group data a warm and welcoming front office was noted as what contributes to a welcoming environment. Parents noted that a warm and welcoming environment was one that was not confrontational and did not contain persons who seemed to be bothered by the addition of a parent in the office. Principals noted that a warm and welcoming front office staff was one that had a smile and was able to answer questions for parents on their own, i.e. being able to solve the problems that parents bring in. Parent community liaisons and Spanish speaking parents noted that having someone who understood and could speak Spanish contributed to a warm and welcoming office staff. Parent community liaison data followed the pattern of highlighting a warm and welcoming front office by noting that a warm and welcoming front office staff acknowledges people when they enter the door, gets up to speak to people, and makes eye contact with whom enters the building.

Non-confrontational staff. This pattern arose from the data from the parents. When asked what contributed to a welcoming environment, parents stated examples of what it was not and what it should be: a staff that was non-confrontational and treated everyone the same. Spanish speaking parents noted that having an office staff that does not act like you are bothering them is a contributing factor to a welcoming environment in schools. Non-confrontational staff were described by parents as someone who does not judge a person by how one looks, does not ignore a person when they walk in, does not act like they are too busy when someone walks into the school, is not accusatory, and does not get angry. Neither the principal or parent community liaison data addressed confrontational staff.

Importance of parent community liaisons. The important role of the parent community liaison was a pattern as it was often the example of what constituted for a warm and welcoming front office staff member or a person who had the answers for parents should they have questions. Principals and English-speaking parent data noted that the school district providing a parent community liaison is a tool the district uses to contribute to a welcoming environment. The Spanish-speaking parents directly noted that a parent community liaison makes them feel welcome and invites them into the school. Parent community liaisons noted that they are able to speak the language that parents understand in order to assist them and field their questions.

Teachers are with the students most. The data from the parent focus groups noted that teachers were with the students most and had the information that parents wanted. Teachers have grades and know how the student did each day. Spanish-speaking parents noted that a harmonious relationship between the teachers and the students contributed to a welcoming environment in schools. English-speaking parent data followed this pattern as they noted that schools (teachers) must be respectful of both parents and students in order for there to be a welcoming environment. Parents noted that they are involved by checking grades and homework which are directly monitored by teachers and noted that teachers should enter grades as quickly as possible as an idea of how schools can assist parents to help their children in their education. Spanish-speaking parents also noted that wanted an easier method to have a conference with teachers, especially in their own language of Spanish. Neither the principals nor the parent community liaisons addressed the role of the teacher being with students most.

Visitation rules. The rules for visiting campuses and when they were welcome to enter presented itself in the data. Parents noted that they wanted to come into the school but did not understand the volunteer and visitor guidelines. Parent community liaisons noted that they would like to see an easier process to volunteer. Spanish speaking parents noted that the rule of asking all visitors for an identification card provided for a safe environment for the school, which contributed to a welcoming environment. Having activities at the school was questioned by parents as to who was allowed to come in and who was not. The English-speaking parents noted that schools make it hard for parents to come in and parent community liaisons noted that an appointment is required when parents come onto campus and want to speak to someone on an issue.

How schools work. Throughout the data of all focus group participants, the pattern of how schools work arose from the data. Principals and parent community liaisons noted that it is their job to explain to parents how schools work via expectations. Parent community liaisons also noted that can assist parents to help children by having conversations with parents on the expectations of their role as parents and by telling parents directly how schools work. Parents noted in the data that schools made it hard and difficult for parents to get information. Parents noted that they did not know what certain classes meant and asked for more information on the academic procedures of the classroom and what the students were doing.

Movement from Categories to Concepts/Themes

The next step for the researcher was to continue to further search for patterns within the categories. From the ten categories, she observed that many were in relationship with one another on the issue(s) they addressed. She then grouped them

together based on their relationships to one another and four groups emerged. These became the concepts/themes of the data. The four themes are discussed in this next section and include insights from the research literature that includes theoretical framing. Triangulation of the four themes concludes this section.

Communication. Communication was the first theme that presented a pattern persistently throughout the data. The focus group data from all groups noted that what that communication entails or looks like varied from the principals, parent community liaisons, and the parents. English-speaking parents in the focus groups wanted more timely communication with the school on how their students are doing and principals in the focus groups wanted more communication to parents about the academic expectations of the school for the students. Both the English and Spanish-speaking parents from the focus groups noted that they wanted more communication with the school and teachers (two way communication) on how the student is doing while the school personnel of principals and parent community liaisons in the focus groups noted that they wanted communication to the parents (one way communication) about how things are done or how the student is doing academically.

Principal: "I know some of us have been here a while and, we began to understand our parents better and they understand us better. We begin to build those relationships that allow us to say we're offering support but it's not like voluntary support, your child needs to be in tutoring, they are going to be in required tutoring. This is what our expectation is and then, over time, the parent begins to say, oh okay, they're on our side. They're working with us and, I know just in my experience, you know when we're consistent like that, when we explain

those things you stop getting the parent phone calls that say, 'I don't want my student to take the required tutoring' and, instead they are stating 'can I have them signed up four days a week?' and then we, we talk about the part where it's written down. Did you do the stuff at home? You know, that's building the partnership."

All parent focus group data noted that they needed more communication about how their children were doing academically in school. The Spanish speaking focus group data noted that they also want to know specifically what they are doing and how the students are learning such as explaining what the classes are about. The parent survey data also noted that only 53% of parents felt like they receive sufficient information regarding their child's education. Spanish speaking parents in the focus groups noted that they do not understand or know about the classes and asked for more parent group meetings in order to learn more about what and why the students are learning. Both English and Spanish speaking parent data from the focus groups noted that Spanish speaking parents want and need more translations and explanations of the information given to them. Both English and Spanish parent focus groups suggested using bilingual parents to assist the Spanish speaking parents at these events or conferences.

Parent: "Mi niño tiene una clase que no sé ni que es. Le digo que es y dice pues no te puedo explicar. Porque ni él sabe. En español no sabe decirme." (My son has a class that I do not know what it is. I would tell you but I can't explain it and neither can he. I don't know how it is in Spanish).

All focus group participants noted that communicating more information using various methods is needed such as e-mail, text, phone call, the website, using school

marquees, and flyers. When asked as a follow-up which one parents preferred, the parents in both English and Spanish focus groups category data noted “all” because parents use various communication tools and the parent participants in the focus groups noted that other parents also use various communication tools. The parent survey data noted that multiple forms of communication returned higher rates of participation. The return rate of parent feedback was quadrupled when both paper and online surveys were used.

The focus group data from all participants found that all groups supported the notion of more parent events where parents can come to meet one another and the school staff in order to build relationships and community. While principals and parent community liaison focus group data noted that schools assist parents by teaching them about the ‘required’ partnership of working collaboratively and having conversations about the expectations of parents at home, English parent focus group data noted that schools can assist by having quicker contact with the child’s parent by the student’s individual teacher as soon as there is an issue.

Communication, as a theme, is supported in the literature and the theoretical framework of critical public pedagogy. As found in the literature, when parents were asked, they said they were participating based on their own beliefs of what constitutes parental involvement (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004). They communicated that they are involved and that they do support parental involvement. This aligns with Desforges and Abouchaar’s (2003) findings that “at-home involvement works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self-concept and high educational aspirations (p. 86).

From a critical theory perspective, researchers found that Latinos believe in many forms of parental involvement in non-traditional manners such as attending sporting events, other events outside of the school, seeing a teacher at the grocery store, and other activities where they value informal communication (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003; Vasquez-Nutall et al., 2006). This paralleled the data from parents who wanted more informal events to be able to communicate with teachers. These are opportunities for teachers and schools to communicate with Latino parents, as they “may not see volunteering in classrooms and at other school-related activities as part of their role unless personally asked to do so” (Guerra & Nelson, 2013, p. 22). Both principals and parents noted that parents are responsible for raising moral responsible citizens. This parallels with the data that Latino parents believe that their biggest role as parents is raising moral and responsible citizens and that school work should be primarily the responsibility of the professionals who are there to teach their children (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Trumbull et al., 2003; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vasquez-Nutall et al., 2006).

As Guerra and Nelson (2010) noted in their review of the literature, parents of different backgrounds, languages and economic levels have high expectations and may support their children’s education in different ways from the traditional middle-class model that Lightfoot (2004) noted which is often used in the majority of schools where power dynamics are strong and the schools control aspects of program planning. This aligns with the data where principals noted that sharing school expectations of how parents should both parent at home and in the academic lives of their children and parent

community liaisons noted that volunteering is how parents are involved in their child's education and did not match the parent data.

From a critical public pedagogy standpoint, the data collected on communication directly aligns with Burdick and Sandlin's (2013) findings that the school's pedagogy of parental involvement documented in this inquiry provided school based meanings of involvement and the school site aimed to affect a certain disposition in individuals (parents). The public pedagogy lens aimed to further locate parents as critically engaged actors, and from this vantage point identified a struggle via parent data that noted parents frequently want to work together with teachers and school administrators to develop home-school partnerships for them to be reflective of the beliefs and values of both groups (Jeynes, 2012; Vazquez-Nutall et al., 2008). "*Use us as allies*" is how a parent in the study put it directly, which echoes the literature that notes that asking parents about themselves and what they deem important is an important tool in understanding their cultural symbols and forms of representation in the community and in the schools (Warren et al., 2009).

Customer service. The data from all participants in the focus groups noted that positive customer service characteristics helped to create a welcoming environment for parents. Both English and Spanish parent data collected in the focus groups describe what good customer service looks like, and what it does not entail, based on their experiences in the schools:

Parent: "Like the people in the front office, I mean, if you walk up and they're like in a hurry to get you out without conversing with you, or not even just, I know they're busy. But if they look at you and you don't see anything friendly about

their face or anything, and they look at you seriously then you're not going to feel welcomed, you're not going to feel wanted, you know if you don't feel that then you're not going to come"

Parent community liaison focus group data noted that while they had received training on customer service, they felt that more customer service training and cultural training was needed by both school office staff and the teachers to improve the climate of the school. Principals in the focus groups did not note a need for cultural training. Another category found in all participant focus group data under the theme of customer service was having the correct information for parents and/or being able (and willing) to find the answers. Principal focus group data noted that the district hires pleasant office staff members who are problem solvers in the office, but the English and Spanish speaking parent data from the focus groups did not align evenly with the principal data as it noted that more parents stated that the office staff is not as helpful or welcoming. The parent survey data from 2014 noted that 78% of parents felt welcome which was down from the year before. Data from all participants in the focus groups noted that office staff that speak Spanish and the district providing a parent community liaison contributes to a welcoming environment.

Principal: "Having good and knowledgeable staff help keep me in the classrooms and I don't have to be up front all the time. I communicate with our staff proper protocols and tell them this is my expectation. I shouldn't have to be there for that school to function. They should know the answers."

Customer service, as a theme, is supported in the literature and the theoretical framework of critical public pedagogy. Warren et al. (2009) argue that for strong home

and school relationships, the amount of power differentiation between families and schools should be reduced. Parents noted that school staff asserted their power by not welcoming them and being confrontational in their demeanor. All data noted that having information for parents in Spanish was important to make them feel welcome and part of a customer service tool. Asking parents and community members about themselves and what they deem important is an important tool in understanding their cultural symbols and forms of representation in the community and in the schools (Warren et al., 2009). Public pedagogy analysis asserts that the school's informal pedagogy related to a phenomenon such as parental involvement might be taken up, mobilized, and/or reconfigured by its intended or imagined learners (Sandlin et al., 2011). In this study, data on customer service highlighted the large difference from the dominant space (principal and parent community liaison idea of customer service) and the stark reality of the actual space as it is perceived and experienced by the parents.

Personnel. Personnel provided by a school district was the third theme derived from the data. Front office staff, parent community liaisons and teachers were all personnel that the focus group data from all participants noted contribute to a welcoming environment, or, as the focus group data from parents also noted- can hinder the perception of a welcoming environment.

The focus group data from both the principals and the Spanish and English speaking parent focus groups noted that front office staff was seen as the gateway to the school. Data from the English speaking parent focus groups noted that if the parents do not feel welcome, they were not likely to come back, even when asked by other parents to come and assist.

Parent: The first one (parent community liaison) said ‘we need you,’ and, you know, she made it feel welcoming, not the people in the front-office, not the teachers, not the staff, nobody. It was her. Then she left and we asked some other parents, before we had our new one (parent community liaison), ‘can you come help us?’ And they were like, ‘okay, because ya’ll asked but other than that we really don’t want to go because they’re mean and we don’t like it.’”

The focus group data from the parent community liaisons noted that schools should use simple terms and teach parents about how schools work because most of the parents are not used to school environments or do not know how a school functions.

Parent Community Liaison: “Most of our parents don’t know what makes up a school, how our school is developed. The majority of the time we in the school use a language that is school language and I’m constantly saying to our school, we need to talk in layman’s terms. All these acronyms, I don’t remember sometimes what they mean and from a parent perspective. Talking in terms they understand would make everyone feel comfortable.”

The English and Spanish speaking parent focus group data did note that in addition to roles of the front office staff or parent community liaisons in creating a welcoming environment, parents wanted to have more contact with their child’s teacher for a better understanding of what is happening with their child and the school. The researcher’s journal entry data also noted this.

Parent: Si ellos dice tu niño va muy bien- no necesita conferencia y no puede uno ver al maestro en todo el año. A mi me gustaría estar viendo mas al maestro seguido para ver que pasa con los hijos. (If they say that your child is doing well-

a conference isn't needed then a parent doesn't get to see the teacher the whole year. I would like to see the teacher more often to see what is going on with the children).

Spanish speaking parent focus group data noted that harmony between the teachers and the students and working as a humanitarian with students and families were key in working together for student success.

Parent: Un ambiente agradable? Pues yo pienso que como la armonía que hay entre los estudiantes con los maestros porque si hay mucha confianza y les dan mucha atención Este, también, los padres pueden hablar con ellos de cualquier cosa sin moleste nada. Están abiertos para cualquier cosa. No cualquier escuela escucha a los padres. (What is a welcoming environment? Well I think the harmony between the students and the teachers because if there is confidence, then they will listen. Also, if parents are able talk with the teachers without bothering anyone. They are open to whatever. Not every school listens to the parents).

This echoed the English speaking focus group parent data of acknowledging each person and treating everyone the same as human beings as key to providing a welcoming environment.

Personnel, as a theme, is supported in the literature and the theoretical framework of a critical public pedagogy. The data from parents on wanting to work together with teachers highlights the literature that notes that parental involvement assists in student achievement when used in strategies such as an emphasized partnership between teachers and parents, parents checking homework, and communication between parents and

teachers (Jeynes, 2012). The data noted that parents asking for a phone call, giving a direct number to call, and then not being called was frustrating and gave them a sense of distrust. This parallels with the literature that found that if parents' views on parental involvement do not match teacher or campus norms, distorted ideas on how to engage in parental involvement and limited roles for parents arise, despite their willingness to participate (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Eberly et al., 2007; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fish, & Hernandez, 2003). Parents that believe that their opinions or participation are not valued are hesitant to be active in their students' schools (Turney & Kao, 2009).

The data also noted that parent community liaisons were seen as a key person on a campus to contribute to a welcoming environment. This echoes the literature that notes that having a key person who is supportive and is trained through participation of feedback and how to provide resources can bring a sense of openness and feeling valued (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Waugh (2000) suggests that in regards to parent involvement, strategies would need to involve all teachers and not just specific staff dedicated to working with parents such as parent community liaisons. Davies, Burch, and Johnson (1991) found that a missing piece is the classroom teacher in an initiative as they are the most important connection between the child and the family.

From a critical perspective, school staff such could have a notion of how to engage parents that does not reflect parent values. Volunteering in schools, such as in classrooms, on school projects, or for fundraising activities benefits the schools, but not necessarily the parents (Lightfoot, 2004). This type of parental involvement is seen as individualistic. While this is a cultural norm for White middle-class families, it is not the

norm in collectivist societies such as Latino, African-American and Asian cultures (Guerra & Nelson, 2010). Parent community liaisons noted that an easier system for parents to volunteer would assist schools and parents to work together while parents did not mention volunteering in their data as a tool for parent involvement.

From a public pedagogy perspective neither the teachers nor the parent community liaisons tend towards engagement in pedagogy as a grassroots or collective effort and they remain rooted in a “dominant educational practice- a position that takes knowledge to be a thing already made and learning to be an experience already know” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 5). There is opportunity here for schools to continue efforts to engage parents while also moving to an understanding of parents as actors in the pedagogical process. In addition to occupying the social space as intended audiences of a pedagogy of parent involvement (Sandlin et al., 2011), parents can likewise be understood as public pedagogues able to teach the school and its personnel about effective parental involvement in education. This understanding invites a radical shift in how school personnel imagine their role and the place of the institution in the pedagogical process, and calls for a great priority on alliance building, mutual learning, and shared engagement as an embodiment of democratic education. Data from the parents unequivocally demonstrates the reality of differences and contradictions when noting that key personnel, such as parent community liaisons or teachers, can assist in providing a welcoming environment but can also bring along distrust following from particular actions. This finding represents a possible fracture within the category of school personnel that suggests the school needs to pedagogically engage its personnel in critical reflection on expanded democratic notions of parental involvement and accompanying

practices. The term “fracture” is specifically employed in this finding as a signal of the possibility that personnel differences may not only be individual, but rather patterned across personnel categories. In other words, it may be that parent liaisons develop a more critically engaged understanding and practice related to parent involvement because of a combination of training and on the job experience from their role as advocates, but that similar development eludes teachers and/or administrators.

Organizational policies/guidelines/rules/norms. Organizational policies/guidelines/rules/norms were the fourth and final theme that derived from the data. Many parents in both the English and Spanish speaking parent focus groups were not aware of school policies, guidelines or rules or did not understand them or why there were developed.

Parent: “I know there are a lot of safety issues now but like if I want to drop in and have lunch with my child or sit in on a class. It’s like a big dramatic thing”.

Another Parent: “Yeah, it’s a whole paper and a 3 day notice. The school makes it hard to be involved.”

Both the English and Spanish parent focus group data noted that parents held the perception that coming into schools was difficult and did not know the rules or differences between coming to eat lunch with a child or coming to volunteer. District data in the current year (2014) parent survey showed low rates of volunteerism (37%) and only 61% noted that they know when events are going on.

Parent: “One of the things I’ve noticed, like if you want to be a volunteer, you have to fill out an application and then you have to turn it into the district not to

the school. I think, I mean you're already doing a background when you come in at the school, so why not, just use that method that you have?"

This echoed the focus group data from the parent community liaisons, which noted that they felt that schools can assist parents by telling them how and why schools work.

Explaining policies, guidelines, rules and norms, as a theme, are supported in the literature and the theoretical framework of critical public pedagogy. Johnson, Pugach and Hawkins (2004) found that schools must work diligently to ensure that their actions and words are reliable for parents to trust actions put in place by the school. Parent data supported that they did not understand volunteer regulations and did not trust certain schools that gave them different answers at different times. The researcher noted in a journal entry that the parents did not understand the process.

Peter Senge (1990) noted that too often in building systems, organizations make changes only to certain parts without seeing the complex long term effects on the whole organization, as the data noted was the case for making parents show identification cards to enter the building (for safety, but excluded some parents). From a critical lens, parents who did not have direct access to an identification card were not explained why the system was put in place and how they could work around it, but rather were systematically excluded. Trumball et al. (2003) note that this lack of understanding of oneself and the different beliefs, values, and goals among cultures are the largest barriers in parent-school communication that affect parental involvement.

From a public pedagogy perspective the institution of the school consistently sets its meaning making from an educational perspective, grounded in conventional institutional understandings (Brady, 2006; Burdick and Sandlin, 2013). The data from the

principals and parent community liaisons noted that they view themselves as ones doing the teaching as a direct act (including explaining the policies, guidelines, rules, and norms), and yet parent data noted that they were confused within this process. *“Why do you make them buy a book if they aren’t going to use it?”* and *“Why do you give them homework on the same night you expect them to come to the school?”* were parent questions from the data. These questions signify that explaining policies, guidelines, rules and norms remains insufficient in that it affirms traditional academic priorities without the capacity to critically reflect on the practice of those priorities or to mutually engage with parents or students in identifying inconsistencies or alternate possibilities.

Concept model of theme grouping. This concept model on the next page shows how the researcher grouped the ten categories. She observed that many were in relationship with one another on the issue(s) they addressed. She then grouped them together based on their relationships to one another and four groups emerged. These became the concepts/themes of the data. For example, parents wanted to be contacted quickly, the expectation of communication was shared from all focus groups, working together to assist students, and two way communication requested by parents were all determined by the researcher to fall within the theme of systematic communication. Having a warm, welcoming front office staff that are non-confrontational was put in the theme of customer service by the researcher. Parents and principals both noted that parent community liaisons were important and parents also noted that their children are with their teachers the most. These two employees by the school were then grouped into the personnel theme by the researcher. Visitation rules and how school work were questions

brought up by the parents and topics that both the principals and parent community liaisons noted that parents did not know or needed to be told about.

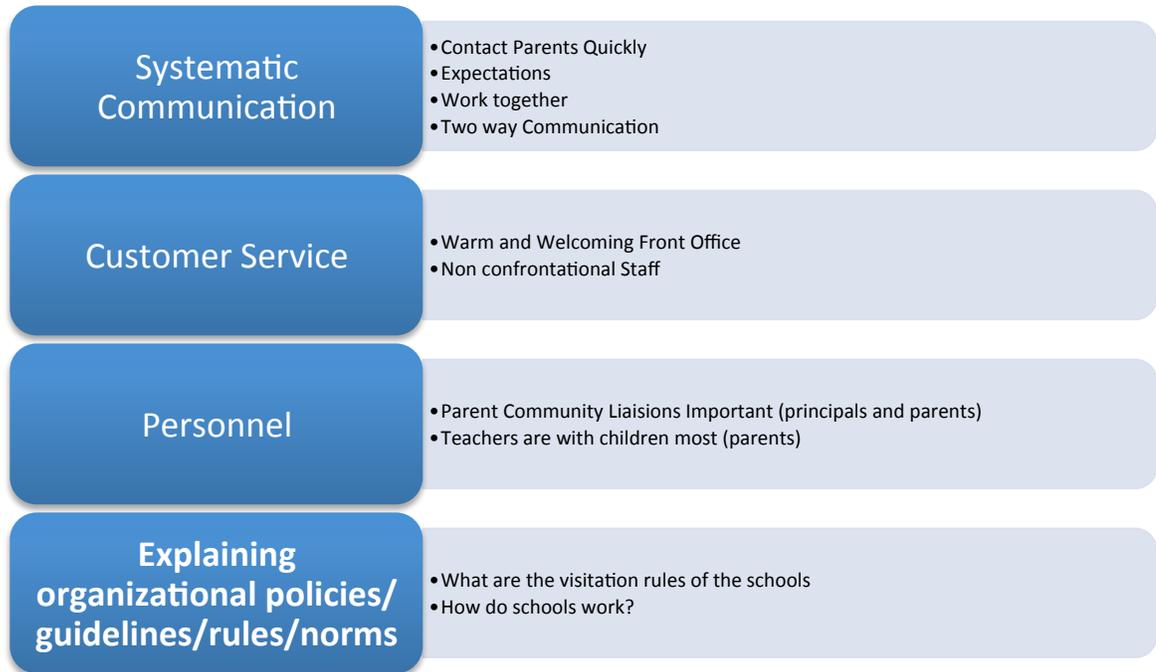


Figure 8. The concept model of theme grouping.

Triangulation

The four themes that emerged from the focus groups were then triangulated (Wolcott, 2005) with the data from all three data sources (focus groups, parent surveys, and researcher journal entries) for trustworthiness. The four themes, and how they were triangulated, are discussed next. The section ends with a figure of the triangulation process.

Communication. Communication was triangulated with the data from the focus groups, the parent surveys and the researcher's journal entries. In the focus group data sources, the parents noted that they wanted to be contacted, had expectations that they should be contacted, and noted that communication that is two way and in which they worked together was present in the data and validated the concept of communication in

order to understand how a school district could systematically create a welcoming environment for parents.

A key communication tool, the parent survey, had data that found that the percentage of parents who felt that the school district provided a welcoming environment declined in the second year, yet these data cannot be compared directly to the previous year because it only included electronic surveys from the second year. The first year had three times the number of participants and it was given out in both paper and electronic formats. Parents in the focus group noted that all types of communication were needed to parents: paper, electronic, verbal, telephone calls, and texts. The parent survey data shows that in order for a school district to get more participants both paper and electronic surveys should be used and the school district should be aware that despite the amount of electronic surveys sent in the second year, only 78% felt welcome at the school.

The data from the researcher's journal entries echoed the pattern of communication desired by the parents. Journal entries noted that parents wanted communication from the teachers in a timely manner and an administrator speaking with a parent was so taboo for one of the parents that it was relayed to the researcher that the parent was scared and nervous during her time in the space of inquiry.

Customer service. Customer service was triangulated with the data from the focus groups, the parent surveys and the researcher journal entries. In the focus group data sources, the parents noted specifically what was good and what was bad customer service. The data suggest parents want a warm and welcoming front office with non-confrontational staff. The pattern of parents noting what was poor customer service based on their experiences in the school correlates with the parent survey data that saw a

decrease in percentage for parents who felt welcome in schools during the second year.

The data from the researcher's journal entries also correlate with the data that suggest that parents also perceived negative information being received by parents as affecting the customer service climate of the campus. A journal entry noted that the parents who were not allowed to visit the school without a national identification card were very vocal in their displeasure with the front office staff and general customer service satisfaction with the school.

Personnel. Personnel were triangulated with the data from the focus groups, the parent surveys and the researcher journal entries. In the data sources, the parents and principals noted that the parent community liaisons were an important staff member for the school to have as they not only provide information but also make parents feel welcome. Parent data noted that the children are with the teachers the most and parents noted that quick and effective teacher communication (entering grades right away or contacting parent as soon as there is an issue) can assist with a welcoming environment for parents.

Parent community liaisons work with volunteers in the school district and their work with volunteers correlates with parent survey data that showed the only increase from year one to year two. The percentage of parents who noted that they volunteer increased from 21% to 37%. The data from the researcher's journal entries echoed the importance of teachers as key personnel. One journal entry noted that they felt that they do not get enough information from the teacher and another journal entry echoed the sentiments of parents who work with a parent community liaison who has her own

portable. The researcher's journal entry noted that the parent community liaison worked to provide that space for the parents and they loved it.

Explaining organizational policies/guidelines/rules/norms. Explaining the organizational policies/guidelines/rules/norms was triangulated with the data from the focus groups, the parent surveys and the researcher journal entries. In the focus group data sources, the parents, principals and parent community liaisons noted that the parents did not know how schools work or operate and the pattern of confusion over the visitation rules by the parents echoed the importance of explaining policies, guidelines, rules and norms. This data paralleled the data from the research journal entries who had several entries that reflected on the parents' unknowing of why the school district operates the way it does. Parent survey data also reflected this theme as the percentage of parents who feel like they receive sufficient information on their child's education decreased from year one to year two.

Triangulating the data was the final step in the data analysis in order to address the research question and sub questions and is represented in a figure below.

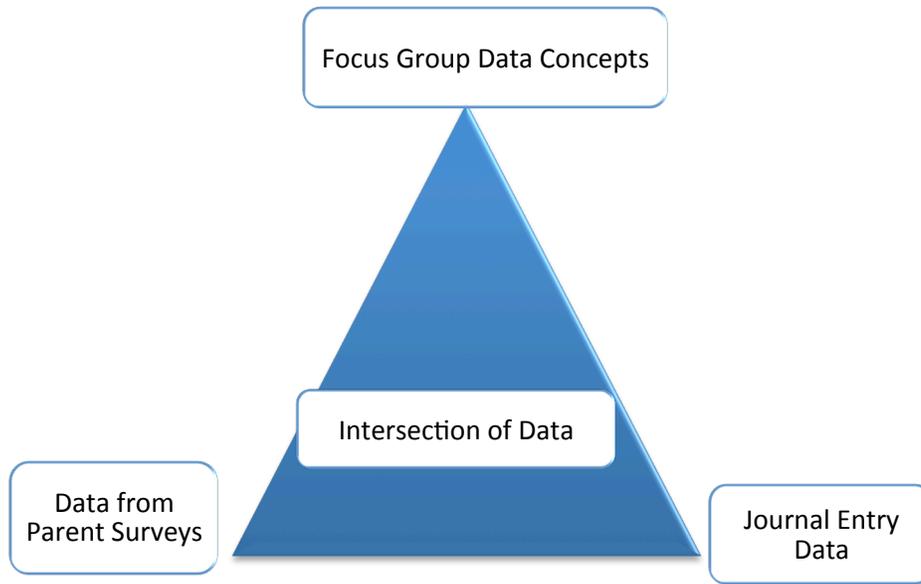


Figure 9. The triangulation process.

Focus Group Questions

This section on data analysis addresses the research questions posed in this study. The primary research question and three sub questions are addressed and supported by the findings from the data analysis.

Research Question One

The primary research question of this study is how does a school district, as a site of public pedagogy, systematically create a welcoming environment that supports parental involvement? Communication was the first theme that presented a pattern persistently throughout the data analysis. The data suggests that parents want to work together for two-way communication between the parents and the school and the parents wanted to be contacted immediately regarding any matter pertaining to their child. Positive customer service characteristics were the second pattern that was persistent in the data. The data suggests that warm and friendly front office staff members who are not

confrontational support a welcoming environment. Personnel were the third pattern that was resolute in the data. District staff members, such as parent community liaisons and responsive teachers, were suggested by the data to assist in helping to shape a welcoming environment for parents. Finally, explaining organizational practices, guidelines, rules and norms was the fourth and final pattern that perpetuated the data. Parents were unaware of the cause of many effects they were experiencing and principals and parent community liaisons noted that assisting them to teach them was important to providing a welcoming environment.

Analysis of the data in this study suggests that the school district should develop a system that addresses the four themes of communication, customer service, personnel and explaining organizational policies/guidelines/rules and norms as, together, they showed a relational pattern of contributing to a welcoming environment.

Sub Question One

Sub question one asked what does it take to make a parent feel welcome. The focus group data from the English and Spanish speaking parents noted that school personnel played a key factor in how parents feel welcome. Not only did the front office staff need to smile and look-up, but the data from all the parents in the focus groups also noted that the front office personnel should have answers available for parents and should not make parents feel like they are bothering them from their work. The focus group data from all participants in all groups noted that interactions with parent community liaisons were noted as a contributing factor to a welcoming environment. Teacher relationships were also noted in the English and Spanish speaking parent focus group data as a

contributing factor as parents noted that they want to hear directly from their child's teacher in how to help their children with their education.

Sub Question Two

Sub question two asked what systematic characteristics support helping parents to feel welcome. The researcher noted from focus group participants' responses to specific questions (questions #1 and #2 about what a school district could do) that systems of hiring and training key personnel such as a parent community liaisons, training for customer service in the front office, providing staff that speak the language of the parents, and systematic forms of communication such as informal coffee chats, family meeting events, parent conferences, and providing information via various communication outlets help parents feel welcome.

Sub Question Three

Sub question three asked how the characteristics from sub question two support parental involvement. The focus group data from the English and Spanish speaking parents noted that the characteristics of hiring and training key personnel, customer service training, hiring bilingual staff, having parent conferences, and systematic forms of communication both informal (conversation, family events) and formal (e-mails, parent conferences, and website updates) support parental involvement by providing a welcoming environment that allows parents to feel comfortable in asking for strategies to help their students at home. The parent community liaison and English and Spanish speaking focus group data, and data from the researcher's journal also noted that these characteristics allow school personnel the opportunity to meet with parents on an

informal level that allows for two-way communication in order for both parties (the school personnel and the parents) to work together as allies for the students.

Concept Model

As noted in the methodology section, a concept model was developed by the researcher based on the data analysis to show a visual model of the four themes as they relate to one another from the relationship patterns for creating a welcoming environment that affects parental involvement. In the model, located in the center is the welcoming environment as that was the goal of the study- to understand what contributes to a welcoming environment. The four themes are connected in relationship to the welcoming environment. Those four themes are communications, personnel, customer service and explaining policies, guidelines, rules and norms. The imperfect circle around the model represents the space of inquiry and the constant movement that a school district should flow through when trying to understand what parents want as it is never ending and constantly changing.

Development of this concept model was based on both the literature in the field and the themes that arose from the data. From a theoretical perspective, public pedagogy allowed the inquiry to have “complex and often contradictory articulations” (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 173) that are often present in public pedagogy approaches. Hence, the imperfect circle in the concept model. The literature review in chapter two on parental involvement noted the complexities and opportunities associated with the concept of involved parents within schools. Those findings coincide with additional literature among scholars who believe parental involvement can be voluntary to be effective (Jeynes,

2012) and where schools can work with parents to become involved (Hughes & Black, 2002).

School districts can work towards these positive educational outcomes by building systems that are assembled on knowledge from all stakeholders. This means that a site of inquiry (a space) should be offered, no matter how imperfect the space is. The understanding of all stakeholders' frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008) will allow district leaders and parents, alike, to know that everyone has different perspectives. This concept model can be used as a starting point to understanding the four themes that can assist the school district studied in developing and building on parental involvement efforts.



Figure 10. The concept model.

This chapter presented an examination and summary of the data that were collected for this study. The interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations regarding these findings are presented in Chapter five.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter summarizes the research findings and interprets the results of the qualitative analysis. It will be divided into seven sections: theory framework, interpretation of findings by the research question, limitations, recommendations for future research, district use of concept model, researcher reflection, and will conclude with a summary. The data for this study were comprised of focus group data of parents, principals and parent community liaisons, district parent surveys, and researcher field notes taken at a school district in the state of Texas. Data were analyzed by codes, categories and concepts and were member-checked and triangulated for trustworthiness. In order to determine how a current school system can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents associate a welcoming environment with parental involvement. Four themes were constructed from the data and using the themes as a framework, a concept model was developed for use by the school district.

Notes on Public Pedagogy as an Interpretive Lens

The data collected in this study were framed by the theoretical lens of critical public pedagogy to understand from the data how a district can systematically create a welcoming environment grounded in mutual engagement with parents across differences. It is through this lens that the researcher viewed the data and made decisions during the research study and afterwards when analyzing the data. This study sought to understand how a school's pedagogy of parental involvement operates within the public sphere, which is to say its influence in regards to parents as well as their pedagogical agency in taking up, mobilizing, contesting, and/or reconfiguring it (Sandlin et al., 2011).

The literature also noted that a problem with public pedagogy is the “rationale for the continued reliance on school-based meanings and mechanisms as heuristics for all sites of education resides in the field’s origin as a humanist project” (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 146). On this matter, the researcher was aware throughout the study that the understanding of pedagogy is deeply embedded in a humanist/modernist/rationalist view (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013) that relies on school-based meanings that dictate how pedagogy is conceptualized. The school district being studied asserted that parental involvement is important and seeks to create a welcoming environment. As this study sought to understand how the school’s vision aligns with parents’ understanding of parental involvement, it engaged a critical public pedagogy lens that expanded the notion of pedagogy. Specifically, it understood the school’s understanding and efforts related to parental involvement not only as an organizational activity but also as a pedagogical process. The school’s actions are themselves educative for teachers, parents, and other publics. This lens of a feminist influenced critical public pedagogy allowed the researcher to shift the very terms of the analysis away from school-based heuristics that generally locate the school as the direct pedagogical agent. In turn, it allowed for a social notion of pedagogy on the public sphere that asked not only how parents receive and engage the school’s pedagogy of parental involvement – one that arguably teaches parents how and for what purposes that must be “involved” – but also how parents themselves might be understood as public pedagogues capable of teaching the school about meaningful parental involvement in education. This form of critically and democratically engaged pedagogy resituates the institution of the school, in terms of its personnel and policy apparatus, a site for learning as well as teaching and, in this sense, is a much more

complicated strategy than conventional notions of pedagogy or teaching and learning (Brady, 2006; Burdick & Sandlin, 2013).

Public Pedagogy in this Research Case Study

This study sought to understand through the framework of public pedagogy how a school district can systematically create a welcoming environment and if parents support parental involvement. It looked for patterns regarding how interactions between parents and the school transpired by providing a space of inquiry. It also explored how the schools, in turn, teach parents about positionality, education, and equity. As noted in the literature, the school district did set the meanings of the pedagogy as the data presented from the principal and parent community liaisons showed patterns of giving school based meaning to parental involvement and did not address the forms of parental involvement that parents noted they offer at home. Focus group data from the English-speaking parents and the researcher's journal entry noted that despite active actions by English-speaking parents to receive more two-way information from teachers and the schools, many district policies, rules, guidelines or norms position the district and its personnel into authoritative figures that often deliver one way communication on how the schools function to service students. While the processes described by the principal and parent community liaison focus group participants detailed a willingness to communicate, the English and Spanish-speaking parent focus group data and the researcher's journal entries noted that parent capacity for engagement was perceived as limited. The questions asked in the focus groups allowed the participants to challenge the illusion of a welcoming environment for parents within the school district.

The parents did challenge the illusion of a welcoming environment by giving specific feedback on how they were, at times, made to not feel welcome. This echoed the survey results of the district's parent survey from the first year that noted 94% of parents felt welcome to only 78% who did the following year. While the participants challenged the illusion, they did not contradict the district's efforts towards creating a welcoming environment. On the contrary, the district's efforts in year two (including this very dissertation that provides the space of inquiry for public pedagogy) suggests that the district is on the right path of seeking engagement from parents to better understand what parents want to know and understand and how parents want that information by asking the parents directly. As the district moves forward in more often and direct communication with parents will it be able to more accurately assess and gauge their efforts as well as to build mutual partnerships and coalitions with parents. In this way, the school has the possibility of moving from traditional conceptualizations of the public intellectual, which places the priority of knowledge and pedagogical activity with an often institutionally located source such as the school, towards a more social form of public intellectualism that recognizes the pedagogical possibilities inherent within grass-roots and collective forms of pedagogy.

Brady (2006) posits “public pedagogy is a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination” (p. 58). She identifies the limits of traditional educational reform by redefining the nature of the term public and its position in public education. She argues that education is public in two ways, first as a space that “contests conventional academic boundaries” and second as its capacity for citizens to “engage as critical educators in their present, everyday lives” (p.

58). Brady (2006) further concludes that educational leaders need to shift from thinking of themselves as individual leaders with abilities and skills to that of collectively working “across differences and through strategic alliances” (p. 60). The findings of this study suggest that communitarian public intellectualism is a key perspective for developing meaningful practices of parent involvement that mutually assist parents and the school in the academic efforts of their children. This highlights the significance of strategic alliances with parents as both learners and public pedagogues capable of advancing the organization's learning in order to realize greater educational equity and justice (Brady, 2006; Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). To be clear, while the data did not suggest that the school district was conceptualizing parents as public pedagogues, the data analysis does parallel the literature that notes that school districts should do so.

Critical Dimensions of Public Pedagogy

Critical theory looks at the dominant construction and then tries to deconstruct it, looking for meaning by asking what voices have been overlooked and why. Critical researchers seek to not only understand behavior, but to change a social phenomenon as well (Blake & Masschelein, 2003; Freire, 1997). Freire (1997) noted one comes to knowledge by reflection and co-construction between the teacher and the learner. From a school district perspective the teacher can also be defined as the school and the learner as both the students and the parents who raise them. Critical perspectives aided this case study in specifically addressing the question of whether parent voices have been overlooked by the school's dominant paradigm and why. The focus group data from the English and Spanish-speaking parents noted that the schools have power: the power to determine who comes into schools, when parents get to speak with teachers, and how and

when the schools will communicate with parents and families. Language played a factor as Spanish-speaking parents in the focus groups noted that they did not understand the reasons or meaning of certain classes their children were taking and their focus group data also noted that they did not have access to communication about these issues in the language that they understand. District structures that provided policies and regulations were not well understood by parents as noted in both English and Spanish speaking parent focus groups. Guidelines and norms for learning that were developed by the District were expressed by the principal and parent community liaison focus group data as key ideas to communicate with parents. Parent Community Liaison focus group data also found that schools use their own language that is not comprehended easily by parents. From a critical public pedagogy framework, the researcher found that the district needs to give greater attention to parents as critically engaged democratic actors in the process of advancing educational equity for all learners and as partners in anti-oppressive work that expands opportunity through altering practices (such as bringing back paper surveys and having parents assist with the customer service training) in meaningful ways (Freire, 1997).

Critical theory reflects on power, justice and social issues. Public pedagogy seeks to understand how educational sites and practices actually work to teach the public, and how the intended educational meanings (both implicit and explicit) are internalized, reconfigured and mobilized by public citizens such as the parents in schools. This research case study looked at the data through a lens of the power and positionality issues within a public school site setting in order to learn about the educational effects and

building alliances across differences. The next section will review the interpretation of the findings.

Interpretation of Findings

This section will provide an interpretation of the findings to address the research question. The interpretation is divided by the research question and four themes that developed from the data when answering the research question. Each section will also have an implication for practice.

Research Question

The research question asked how does a school district, as a site of public pedagogy, systematically create a welcoming environment that supports parental involvement. The data analysis suggests that four areas can be addressed to move towards a welcoming environment and that parents support parental involvement. The researcher advocates, as well, that a public pedagogy lens be used when addressing these four areas and that before the four areas can be addressed, a site of inquiry must first be found. Public pedagogy works as a site of knowing and learning. It seeks to understand how the agents involved in the pedagogy (in this case, parents) see themselves and their role within the pedagogy. Critical dimensions of this theory seek to understand the role of power, language, race, and other forms of difference. The findings suggest that a school district cannot fully address this topic until parents engaged as partners in the project and the district reflects on its own power and positionality within the system and how race, culture, or other differences play out in the pedagogical process. While the findings of the data suggest that the four themes assist in creating a welcoming environment, a school district cannot know to what degree the themes need to be addressed without its own

continuous inquiry. The researcher also suggests from her interpretation of the literature on both the theoretical framework and parental involvement that the school district take into account that the inquiry can and should be imperfect as it allows for a free flow of ideas and suggestions into the answers of the inquiry. For example, the data in the study suggests that the school district cease its electronic only version of the parent survey as parents noted that all types of communication are needed when working with parents and the parent survey data showed that participation rates dropped dramatically. Parents became agents of change through this inquiry just by giving their answers as their data contested the district's vision of providing a welcoming environment using school directed pedagogy. The space provided by the focus groups allowed the opportunity for parents to move beyond the retrieval of specific information and become critically reflective in the space. As such, they challenged existing school social practices by asking for two-way communication instead of the 'sit and get' model the school practices through parent classes and parent information sessions.

An interpretation of the findings of this study supports the school district creating and providing a space of inquiry to address the four themes that showed relational value when seeking to understand how to systematically create a welcoming environment. The four themes are communication, customer service training, personnel, and explaining organizational policies, guidelines, rules, and norms. The implications for practice will be divided by the four themes and will be addressed next.

Implication for Practice: Systematic Communication

The results of this study support the idea that school districts and campuses should work together with parents to come up with many methods of systematically

communicating with families (two way) using all types of communication tools. The methods of communication range from both informal (conversation, family events) and formal (e-mails, parent conferences, and website updates).

The findings from this study connect with the literature that in “expecting to see involvement behaviors like those outlined by the National Standards, educators fail to recognize, understand, and value different forms of involvement” (Nelson & Guerra, 2009). Critical theory looks at who is in control or who holds the power, and both the principal and parent community liaison focus group data noted that they are there to teach and relay information, but their same data showed that they controlled the conversation. The focus group data from the parent community liaisons did note that school personnel listen to answers on questions they ask (in the forms of surveys) or in parent trainings, but the English and Spanish-speaking parent focus group data did not support the idea that learning was taking place together with parents and principals or parents and teachers. The focus group data from all participants supports the theory of public pedagogy that while these relationships are reproducing certain elements of formal schooling, the involvement of parents adds an educational element within these spaces that disrupt or oppose the formal practices of schooling because the parents are now questioning the hegemonic rules and norms via the types of communication sent out by the schools, how they are communicated to (or not) by the campuses, and posing questions about the impact on them outside of their child’s classroom experience. (Sandlin, O’Malley & Burdick, 2011).

The study also found that parents in the English and Spanish-speaking focus groups directly relate a welcoming environment with their level and type of

communication with their child's teacher(s). The focus group data from the principals and the parent community did not present itself on this subject. Parents in the English and Spanish speaking focus groups also noted that they provide parental involvement at home and requested more information and communication on the how and why to support their children in academics. Principal and parent community liaison focus group data did not connect parent involvement with home practices such as eating meals together, making sure the children go to sleep on time, and ensuring that the student's daily routines are kept at home. If parents' views on parental involvement do not match teacher or campus norms, distorted ideas on how to engage in parental involvement and limited roles for parents arise (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Eberly et al., 2007; Trumball, Rothstein-Fish, & Hernandez, 2003).

Implication for Practice: Customer Service Training

The results of this study support the notion that school districts should provide consistent and ongoing customer service training for as many personnel as possible, but especially for front office staff. Principals and teachers should be included in the trainings and cultural training should be imbedded within the customer service training.

Acting in a humane way, acknowledging each person, and treating everyone the same as human beings were found in the English and Spanish-speaking parent focus group data to improve the perception of providing a welcoming environment. The parent community liaisons were noted in the English and Spanish-speaking parent focus groups as open and friendly, who seek to form alliances with parents. Brady (2006) found that engaging educational leaders as critically engaged public pedagogues is key to facilitating the formation of alliances across differences and disrupting self-

understandings to allow “educators and community members to address the challenges of contemporary life within the social fabric of the everyday. It is in these public spheres that opportunities for alliance are most often obtainable” (p. 59).

The categories from the English and Spanish-speaking parent data note that they do not always feel welcome or listened to which supports the literature that states that if there was a strong sense of trust at the school by parents and the community, then there would be more success of the school in educating students (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). English parent focus group data noted that some parents within the focus groups asked teachers to call them if there was ever a problem and gave a cell number to call and then were not called when an issue arose which led to both frustration and a weakened sense of trust of the teacher. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) further found that if school norms note that parents’ roles are limited and teachers receive “distorted messages about how to approach and develop meaningful family involvement” schools then become a “self-fulfilling prophecy of very limited roles for parents” (p. 187). This affects the trust parents have of whether or not they are welcome if limited roles are provided. Parents that believe that their opinions or participation are not valued are hesitant to be active in their students’ schools (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Implication for Practice: Providing Key Personnel

The results of this study support the idea that school districts should provide key personnel for campuses such as a parent community liaison or other person dedicated to serving parents. Using parent community liaisons as a supportive link between parents and the school is supported in the literature. Sanders (2008) found that these specific campus personnel assist by providing “direct services to families, support for teacher

outreach, support for school based partnership teams, and data for program involvement” (p. 295). He further notes that district support and training for these positions is especially important to ensure that they are aware of the district philosophy and policies of these partnerships.

In this case study, the focus group data of the parent community liaisons found that these liaisons are trained to work together with parents to ask for their input and provide services that parents request. The parent community liaisons in the focus group noted that schools should use simple terms and teach parents about how schools work because most of the parents are not used to school environments or do not know how a school functions. Under the public pedagogy theory, these parent community liaisons are important because they can be viewed as public intellectuals as they engage the public with expert knowledge for specific purposes of mutual engagement and because “engaging in critical transformational learning from sites of public pedagogy occurs most optimally with the help of an educator of some kind, either in formal classroom settings or in some vaguely defined ‘public’ space” (Sandlin, O’Malley and Burdick, 2011, p. 360). However, the parent community liaisons must reflectively act upon the conversations they have with parents because, as the literature on trust noted, parents are less likely to trust a school if a school states that it welcomes parents but then falls short in customer service or does not have genuine opportunities for parents to be involved (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999).

Implication for Practice: Understanding and Explaining Organizational Policies, Guidelines, Rules, and Norms

The results of this study support the notion that school districts should work to ensure that school personnel and parents both understand and can explain the reasoning behind organizational policies, guidelines, rules, and norms. Parents and school personnel working together would assist in building systems as Senge (1990) notes that a shared vision involves conversations which are crucial to building common understandings, shared commitments, understanding push-back, and valuing an agreed upon vision. Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) also add that identifying and valuing what the families want from the school as part of that shared vision is a principle needed in developing strong home and school relationships.

The data from the English and Spanish-speaking parent focus groups, the district parent survey, and the researcher's journal entries in this case study echoed this research as they noted that parents did not know about and/or understand organizational policies, guidelines, rules, or norms. The English and Spanish-speaking parent focus group data noted that not knowing or understanding the schools' or district's policies, guidelines, or rules became norms for misunderstanding how schools work, and subsequently, how welcome parents perceived to feel in the schools.

Limitations

This study was limited in scale and can only be generalized to the school district site it studied for the 2013-2014 school year. Larger samples would have been useful to gain access to more people as it could have yielded deeper information on the subject.

Ethical considerations precluded the researcher, as an administrator at the site studied, to interview the parent community liaisons directly.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was intended as basic research in the field of parent involvement in public schools. There are recommendations for future research based on the limitations in this study. First, another case study in a similar sized school district with matching socio-economic factors with the addition of teacher responses could provide stronger correlations of the perceived environment of the school district. The subjects who participated in this study (principals, parent community liaisons, and parents) are not in the classrooms working with students, yet a key factor to parental involvement noted from the English and Spanish speaking parent focus groups was more direct communication with teachers.

A follow-up qualitative study in this particular school district could provide richer and more descriptive data if the school district noted that they were implementing changes based on the data findings. This would allow researchers to study if the areas noted from the data in need of development or improvement were addressed by the organization in a systematic order and if they assisted with the perception of a welcoming environment.

District Use of the Concept Model

This qualitative research study sought to explore if parents connect a welcoming environment with parental involvement and how a school district can systematically create that environment. Analysis of the data collected by the parents indicated that parents do connect a welcoming environment with parental involvement when seeking

more information on how to assist students academically. The researcher for this case study developed a concept model, framed in public pedagogy, based on the four themes that arose from all the data collected that can be used to assist the district when working to address parental involvement. While the findings from this study cannot be directly applied to all other school districts, many school districts can learn from this study and work to provide a space of inquiry and then work to address the same four themes in their own school district, as they are relevant to all schools. How this model can be used, specifically by the school district studied and any school looking to address any of the four themes, will be addressed in this section.

The use of this concept model is quite simple because using it means engaging in dialogue and responding to parental involvement issues. The four areas that can assist in creating a welcoming environment are multiple forms of systematic communication, personnel dedicated to assisting parents, good customer service, and an understanding of organizational policies, guideline, rules and norms.

A school district can begin looking at the concept model to establish a site and process of inquiry into the four themes, as informed by a theory of critical public pedagogy. First, a space of inquiry must be developed where parents can give feedback on their perceptions of the four themes and how they are perceived to function in the school or district. Next, the school or district should compare the parent perspectives with how their current policies and practices actually engage with parents. The site of inquiry and addressing the themes from a public pedagogy perspective allows for generative struggle (Dentith and Brady, 1999) when comparing the results.

For example, a school district might note that through federal funding for tutoring the district or campus is engaged with parents in the academic lives of their children. It is noted that federal regulations state that if a school receives funding they must engage with parents. To use the concept model, the district should first create a space of inquiry for parents whose students are tutored and of those who are not in order to get a holistic view of parent engagement on the subject. The inquiry could ask for parent feedback on how they perceive communication, personnel, customer service, and what they understand in regards to guidelines, rules and norms within the tutoring process. Simultaneously, the school district would compile their own data on what personnel they have dedicated to assisting parents of students using the tutoring process and how and when the personnel engage with parents. The district would then list what data they have or how they perceive that the customer service when providing tutoring to students is perceived by the parents. Lastly, the district would also address how (or if) they answer questions from parents on the policies, guidelines, rules and norms that surround tutoring on the campus. Once the data are compiled from both groups, the district can begin to compare where the alignment is and where the data diverge. Using the framework of critical public pedagogy would allow for the struggle of understanding differences within the context of a mutual learning process oriented toward forming alliances across difference. It would highlight this type of parent engagement as a step forward in parents being viewed and supported as democratically engaged public pedagogues.

While doing this for every policy and practice that seeks to engage with parents may seem daunting for a school district, doing so as general way of proceeding allows for dialogue within a space of inquiry together with parents. That, in turn, opens the door for

reflection and consciousness of what is actually taking place within the district, in schools, and at home to better understand how schools and families might assist one another in quality teaching and learning for students.

Researcher Reflections

This qualitative research case-study was interesting for me as a researcher because I had to juggle the research work as both the researcher and the administrator at the site being studied who is in charge of improving parental involvement. I chose this case study because I want to be a change agent, yet had struggled in the past with how I can connect theory into practice. This study was not focused merely on my work in practice, but in the educational reality of all those who participated which made the study both meaningful and daunting. This study engaged participants (and myself) in dialogue to comprehend the complex topics of learning in public spaces through the layers of race, equity, and power in our school district and within ourselves.

There were times when I struggled to remain neutral during the focus groups as noted in my journal entries. I felt the urge, however, as soon as the researcher hat was off, to engage with the parents if they shared with me issues that concerned them and I did, in fact, act on them. Walking the line between researcher and administrator was often tumultuous but was always gratifying because the dialogue was taking place, and I have learned that this is as good a place as any to start on a journey towards progress.

Using the critical theory paradigm meant framing the knowledge studied from the data through structural, power, historical, and social justice lenses. It looked at the knowledge produced through reflections and constructions of reality by very real people (not the faceless ones I had read about in previous articles and dissertations). Going into

this study, I knew there could be some parts of critical consciousness that are ignored which keep certain structures of oppression in place. Myself as the researcher meant I was at the center of knowledge being shared and my role as an Administrator had me in the periphery. As one is never finished in critical theory, neither was I as both researcher and administrator when I looked at myself consciously through this lens.

Through the critical public pedagogy lens I wanted to make sense of the space of schools as a public site of learning for, with, and from parents. It is not a perfect theoretical framework but that encouraged me to pursue it, as I wanted to engage our parents as citizens in their present, everyday lives as members of our school society and listen to the struggle that the framework allows. Being able to have a space to challenge the system (Brady, 2006) was intentional for all participants: the principals, parents and parent community liaisons. They are all part of this public school space and determine how it is or is not used by students, staff, and the community.

I learned from this study that we must engage in our own critical consciousness in order to ensure that every family is known, valued and inspired. Critical consciousness, as defined by Freire (1973), is a state of awareness, activated through dialogue, where one engages in analysis of context and power. In order to be able to move from theory into practice I can begin by advocating for professional development that addresses our own assumptions as educators that allows us to critically look at our beliefs, attitudes and practices both in and out of the classroom. From this study I can more aptly recognize language and behaviors in spaces of pedagogy or inquiry that may seek to oppress or empower and quickly react and engage in reflection on the scenario with the persons involved.

Using the theory that framed this research leaves me optimistic in moving towards a society in which public schools are engaged in informed and mutual dialogue amongst all parties involved because an underlying current throughout the entire data collection process was one of hope. While hope was not a code, category or theme that was derived from the data, I felt it as a researcher. I saw it in the smiles and laughter from participants with one another, I heard it in the voices of the principals, and I read about it in the data transcriptions and know it first hand from the work of the parent community liaisons. All expressed a desire for more communication and spoke of ways to better partner with one another and I sensed that they were hopeful of the future and moving in this direction. The inquiry provided the space for both struggle and hope.

Is there still a lot of work to be done on this effort? Absolutely, but one cannot leave this type of research that took place within this case study without a sense of optimism and hope for the future. It was this very dissertation that sought to view a piece of the public lens into a public school system to discuss how we should work to move forward and challenge and change our systems for our children. Every person interviewed gave answers noting that a better system can be developed. Indeed, it can.

Summary

This case study of one school district in Texas sought to determine how the school system can create a welcoming environment for parents in order to understand if parents support parental involvement. It suggests that parents support parental involvement and addressed four areas that can assist in creating a welcoming environment. The four areas are multiple forms of systematic communication, personnel dedicated to assisting parents, good customer service, and an explanation of organizational policies, guideline, rules and

norms. It also determined that parents do support parental involvement as parents noted that they view parental involvement as taking care of the child at home (via providing food, an adequate bed time, and/or ensuring they get to school on time) and assisting with their academic progress by checking a child's homework, monitoring their grades, and/or knowing what is going on in school and why. The study suggests that the latter is hindered if the campus or district does not provide a welcoming environment where parents can feel comfortable to engage in dialogue and ask questions about their child and what is happening in the school.

Previous research has noted that the four themes that arose from the data and were used to develop the concept model contribute to an increase of parental involvement when present in schools. Therefore, it is clear that schools and school districts should give attention to addressing these four themes together with parents. School districts can systematically work to support campuses to create a welcoming environment by addressing and answering if and how they provide multiple tools of systematic communication for parents, personnel dedicated to assisting parents, good customer service training for all staff, and ensure the understanding of clear and concise explanations of organizational policies, guideline, rules and norms by parents.

As evidenced by the passing of House Bill 5 under the Texas Legislature, which now requires all Texas districts and campuses to rate themselves on parental involvement, this study is timely and useful. The concept model developed can assist the school district studied when working to provide a welcoming environment which this study suggests parents do associate with parental involvement. This study also determined that additional research is needed into the role of the teacher in a welcoming

environment in order for school districts and campuses to be able to effectively work together with parents to meet the needs of their children.

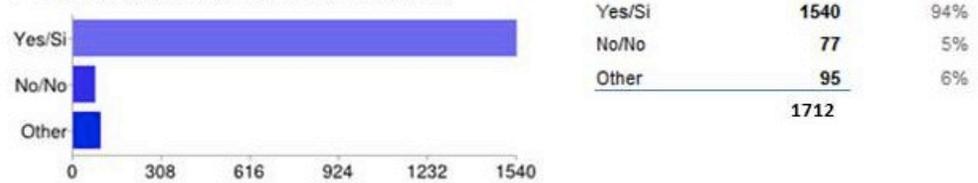
APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

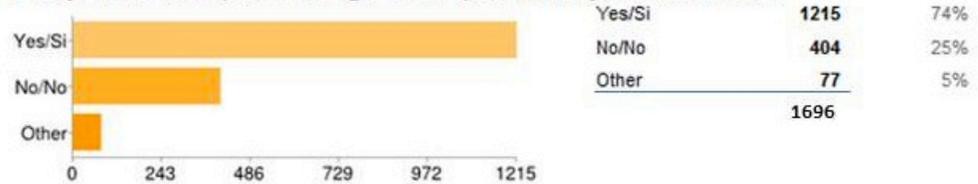
District Parental Involvement Survey Results, 2013

2013 Parent Survey Results (Electronic and Paper)

1 - Do you feel welcome at your child's school?



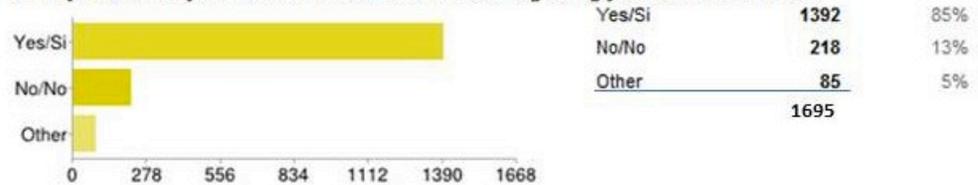
2 - Do you know about parent trainings/workshops offered at your child's school?



3 - Do you volunteer at any school or district events?



4 - Do you feel like you receive sufficient information regarding your child's education?



APPENDIX B

 INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

**RESOLUTION CONCERNING HIGH STAKES, STANDARDIZED TESTING
OF TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS**

STATE OF TEXAS §
 §
COUNTY OF TRAVIS §

WHEREAS, the over reliance on standardized, high stakes testing is strangling our public schools and undermining educators' ability to transform a traditional system of schooling into a broad range of learning experiences that better prepares our children to live successfully and be competitive on a global stage; and

WHEREAS, we believe our state's future prosperity relies on a high-quality education system that prepares students for college and careers, and without such a system Texas' economic competitiveness and ability and to attract new business will falter; and

WHEREAS, we believe our state's dwindling public education funding must be focused on enhancing student achievement and building classroom infrastructure and technology; and

WHEREAS, the real work of designing more engaging student learning experiences requires changes in the culture and structure of the systems in which teachers and students work and that parents enhance; and

WHEREAS, what occurs in classrooms every day should be student-centered and result in students learning at a deep and meaningful level, as opposed a superficial level of learning that results from the current over-emphasis on that which can presumably be easily measured by standardized tests; and

WHEREAS, Our vision is for all students to be engaged in more meaningful learning activities that cultivate their unique individual talents, and to embrace the concept that students can be both consumers and creators of knowledge; and

WHEREAS, only by developing new capacities and conditions in districts and schools, and the communities in which they are embedded, and by engaging parents in meaningful ways as partners in this effort, will we ensure that all learning spaces foster and celebrate innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication and critical thinking; and

WHEREAS, these are the very skills that business leaders desire in a rising workforce and the very attitudes that are essential to the survival of our democracy; and

WHEREAS, imposing relentless test preparation and memorization of facts to enhance test performance is stealing the love of learning from our students; and

WHEREAS, we do not oppose accountability in public schools and we point with pride to the performance of our students, but believe that the system of the past will not prepare our students to lead in the future and neither will the standardized tests that so dominate their instructional time and limit educators' ability to make progress toward a world-class education system of student-centered schools and future-ready students; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the [redacted] ISD Board of Trustees calls on the Texas Legislature to re-examine the public school accountability system in Texas and to develop a system that encompasses multiple assessments; reflects greater validity; uses more cost efficient sampling techniques and other external evaluation arrangements; more accurately reflects what students know, appreciate and can do in terms of the rigorous standards essential to their success; enhances the role of teachers as designers, guides to instruction and leaders; embraces an environment of collaboration between parents and school personnel; and nurtures the sense of inquiry and love of learning in all students.

PASSED AND APPROVED on this 18 day of September, 2012.

[redacted]

Title: Board President

[redacted]

Title: Board Vice President

[redacted]

Title: Board Secretary

[redacted]

Title: Board Member

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. **Welcome, Introduce yourself as researcher (secondary researcher for parent community liaisons)**
2. **Have others introduce themselves**
3. **Explain Project. Dissertation Title: Public Pedagogy in Public Schools: The Journey to Creating a Welcoming Environment for Parents to Support Involvement and Student Learning**
4. **Explain why participants were asked to participate**
5. **Give estimate time frame to complete focus group**
6. **Explain that Focus Group will be audio-recorded: show iPhone as device to be used**
7. **Hand Out IRB form and discuss importance of voluntary consent**
8. **Read IRB form out loud**
9. **Ask if there are any questions**
10. **Ask if it is ok to begin recording**
11. **Begin recording and start with question #1 below**

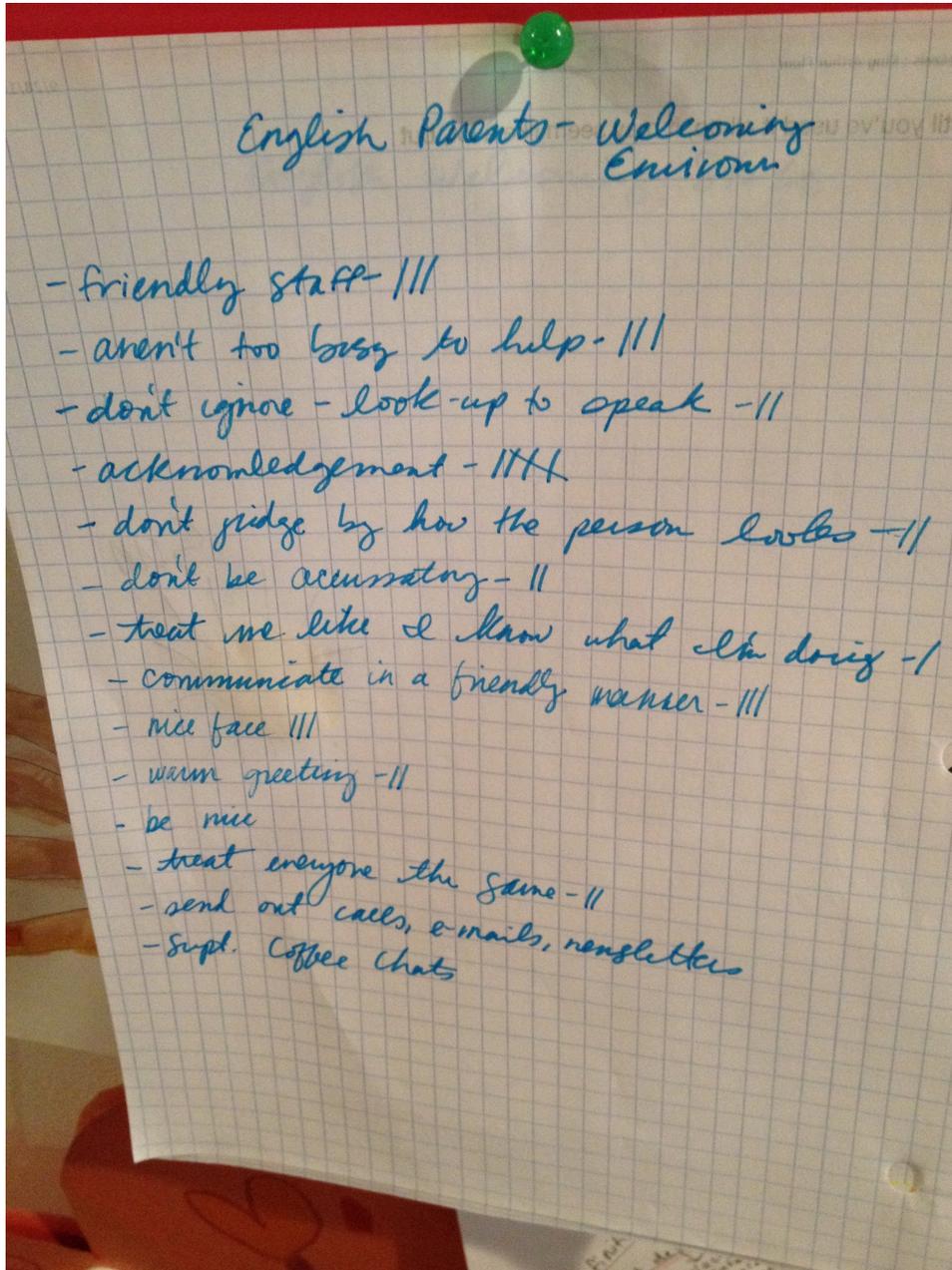
Focus Group Questions

1. What contributes to a welcoming environment in schools?
 2. How does [REDACTED] contribute to a welcoming environment for parents?
 3. (For Principals and Parent Community Liaisons) How are parents involved in their child's education?

(For Parents) How are you involved in your child's education?
 4. What can schools do to assist parents to help their children in their education?
 5. How can schools and parents work together for student success?
-
12. **Ask if the participants have anything to add**
 13. **Stop recorder when conversation ends**

APPENDIX D

Coding

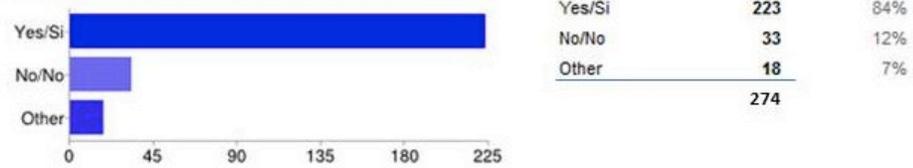


APPENDIX E

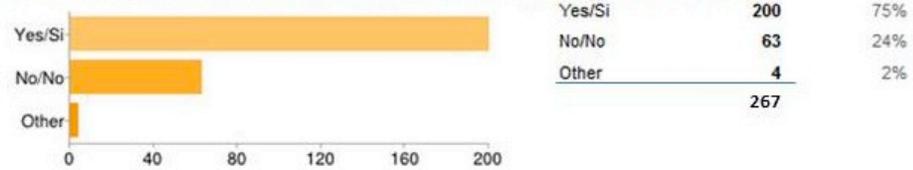
District Parental Involvement Survey Electronic Only Results, 2013

2013 Parent Survey Results (Electronic Only)

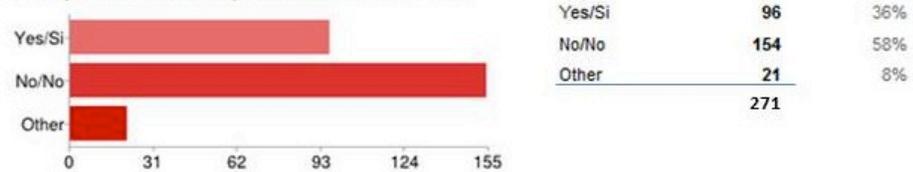
1 - Do you feel welcome at your child's school?



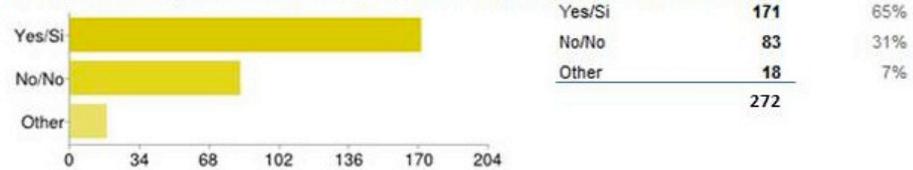
2 - Do you know about parent trainings/workshops offered at your child's school?



3 - Do you volunteer at any school or district events?



4 - Do you feel like you receive sufficient information regarding your child's education?

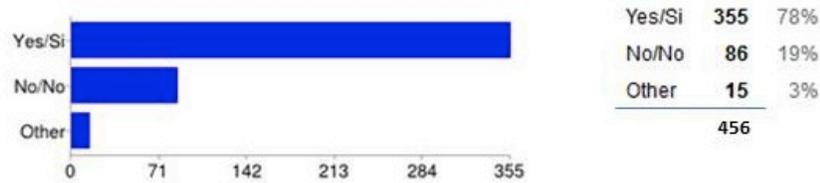


APPENDIX F

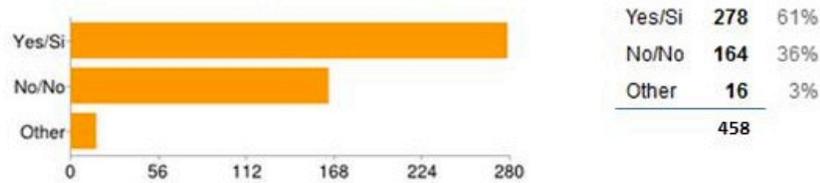
District Parental Involvement Survey Results, 2014

2014 Parent Survey Results (Electronic Only)

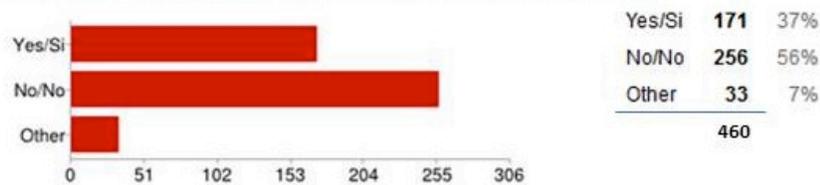
1. Do you feel welcome at your child's school?



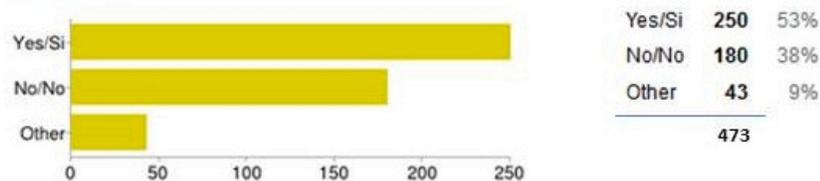
2. Do you know about parent trainings/workshops offered at your child's school?



3. Do you volunteer at any school or district events?



4. Do you feel like you receive sufficient information regarding your child's education?



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