EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF PARENT MENTORING PROGRAMS ON LATINO PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

Marlene Batista

May 2016
The Dissertation of Marlene Batista is approved:

______________________________  ____________________
Dr. Stacy Bryant                 Date

______________________________  ____________________
Dr. Shartriya Collier            Date

______________________________  ____________________
Dr. Susan Auerbach, Chair        Date

California State University Northridge
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Osvaldo and Edelfina Batista, two immigrant Latino parents who took a huge risk 48 years ago in coming to this country so that their children could fulfill the American dream. It is thanks to that bravery that I am here today accomplishing my biggest dream and aspiration. Thank you Papi for having the foresight to see that a communist country was not where you wanted to raise a family and being the catalyst for moving to this amazing place called the United States. Thank you Mami for being brave enough to leave all you knew and all you loved behind to follow your husband’s dream. You have been the anchor for our family, never wavering in your belief that your children could be anything and everything they wanted to be. You have always encouraged me and given me the support and strength to pursue all of my dreams and without you, I would not be here today. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my two sons, Christian and Casey Calcines, who had to give up their mommy every Wednesday for three years, be quiet when mommy was working in the office on homework and papers, and give up spending countless hours with mommy so she could finish writing her dissertation. I hope that this finished product and all my efforts make you proud in being able to say, this is my mother, Dr. Marlene Batista!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“The only impossible journey is the one you never begin.”

- Anthony Robbins

This dissertation has been one of the most difficult challenges that I have ever faced. Despite the fact that this journey felt like an impossible one at times, it would not have been possible without certain special people in my life who helped pave the way.

I would like to begin by thanking my dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Auerbach, one of the most intelligent and awe-inspiring women I have ever met. Her relentless demand for my best work has made this project something that I can be so proud of. She brought out the best scholar, student, researcher and writer in me that can exist. I would also like to thank my amazing boss and mentor, Dr. Stacy Bryant, who not only has guided me in my professional career, but has been an ear and shoulder to cry on when I have felt frustrated or discouraged throughout this process. Finally, thank you to Dr. Shartriya Collier, another amazing researcher and scholar for taking the time out of her busy schedule to read my work and give me thoughtful and pertinent suggestions that could only make my writing and research better.

I’d like to also acknowledge my network of support, my family and friends. Thank you to Mami and Papi for the many hours of babysitting, the countless words of encouragement and your endless faith in me. Thank you to my closest and dearest friends and family--Martha, Hani, Ileana, Willie, Bell, Eddie, Anniet, Alina, Manny and Danny--who never hesitated to volunteer their time whenever I needed help with my boys, gave me their endless support and encouragement, and never failed to believe in the fact that I could accomplish this goal. It was always comforting to know that Christian and Casey had many places to go and spend time when mommy was busy writing or going to class. Thank you to Daniela for her visual mastery in
making the graph in my head a reality and then never getting angry when I asked her to edit it at 10pm!

Finally, I want to thank my newfound family, doctoral cohort PK1212. We started this journey together as mere strangers and in our three years together became a network of friends, comrades, supporters, consultants, therapists and more. It was through the strength I found in this group of colleagues that I was able to not give up hope and to finish this endeavor. And a special thanks to my partner in crime. You know who you are, and I can’t think of anyone else in this world who I would’ve rather taken this journey with. Here’s to our Wednesday therapy at El Pres.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT...........................................................................................................ii

SIGNATURE PAGE...............................................................................................iii

DEDICATION..........................................................................................................iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.......................................................................................v

LIST OF FIGURES..................................................................................................x

LIST OF TABLES.....................................................................................................xi

ABSTRACT...........................................................................................................xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................1
  Statement of the Problem....................................................................................2
  Purpose and Significance..................................................................................13
  Research Questions..........................................................................................14
  Overview of Methodology................................................................................15
  Limitations and Delimitations.........................................................................16
  Organization......................................................................................................17

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................18
  Introduction......................................................................................................18
  Review of the Literature..................................................................................19
  Theoretical Framework....................................................................................52
  Summary..........................................................................................................56

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ..........................................................................58
  Research Design and Tradition.......................................................................59
Research Setting/Context ............................................................... 60
Sample and Data Sources ............................................................. 62
Instruments and Data Procedures ................................................... 65
Data Collection .............................................................................. 68
Data Analysis .................................................................................. 72
Role of Researcher .......................................................................... 75
Summary .......................................................................................... 77

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS ................................................. 79
Introduction ...................................................................................... 79
A Lack of Cultural and Social Capital as Barriers .......................... 85
Breaking Down Barriers Through Parent Mentors ......................... 91
Parent Mentor Roles ....................................................................... 103
The Administrator’s Role in the Program’s Success ....................... 113
Summary .......................................................................................... 137

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS ................................. 139
Introduction ...................................................................................... 139
Summary of the Study ..................................................................... 139
Discussion ......................................................................................... 146
Implications for Policy and Practice .............................................. 162
Recommendations on Future Research ......................................... 163
Conclusion ........................................................................................ 164

REFERENCES .................................................................................... 166

APPENDIX A: Parent Mentor Focus Group Protocol ...................... 185
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1 – Difference between traditional parental involvement programs and parent mentoring programs for Latino parents……………………………………...150
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 – Study Participants.................................................................81
ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF PARENT MENTORING PROGRAMS ON LATINO PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

By

Marlene Batista

Doctor of Education Degree

Educational Leadership

Research indicates that children do better academically when their parents are directly involved in their education, but parents of ethnically and linguistically diverse students fail to participate in schools at the same level as families from the dominant culture. Over the past 20 years a number of parental involvement programs have been attempted in an effort to be more inclusive of Latino families, but they have not had sustainable effects in engaging these parents in the school community. Parent mentoring programs, in which parent mentors are used to facilitate classes and create a bridge between the school and Latino parents, are a promising new practice for creating long-term, collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators involved with a parent mentoring program in an effort to understand how these types of programs might create more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools.

This ethnographic case study took place at two elementary schools in Sunnydays Unified School District, a pseudonym for a suburban K-12 district east of Los Angeles in Riverside
County. The study used a purposeful sample of nine Latino parent mentors, 11 Latino parent participants, two site administrators, and one district level administrator all involved with the parent mentoring program at two school sites. Data was collected utilizing semi-structured individual interviews, observations and focus groups.

The theoretical framework used for this study was Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social and cultural capital. The findings from this study showed that their lack of social and cultural capital in the dominant culture hindered Latino parents from getting involved in their children’s school. Parent mentoring programs helped address such barriers as the fractured relationship between the Latino parents and the school through the use of parent mentors as a bridge of communication and support. Parent mentors also played the important roles of teachers, advocates, and role models for the other Latino parents at the schools. Data revealed that administrative support was an important factor in the success of the parent mentoring programs, but that site administrators had not received professional development on Project 2-INSPIRE and therefore had not informed or trained their staff about the program. Thus, despite the best efforts of the parent mentors, the program was never given the opportunity to bring about a true collaboration between all stakeholders.

Insights from this study could be helpful to school districts interested in increasing Latino parental involvement and engagement, particularly those school districts hoping to move away from traditional parental involvement programs and toward a parent engagement approach. The study also sheds light on the need for Latino parental involvement programs to focus not just on increasing parents’ cultural capital, but rather creating the environment that will increase their social capital. This study showed that the relationships and network built between the parent mentors and other less involved Latino parents was the major factor in the success of the
program and the increased involvement of Latino parents at the school. Recommendations for policy and practice include replacing traditional forms of parent involvement with programs that include a parent mentoring component; training administrators and school staff in collaborative parent engagement strategies; create warm and welcoming environments at schools that foster and appreciate diversity; and creating a space specifically designated for families in the school run by a bilingual parent/community liaison who can help in bridging Latino parents to the school.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic population of the United States grew by 45.5% from 2000 to 2011, the largest increase in any ethnic group in the last decade (Cooper, 2013). Yet nearly a third of Hispanic students will not graduate from high school, leaving them without the skills they will need to succeed in a 21st century global society (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes & Malone, 2009). Research indicates that children do better academically when their parents are directly involved in their education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009), but “parents of ethnically diverse students fail to participate in schools in numbers comparable to other majority group parents” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 20). Schools have tried various parental involvement programs in recent years; however, school staff often have difficulty forming partnerships with Latino parents that could help produce greater student success (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). One promising new development is parent mentoring programs, which build on the leadership capacity of parents by training them in educational practices and preparing them to train and mentor other parents in the school community (Warren, Hong, Rubin & Uy, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators in schools participating in a parent mentoring program in an effort to assess the degree to which these programs create more sustained collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the school. The goal was to build on the limited knowledge of these programs in the literature and study their effectiveness in engaging Latino parents. The expectation is that schools may take this information to improve the involvement programs they currently offer to better fit the needs of non-dominant culture families.

This ethnographic case study took place at two elementary schools in Sunnydays Unified School District, a pseudonym for a suburban K-12 district east of Los Angeles in Riverside
County. The district is home to 23,360 students living in five cities with 75% of the students being of Latino decent. The study used a purposeful sample of 18 Latino parents and three administrators involved with the parent mentoring program at two school sites. Data was collected utilizing semi-structured individual interviews, observations and focus groups.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research has shown a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement (Epstein, 1995; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Over the past 20 years a number of different parental involvement programs have been tried in an effort to be more inclusive of Latino families, but they have not had sustainable effects in engaging these parents in the school community over time (Mirtezky, 2004; Warren et al., 2009). It is important to explore mentoring programs as they may be a promising new practice for creating long-term, collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools.

This section first introduces the academic challenges faced by Latinos in American schools, then outlines trends in parental involvement generally and in parental involvement programs aimed at Latinos. Finally, different types of parental involvement programs, which include traditional, leadership and mentoring programs, will be introduced.

**Latinos and the American Education System**

Latinos continue to lag in graduation rates for both high school and four-year college behind their White and Asian counterparts. Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2012) showed that in all but two states, Latino students were less likely to graduate than Whites or Asians, with graduation rates as low as 51%, 53% and 55% in some of the states with the largest achievement gaps. The Latino achievement gap affects students in both the areas of reading and mathematics, which ultimately can affect graduation rates. Among 17-year-old high school
students, Latinos lagged in reading scores by 26 points compared to their White counterparts on the 2008 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Madrid, 2011). States like California have shown growth in the number of Latino students completing benchmarks towards graduation (Excelencia in Education, 2010). However, in looking at the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which determines whether a student will receive a high school diploma, still only 68% of Latino students passed the mathematics portion of the exam and 66% passed the language portion in 2009, in comparison to 90% of white students who passed both sections of the exam (Excelencia in Education, 2010). This combination of low achievement scores and low high school graduation rates among Latino students makes their future in college very unlikely.

Opportunities currently exist to help encourage and support Latino students to finish high school and continue on to a four-year university; however, with the low level of success in high school for Latino students, the chance that they will go on to graduate with a college degree is even less likely. Among Latinos between the ages of 18 and 25, 48% of them did not possess a high school diploma (Rupert, 2003). Only 7% of Latinos earn a Bachelor’s degree, and only 4.5% an MBA (Tapia, 2008). In order for the U.S. to “regain the top ranking in the world for college degree attainment, Latinos will need to earn 5.5 million degrees by 2020” (Excelencia in Education, 2010).

Another barrier impacting Latino students’ success is the fact that many of them fall into the category of English Learners (EL). EL students pose a complex instructional challenge for educators due to the fact that they have varying levels of English proficiency, primary language literacy and past educational experiences (National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the number of EL
students in the United States rose from 4.1 million in 2002-03 to an estimated 4.7 million in 2010-11, or 10% of the student population. Western states like California had even higher percentages, with 29% of EL students enrolled in public schools in 2009-10. Students who spoke Spanish comprised 73.1% of EL students in the United States (National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, 2010) and 84.5% of the EL students in California (CDE, 2014). Graduation rates among EL students in the United States were as low as 25%, with most states ranging from 40% to 50% and California at the higher end with 70% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). These statistics show that Latino students, especially those deemed EL’s, continue to be at an educational disadvantage.

Achievement gaps have a lot to do with the poor conditions of the schools in which many Latino students are enrolled. Research shows that children of color are exposed to many disadvantages due to segregation in areas where they live and go to school. “Youth of color generally attend schools in lower-income neighborhoods that lack the resources and rigor of schools in more affluent neighborhoods” (Kuscera & Flaxman, 2012, p. 13). Typically, high poverty schools with large percentages of language minority students have to deal with challenges like family and health crisis situations, issues of security and safety, large number of students who do not speak English, and a shortage of highly qualified teachers, as well as high teacher turnover (Orfield, Bachmeier, James & Eitle, 1997). A combination of the low quality of coursework offered, the way these students are perceived by teachers and school leaders, and a lack of school resources, are just some of the reasons Latinos are not closing the achievement gap (Madrid, 2011).

The Role of Parental Involvement in Latino Families
Historically, public schools were established in the United States as home-community partnerships that shared the responsibility of student learning; however, beginning in the late 19th century and early 20th century, a more separate relationship between schools and homes emerged (Epstein, 1986). In the past 30 years, the pendulum has once again begun to swing in the direction of making parents partners in their children’s education. Both federal and state policies favor giving parents more of a voice. For example, California has implemented a new funding policy, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), that not only encourages but requires parents to participate in the planning and implementation of their school and district’s funding plans to ensure that the needs of low-income and English Language Learner students are met (Hernandez, 2014).

Traditionally, parental involvement activities were school initiated programs suggested for both the school and the home and might take the form of volunteering, homework assistance, home-school communication, attendance at school events and parent-teacher conferences (Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Voorhis, 2009). However, when educators view parental involvement in this way they often neglect to acknowledge other forms of parental involvement more typical of Latino and ethnic minority families (Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smith, Stern & Shatrova, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), although 86% of Latino parents stated that they attended general school meetings, only 32% reported that they volunteered or served on school committees as compared to 50% of White parents. These traditional forms of parental involvement, while important, are not likely to create the long-term collaborative relationships needed to sustain the type of parental involvement that will make a

Among the most common reasons why Latino parents sometimes do not get involved in their children’s school are barriers related to low economic status and language. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) Latino children comprised 34.1% of children living in poverty, which was almost three times more than white, non-Hispanic children. Low-income parents must work long hours or more than one job in order to make ends meet at home. These schedules make it difficult for Latino parents to spend time with their children or attend school activities (Parra-Cardona, Cordova, Holtrop, Villaruel, & Wieling, 2008). Additionally, when they are able to attend, school communication is often sent out only in English and a lack of staff on site that can speak Spanish further alienates these parents from participating more (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; HCREO, 2014; Smith et al., 2008).

Part of the problem may be that schools do not recognize the ways that Latino parents do get involved. Although Latino parents may not become active participants in PTA meetings and other school activities, many of the supports that Latino parents offer their children go unseen or “rendered invisible” by teachers and the school (Matos, 2011). In order for schools to build connections with Latino parents, they must begin by respecting and acknowledging the Latino culture and the varied ways that parents lend their support to their children (Crispell, 2014). This lack of understanding of Latino parental involvement and educators’ tendency to see Latino parents through a “deficit lens” will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 2.

Leaders in education are beginning to realize that while parents need to be more actively engaged in the education of their children, schools must take additional measures in creating welcoming environments for Latino parents that make them feel like they are part of this
educational process (Ramos, 2012). The underrepresentation of Latinos at the leadership level of school districts may be part of the problem. When looking at administrative positions such as principals, superintendents or school board members, Latino falls well below the number needed to be proportional to the number of Latinos in many communities (Naser, 2010).

With Latinos being the fastest growing minority group in the United States, it is imperative that educators find a way to close achievement gaps if students are to be able to compete in the 21st century global market. Because parental involvement has been shown to positively impact children’s educational performance (Lee & Bowen, 2006), finding effective parent education programs that are well-suited to this population is essential as a strategy for reducing the achievement gap. Latino parental involvement continues to fall short in comparison to that of white families, due in part to the lack of exposure to American social and cultural capital, or access to social and cultural resources of the education system through dominant culture networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Because many Latino families are often new to the country they might not have the knowledge or social contacts to find support when dealing with their children’s school or the American educational system. Social and cultural capital, which will be the conceptual framework utilized for this study, will be addressed further in Chapter 2.

With research indicating that parental involvement is highly associated with higher levels of achievement among children this should become a main focus for school staffs (Cook-Cottone, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Lee & Bowen, 2006). The next section will look at some of the programs that have been developed by schools specifically for Latino parents in an attempt to break down some of the barriers they face.

**Programs for Latino Parental Involvement**

Many programs targeted at Latino families are currently in use and although some
components of these programs have had success in breaking down barriers and creating new opportunities for Latino parents to become more involved, do they make changes in the school culture that create sustainable relationships between schools and Latino families? Are these programs successful in involving more Latino parents, especially those hard-to-reach parents who do not come to school or respond to school requests? This section will look at examples of well-known programs for Latino parents in California and will then describe some of the newer parent leadership and mentoring programs currently found in schools.

**Well-known Latino Parent Programs.** As educators have come to understand the importance of getting Latino parents more involved many programs have been developed that try to reach out to these parents and address the barriers impacting them (Chrispeels & Bolivar, 2011; Christianakis, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Programs like Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), Committee for Latino Parents (COPLA) and Families in Schools (FIS) work with parents in Spanish and were created out of the realization that Latino parents had a need for a better understanding of the American school system. PIQE is a nine-week program that works to educate Latino parents on fostering positive learning environments for their children both at home and school (Chrispeels & Bolivar, 2011). PIQE has graduated more than 475,000 parents since 1987 and is found in 334 districts throughout California. PIQE focuses on increasing the high school graduation rates and number of Latino students going on to college by educating their parents in the American education system (Chrispeels & Bolivar, 2011; PIQE, n.d.)

By contrast, programs like COPLA focus more on activities that validate the social and cultural experiences of families while teaching them about the school system. Parents are part of the decision-making process with the program coordinators, which creates a sense of ownership; coordinators guide a critical reflection process to examine the norms, values, practices and
policies of their educational institution (Fernandez, 2006). They stress the creation of social
networks between Latino parents, which has been shown to be successful in engaging larger
numbers of Latino parents while at the same time helping them to create broader ties to the
school community (Christianakis, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson,
2011).

Finally, programs such as Families in Schools (FIS) in Los Angeles focus on training and
strengthening the capacity of Latino parents and school staff to help engage them. Funded by
grants through the Annenberg Project, the program was established in 1994 to ensure that
schools had staff with the capacity to train parents in understanding the school system, which in
turn could help parents to realize that they could be partners, teachers and advocates for their
children. FIS also has the Abriendo Puertas parent advocacy training program for Latino parents
with children ages zero to five and College Knowledge Academy, a joint parent and student
college awareness program. Through these and other programs FIS impacted 6,627 parents and
3,110 students at 293 school sites in 2012 (FIS, 2012).

The purpose of many of the programs created for Latino parents is to educate and train
them to support their children and change what might be considered negative parenting
behaviors with positive ones (First & Way, 1995). Although these programs try to address the
barriers that inhibit Latino parental involvement they may be missing the importance of capacity
building of Latino parents as leaders and mentors within schools to help bridge the gap between
Latino families and schools.

**Parent Leadership Programs.** Parent leadership and mentoring programs stem from
community organizing ideas in community-based organizations (CBOs). These organizations
believe that in communities where parents are well organized and have political influence, low
academic performance and substandard schools are not tolerated (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011). Unlike traditional programs, which focus on educating parents about schools to get them to be more active in school activities, leadership programs help parents to become leaders through more intentional means and empower them through the development of leadership skills and self-efficacy to speak up for change in schools (Warren et al., 2009).

Parent leadership programs can come in the form of more community action-based activities that encourage parents to go outside the school. These programs provide Latino families the skills to engage with schools and other formal institutions to maximize resources needed by these families in areas where formal services and supports may be short in supply (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011, p. 653). Interventions are focused on getting parents to work collectively as a group and training parents to be “advocates and leaders in the community working for the betterment of low-income children” (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011, p. 657). The empowerment of these parents as community leaders and advocates often leads to more parental involvement and action within the school (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011).

The Parent School Partnerships (PSP) program funded through the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) takes this approach through a 12-session parent leadership course with a focus on teaching parents their educational rights, the structure of the educational system and avenues for college access for their children (MALDEF, n.d.). Additionally, the program assigns participants a group project that will make a difference in their school or community. This allows parents the opportunity to see how powerful they can be when they work together and counters many of the Latino stereotypes that both parents and educators have regarding the level of involvement in school (Action Alliance for Children, 2002).
**Parent Mentoring Programs.** Parent mentoring programs have a slightly different approach to parental involvement than leadership programs. Parent mentoring programs teach parents to be trainers of other parents and use their expertise to bridge the gap between the school and other less involved parents (Warren et al., 2009). By using parents to “recruit more parents, schools use their community assets to tailor efforts to fit their parent population” (Miretzky, 2004, p. 843). In addition to creating social networks that support Latino parents to be more active, parent mentoring programs have attempted to challenge Latino parents’ beliefs that they are incapable of helping their children due to their lack of education or English abilities (Madrid, 2011). These programs work on building the capacity of low-income and immigrant parents through training in leadership skills and self-efficacy so that parents can begin to serve in advocacy roles for their children and other Latino families as mentors at the school (Warren et al., 2009).

The Logan School Neighborhood Association (LSNA) is one such mentoring program in Chicago that combines providing parents training and a place to create social network ties with an opportunity for parent leadership (Warren et al., 2009). The program has two parts, first to train and empower parents to become school and parent leaders and secondly, to get parents into classrooms supporting students and teachers. Parents are trained in weekly seminars on the school system and how to work with teachers and students and then are given access to classrooms as tutors to support the students and teachers.

Project 2-INSPIRE, another parent mentoring program that will be the focus for this study, is a family, school, and community engagement program that was created by the California Association of Bilingual Education (CABE) in 2006. Utilizing some of the strategies of LSNA, the goals of the program are to help schools and districts of Latino students generate
home/school partnerships through weekly classes that teach parents how to support their children’s success in school and to become trainers of other parents as active leaders in local school improvement efforts (CABE, n.d.). Activities consist of creating social networks between parents in the school through the weekly meetings/trainings, having parents work in classrooms with students under the guidance of teachers, and growing new parent leaders and mentors within the program.

CBOs have also created some mentoring programs outside of schools that are designed, implemented and operated by parents. One example is the Community Action Network (CAN), located in a mid-size city in a western state approximately 400 miles from the Mexican-American border. CAN trains Latino parents in communication, outreach, and interviewing skills that will support them “as advocates and leaders in the community working for the betterment of low-income children”; it also requires parents to give 25 hours of mentoring time to the agency to train and support other parents (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011, p. 657).

According to Hong (2011), parent mentoring programs have the potential to transform schools’ and teachers’ attitudes so that parental involvement is seen as a long-term, collaborative partnership. Because there are few of these programs, very little research exists on their effectiveness. What impact have these programs had on both the parents working as mentors and the overall parent community in the Southern California context? This study seeks to answer this question by looking at the perceptions of parents and administrators involved in a mentoring program to see how the program affects parental attitudes and involvement that may make a difference in creating sustained parent engagement at a school site.
Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators involved with a parent mentoring program in an effort to understand how these types of programs might create more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools. Much research explains why traditional parental involvement strategies do not always work well with Latino parents and describes programs that seem to be more effective in engaging Latino parents. However, only a few studies have looked at how parent mentoring programs affect schools and Latino parents (Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). The present study builds on this body of research to specifically look at how Latino parent mentors view their role and influence on other parents within the school setting, as well as how administrative support impacts the success of these programs. There is a lack of documentation and literature on parent mentoring programs, especially in Southern California where there are some of the highest percentages of Latino students. By gathering information about Latino parents’ views on these programs, educators will be able to better understand if these programs can help create collaborative cultures between Latino parents and the schools that can, in turn, lead to more sustained parental involvement.

The ultimate goal of this study is to assist educators in creating parental involvement programs that will better engage Latino families at their schools and create long-term collaborative relationships between these families and the school. This study will give educators insight into the perceptions of parents and administrators regarding these programs and their impact on the school community. This study is significant in that it will help educators understand how to create parent programs that best fit the needs of Latino families; this, in turn, has the potential to help improve Latino student achievement and address the achievement gap.
Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

- What do Latino parent mentors perceive their role and influence to be in their children’s suburban elementary school?
- What aspects of the parent mentoring program create opportunities for more long-term, collaborative relationships with the school?
- What are parents’ and administrators’ perceptions of the program’s impact on parental involvement, parent-school relationships and student achievement?
- What impact does the support of administration have on the success of parent mentoring programs?

For the purpose of this study, key terms and definitions are listed below:

- Cultural capital: This term refers to accumulated cultural knowledge that promotes power, status, and social mobility within a system (Bourdieu, 1986).
- Parent engagement: This term refers to an approach that recognizes parents as citizens and change agents within a school (Warren & Mapp, 2011). In schools with parent engagement, teachers and parents see themselves as part of a community that shares “collaborative discourse” (Miretzky, 2004; Warren et al., 2009).
- Parent mentoring programs: This term refers to a variety of programs that train and support parents to assist other parents with advisory, educational, and moral support related to their children’s education and school. In some cases, parent mentors provide teacher and student support within classrooms (Hardin & Littlejohn, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hong, 2011).
• Parental involvement: This term refers to “parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (Jeynes, 2007, p. 83), both at school and in the home (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

• Social capital: As defined by Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the resources a person gains access to and develops through participation in social networks that can be used for social advantage to benefit the individual.

**Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative case study utilized an ethnographic methodology to investigate the shared patterns of behaviors and beliefs of Latino parents and administrators involved in a parent mentoring program at a suburban elementary and middle school. The research questions used for this study focused on the perceptions of parent mentors regarding their role in bridging the relationship between the school and parent community and their influence on overall parental involvement at the school.

The study was conducted at two schools in Sunnydays Unified School District (a pseudonym), a large suburban school district located east of Los Angeles in Riverside County. The school district has a 75% Latino population with about one-third of students being English Learners (EL); of these students, 97% are Hispanic. Approximately 82% of students in the district receive free or reduced-price lunches, indicative of low socioeconomic status. In looking at the teaching staff of Sunnydays Unified a very different picture is painted; 82% of teachers are white with only 12% of the teachers being Latino. Project 2-INSPIRE, the parent mentoring program that was the focus of this study, has been active in the district for the past four years.

This study used purposeful sampling wherein all participants met specific criteria (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All parent participants were Latinos who were either parent
mentors in the Project 2-INSPIRE program or parent participants who were currently being trained or had been trained in the recent past by project mentors. Administrator participants were site administrators from the two schools participating in the program and the district parent involvement coordinator. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with four parent mentors in the program, as well as three administrators; focus groups with nine parent mentors and eleven parent participants from the school community currently being trained or having been trained in the program; observations of three training sessions of the parent mentors; and document review. Detailed descriptions of settings and individuals throughout the data collection were “followed by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns and issues” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 137). Themes and codes were developed based on the conceptual framework on social and cultural capital (see Chapter 2), as well as the research questions.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study were:

- Only two sites in one district were used to study a particular parent program.
- The sample included a small number of Latino parents and school staff members involved with the program.

The limitations of this study were as follows:

- Participants in this particular study may have represented limited points of view since they were all participants in the same program and limited to only two school sites. Additionally, these participants may express desirable responses towards the program because some may be highly invested in the program and the schools.
- There were a limited number of trained parent mentors to choose from since there are few in the district who have the extensive experience and training in the program.
The study focused on only one particular parent mentoring program at a particular school/district so results cannot be generalized to all programs or schools; however, results from this study may help give insight into parent programs and home-school relations at other schools with similar demographics that are trying to improve Latino parental involvement.

**Organization**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with a statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, a summary of methods, and the limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 contains a conceptual framework and review of the literature in areas that relate to the topic of this study. Chapter 3 presents the methods and procedures utilized in this study, while Chapter 4 organizes and reports the findings of this study. Chapter 5 contains the summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to parental involvement and more specifically, programs designed for Latino parents. The literature presented looks at traditional parental involvement approaches and the barriers that have made it difficult for Latino parents to become more involved in their children’s school, as well as newer programs geared to parent engagement. The chapter also examines research on parent mentoring programs to explore whether these programs create more opportunities for Latino parents to become involved with the schools in sustained, collaborative relationships. Although some research exists on this type of program, little research has been done on the perceptions of Latino parents in these programs regarding whether or how these programs empower Latino parents and how administrators impact the success of such programs.

This review of the literature was conducted through an electronic literature search that utilized such terms as parental involvement, Latino parental involvement, parent education, home-school partnerships, parent mentoring programs, and parent leadership. Databases used to search for peer-reviewed articles included Education Research and Information Center (ERIC), Proquest Research Library, JSTOR, EBSCO Host, and Academic Search Elite. The focus of the search was empirical studies related to Latino parental involvement in schools, the impact of parental involvement on Latino students, parent education programs that cultivate leadership and mentoring skills in parents, and social and cultural capital theory. The articles reviewed were published between 1987 and 2013 and were limited to parental involvement in Kindergarten through high school, in alignment with the focus of this study.
The topics for the literature review are presented in the following order: student achievement and parental involvement, traditional parental involvement and culturally diverse parents, barriers to Latino parental involvement, the impact of parental involvement programs and parent leadership and mentoring programs. The theoretical framework that follows focuses on the concepts of social and cultural capital and their relationship to Latino parents and schools. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Latino parents involved in a parent mentoring program, to see if this type of program creates more sustainable relationships between the schools and Latino parents as observed by parents and administrators.

Review of the Literature

Student Achievement and Parental Involvement

Research continues to show that parental involvement is directly related to student achievement and that in schools where parental involvement is strong, students perform better (Epstein, 1995; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). This section reviews the literature to define parental involvement and examines how different components of parental involvement affect student achievement.

Defining Parental Involvement and its Impact. Defining parental involvement is a difficult task because its definition is often framed by the experiences, background, and culture that parents and educators bring with them (Boncana & Lopez, 2010). Viewed in a more traditional way, parental involvement might be defined as programs and activities initiated by schools with the intent of getting parents to participate in the education of their children either at school or home (Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Jeynes, 2005). These types of activities might include family nights, parent-teacher conferences, parent workshops and volunteering, as well as activities that schools request of parents, such as reading to their children.
or homework assistance. Parental involvement can be greatly affected by parents’ socio-economic status and cultural background, which can impact what they believe they are supposed to do to support their children (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005; Lareau, 1987).

“Home-school partnerships, in which the parents are involved in the cognitive development of their children, currently seem to be the dominant model” of parental involvement (Lareau, 2000, p. 74). Epstein’s classic study (1986) specifically identified six different types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each of these different types of parental involvement requires different strategies to be used by the school to support parents in working with their children and the school. Other researchers see parental involvement in two distinct categories, either school-based or home-based activities, emphasizing the school-based activities because the school has more control over these programs (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). Traditional definitions of parental involvement often focus on parents’ investment of time and money in the schools without looking at how schools can work on supporting the success of families; therefore, parents who are unable to provide their children and the school with these resources can be labeled as uninvolved (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Most research over the past three decades has heralded parental involvement as a way to increase student achievement, which has made parental involvement part of every educational reform movement since the 1980’s (Cook-Cottone, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Researchers emphasize that teachers need to communicate with and help parents become more involved in their children’s education if we are
to see students succeed (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In the 1980’s the National Committee for Citizen in Education (NCEE) published two annotated bibliographies that described over 50 studies showing that parental involvement in any form was associated with measurable gains in student achievement (Henderson, 1988). Epstein (1986) has researched parental involvement over the past three decades and found that “parent involvement is a manipulable variable that can be designed to increase school effectiveness and to improve student success in school” (p. 52). Specifically, Epstein & Dauber (1991) found that when teachers incorporate parental involvement into their teaching practice on a regular basis, academic interactions between parents and children increased at home and students’ attitudes and achievement improved at school.

More recently in a meta-analysis of 51 studies by Jeynes (2012), students in schools with parental involvement programs showed substantially higher test scores than those in schools without such programs, even when controlling for such factors as race, socioeconomic status, and gender. Specifically, programs in elementary schools encouraging parents in activities like checking homework, shared reading with their children, and teacher-parent communication had statistically significant positive effects on student outcomes (Jeynes, 2012). In contrast, Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez & Kayzar (2002) analyzed 41 parental involvement programs Kindergarten through grade 12 and found that there was little empirical support for the belief that parental involvement improves student achievement. Among the flaws in the studies found by Mattingly and his colleagues (2002) were a lack of rigor in the data collection methods and inattention to parents’ socio-economic status, race and immigration status as variables affecting parental involvement. These contrasting results between studies may be due to the types of parental involvement programs looked at in each of the studies or the fact that the
Jeynes’ (2012) meta-analysis included preschool programs. Studies have shown positive effects on early academic achievement in Latino students attending preschool programs, especially those with high levels of parental involvement (Crooks, 2005; Gregg, Rugg & Stoneman, 2011; Henderson, 1988)

**Varied Effects of Parental Involvement.** Parental involvement can take on different forms and have varied impacts on student achievement. For example, Ramirez (2003) did a mixed methods study of a parental involvement program initiated in a Southern California middle school with students of low SES and found that when parents became more involved in checking their children’s school work and monitoring homework, students with an average of a B grade in their classes went up to an A. Similarly, a quantitative study of 1,609 Mexican American families by Altschul (2011) examining what types of parental involvement most impacted achievement found that home-based involvement by parents, especially discussing school matters with their children, had the most positive effects on students especially in elementary grades. These studies indicate that many of the types of home-based parental involvement activities most common with Latino parents do support student achievement although they are often marginalized and discounted by educators (Auerbach, 2011; Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Gregg et al., 2011).

In addition to involvement in school work, motivating their children to succeed and advocating for a better education for their children are types of parental involvement that are associated with increased student achievement (Altschul, 2011; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Jasis, 2013; Jeynes, 2012). Cheung and Pomerantz’ (2012) quantitative study comparing 374 Chinese and 451 American 7th grade students found that students whose parents had high expectations for them were more motivated in school. This was due in part to their “externally
regulated concerns” of receiving rewards or punishments from parents at home. Students internalized their parents’ goals as their own, assisting them to achieve at higher levels. Furthermore, the results were found to be identical in both Chinese and American students, indicating in this study that parent-oriented motivation was not affected by culture (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012).

Sometimes student motivation is not enough, however, especially when schools place students in lower level academic courses based on preconceived notions of ability related to socio-economic status and culture. A qualitative study by Jasis (2013) looked at Latino parent activism in challenging their children’s lower level math placements at a Northern California middle school. This empowered form of parent engagement helped parents move their children into more rigorous math classes, which in turn helped raise Latino student academic achievement over the next few years. According to Jasis (2013), schools need not see “concerned parents as threats to established school norms but rather as vehicles to improved student academic achievement” (p. 128).

Socioeconomic status can also have an impact on parental involvement in a number of ways and thus impact student achievement. Researchers have reported an achievement gap among school children that is associated with socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Some of the factors associated with lower academic achievement are low parental education, poverty, and students being African American and Hispanic (Bali & Alvarez, 2004). When families are struggling to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety, parental involvement in the school becomes a lower priority and this outside struggle may become a barrier for the school system (Epstein, 2001; Lawson, 2003). Schools in more affluent
communities tend to have more positive traditional forms of parental involvement on average than schools in disadvantaged areas (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Social class differences in family life or class cultures have also been shown to have implications for family-school relationships and can influence parents’ self-efficacy and how they support their children in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 1987). Lareau (1987) found that even when the value placed on education by both middle-class and working-class parents was the same, the way that parents became involved in the education of their children looked different (p. 81). For example, in Lareau’s (1987) classic study, parents from the low SES school were awkward and uncomfortable in their interactions with teachers and avoided speaking to them at activities like Open House; by contrast, at the higher SES school, parents contacted teachers with ease and had active conversations with the teachers at school events. Therefore, teachers might interpret the lack of traditional parental involvement by families of low SES as a lack of interest in their children’s educational success (Christianakis, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lareau, 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, the extent and type of involvement is often a topic of dissent between educators and the parents of the children they teach because of the difference in the way parents define parental involvement (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011).

Parental involvement influences many different aspects of student success in schools. Parental involvement socializes children and sends the message that school is important (Turney & Kao, 2009). Research also shows parental involvement as positively influencing students’ self-confidence and self-esteem, which, in turn can lead to academic success (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In addition to higher academic achievement, research correlates
parental involvement with such educational benefits as better attendance, positive attitudes about school, improved programs in schools, decreased drop out and truancy rates, and improved student behavior (Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Cancio, West & Young, 2004; Smith, et al, 2011).

As we have seen, both home-based or school-based parental involvement can provide the type of support students need to increase grades and develop positive attitudes about school (Altshul, 2011; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Henderson, 1988; Jasis, 2013; Jeynes, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006). But does all parental involvement work equally well with specific populations like Latino parents? Do the traditional activities used by schools to involve parents work in bringing in Latino parents and creating long-term engagement with the schools? The following section discusses the traditional approaches to parental involvement programs used by schools and how these programs have not necessarily been successful with Latino parents.

**Traditional Parental Involvement and Culturally Diverse Families**

Parental involvement at school can take place through a variety of traditional activities such as volunteering, communicating with teachers, and attending school functions and parent-teacher conferences (Epstein et al., 2009). However, many families from non-dominant cultures view parental involvement as being supportive at home through nurturing their children, teaching them cultural values, and encouraging them to do well in school—practices that are not always accepted or valued as valid parental involvement by schools (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Scribner, Young & Pedroza, 1999; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). This section reviews literature on traditional parental involvement and its focus on middle-class standards, which is often a barrier for Latino parents.
Baquedano-Lopez and colleagues (2013) suggest that the American education system is based “on the European legacy that to this date returns to a history that redeems colonial practices and promotes success through notions of excellence based on Western values such as individually earned merit, which assumes a level playing field” (p. 169). Therefore, the tendency has been for federal and state policies on education to stress Anglo-conformity and create structures and practices that are aligned with white, middle-class culture (Lareau, 2000, as cited in Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). This also holds true for the traditional ways that most schools have approached parental involvement.

Parental involvement can be looked at as having two categories, school-based and home-based (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack, 2007). School-based parental activities in the traditional sense require parents to be present in the school setting. Activities can include being part of school advisory boards, attending parent meetings, chaperoning field trips, volunteering in classrooms and participating in parent workshops or trainings. These types of activities tend to be the most acknowledged forms of parental involvement by teachers (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). However, they are often the most difficult types of activities to participate in for Latino and low-income parents due to barriers that will be discussed in the following section (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Home-based involvement refers to any activities used to build academic knowledge at home, which could include homework, class projects, tutoring, providing enrichment activities or communicating with the school (Boncana & Lopez, 2010). Again, in this situation, what schools view as traditional or “acceptable” forms of home involvement can differ from what Latino and minority parents might consider being involved (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Hornby & LaFaele, 2011; Smith et al., 2008). Even when parents are not formally involved in the school life of their
children, studies show that parents with diverse racial/ethnic, educational, and economic backgrounds are involved in their children’s education through unseen support at home not acknowledged by the schools (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 210). For example, a qualitative study of 32 Hispanic parents with children between the age of seven to 18 by Hwang and Vrongistinos (2010) found that all the parents in the study offered their children some type of information and support at home, such as assisting with homework, being good role models and offering emotional support, even when they were not present at the school.

In traditional forms of parental involvement, the activities provided allow for the dominant power to stay with the school and to try to get parents to conform (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Activities such as Back to School Night, parent-teacher conferences, advisory councils and parent education classes invite parents to the school while maintaining them in the role of a visitor. While these activities may work for white middle-class parents who feel comfortable socializing and discussing their concerns about their children with the teachers, non-dominant culture parents may feel they are not as qualified as teachers in educational matters and prefer to leave the education of their children to professionals (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Traditional school “partnerships” with parents are more likely to be one-way approaches to parental involvement that look to further the schools’ own agenda, curriculum and mission (Warren et al., 2009). This one-sided approach by schools does not take into account the needs of Latino families in their community and fails to provide them with alternative ways to become involved in their children’s education that are more culturally sensitive.

**Parental Involvement as Middle Class Values.** Parental involvement can be a difficult concept because “teachers and parents each bring their own personal set of beliefs that are set by their historical, economic, educational, ethnic, class and gendered experiences” (Hornby &
Lafele, 2011, p. 45). Because schools tend to reflect white middle-class values, school involvement tends to happen more frequently and easily in the families of the children whose culture and background is similar to the school culture (Lee & Bowen, 2006). A classic study by Lareau (1987) of parent-school relationships looked at two distinct types of schools, one with a white middle-class parent community and the other with a white working-class parent community. One of the conclusions in her study was that there was a “social profitability” for parents who were middle class that was “tied to the schools’ definition of the proper family-school relationships” (Lareau, 1987, p. 82). This can create situations where middle-class white parents are made to feel more welcomed in schools than working-class or minority parents. It should then come as no surprise that “parents of ethnically diverse students, often fail to participate in the schools in numbers comparable to other majority group parents,” as Delgado-Gaitan (1991) wrote in another classic study (p. 20).

This focus on highlighting middle-class values within the educational system may be a direct consequence of federal and state educational policies. These have tended to focus on a white middle-class ideal for parental involvement embedded in the American values of the 1950’s prior to when parents left the home to join the labor force and according to the government, lost interest in the education of their children (Baquedano-Lopez, 2013). Similar to schools, government policies and programs for parental involvement tend to frame parents as the problem and blame schools for not doing enough to engage families of culturally diverse backgrounds (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). As recently as Obama’s Race to the Top initiative in 2010, programs for early learning to close the school readiness gap have promoted introducing the “cultural practices of the dominant community into the homes of minority children so that deficit assumptions drive the purpose, design and practices of the interventions being
introduced” (Baquedano-Lopez, 2013, p. 154). This exemplifies the United States’ history of exclusionary policies that could be worsening the achievement gap for many economically disadvantaged and immigrant families (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Part of the problem may lie in the traditional nature of parent-school relationships that help schools to maintain the power and responsibility for the education of students in their control (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The key is to differentiate between “parental involvement” and “parent engagement” as two distinct approaches to parent-school relationships. In parental involvement approaches, schools avoid the issue of power by assigning parents passive roles in the school culture, while parent engagement approaches recognize parents as citizens and change agents within a school (Warren & Mapp, 2011). When teachers and parents see themselves as part of a community that shares “collaborative discourse,” a sense of respect and inclusiveness arises and can foster powerful forms of engagement (Miretzky, 2004; Warren et al., 2009).

As we have seen, traditional forms of parental involvement in schools tend to be one-sided and based on middle-class values, neglecting the specific needs of Latino parents. What are the barriers that keep many Latino parents from becoming more involved in their children’s education?

**Barriers to Latino Parental Involvement**

As previously discussed, parental involvement has historically reflected a middle-class white perspective in the United States. As the number of Latino families continue to grow, especially in western states, it is essential to find ways to break down the barriers that many Latino families face in trying to become more involved in their children’s education. Some of the fundamental barriers include many parents’ limited English, inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation and daycare. Other barriers for Latino parents may be a lack of invitation by
schools to participate, the different perceptions of parental involvement of parents and teachers, as well as educators’ lack of knowledge of Latino parents. Finally, insufficient training in teacher credential programs on working with minority parents continues to create a vicious cycle where many teachers continue to view Latino parents with deficit thinking (Christianakis, 2011).

Teachers tend to interpret parental involvement as a reflection of how much parents care about their children and value their academic success (Lareau, 1987; Turney & Kao, 2009). What teachers may not take into consideration is the fact that many Latino parents have personal barriers that might be keeping them from being able to fully participate in their children’s education. A major barrier for many Latino parents is their inability to speak fluent English. Many Latino parents are immigrants and are unfamiliar with English language and American culture (Zhou, 1997). This can cause parents to become intimidated by teachers, and in response, teachers give up on parents “due to this cultural divide” (Chrispeels, 2001, p. 120).

For example, in a qualitative study of 15 Latino parents with little or no English language comprehension, Smith and colleagues (2008) reported that the lack of school information in the parents’ native language was a major barrier to their involvement. Other barriers faced by Latino parents can include inflexible work hours and schedules or a lack of child care that do not allow them to be present at school during regular hours (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Hornby & LaFaele, 2011). Parents often wish that teachers understood the difficulties they are facing in their communities, neighborhoods and family situations, just as teachers want parents to understand the difficulties faced by teachers in classrooms (Miretzky, 2004). When school administrators and teachers cannot understand the special needs of Spanish-speaking parents in order to get them involved, this separation is a structural problem, not a parent problem (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).
Another major barrier for Latino parental involvement can be lack of opportunities and invitations from the school. Epstein (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) suggest that the school climate and types of invitations offered by schools for parents to get involved are very influential in whether parents will become involved or not in their children’s education. The school has a great influence in developing parents’ self-efficacy for helping their children; invitations from the school to get involved were an important motivational factor that might help nudge those parents with weak self-efficacy to get more involved in their children’s education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Miretzky (2004) conducted a qualitative study in elementary schools with low SES and minority families in Chicago, interviewing both teachers and parents. She found that unless teachers made an effort to break down barriers with parents in their communities and start making personal contact with those diverse families to get them to attend school programs, simply sending flyers home did not help to get these parents more involved (p. 843). In addition, according to Hong (2011), many schools across the country have fractured relationships with parents and discourage parents from entering the school, creating a culture of distance between families and educators. Although both parents and schools might agree that a partnership between home and school is essential to student success, we often see that teachers do not act on this belief. Many teachers alienate parents by blaming them for students’ lack of success and communicating with parents usually for negative purposes (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). Therefore, it is very important that schools create welcoming environments that encourage parental involvement if they hope to break down the barriers, especially for their immigrant parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Research on parent involvement in middle schools suggests that communication and involvement decline significantly from elementary grades to middles schools creating an even
larger gap between families and schools (Patel & Stevens, 2010). Limited communication and expectations on the part of the school can lead to this increased lack of parental involvement. A study done by Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013), surveyed over 1000 parents from two Title 1 Middle Schools with over 50% Hispanic and Black students on their perceptions of invitations of involvement from teachers and students, school climate, and school expectations of involvement. The study found that parents’ perceptions of school expectation of involvement and of their students’ invitation to involvement were the most influential in getting parents to become involved. Similarly, a quantitative study of 437 sixth through eighth grade parents at two ethnically diverse Title 1 schools found that in order for middle school parents to become productively involved they must have a clear understanding of the teachers’ views of students, the purpose of schools and the role of parent involvement (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). It seems that lack of communication and invitations from the school to be involved become greater barriers as the students move into middle school.

Another factor creating barriers for Latino parents are the different perspectives on parental involvement that they may have versus what the school and teachers believe parental involvement should be. Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999) found that while teachers tended to consider parental involvement as attendance at school activities, parents saw it as things they could do at home to work with their children, such as talking about their day, helping with homework and encouraging their children to do well in school. These results were further supported by Smith and colleagues (2008), whose qualitative study of Latino parents found that Latino parents believed that their role in helping with their children’s academic success consisted of activities such as supervising homework, ensuring good behavior at school and motivating their children to work hard. At the middle school level, a qualitative study of junior high
families by Halsey (2005) found that teachers assumed parents were unwilling to become involved when they didn’t volunteer; whereas, most of the parents interviewed perceived that there was not an open invitation for classroom involvement once students got to middle school. These different perspectives can cause a “disconnect” between Latino parents and school staff and make it difficult for either side to understand the others’ culture (Gibson, 2002).

Differences in social, cultural and economic resources experienced by many lower SES Latino parents can help explain why they respond differently to teachers’ requests for parental involvement as opposed to middle-class parents (Chrispeels, 2001; Lareau, 1987). This is especially true when “schools ask for very specific types of behavior from all parents regardless of their social class” (Lareau, 1987, p. 83). Many lower SES Latino parents see their essential role as providing food, clothing and shelter for their children (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991) and often do not feel competent enough to meet with school personnel or to volunteer (Chrispeels, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Smith et al., 2008).

Schools’ expectations of parental involvement and minority parents’ response continues to cause a cultural divide that can be a major barrier for Latino parents. Ramirez (2000) found that teachers believe that parents must initiate contact with the school while Latino parents seem to believe that the teacher is responsible for initiating communication with them. Regardless of who initiates the communication, teacher and parent discussions typically revolve around negative behaviors or failing academics. For example, teachers from two high schools in a small mid-western town stated on a survey that they felt parents needed to be responsible for telling teachers information about students that could affect their learning; however, this could prove difficult for parents since teachers also responded that they did not feel it was important to conduct parent conferences with all their students (Ramirez, 2000). In order to close this
cultural divide, American teachers need to understand that many “Latino parents have come with the idea that they educate their children with values, respect, and a desire to learn and that school should give them the instruction necessary to ensure a better future” (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011, p. 237). Schools in ethnic communities therefore need to address school-home communication to better understand the needs of their parents and students (Ramirez, 2000).

Administrator attitude towards parental involvement can also significantly impact Latino families in schools. According to Epstein and Sanders (2006), only 20% of students graduating from administrative programs will be prepared to work with families. For this reason, most administrators will continue to view parental involvement in conventional ways and fail to engage their Latino families in their schools in meaningful partnerships (Auerbach, 2009). Another issue arises when administrators and teachers have strong beliefs about parental involvement but their actions fail to match those beliefs. In their quantitative study of 92 teachers and administrators in K-12, schools Barnyak and McNelly (2009) found that despite the fact that these educators knew that using newsletters, email, parent-teacher conferences, interactive homework and teacher/school webpages would increase parental involvement many did not use these practices. According to researchers, administrators play a key role in creating a culture where parental involvement is valued and strong leaders can create that cohesive partnership among the school and families (Ferguson, 2005; Zarate, 2007). Although it may seem obvious that administrators should nurture the relationship between teachers and parents, it is not something often mentioned by administrators when interviewed in larger studies (Auerbach, 2009). When administrators do not have positive views of parental involvement, especially related to Latino parents, these negative belief systems can manifest themselves among their staff as well.
A related barrier that Latino families face is the belief by many teachers that being a member of a minority is a disadvantage in itself. Many educators look at Latino parents in terms of a deficit model, maintaining the false belief that Latino parents do not value their children’s education (Madrid, 2011). However, studies on Latino parental involvement have shown that Latino parents are very interested in their children’s education and often participate in home-based parental involvement, which is not acknowledged by schools (Altschul, 2011; Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010; Lareau, 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006). This false notion looks past the fact that immigrant parents support their children through verbal messages and offering “moral and emotional” support at home, which is often ignored by school personnel (Auerbach, 2011, p. 18). Being that the majority of U.S. teachers are white, they may feel uncomfortable with what is different and fail to acknowledge that students are not an empty slate when they arrive at school; rather, they bring cultural values with them from their home and families (Magdaleno, 2013, p 31). Orozco (2008) suggests that educators “approach low-income immigrant Latino parents from a strengths-based perspective” (p. 34). She states that all parents regardless of their background have a culture that is rich with history, language and traditions and that these deserve to be “honored, respected and cultivated” by schools.

Contrary to what many educators may believe, minority parents often place high value on the importance of education, having aspirations for their children and seeing education as a way to gain upward mobility in society (Driessen, Smit & Sleegers, 2005; Spera et al., 2008). Spera, Wentzel and Matto (2008) surveyed 13,577 parents of various ethnic backgrounds and found that over 85% of Hispanic and African American parents had aspirations for their children to attend college. This is in stark contrast with the percentage of minority students who actually attend college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Why is there such a large discrepancy between the two
numbers? The social, cultural and economic resources needed to succeed in American society can be daunting for many immigrant families (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011). Parents of color may lack the skills or knowledge to translate their desires for their children’s success into parental involvement that fosters these educational values (Spera et al., 2008, p. 1149). Among other things, Latino parents’ need for basic information about American schools, a lack of educational resources at home, low teacher expectations for Latino youth, and tracking Latino students in non-college bound courses are barriers that continue to hold back these students from going to college (Altchul, 2011; Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010; Jasis, 2013; Orozco, 2008).

Understanding barriers to Latino parental involvement is essential in order for schools to create programs that can adequately meet the needs of these parents and create long-term collaborative relationships with them that will make a positive impact on their children’s education. Many programs have been established over the past three decades that have focused on trying to improve the rates of Latino parental involvement in an effort to raise Latino student achievement. In the next section we will look at the impact some of these programs have had.

The Impact of Latino Parental Involvement Programs

This section will look at the empirical evidence regarding parental involvement programs for Latinos and how effective they have been in supporting the needs of Latino parents in schools. According to Delgado-Gaitan (2012), in order to create an effective Latino parental involvement program, schools must be culturally responsive to their community and work closely with diverse parents so that these parents can understand the classroom and school’s expectations. These programs are successful when the administration and staff at a school understand the barriers faced by families of color and provide supportive services within the community for them (Rivera & Lavan, 2012). However, because many schools look at Latino
students and families through a deficit lens, some of the parent education classes offered put an emphasis on teaching Latino parents how to help their children and do not acknowledge the “funds of knowledge” that Latino families bring with them and can contribute to the conversation (Gregg et al., 2011; Miretzky, 2004). Jordan, Orozco, and Averett (2001) state that “educators are attempting to create partnerships with families without adequate research-based knowledge to support their efforts” (p. 1). In other words, educators want to build relationships with families in their communities without truly understanding the diverse background and culture that these parents and students bring with them. It might seem like a conflict then, if these same educators with little understanding of the Latino culture are the ones who are leading these parent education classes in schools.

In an effort to identify effective components of parent education models, researchers have looked at different programs that may help increase parental involvement among minority parents. Hardin and Littlejohn (1994) review the elements of effective family-school collaboration program models. These elements included trust and openness, positive communication, acknowledgement of parents’ roles, and having a group of parents committed to making changes in their schools (Hardin & Littlejohn, 1994, p. 2). The authors felt educational professionals must recognize that parents are not skilled in the collaborative process and do not always have the same amount of time to dedicate to it; however, educators need to value the differences and not judge parents too harshly (Hardin & Littlejohn, 1994). As stated previously, educators must not look at Latino parents through a “deficit lens,” but rather see what these parents can bring as positive influences to the educational process. By actively listening to Latino parents and ensuring that everyone is speaking the same “collaborative language,”
educators can create powerful and effective programs of parent engagement (Hardin & Littlejohn, 1994).

Similarly, Henderson (2010) researched effective parent education program models for minority and/or low SES parents in urban schools across the nation and categorized these programs into four major types: 1) parent leadership training programs developing leadership structures, 2) parent training programs supporting immigrant families (such as PIQUE), 3) parent academies or universities supporting student learning, and 4) parent training to help parents understand and navigate the educational system. All four types of programs showed increases in parental participation in schools, changes in parents’ attitude towards education that positively impact children’s achievement, and increased parent knowledge about the education system. Additionally, gains in parent leadership skills were present in two types of programs. Parents participating in the type one program had increased involvement in leadership roles within the school and district committees while parents in the type four program found that their newfound leadership skills helped them to use data in making decisions about school improvement (Henderson, 2010).

Like Hardin & Littlejohn (1994), Henderson (2010) found certain key practices related to the success of the programs studied. The report found that successful parent programs ask for input from the parents and the community when creating their programs; find ways to engage parents through motivation to gain long-term participation; provide a variety of delivery models to support their needs; and build relationships with local government officials to offer parents the opportunity to get involved in community advisory councils (Henderson, 2010). Many aspects of successful parental involvement programs have been studied and utilized by districts in an
effort to create effective programs that will involve parents at school. This section will analyze parental involvement programs specifically focused on Latino parents.

An area of need identified by many school districts when working with Latino families are early childhood programs that educate young Latino parents in parenting skills for positive life-long changes in a child’s education. Two such programs, AVANCE and Family Learning Center (FLC), have found that by giving Latino mothers the tools needed for parenting and focusing on their eagerness to ensure their children’s educational success at an early age, they could be helped in making this educational vision a reality (Schaller, Rocha, & Barchinger, 2007; Johnson, 2009). Preliminary results from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) indicated that 88% of the children whose parents graduated from AVANCE met passing standards in reading as compared to 77% of the students in the Dallas Independent School District (Johnson, 2009). Additionally, FLC gave these young mothers a forum to discuss parenting practices and beliefs, helping them to challenge some old familial practices and to consider other approaches to parenting that will assist their children as they transition into American public elementary schools (Johnson, 2009).

Although programs created for Latino parents may have different goals and activities, they share a common focus on student achievement in an effort to close the achievement gap for Latino students. Programs such as Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) specifically focus on immigrant parents’ understanding of college readiness skills for their children. Chrispeels, Bolivar and Vaca (2008) looked at two high schools comparing parents who had attended PIQE courses and those who had not. On average, the parents who attended PIQE had less education than the control group yet their children had 50% more required college preparatory classes, higher graduation rates and fewer absences than the children of the control
Likewise, Chebbi (2008) found that 96% of parents surveyed in the Parent Academy in Miami felt that the program had helped their child in school, and low-performing schools using the program reported an overall increase in achievement. These two programs build on engaging parents in their children’s education over the long-term and committing them to change, some of the components of successful programs according to Henderson (2010) and Hardin and Littlejohn (1994).

Schools must work on understanding their students’ families in order to increase parental involvement, which, in turn, can help raise student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Spera, et al., 2008)). Too often schools create parental involvement or education programs in response to their own needs without taking into account family and community needs. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District launched a parent education program for hard-to-reach Latino parents in response to the large number of schools failing to meet NCLB targets and thus unable to get out of Program Improvement (PI) status (Collier & Auerbach, 2011). Collier & Auerbach (2011) examined the program at four elementary schools with predominantly low-income Latino students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Through observations, interviews and focus groups, the researchers found that the curriculum and objectives of the program had been planned by a district committee without looking at ways to accommodate the Spanish-speaking parents other than just translating the materials themselves.

On the other hand, some programs have found success with Latino parents when they use an inclusive process in the planning of the program, have clear expectations for the participants and have enough flexibility to accommodate different cultures and parenting styles (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). Project AVANZANDO, a community-based adult education program,
works with Latino migrant working parents to empower them through their own education so that they can, in turn, support and help their children. Over seven years the program graduated 600 participants and transitioned 35% of those graduates to local community colleges (Jasis & Marriot, 2010). The program uses a “constructivist” approach to teaching using the participants’ previous experiences and knowledge and building on it. This study of 32 migrant worker parents using interviews, observations, and surveys, found that as parents pursued their own education, they gained a better appreciation of education in general. As a result, 85% of those surveyed felt better able to support their children in school activities such as homework and 70% claimed that they visited their children’s school more often and communicated more with teachers (Jasis & Marriot, 2010). A key component of Project AVANZANDO is the notion that when a community of learners is established, participants learn from one another’s experiences, thus “blurring the barriers between teachers and students” (Jasis & Marriot, 2010, p. 136). This form of empowerment within parental involvement programs is also one of the key components of parent mentoring programs, which will be explored in the next section.

Anecdotal evidence from educators suggests that parents attending the parent education programs offered by schools are often the ones who are already involved in their children’s education. This dilemma can be described as “preaching to the choir” and schools often find it difficult to make connections to those less involved and hard-to-reach parents whose children would benefit from their involvement. Part of this problem could be related to a “cultural disconnect” since often times teachers and administrators do not make up the same cultural and socioeconomic background as the families they serve (Christianikis, 2011; Lareau, 1987; Smith et al., 2008). According to Miretzky (2004), schools might need to consider using the parents already involved in the school as assets in their community to recruit more parents to become
more actively engaged in their children’s education. By empowering these parent leaders, educators can utilize their enthusiasm and knowledge about the community to help other less involved parents to help with the disconnect between the school and home cultures (Smith et al., 2008).

The parenting programs discussed in this section utilized different ways to engage and involve Latino parents in their children’s education to promote higher student achievement. Many of the programs focused on parent education and building parents’ knowledge; however, none considered the opportunity of using parents as mentors and teachers for other parents within the schools. The following section will focus on parent leadership and mentoring programs that promote leadership capacity for Latino parents.

**Parent Leadership and Mentoring Programs**

Parent involvement has been shown to positively impact children’s educational performance (Lee & Bowen, 2006), therefore, educators know that finding the right type of parent program is essential. Although programs designed to support and engage Latino parents have been in existence for a number of years, fewer Latino parents participate regularly in their children’s schools compared to white parents (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Newer programs that stress parent leadership and mentoring show promising results in addressing the lack of participation with Latino parents (Warren et al., 2009). This section will explain the difference between parent leadership versus parent mentoring programs and look at the components of these programs, as well as their effectiveness with Latino parents.

Parent leadership and mentoring programs contrast with traditional parental involvement approaches because they tend to favor parent engagement rather than involvement. Schools
using conventional forms of parental involvement tend to maintain control within the school
prefer to facilitate parents in complying with dominant standards in school interactions
(Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). These traditional forms of parental
involvement are based on middle-class standards where parents are highly visible at school and
give little flexibility for other ways parents might get involved (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Olivos,
2009). On the other hand, parent engagement looks more at creating a democratic school
environment where parents are seen as having knowledge to contribute to the school; the
engagement approach seeks to empower parents as partners in the learning process of their
children (First & Way, 1995; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011; Miretzky, 2004; Warren et al.,
2009). These programs seek to level the playing field between parents and educators and
challenge the traditional roles of school and parents (Miretzky, 2004). Miretzky (2004) states, in
order to create a vision of schools as “democratic sites” where families and schools work in
collaboration, educators have to put aside “traditional notions of power, control, and authority;
and re-conceptualize their own roles” (p. 843).

**Parent Leadership Programs.** Researchers have recently begun to examine a new form
of parent engagement that gives voice to low-income and minority parents. This engagement
creates changes within low-performing schools by creating parent organizations that develop
parents as leaders with skills that can take on community issues (Hong, 2011; Warren & Mapp,
2011). Many of these programs educate parents about the American educational system while at
the same time training them to be school and community leaders. Leadership programs change
parents’ perspectives to one of being advocates for all children rather than just their own (Corbett
& Wilson, 2008). Similarly, mentoring programs build on the capacity of parents as teachers and
role models for other parents, thus impacting the entire school community (Hong, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Although parent leadership and mentoring programs both create parent engagement in schools, they are different in their focus and ultimate goals. Parent leadership programs engage parents in civic and community advocacy, putting parents in the role of change agents for all children. Some parent leadership programs begin at the school level, but many are started as grassroots movements within community organizations or churches and operate mainly outside the school in the broader community (Catone, Chung & Oh, 2011; Kuttner, Taylor & Westmoreland, 2011; Mira, Nikundiwe and Wadhwa, 2011). On the other hand, parent mentoring programs seek to change the traditional roles of parental involvement and put parents in the role of trainers and advisors of other parents. According to Hong (2011) schools should use an ecological model of parent engagement, which includes “developing mutual forms of engagement, building relationships, and sharing leadership and power” that are all “mutually engaging” (p. 30). She further states that in order for schools to close the parental involvement gap they “must focus on the relationships, rather than the activities of parent engagement” (p. 31).

A growing number of community organizing initiatives work on improving low-performing schools and engaging parents in community and political outreach through parent leadership programs. For example, organizations like One LA believe that “they can build a network of institutional relationships of trust among students, parents, teachers, principals, clergy, business, community leaders and local residents that responds to the weak existing culture in schools often characterized by distrust, fear, and blame” (Catone et al., 2011, p 72). One LA proved successful in its political outreach by organizing against a large institution like
Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in 2001 to alter budget timetables. This effort was successful in closing funding gaps and positively affecting 250,000 students who were unfairly tracked and at a disadvantage (Catone et al., 2011). Similarly, the Coalition in New York City has collaborated with and supported families in the Bronx public schools in leadership skills and having a united voice, which has helped to ease overcrowding and improve the poor quality of education in the city’s public schools (Kuttner et al., 2011). The Coalition’s efforts created 3,000 additional seats in 1999 for students in the city’s master plan by finding locations for new school sites through the connections made by parents with shared concerns (Kuttner et al., 2011).

In a like-minded fashion, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos (PJU) in Denver created a network of both parents and secondary students who engage in political action to improve the status of underperforming schools by focusing on human rights and equality for all students (Mira et al., 2011). After surveying minority students and finding that 90% wanted to go to college but only 50% felt prepared to do so, the organization of parents united in action to redesign the high school curriculum with a College Prep for All framework. This helped to release half of the teaching staff at North High School, who proved not to be open to working with students of color (Mira et al., 2011). Additionally, the organization reports that their work with the state on restorative justice and discipline measures helped lower the state’s expulsion rate by 25% and the suspension rate for Latino students by 12% in 2012-13 (Padres y Jovenes Unidos, 2014).

One of the major focus areas for parent leadership programs intended for minority parents is encouraging shared responsibility for all students in the community through civic empowerment and collective action. These programs seek to build on parent capacity within the community and to have lasting impact for the education of all students (Corbett & Wilson, 2008;
Henderson, 2010). One such program, Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), showed that although participants were already fairly involved parents, after attending the program there was increased district committee involvement from 19% to 25% and parental involvement in regional committees increased from 4% to 17% (Corbett & Wilson, 2008). An external evaluation done on another such program, Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), reported that many parents became more engaged in advocacy and improvement efforts in the school and community after graduating from the program (Henderson, 2010). Much like the two previous programs, Supporting Excellence in Education (SEE) prepares parents to examine educational policies and procedures and to be prepared to address public concerns in an effort to improve schools for all children (Henderson, 2010). Pre and post surveys of alumni of the program found that 77% of the parents were more likely to reach out to parents of diverse backgrounds, 69% recruited parents to become involved and also joined other parent advisory groups after completing the leadership training (Henderson, 2010).

Similar to the above programs, the Parent School Partnership (PSP) program and Vision and Voice Family Leadership Institute (VVLFI), both funded through the Mexican American Legal Education Foundation (MALDEF), work to provide parents with the social and intellectual capital needed to support their children’s school success and become emerging leaders (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010; Cunningham, Kreider & Ocon, 2012). Bolivar & Chrispeels (2010) found that although social and intellectual capital is unequally distributed across diverse groups, it is possible to increase these through the “provision of critical information and multiple opportunities for community development” and enable the active participation of minority parents in the education system (p. 32). Their study found that parents were empowered to take action in both the educational and political arena by learning the norms for interacting with
educational and public officials; however, a shift in the power relationship between parents and schools was not visible as a direct consequence of the program (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010). Results of a survey given to VVLFI alumni indicated that 68% of alumni had built alliances with parents whose background was different from their own and 57% were actively recruiting other parents to make changes in their schools and community. Despite these areas of growth, one area that did not improve for parents participating in VVLFI was the comfort level of speaking with their child’s teachers (Cunningham et al., 2012). These results could be reflective of the fact that although parent leadership programs develop parent advocacy and participation, focusing more on activities, they do not necessarily work towards developing the relationship of parents as partners in their children’s school; thus, barriers between parents and teachers remain.

But what type of parental involvement creates the necessary foundation to empower parents as partners in their children’s school? What must schools provide to foster this type of collaborative relationship?

**Parent Mentoring Programs.** An important aspect of parent mentoring programs that is different from leadership programs is their emphasis on opportunities for parents to socialize, form bonds and help one another. Studies show that parental involvement is not only beneficial to the students attending a school, but to the parents who are involved as well (Smith et al., 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006). This could be due to the fact that when parents are present on a school campus for parent programs, they gain access to teachers, other parents and administrators that can give them valuable insight, information and strategies that can help them to support their children at home and school; this, in turn, puts them in a better position to intervene in their children’s education when necessary (Turney & Kao, 2009, p. 258). For example, Horvat and colleagues (2003) found that working-class parents typically did not know
other parents at their children’s school and often lacked the education and confidence to deal with school authorities as equals. Thus, studies show that opportunities for parents to form friendships with peers within group interactions at school are also of high importance (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Powell, Zambrana & Silva-Palacios, 2012).

First and Way (1995) found that one of the positive outcomes of the parent education program that they studied was the opportunity for parents to meet other parents and share parenting tips. Parents felt these socialization opportunities helped them in learning different ways of doing things with their children. The CAN program is another example where parents involved in the program reported that the ability to interact with other parents on a regular basis led to group cohesion and confianza (trust); this helped both with increased social capital among the members of the group, and decreased feelings of social-psychological isolation (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011, p. 670). This opportunity to increase social capital and networks for parents allows students to have access to additional resources and support for academic success, as we will see (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Schools need to build on the social capital of Latino parents if parents are to gain access to resources and assistance that will help them become support systems for their school-aged children (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011).

Warren and colleagues (2009) conducted a case study of three notable school-community collaborations in large cities and found that all three shared certain core elements, which were focused on emphasizing relationship building. This relational approach to engaging parents in schools was seen in all three school-community programs in Warren et al. (2009), yet one particular program, Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago, stood out as having the clearest approach in utilizing relationship building as the foundation for parents to participate as equals in the schools. By socializing parents with other parents throughout the
year in LSNA’s parent mentoring program, the program established a long-term collaborative network between the parents and the school. Warren et al. (2009) found that when parents built bonding ties with other parents in similar circumstances as their own, these social ties helped to broaden the collaborative efforts of the school and bridge the relationship between parents and teachers, who are seen by parents as of higher status.

To further build on the trust between teachers and parents, LSNA expanded the mentoring program beyond the weekly meetings into having parents work as assistants in the classrooms. There, they “begin to understand the complexity of the work of teaching,” which in turn changed the nature of the relationship between parents and teachers (Hong, 2011, p. 121). Additionally, parent mentors are placed in classrooms not assigned to their children, which builds on the sense of community responsibility in supporting all students rather than just their own. During the 2012-2013 school year LSNA had 150 parent mentors in nine different elementary schools in Chicago working with the neediest population of students.

Building further on the concepts of relationship building among parents and developing leadership skills, Math and Parent Partnerships in the Southwest (MAPPS) sees their participants as parents, learners, teachers and leaders (Civil, Bratton & Quintos, 2005). MAPPS provides parents, teachers and administrators the training to facilitate workshops for the larger parent community and become mentors for the new participants in the program. A study on the program by Civil and colleagues (2005) was conducted in a MAPP school district with an 85.4% Hispanic population, of whom 77% were on free and reduced lunch. Results indicated that MAPPS challenged the traditional role of parents as listeners and “students” and allowed them to give back to their community by becoming trainers and facilitating parent workshops. Parents, in turn, hoped that by training other parents they would continue to develop and grow new parent
mentors for the future even after their own children were no longer in the school (Civil et al., 2005, p. 62). Again, this type of program has the potential to develop long-term collaborative relationships with the schools by utilizing parents as future trainers and recruiters for the program.

Leadership and mentoring programs all develop parent leadership capacity through knowledge and empowerment. However, while leadership programs use advocacy and collective action in the community to improve living conditions and education, mentoring programs create a network of parental support and collaboration to improve the quality of education within the school and build on parents’ social and cultural capital. Leadership programs for Latino parents empower parents within the school and community; however, these programs seem to recruit parents already fairly active within their children’s school (Corbett & Wilson, 2008). The research has shown that Latino parents often times feel alienated or unwelcome in schools. Schools need to look at alternative formats for their parent programs and consider parent mentorships that may help to reach those parents who are “reluctant to come to school” (Wood & Baker, 1999, p. 245). Do parent mentoring programs utilize their strong parent leaders to access and mentor those hard-to-reach parents and encourage them to actively participate in their children’s education?

Gaps in the Literature and the Need for this Study

Parent engagement is a key component of efforts to raise student achievement, and Latino parents continue to trail behind white middle-class families in rates of actively engaging in the education of their children (Lee & Bowen, 2006). As seen in the literature, traditional parental involvement programs, and even programs specifically created with Latino parents in mind, have been somewhat successful in providing knowledge and tools that parents can use to help their
children be more successful in school. However, these programs have been unable to bridge the larger Latino parent school community or create long-term, sustained parental involvement in the schools beyond the scope of the classes or workshops offered. Similarly, parent leadership programs provide parents with capacity-building activities that have created successful community action movements, improving education and infrastructures for minority students and families at large. However, these programs do not focus on parents as experts with valuable knowledge and talents to share with other parents within the school (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). Using parents as mentors and teachers for other parents creates an environment where parents feel that their expertise and knowledge is valued and they are understood, thus making it easier for them to connect to other parents and the school community (Larotta & Yamamura, 2011).

Few studies exist on parent mentoring programs, but the ones available show promising results in their ability to bring Latino parents into the schools and engage them in supporting their children’s education, as well as in supporting and empowering other Latino parents in their school communities (Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). Unlike traditional parental involvement programs, parent mentoring programs take parents out of the traditional role as a passive learner and develop their strengths, knowledge and ability to empower and teach children and other hard-to-reach parents (Hong, 2011; Larotta & Yamamura, 2011; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Warren et al., 2009). Previous studies have looked at the motivations, perspectives and experiences of parents in a mentoring program, as well as teacher and administrator perspectives on the impact of these programs in their schools (Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). There is a need for better documentation of a variety of models for parent mentoring programs with different goals and strategies in different community settings.
Therefore, this study builds on the limited body of knowledge about parent mentoring programs to see what components are effective in engaging Latino parents from the perspective of both parent mentors and participants, as well as administrators. This study hopes to gain insight from Latino parents in a parent mentoring program to better understand how this type of program has affected their relationship with the school, as well as with other Latino parents in the community. Additionally, the study will examine the perspective of administrators working with a parent mentoring program to discover what they see as the impact of parent mentors on parent engagement at their school and how their support affects the success of the program. Findings will help inform educational leaders in schools with high Latino populations on how to create successful parent mentoring programs to actively engage and create sustainable relationships with a larger portion of their parent community.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will draw on the theory of social and cultural capital as its theoretical framework. The concept of social capital as related to schools stems back to the work of Bourdieu (1977), who argued that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of society. He wrote that schools tend to use structures, language, and authority patterns that may not be familiar to children of low-income families; this lack of cultural experience in the home makes it more difficult for children to adjust to school and experience high academic achievement.

Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the resources one develops through participation in social networks that benefit an individual. Coleman (1988) further explains that one gains social capital “through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action” (p. S100). Whereas physical capital is tangible and can be seen in material form, social capital is
less tangible because it “exists in the relations among persons” and the resources one can access through these relationships (Coleman, 1988, p. S101).

Cultural capital, on the other hand, relates more to the experiences one brings from home and the ability to transform them into capital that can be used for social advantage with the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) outlined three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital refers to cultural knowledge of styles, manners and cultural preferences. Objectified cultural capital is cultural artifacts such as literature, music, dance, art, museums, and the like. Finally, institutionalized cultural capital refers to educational qualifications and academic credentials that distinguish a person. Social and cultural capital are related because a person must invest cultural capital in order to acquire social capital, “that is, one must demonstrate membership through appropriate use of cultural resources and knowledge to gain entry” into these social networks (Monkman, Ronald & Théraméne, 2005, p. 13).

Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) examine social capital and its impact on children’s school success by looking at parent networks. Parents who have the ability to gain consistent access to resources, aid, and existing social ties are seen as those with high stocks of social capital (Horvat et al., 2003). Developing social and cultural capital is very important to many Latino parents, especially recent immigrants, because of their cultural and social isolation when they enter American society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011). These parents often lack the resources and information needed to navigate their children through the educational system and do not have the knowledge and social contacts to know where to find the support. It is particularly important for schools to create outreach programs that can create bonding and bridging relationships for these parents. The key is to
offer them social connections with people outside their primary social communities that have access to educational, social, health, occupational and financial resources (Putnam, 2000).

A classic qualitative study done by Lareau (1987) found that although working-class and middle-class parents expressed similar desires for their children’s educational success, the path they took to support that success looked different than that of parents of higher socioeconomic status. Social class differences in family life can have implications for family-school relationships for reasons as simple as how middle-class and working-class parents respond to teachers’ requests for parental involvement (Lareau, 1987). Similarly, educators often see Latino parents as passive in their participation in schools (Olivos, 2009). This may be related to the fact that with less formal education and knowledge of the American school system, these parents may not see themselves as capable of supporting their children with schoolwork at home (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The lack of American mainstream social and cultural capital faced by Latino parents may be one reason for their lower rates of participation and involvement in their children’s education.

Unfortunately, many Latino students find themselves in classrooms where the “linguistic and cultural milieu in which they live is not given equal respect” as the experiences of the dominant culture (Garcia, 2008, p. 296). Schools generally value knowledge and resources that are based on the “patterns of the dominant ideology in the broader culture” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p 42). White, middle-class culture is typically used as the standard because it represents the “accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Therefore, minority students are often viewed as being “culturally poor” by schools, with parents and the community expected to change to conform to their effective system. Yosso (2005) believes Latino students and their
families bring “cultural wealth,” or rich cultural experiences from home, that offer students an alternative form of social and cultural capital that can be tapped into by educators as background experience and springboards for teaching, but rather are typically dismissed or considered irrelevant.

One of the primary functions of social capital is for students to gain “access to human, cultural, and other forms of capital, as well as to institutional resources and support” (Perna & Titus, 2005, p. 488). A key aspect of social capital in education are the social networks formed by low-income and working-class versus middle-class parents. Horvat and colleagues (2003) reported that while both working-class and middle-class parents made connections with other parents through their children’s activities, middle-class parents had many more opportunities to interact due to the greater extent of those activities. Additionally, the researchers found that middle-class parents were more likely to have relationships with professionals such as teachers, doctors, and lawyers than working-class parents. When dealing with issues at school, these networks or relationships forged by middle-class parents served the purpose of quickly bringing about change when issues arose because of these parents’ ability to sweep down on schools with many supporters. Working-class parents, on the other hand, often have to face problems at school on their own and may not dispute the school’s authority (Olivos, 2009; Smith et al., 2008).

As we have seen, the research has shown that immigrant, low-income and working-class Latino parents deal with many barriers to becoming more involved in their children’s education. One of these barriers may be their lack of social capital to successfully navigate the social and cultural terrain that is the American education system. How can schools support Latino parents in gaining the social and cultural resources needed to support their children’s educational career
and futures in American public schools? The literature has suggested that parent mentoring programs give parents the opportunity to build social networks with other parent leaders within the school (Civil et al., 2005; Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). Can building these social networks help Latino parents learn from each other about the American educational system and help put them more at ease in communicating with teachers and administrators through group empowerment?

**Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter addressed topics related to how parental involvement affects student achievement and how traditional parental involvement in schools has failed to address the barriers for Latino parents to become immersed in their children’s education. It also examined programs specifically aimed at Latino parents and how they have had less impact than hoped for on Latino parental involvement. Finally, leadership and mentoring programs were reviewed and compared in an effort to see which, if any of these programs have shown a positive impact on creating collaborative long-term relationships between schools and their families and more involvement among Latino parents.

The research indicates that lower levels of participation in education by Latino parents may be part of the reason for the Latino student achievement gap. Studies suggest that many Latino parents lack the social and cultural capital associated with the American education system that is needed to help navigate their children through K12 to higher education. Parents can positively affect their children’s academic future when they feel empowered and are viewed by educators as “cultural experts and capable adults who can play an active role in their children’s education” (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). Unfortunately, the majority of parental involvement programs currently seen in schools continue to maintain traditional roles between the parents and
the school and do not foster true collaborative relationships (Chrispeels, 2001; Hoover et al., 2005; Horby & LaFaele, 2011; Smith et al., 2008). These collaborative relationships are possible when parents feel that they are an equal player in a team that includes parents, teachers and administrators working together for the betterment of their school and all the students. Parent mentoring programs foster powerful forms of engagement for parents by developing their social and cultural capital and making parents true partners in their children’s education (Warren et al., 2009). However, there is very little literature that looks at what aspects of parent mentoring programs best support Latino parents in attaining this type of long-term, collaborative relationship with schools.

This study will address this gap in the literature. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in the study for attaining these goals.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators in schools participating in a parent mentoring program in an effort to see how these programs might create more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the school. The goal was to build on the limited knowledge about these programs and study their effectiveness in engaging Latino parents. The expectation was that schools may take this information to improve the involvement programs they currently offer to build collaborative relationships and better meet the needs of non-dominant culture families.

The main research questions guiding this study are: What do Latino parent mentors perceive their role and influence to be in their children’s suburban elementary school? What aspects of the parent mentoring program create opportunities for more long-term, collaborative relationships with the school? What are parents’ and administrators’ perceptions of the program’s impact on parental involvement, parent-school relationships, and student achievement? What impact does the support of the administration have on the success of parent mentors and the program within the school?

This chapter will begin by explaining the ethnographic research design and tradition used in guiding the study. The second section is a description of the setting and context, which will be two schools in the Sunnydays Unified School District (a pseudonym), located in Riverside County in California. Next there is a description of the proposed research sample of 18 Latino parents and three administrators involved in a parent mentoring program. This is followed by an explanation of the data sources, instruments and procedures, and finally, details of the data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with the role of the researcher and a reflection on biases and assumptions related to this study and a summary of the chapter.
**Research Design and Tradition**

This study was conducted as an ethnographic case study. A case study examines a case of individuals or a group and explores a bounded system over time and place (Creswell, 1996). A case study is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic (Merriam, 2009). The research will be bounded by one parent education program within two specific schools during one semester. The study was particularistic as it focused specifically on the perceptions, behaviors, and actions of administrators and parents associated with this program. Additionally, it was descriptive because it contained detailed descriptions of data from interviews and observations. Finally, the study was heuristic, informing the reader on the effects of this type of parent mentoring program on Latino parental involvement in schools.

This study utilized the ethnographic research tradition; however, because of the limited time frame, it does not have the typical depth of an ethnographic study. Ethnographic studies are those that “describe, analyze, and interpret a cultural group’s shared patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (Creswell, 2012, p. 426). An ethnographer’s main focus is to study “the meaning of the behavior, interaction, and communication among members of the culture-sharing group” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 32).

This study looked at what the Latino parent experience was within this parent education program and entered the field, participating with, observing and interviewing this group. The intention of the research was not to “study” the group but rather learn from their interactions to understand broader patterns of the group within a school setting. Two important concepts of an ethnography were utilized: (1) describing evidence of certain cultural patterns; (2) examining things holistically or contextually in their entirety rather than in parts (Schram, 2006). The final
product will contain a holistic portrait of the group through the views of the participants (emic), as well as the views of the researcher (etic) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

**Research Setting/Context**

Data was collected for this research study at Evans Middle School (a pseudonym) and Rio Elementary School (a pseudonym), located in a large suburban school district in California. Sunnydays Unified School District is located east of Los Angeles in Riverside County. The school district serves five cities and has a 75% Latino student population. About one-third of students in Sunnydays Unified are English Learners (EL) and of these students, 97% are Hispanic. Approximately 82% of students in the district are of lower socioeconomic status and receive free or reduced lunch. According to statistics presented by the California Department of Education, a majority of parents in the district are Spanish speaking and may likely struggle economically based on the large number of students receiving free lunch. In looking at the teaching staff of Sunnydays Unified, however, a very different picture is painted; 82% of teachers are white with only 12% of the teachers being of Latino decent. These very different demographics between the staff and the students could indicate a disconnect between the schools and the families they serve (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Hornby & LaFaele, 2011; Smith et al., 2008).

Evans Middle School has about 931 sixth through eighth grade students of whom 59% are Hispanic. Approximately 21% of the students are English learners with 93% of Hispanic origin. A total of 80% of the students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes. The school had an Academic Performance Index (API) score of 746 in 2013, which was below the state average. The parent mentoring program was established in the district in 2011 and
currently has ten highly active parent mentors who provide the parent mentoring training to other Latino parents at Evans and at other schools around the district.

Rio Elementary School (a pseudonym) has approximately 623 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade of whom 55% are Hispanic. About 32% of the students are designated as EL with 94.55% of those students Hispanic. About 68% of the students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes, yet the school had an API of 882 for 2013, which is considered above the state average. The parent mentoring program started in the fall of 2014, and graduated their first class of parent mentors in winter, 2015. Parents at Rio Elementary were trained by the parent mentors at Evans Middle School.

A criterion-based sampling strategy was utilized in selecting the sites for this study, based on the schools having trained mentors with at least two years of experience or offering current trainings utilizing the active mentors. This strategy was employed because the study was examining schools with the Project 2-INSPIRE mentoring program, which was already established and running in these particular schools. Suggestions of sites and access to the sites were obtained through the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator for the California Association of Bilingual Education (CABE) and district staff. As a member of CABE and participant in their conference planning committee, I established a relationship with the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator, who then assisted me in entering the schools and developing relationships with participants in the study. I met with the administrators of the school along with the program coordinator to inform them of the goals of this study and obtain their permission for research.

The program studied, Project 2-INSPIRE, is offered through California Association of Bilingual Educators (CABE) and is a research-based collaborative project that aims to build the capacity of schools and districts in establishing a Family-School Community Leadership
Program. The program is offered through three levels of courses of which Levels 1 and 2 cover a basic overview of the American school system followed by more intensive coaching and mentoring for parents, teachers and administrators to develop and implement actions plans within a collaborative team. Level 3 builds upon the knowledge and skills developed in the Level 1 and 2 trainings by providing more in-depth training and the development of specific leadership skills, e.g., outreach, group process and facilitation skills (for course list see Appendix E). This level provides parent mentors with 16 sessions of on-going coaching and feedback as well as opportunities to “practice” teaching of the program modules to other parents with feedback from the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator. Level 1 workshops are delivered by parent mentor facilitators, who have completed all three levels of the program.

**Sample and Data Sources**

Since the main purpose of the study was to look at parent mentors’ perspectives, the primary sample was nine parent mentors. Additionally, the sample included 11 parents who were not mentors but involved in the program at the two different sites, as well as two site administrators and the parent involvement coordinator for the district. Parent focus groups and interviews were conducted in Spanish, and data from all focus groups and interviews with parents and administrators were collected in the form of audio transcripts. Additional data sources were field notes from three observations of the parent mentor trainings, as well as a document review of the parent mentoring program materials and school data on student achievement and parental involvement. The original proposal plan was to observe the Level 1 classes for parents facilitated by the parent mentors; however, Level 1 classes were not offered during the data collection timeframe and observations of the Level 3 classes (the Expert Level where the parents receive their mentor/facilitation training) were conducted instead.
Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that those selected for the study fit the particular criteria necessary for the study and to ensure that those chosen had appropriate data to share for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Using a criterion sampling strategy, participants who had experienced the same parent program at the two school sites were selected. The primary sample was the nine parent mentors trained at the district level, who met the criteria of 1) active involvement as a parent mentoring for at least two years, 2) Latino race/ethnicity, and 3) currently training other parents at Evans Middle School and other school sites throughout the district, as identified by the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator. Based on the degree of active participation in the focus group, four of the eight parent mentors will be asked to participate in additional one-on-one interviews.

To find parent mentor participants for the study, the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator from CABE was utilized. I prepared a research invitation and she distributed the invitations to solicit help from the parent mentors currently providing trainings. The nine active mentors from various schools in the district were asked to participate in the initial focus group.

Additionally, eleven other parents participating in the program at the two sites, who were not mentors, were identified through the district parent involvement coordinator and the parent mentors. Criteria for selecting those parents were parents of Latino race/ethnicity who were currently attending or had attended the parent mentoring trainings and program activities at Evans Middle School and Rio Elementary and who responded with interest to the invitation for the focus groups. A research invitation was distributed to parents currently attending the parent mentor trainings with the help of the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator. In an effort to create variation in the sample both actively involved and less active parents in the program were
selected based on their attendance at the program trainings and activities. Past sign-in sheets for parent mentoring trainings were utilized to invite other Latino parents who may not be currently attending the trainings any longer or may have started the training but dropped out.

In addition to the parent samples, two site administrators were individually interviewed, as well as the district parent involvement coordinator. Site administrators currently holding the position of principal or assistant principal at the collection sites who were most actively involved with the parent mentoring program were invited to participate. Additionally, the district currently has a coordinator who has been hired to directly oversee the parent involvement programs district-wide, and having their input and perception of the program was important. A research invitation was prepared and distributed to each of the administrators.

Ethical Issues

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2003), it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that a study is conducted in an ethical way that creates the least amount of risk of harm to participants. In addition to being conducted in an ethical manner, in order for a study to be considered trustworthy, it must also have credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The credibility of this study was reinforced by ensuring that my effort to accurately record the thoughts, feelings and actions of the participants created an authentic picture of the phenomenon under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All participants in this study were provided with an Informed Consent Form, aligned to all federal standards for research with human subjects. The form guarantees that all thoughts, reflections, and experiences shared during the study remain confidential and that any and all identifying features of the participants and their schools will be protected with pseudonyms. The
form disclosed all possible risks to the participants and ensured that their rights were protected. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance and parents needed to feel comfortable and know that pseudonyms and the disguise of any identifiable characteristics would be used so that they could feel safe to speak frankly about the program. Participants were informed that they had the option to elect not to answer any of the questions if they did not feel comfortable while still continuing to be a part of the study. Interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed and participants were given the option to not be recorded during the interview. Lastly, all data collected during the study remained securely stored and was only transcribed and used in the study with the participant’s permission.

I submitted my human subjects research application (IRB) to the Standing Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Northridge, for their review, in addition to checking with the school district of the research used for any additional documentation that were needed or required.

**Instruments and Data Procedures**

Several instruments were used to collect data to establish triangulation through the use of multiple forms of data (Hendricks, 2009). Interviews, focus groups, and observations of parents, as well as interviews with administrators and several parent mentors, and a document review was used. Instruments included an administrator interview protocol, two different parent focus group protocols, for both the parent mentors and for parent participants in the parent mentoring trainings, and an interview protocol for parent mentors interviewed after the focus group.

**Interview and Focus Group Protocols**

Four different interview protocols were used as instruments for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups with parents and administrators. Because this study focused on
Latino parents who were not fluent in English and on a parent program that was conducted in Spanish, the interview and focus group protocols for the parents were all translated into Spanish to ensure that parent participants could understand and fully participate in the study in their native language. A combination of different data collection formats is important in triangulating the data for this study (Hendriks, 2009). Protocols for both individual interviews as well as focus groups began with introducing myself and briefly describing the research project. I summarized the informed consent and gave the participants some general information and guidelines regarding the interview process. The participants were asked some demographic information which included the number of years they had been involved with the school, the number and ages of their children and the schools they attend, and their role in the mentoring program.

I then moved into a few warm-up questions to put the participant at ease and make them more comfortable. Interview and focus group questions were formulated based on the research questions and utilized the social and cultural capital conceptual framework and literature review as a guide. Several interview questions were written for each of the research questions with some extension, probing and exploratory questions to gain a richer and more detailed description from the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Finally, the interview was concluded by debriefing the participant to ensure that nothing had been missed and to offer them the opportunity to add any additional information (Creswell, 2012).

One focus group protocol focused on questions for parents serving as mentors that directly explored the research questions related to their perceptions of their role in the school and their impact on other, less involved parents. For example, questions covered topics such as their view of parental involvement and what they saw their role as in the school since becoming a parent mentor (see Appendix A).
From this focus group of mentors, four of the mentors were chosen to participate in individual interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to ask more in-depth questions regarding the mentors’ participation in the program that were not possible to do during a focus group. Questions in this protocol covered topics such as how they felt their involvement had impacted the school, staff and students, and their suggestions for how to empower Latino parents to get more involved (see Appendix B).

The third protocol was used with a focus group of parents currently participating or having participated in the past in the trainings offered by the parent mentors. The purpose of this group was to see what impact the parent mentors and their trainings had had on other parents. Questions covered such topics as their experience at the school since they started attending the mentor trainings, their perceptions of the parent mentors and their role in the school, and how they felt the mentoring program and school could help them and other parents become more involved (see Appendix C). All three protocols related to the parents were translated into Spanish and parent interviews and focus groups were conducted in Spanish.

Finally, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to speak to the administrator(s) at each school site (principals and/or assistant principals) and the district parent involvement coordinator. Questions focused on the overall impact of the parent mentoring program on parent mentors, Latino parents as a whole, teachers and Latino students and the administrators’ role in supporting the program (see Appendix D). This was an opportunity to gain a global perspective on the program and its effects on the school as a whole, as well as to see how the administrators’ involvement in the program had impacted the program’s success.
Data Collection

This study used four methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, observations and document review. A focus group of nine parents currently involved as parent mentors in the parent mentoring program was conducted. From this focus group, four of the more vocal and interactive mentors were chosen for semi-structured interviews. Additionally, two more focus groups were arranged with parents from the community attending trainings facilitated by parent mentors at the two school sites. Interviews of two administrators working at the two study sites was done as well, along with an interview of the district parent involvement coordinator. Finally, two to three observations of the training sessions for the parent mentor trainings for other was conducted, with a review of the training materials and documents related to the program and any available documents describing data at the schools related to parental involvement and student achievement.

Focus Groups

This study included three focus groups: one 90--minute focus group of parent mentors, as well as two 60-minute focus groups of parents from the two schools who were or had participated in the trainings facilitated by parent mentors. Currently the mentors are facilitating the trainings in Spanish, therefore, focus groups were conducted in Spanish, the language the parent mentors were more comfortable speaking in, to allow for active participation among the participants. Participants were sent the consent forms prior to the focus group, and any questions or concerns were addressed on the day of the focus group. Focus group interviews were audio recorded and concurrently translated and transcribed, and field notes and reflective memos on interactions were done after the focus group. Due to limited time allotted for data collection, a focus group is an appropriate way to get information from a larger group of people in less time.
(Creswell, 2008). Additionally, groups who have a shared experience or familiarity can create a positive and interactive environment that may help some participants who generally tend to be quiet or shy to open up and express their ideas and feelings.

Participants were welcomed and greeted in a warm manner to ensure they are comfortable and feel safe (Glesne, 2011). Informed consent and ground rules for the focus group were discussed with the participants prior to beginning the focus group. Once the participants had agreed and signed all the forms I used the focus group protocol (see Appendix A) prepared with the flexibility of asking additional or probing questions when needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After all questions had been asked I thanked the participants and reminded them that they would be notified by email or mailed letter when transcripts of the interview were available for review; it would be up to them to contact me if they chose to review and edit the transcripts. Participants were given two weeks from notification to make changes to the transcripts to clarify their views.

The focus of this study is the perceptions of parent mentors and how they see their role within the school, which includes their impact on other less involved parents at the site. In order to see if parent mentors are helping to bridge the gap between the community and the school, two other focus groups were held with parents not currently working as mentors but attending trainings facilitated by the parent mentors; this helped to triangulate the data collected from the interviews and parent mentor focus groups. There were approximately five to six participants for each of the two 60-minute focus groups. Because the parent trainings were conducted in Spanish it would seem that the parent participants were more fluent in Spanish. The focus groups were conducted in Spanish, which was the language the parent participants felt most comfortable in and was done at the school site in a comfortable location large enough for the group. Focus
group interview protocols were used (see Appendix C) to ensure that questions were open ended enough to allow for the participants to respond while at the same time allow for flexibility for participants to include their own personal experiences and questions. All procedures used for the other parent focus group was followed.

**Interviews**

Because the primary source of data for this study were the parent mentors, four parent mentors from the focus group participated in an individual semi-structured interview conducted again in either Spanish, which the mentors preferred. Criteria for choosing parent mentors was based on their active participation, openness and involvement during the parent mentor focus group. The parent mentors chosen from the focus groups were personally invited to participate in a semi-structured interview utilizing a separate interview protocol (see Appendix B). I chose a location that was both comfortable and convenient for the parent mentors. These one-hour semi-structured interviews allowed for more in-depth and detailed data to be collected regarding the perceptions of the parent mentors in regards to their role as mentors and their relationship with other less involved parents, staff and administrators at the school. This was done through the use of an “interview guide approach” utilizing specific topics within the interview protocol. This allowed for the interview to remain open ended in order to allow for questions or topics introduced by the participant that provided for context rich data to be collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Interviews were audiotaped and simultaneously translated and transcribed; field notes were taken during the interviews in order to record the mood, atmosphere and tone of the setting. Once the interviews had been completed I informed the parent mentors that a copy of the transcripts would be mailed to them within 30-days and that he/she would have seven days to review the transcripts and make changes as needed.
In addition to parents’ perspectives about the parent mentoring program, the study also looked at administrators’ feelings about how the program had impacted the school culture and most importantly the Latino students. The study examined how the administrators’ attitude and support or lack of support for the program had impacted the overall success of the parent mentors at their school site.

The administrators of the data collection sites and the district parent involvement coordinator were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview and a separate interview protocol was used with them (see Appendix D). The interview was conducted at a place convenient and comfortable for the administrators, whether that was in their office, at the school or an outside neutral location. All guidelines and procedures used for the parent mentor interviews were also used for the administrator interviews.

Observations

Three observations of 75 minutes each were conducted at the weekly Level 3 parent mentor training facilitated by the CABE training facilitator. I coordinated with her to decide which sessions would be most beneficial to observe. I entered the trainings and introduced myself and mingled with the group until the actual training session began, at which point I acted as an observer, not a participant, to ensure objective data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Through observations I was able to infer the meaning of particular actions by the participants by looking for “recurring patterns of events and relationships” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 194). The observations were done over a two-month period during three scheduled parent mentor trainings. These observations provided information as to how the parent mentors were trained and interacted with each other. Field notes describing the details of the setting, people and interactions were written in a timely manner after the observations and included observer
comments and reflective memos on thoughts related to the emerging themes. Additionally, I referred back to the theoretical framework of social and cultural capital to look for evidence of how mentoring programs help build capacity in Latino parents.

**Document Review**

In order to gain a more holistic view of the parent mentoring program and the two sites being studied, an examination of “material culture,” a review of the training materials and any other relevant program documents, was conducted (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 197). Additionally, available data from such documents as School Accountability Report Cards, sign-in sheets for parent trainings and activities, and any other documents from both sites related to parental involvement was collected and reviewed to help triangulate the other data collected for the study.

**Data Analysis**

According to Glesne (2011), the process of analyzing data first comes by taking large amounts of data and finding a way to manage it and reduce it into something meaningful. Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process throughout the data collection. Translating and transcribing the interviews as quickly as possible and personally listening to the tapes helped me to immerse myself in the data and know it intimately (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For an ethnographic study such as this, the researcher will need to ensure that there are detailed descriptions of settings and individuals throughout the data collection “followed by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns and issues” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p 137). Qualitative research is interested in the “language of the participants or text” and the researcher must identify words within this information that will contribute to the themes and patterns being researched (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). It was important that I look for patterns or themes
within the Spanish recordings to ensure that characteristic words and phrases were preserved and coded as emic codes when the translations were done. Themes and codes were developed based on the conceptual framework identified in the literature review on social and cultural capital, as well as the research questions. The transcripts of interviews and focus groups were the primary sources for data analysis, with observation field notes and the document review as secondary sources.

**Preliminary Data Analysis**

In order to become completely familiarized with the data, I translated and transcribed all the parent focus groups. A professional transcriber was used for the individual administrator interviews and a transcription protocol was provided to the transcriber. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy. Initial coding began by looking at chunks of text that could be sorted relating to social and cultural capital, parent empowerment and perceptions of parents’ roles in the school and education of their children. I used coding to organize the interview data and field notes by assigning tags or labels to phrases found within the transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data was then analyzed further using Atlas.ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), that helped further develop and categorize codes.

**Thematic Data Analysis**

I used the process of thematic data analysis to search through the data to find themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). By reading through the transcripts of the interviews, focus groups, and field notes the researcher can get a sense of data to fully understand what the participants are saying (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Because this was an ethnographic study, it was important to understand the information through the lens of the Latino parents’ cultural beliefs, language, values and experiences and look for themes there. Glesne (2011) suggests that thematic data
analysis looks for patterns that unify aspects of the culture or setting; however, it is important that the researcher also look for patterns that go beyond the norm, revealing the complexities of human nature and culture.

After all coding had been completed a synthesis of the data was constructed that looked at how the findings answered the research questions and how these findings related to the literature and the social and cultural capital conceptual framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This holistic reconstruction of the data allowed the researcher to draw conclusions and look at the larger picture. Draft summaries of these interpretations were shared with some of the participants in an informal member check to ensure that interviews and opinions had been represented accurately and to give further input to the interpretation of the data.

To enhance the validity of findings, I triangulated data from the interviews, focus groups, observations and document review (Hendricks, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Data was recorded accurately, thick descriptions were provided, and member checks were used to ensure that participants’ responses were being accurately reported (Hendricks, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The usefulness of this study will be determined through its credibility by the way the researcher relates an authentic story of the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher must also accurately portray the perceptions of the participants by objectively recording the participants’ thoughts, feelings and actions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2003). Credibility for this study was increased through triangulation of a variety of data collection methods, audio taping, verbatim transcription of interviews and focus groups, and member checks.
Role of Researcher

During this study I had to keep in mind the different roles that I maintained in this data collection process. My primary role in this study was of a qualitative researcher and doctoral student. My main focus was to remain subjective to ensure the accurate interpretation of the information collected during the focus groups, interviews and observations.

Additionally, I needed to overcome my personal biases that could interfere with the representation of information regarding the mentoring program. For instance, I am a huge proponent of parent engagement in schools and believe that parent mentoring programs help to empower and assist parents of Latino decent. I may have inadvertently given my participants the idea that I promoted the program thus lead them into inaccurate or incomplete responses. I may also have used the lenses of my own experiences and passion on the subject to incorrectly interpret the meaning of the participants’ response (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In order to address these concerns, I needed to be extremely self-reflective during this process. I needed to be neutral in my representation of my views regarding the study to ensure that my participants not view me as biased in any way. I also kept a journal to remind me of my own biases and helped me to examine my own motivations regarding my study and to what extent these personal feelings might influence my data or results. Finally, I asked fellow researchers to analyze excerpts from the data that I collected to ensure that they could find the themes and codes identified by my results.

As a current administrator at an elementary school who is also of Latino descent, I realize that I have an advantage in relating to the participants I would be working with throughout the study. I am a parent, an administrator and a former teacher who has advocated for Latino families and students for over 20 years. My experience with parent education within schools and
my ability to connect to teachers and parents helped me to build relationships with participants and assist me in ensuring that interviews were filled with in-depth information.

I have a deep-seated belief that parent education and empowerment is one of the most powerful ways to build up minority students and help close the achievement gap. These experiences and beliefs could, however, impact the types of questions I asked and might influence how I interpreted the data. Therefore, it was imperative that I kept my professional and personal values and beliefs continuously in check as I worked through the research study.

**Researcher Biases**

I came to this study with several preconceived notions that I knew could both facilitate and hinder my work as a researcher. Having grown up as a first generation American student in a Latino family, and having worked for the last 20 years as an educator and administrator in schools with large Latino populations, I believe that: (a) Latino parents are at a disadvantage in the area of parental involvement due to their lack of social and cultural capital in navigating the American education system; (b) schools set their standards for parental involvement and plan parental involvement activities utilizing white, middle-class parents as the model, which puts Latino parents at a disadvantage; and (c) student achievement will increase when parents are actively involved in their children’s school.

As a researcher, I must continually consider these biases during my research to ensure that they do not affect the study. The fact that I am Latina and speak Spanish, hopefully made me more approachable and trustworthy in the eyes of the parents I interviewed. Being able to speak to them in their native language made them feel at ease and hopefully helped them to open up to me so that I could get accurate and honest data for my research. However, I did realize that I am also an administrator and someone of authority or power in the eyes of the parents; thus, I
had to try to break down any barriers they might have felt in talking to me and feeling as if they needed to tell me “what I wanted to hear.” Glesne (2011) points out that we must remember our role as “a researcher as a learner” (p 60). Presenting myself as a student who was curious and interested in what the participant had to say helped in breaking down these barriers.

Because this study was of great significance to me and I have a strong belief system related to it, I may have interpreted my data and found themes that affirmed my ideas. Due to my biases, I may have overlooked themes that were contrary to my belief systems or contrary to the norm, as Glesne (2011) recommends. In order to avoid this situation and ensure that my biases were in check, I utilized strategies that helped keep my research grounded in data and accurate accounts that represented what the participants thought and felt in order to make my research credible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). One of the first practices I used was keeping a reflective journal. By writing down my thoughts and feelings as I went through the research process, I became more aware of my own beliefs and biases which can help me to become more objective in my approach. I continuously went back and read my journal to see if any of the ideas I wrote had shown themselves in my data collection or analysis. I also used triangulation and “peer debriefing” with colleagues to enhance the accuracy and validity of my findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113).

**Summary**

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators in schools participating in a parent mentoring program to assess how these programs could help in creating more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the school. The research setting was Evans Middle School and Rio Elementary School, both located in the large suburban Sunnydays School District. The sample was nine parent mentors,
11 parent participants involved in the Level 1 trainings and the administrators from both sites along with the district program coordinator. The primary methods of data collection were focus groups, interviews, observations and a review of program materials, student achievement and parental involvement data. Qualitative data was analyzed by developing codes and themes based on the conceptual framework of social and cultural capital, as well as the research questions.

The findings of this study will be presented in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the findings’ implications for practice and suggestions for further study in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators in schools participating in a parent mentoring program in order to see how these programs might create more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the school. Specifically, the goal was to explore how these programs might empower more highly involved Latino parents in engaging other less involved parents in order to better meet the needs of non-dominant culture families in schools.

This chapter reports the findings based on individual semi-structured interviews of four parent mentors, two principals, and one district parent involvement coordinator, all of whom were involved in the Project 2-INSPIRE mentoring program at Sunnydays Unified School District (a pseudonym). Data was also collected from a focus group of nine parent mentors and two focus groups of 11 parent participants in the program at Evans Middle School and Rio Elementary School (pseudonyms). Data also came from observations of the Project 2-INSPIRE Level 3 mentor classes and review of documents, including records of parent participation, program and event flyers, and program training materials. The data were coded and then categorized by themes utilizing the lenses of the thematic framework of social and cultural capital and the research questions.

This chapter presents the data under five major findings that emerged from this study as related to the research questions:

1. A lack of social and cultural capital in the dominant culture was a major barrier that hindered Latino parent involvement and manifested itself through limited English
abilities, lack of knowledge of the American school system, and the resulting fear of dealing with school personnel.

2. The Project 2-INSPIRE program affected the relationship between Latino parents and the schools through empowering the parent mentors to help break down the barriers between the school and Latino parents.

3. Key roles of the parent mentors of the Project 2-INSPIRE program included teaching parents about the school system, promoting parent leadership, creating a bridge between Latino parents and the school, and acting as role models for Latino parents.

4. The extent of the support of the district and site administrators directly impacted the success of the parent mentor program; however, despite inadequate support, parent mentors eventually were able to develop the programs at their schools.

5. Little evidence was obtained regarding the creation of long-term collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the schools through the parent mentoring program; however, the program did show evidence of sustainability within the schools and the district.

This chapter will begin by describing the participants involved in the study and the Project 2-INSPIRE program. This will be followed by description of the major findings on the barriers hindering Latino parent involvement at Sunnydays Unified School District, the relationship between the Latino parents and the schools, how mentors bridged this relationship between the parents and the school, the major roles of the parent mentors, and the impact administrators had on the success of the parent mentoring program. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings.

**Background on Study Participants and Program**
The characteristics of the nine parent mentors and three administrators in the study can be found in Table 4.1. Pseudonyms were given to all participants and any schools mentioned in order to protect their identity and ensure the confidentiality of the participants. As can be seen, the two principals were the only study participants who were white; all others were Latino females. The 11 parent mentors were the lead parents who were trained to facilitate the Project 2-INSPIRE program to other parents in the district. The majority of the parent mentors involved in the study were associated with Evans Middle School, which is where the first Project 2-INSPIRE program was established.

The study also included parent participants, as opposed to mentors, in the program who were interviewed as part of focus groups. Parent participants were those parents from Evans Middle School and Rio Elementary who recently had gone through the Level 1 classes run by the parent mentors. There were a total of 11 parent participants in the two focus groups and all these parents were of Latino background and all female except for one. These parent participants were not identified by pseudonym in the table, as data from their focus groups were referred to in more generalized descriptions and quotes.

The Project 2-INSPIRE program was studied at two sites, Rio Elementary School and Evans Middle School. However, because the original Project 2-INSPIRE training was offered to all parents in the district through the Sunnydays Unified School District teachers’ union, parent mentors were trained at a variety of sites in the district. The majority of the parent mentors came from Evans Middle School, which was the first site to offer the program to its parents. In addition, some of the parent mentors had children at other sites in the district, but because these sites were not one of the two main study sites they have been listed as “other.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>School Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rio Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Johnson</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Evans Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sands</td>
<td>District Parent Involvement Coordinator</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Sunnydays Unified School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Other elementary/middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulema</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School &amp; Rio Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melba</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonia</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Other elementary/middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School &amp; Rio Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School &amp; Rio Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ileana</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Evans Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  L= Latin American   W= White   F= Female   M=Male
Project 2-INSPIRE

Project 2-INSPIRE was established by the California Association of Bilingual Educators (CABE) in 2006 as the result of a five-year research project (2006-2011), funded by the Office of Innovation and Improvement-Parent Information Resource Centers at the U.S. Department of Education. Project 2-INSPIRE is a research-based collaborative project that aims to build the capacity of schools and districts in establishing a Family-School Community Leadership Program.

The program is offered through three levels of courses. Level 1, titled Awareness of School and Family Partnerships, consists of 12 sessions and covers a basic overview of the American the school system. These workshops are delivered by parent mentor facilitators through a traditional presenter-centered format. The intended outcome is increased parent knowledge of the school system.

Level 2, Parent Leadership Development, is a participant-centered intensive training of 12 sessions with on-going follow-up coaching and mentoring. The goals are to help parents, teachers and administrators develop and implement individual action plans, as well as develop the skills needed to work together as an effective Family-School-Community collaboration team. Although the program documents claim that the program is designed to include teachers and administrators at this level, no evidence that teachers or administrators were actually trained at Sunnydays Unified School District was seen during the course of the study.

Level 3, Parent Facilitator Preparation, builds upon the knowledge and skills developed in the Level 2 training by providing more in-depth training and the development of specific leadership skills, e.g., outreach, group process and facilitation skills. This level provides parent
mentors with 16 sessions of on-going coaching and feedback as well as opportunities to “practice” teaching of the program modules to other parents with feedback from the Project 2-INSPIRE coordinator. All parents wanting to become mentors must complete the three levels of the program.

Project 2-INSPIRE has been used by more than 20 districts throughout the state of California and has had over 400 graduates since 2006. Initial research results conducted by an independent third-party indicate that 99% of the parents who completed Level 3 strongly agreed or “agreed” that they learned how to share the information that they learned with other parents and 88% felt moderately or highly confident in presenting information about schools to other parents (Wexford Institute, 2015).

The teachers’ union of Sunnydays Unified School District has been sponsoring Project 2-INSPIRE since 2011, with four out of 26 schools in the district participating at the time of the study. After the district hired the district parent coordinator in November of 2014, the program expanded to ten schools for the 2015-16 school year, which included the three middle schools, five elementary schools and two high schools in the district. There were about 100 parents taking Project 2-INSPIRE classes throughout the district who were expected to graduate by the spring of 2016.

The district has had two advanced level trainings that have prepared a total of 18 parent mentors throughout the district; however only ten parent mentors were actively training other parents at the time of the study. An invitation was made to parents at all schools to attend the trainings, with a majority of the parents who were trained coming from Evans Middle School. Once these parents had gone through all three levels of training and achieved mentor status, the course was offered to other parents at Evans Middle School and one of the high schools by these
parent mentors. All the site-based programs started through the efforts of the nine original parent mentors to expand the program in the district. These were the parent mentors who participated in the study.

The next section will look at barriers that prevented Latino parents from getting involved in their children’s schools and how the parent mentoring program helped in breaking down those barriers.

**A Lack of Cultural and Social Capital as Barriers**

As discussed in Chapter 2, a lack of relevant social and cultural capital in the dominant culture can cause isolation among immigrant parents when they enter American society (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011). In the case of Latino parents, a lack of cultural capital can present itself through the inability to speak fluent English and through limited understanding the school system and its rules, which can limit parental involvement. These barriers were referenced repeatedly by eight of the nine parent mentors, all three administrators, and the parent participant focus groups. The most common barriers discussed were a lack of ability to communicate in English, a lack of knowledge of the school system, and fear of interacting with the school and its staff. An underlying level of discrimination and racism by staff towards Latino parents was also touched on as a barrier by two of the administrators and one of the parent mentors.

**Inadequate Communication Skills in English**

Speaking the dominant language is a key component of cultural capital that allows a person to acquire social capital through the ability to create social networks and relationships within the dominant culture (Monkman, Ronald & Théraméne, 2005). In all three focus groups and in all the parent mentor interviews, parents commented on the fact that lack of fluency in
English created a definitive barrier between the parents and the school. According to Lorena, a parent mentor, many parents become “intimidated” when they attend school functions and there are no translators. The message received by Latino parents when there are no translators is that the school does not value their language or culture and therefore is not interested in them getting involved. Three parent participants discussed the need to have designated Spanish-speaking staff in the school office. One parent participant from Rio Elementary school expressed the almost paralyzing fear felt by Spanish-speaking parents when she said:

\[
Y \text{ vuelve el miedo, para varias personas eso es, el miedo de levantar el teléfono esperando que uno que, pensando de que alguien en el otro lado del teléfono va hablar inglés. (And the fear returns, for many people that is it, the fear of picking up the telephone waiting and thinking that the person on the other side of the phone will only speak English.)}
\]

In addition to lack of fluency in English, in some cases Latino parents may even be illiterate in their own language. According to Ms. Sands, the district level parent coordinator, even when the district provides written communication to parents in both English and Spanish, a handful of parents have approached her to say that they cannot read or write Spanish, furthering the gap between these parents and the school system.

**Lack of Knowledge of School Systems**

Cultural capital relates to a person’s knowledge of the systems surrounding them, which can include unspoken rules and expectations of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1986). Because many Latino parents are immigrants to this country, they are not familiar with the way that the American school system works. This lack of knowledge, such as not knowing what the rules and regulations are for volunteering in the school, can create a barrier for them to get involved.
In this study, the lack of knowledge about the school system or even about what was happening at the school was most apparent at the middle school. In the Evans Middle School focus group, a lack of knowledge among the parents came up more than eight times by more than half of the participants in the group. One parent participant specified the inability for parents to get involved in programs or events if they are not aware or informed of the things happening at the school. She said:

Para mi no es la falta de interes, o sea la falta de información a los padres y alomejor si uno no sabe, ¿cómo se va a interesar de las cosas [de la escuela]? (For me it’s not a lack of interest, but rather a lack of information for the parents and maybe if a parent doesn’t know, how are they supposed to get interested [in school programs or meetings]?)

Another parent participant in the same focus group commented that phone calls with recorded announcements from the school lacked clarity as to the programs or meetings being offered to parents. She suggested that if the phone calls explained more about the programs or events, parents might become more interested and attend.

Two of the nine mentors described how Latino parents sometimes are given the wrong information related to participating in school from staff or teachers. This misinformation about the rules and regulations of American schools can get in the way of Latino parent participation. For example, parent mentor Julia stated:

O también tienen la información incorrecta porque muchas veces yo he escuchado que le dice el maestro, “Necesitas la vacuna del TB y aparte necesitas tus huellas.” (Or sometimes they [parents] have the incorrect information because many times I’ve heard the teachers tell them, “You need your TB test as well as your fingerprints.”)
This type of misinformation kept parents from coming to the school or volunteering. Lorena, another parent mentor, clarified that she learned in her Project 2-INSPIRE courses that unless a parent is working more than four hours a day in the classroom, they do not need to have their fingerprints taken. This is a big concern for many Latino parents who may be residing in the United States illegally and are afraid to have their fingerprints taken.

**Fear of Interacting with the School and Staff: Parents Seen as a “Strange Bug”**

Fear was the second most important barrier to Latino parent involvement after a lack of English skills, according to the participants in the study. Fear of participating in the schools due to the lack of understanding or knowledge of the system was brought up in five of the seven interviews and in all of the focus groups by more than one participant. Reasons to be fearful included: not feeling welcomed in the school, not being able to communicate with staff, not being listened to, being judged, having their children be retaliated against, and not doing things right or acting the right way. All of these fears can be related back to the lack of cultural and social capital, which hinders Latino parents’ ability to interact with their children’s schools.

Three of the parent mentors pinpointed the problem as being seen as “un bicho raro” (a strange bug) by the staff when they would come to the school. Using the term “bicho raro,” a not uncommon term in Latino culture, may refer to these parents seeing themselves as small and insignificant within the larger school environment. It could also indicate that the Latino parents may be feeling like strangers or outsiders to the school culture because they do not have the language, background information and knowledge needed to be a part of the system. This again relates to the lack of cultural capital, which in turn keeps Latino parents outside the social network of the dominant culture parents and staff.
Melba, a parent mentor, explained that Latino parents and teachers were often fearful of each other. Participating in Project 2-INSPIRE allowed her and other parents to develop a relationship with the school staff, which in turn helped them to stop feeling that lack of trust with each other. She said:

_Sí, nosotros también nos sentimos bienvenidos con los maestros [ahora], ya no sentimos ese “oh mira ese bicho raro que solo sabe hablar español” como que ya hablamos, ya tenemos más comunicación con los maestros sin miedo, y el maestro sin miedo también. Antes [los maestros] decían “mira esta mama” o yo sentía como que se ponían a la defensiva pero hoy me veo como bienvenida._ (Yes, we also feel more welcomed by the teachers [now]. We no longer feel that they are saying, “Oh look at that strange bug that only speaks Spanish.” Like now we can talk, now we have more communication with the teachers without fear, and the teachers without fear of us as well. Before they [teachers] used to say, “look at that mother” or I felt like they were on the defensive, but now I feel welcomed.)

Through the project Melba and the other parent mentors gained enough understanding of the system to feel more confident to participate in the school because they better understood the school culture. This newfound confidence allowed them to communicate and break down the walls with the teachers and staff.

This fear of being judged may not be completely a perception of the Latino parents in the study. The theme of discrimination or Latino parents being treated differently than “American” or English-speaking parents was brought up by two administrators and a parent mentor. Ileana, a parent mentor, stated that the white parents who spoke English fluently were given more attention at the school than the Latino parents. Additionally, principal Johnson noted that there
were teachers who were disrespectful to “that population,” referring to the Latino families. She was concerned that despite the fact that Project 2-INSPRIE was getting more Latino parents to become more active in communicating with the teachers, some teachers still did not open their doors to these parents simply because they were immigrants or did not speak the language. She stated:

They [Latino parents] still look like Latinos, so the teachers still feel [superior]. That’s one of my challenges to be honest, that no matter how much I train the [Latino] parents, and no matter if [Latino] parents increase their understanding of the processes of what happens at school, it doesn’t change how some of the teachers treat them. The [teachers’] union is actually offering an unconscious bias training next week.

This comment points out that despite Latino parents learning about the school system through Project 2-INSPRIE and increasing their cultural capital, in some cases this may not be enough for these parents to be accepted or feel welcomed by certain staff members who may hold biases against minority families. Some white, middle-class staff may continue to see Latino parents as being “culturally poor” because they do not have the knowledge and skills that are valued and seen as important by the dominant group (Yosso, 2005).

Among the different barriers experienced by Latino parents, the data from this study showed that inadequate English skills and a lack of knowledge of the American school systems created a fear among Latino parents that kept them from participating and being more active in the school system. However, through the information and knowledge acquired through Project 2-INSPRIE, the parent mentors were able to break down barriers to develop better relationships and communication with school staff. The next section will look at the impact of the parent mentors on other Latino parents in engaging with their children’s school.
Breaking Down Barriers Through Parent Mentors

The following section will look at how parent mentors addressed barriers to Latino parent involvement by creating a bridge between Latino parents and the schools, empowering other Latino parents, and promoting improved relationships between them and the schools.

Creating a Bridge Between Latino Parents and Schools

The data in this study continuously pointed to parent mentors as the key to getting other less involved parents to participate in the school. The administrators saw the parent mentors as that bridge of support, acting as advocates for other less knowledgeable Latino parents and helping them to get past their fears of school officials. Principal Johnson stated, “They act as a liaison for the parents who don’t feel 100% percent comfortable with school officials.” Just as the administrators at the school saw the parent mentors as important liaisons between themselves and Latino parents, three of the four parent mentors who were personally interviewed commented that they were well known by the principal and that part of their role as a parent mentor was to bring information to the principal. They felt that they held the important job of disseminating information from the administration to other parents and saw themselves as “el puente” or the bridge between the school and other parents.

As stated previously, one of the barriers for many Latino parents was the lack of information or understanding about meetings and programs at the school, especially at the middle school level. The parent mentors became that line of communication or information to the parents and often stopped to talk to parents in the parking lot at school to personally invite them to meetings or classes. Site administrators found themselves using the help of the parent mentors to communicate to other parents, as one of the parent participants from Rio Elementary put it:
De hecho ya el director deja [la padre promotora] poner el anuncio alla afuera (laughs) y si no les da el papelito [para distribuir]. (As a matter of fact the principal now lets her [parent mentor] put the information out front (laughs) and if not, he gives her the flyers [to distribute].)

The parent mentors seem to understand that face-to-face communication works best with the Latino parents and that this is the best way to get the information out to the parents and to get them to attend classes and meetings (Espinosa, 1995). By standing out in front of the school personally distributing flyers and information, they ensure that parents have no excuse for not being informed. Julia, a parent mentor, found that staying a little after she dropped off her daughter at school or coming a little earlier to pick her up was the best way to talk to parents face to face and encourage them to participate in meetings and classes at the school.

Additionally, parent mentors went out of their way to talk to parents they did not know simply because they felt it was important. Ileana, one of the parent mentors, stated that she had found herself inviting parents she did not know to meetings and classes and that some attended and some did not. She found that being insistent often worked, especially when she felt that what they had to learn was important. Many parents would show up and then return to the classes week after week when they saw how beneficial the information was.

Seeing that parent mentors have a relationship with the principal and teachers also helped to create that sense of a bridge for other Latino parents. A parent participant from Rio Elementary noted that she saw that the parent mentors talked often with the principal. Seeing this relationship between the parent mentors and the site administrators allowed other Latino parents to feel confident in asking the parent mentors for help when they needed an advocate. A parent participant from Rio Elementary stated,
La maestra habla puro inglés entonces yo le dije [a la padre promotora Lorena] ayudame por favor vamos a hablar con la maestra y ella me dijo, [porque] ella siempre esta disponible, y me dijo “o si vamos en que te puedo ayudar y que tenemos que hacer?” (The teacher only speaks English and so I told her [parent mentor Lorena] help me please let’s go talk to the teacher. And she tells me, [because] she is always so available, and she told me, “Yes, let’s go, what can I help you with and what do we need to do?”)

All four of the parent mentors interviewed also addressed being seen as advocates and translators for parents wanting to go speak to the teacher or principal. Additionally, both site principals saw the parent mentors as advocates and support for other Latino parents. Mr. Smith recalled having a meeting with a Latino mother where she brought three other parents, including a parent mentor, with her to discuss concerns about her Kindergarten student. He felt that this was a natural thing for the Latino parents to do when they did not feel comfortable coming in to talk to him alone and that he was open to it as long as it got the parents in to communicate with him. Having parent mentors support the other parents as advocates was a key way to give other Latino parents the confidence and empowerment needed to become more involved with the school.

Empowering Latino Parents: “Red Carpet Treatment for All”

According to Delgado-Gaitan (1994), empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process in which people lacking in an equal share of valued resources gain more access through mutual respect and critical reflection within a larger group (p. 2). Through empowerment parents learn to utilize knowledge gained, despite the fact it might be outside of their experience, to transform their lives and the lives of those around them (McLaren, 1998; Ochoa, Olivos & Jiménez-
Castellanos, 2011). In this study there were a variety of components of the parent mentoring program that created the environment needed for the Latino parents to feel empowered. The program supported Latino parents gaining the cultural knowledge needed for the parents to be able to have equal access and participate in important decision making at the school, promoted leadership capacity in the parents so that they could become advocates for their children’s education, and increased their social network so that they could benefit from the resources made available through these networks.

Empowerment has to do with giving equal access and value to all members of a community despite the resources they may have. The parent mentors wanted to empower other Latino parents in the schools because they believed in the importance of equal treatment and respect for all parents at the school. All the parent mentors noted that due to their increased involvement and participation, they were treated differently than the other Latino parents at the school. This was also observed and commented on by other parents such as a parent participant from Evans Middle School who stated:

*Yo estado en la oficina y si miro que llegan ellas y se siente la presencia de ellas. Y yo como por la clase que he tenido amistad con ellas y antes puedo decir que no me tomaban mucho en cuenta en la oficina cuando preguntaba algo. Y ahora como ya miran que tengo participación con ellas no mas llego y si me atienden.* (I have been in the office and have seen that they [parent mentors] arrive and their presence is felt. And I can say that because of the [Project 2-INSPIRE] class, I’ve created a friendship with them [parent mentors]. Before they did not take much notice of me in the office when I asked a question. But now since they see that I participate with them [parent mentors] as soon as I come in they [office staff] help me.)
Not only did the other parents see the preferential treatment received by the parent mentors at the school, but they also found that knowing and being associated with the parent mentors worked in their favor, as well, for a similar type of treatment.

The parent mentors had become empowered through their active participation in the school because they were seen as equals whose voice and ideas were respected by the dominant culture. Furthermore, the mentors took the knowledge that they had received through the Project 2-INSPIRE program to improve their lives and the community around them. Part of this improvement was the mentors’ desire to see all the Latino parents in their school community empowered and to feel that they, too, could be seen as equals and important by the school. During the parent mentor focus group, this was stated by parent mentor Melba and agreed on by Julia:

*Entonces mi trabajo como papa promotor es ayudar a los demás para que le den esa alfombra roja a todos [los padres], a todos, porque todos somos iguales.* (So then my job as a parent mentor is to help everyone else to receive that red carpet treatment, all of them because we are all the same.)

This attitude of feeling empowered and wanting other parents to feel the same, helped the parent mentors to advocate for other Latino parents in the school and encourage them to become involved and supportive of their children’s education. As a parent participant from Rio Elementary said of the mentors, “*Nos ayudan a involucrarnos como padres para ayudar a nuestros hijos sobresalir* (They help us to become more involved as parents to help our children become successful.”) As the parent mentors gained more confidence they began to participate in a variety of committees and decision-making bodies to ensure that their voices were heard, and the needs of their children were addressed by the school. They then actively pushed other Latino
parents in the school to do the same by insisting that parents attend meetings and classes, getting them to attend committee meetings such as School Site Council (SSC) and English Learners Advisory Council (ELAC), and encouraging other parents to become parent mentors like themselves. For example, one of the parent participants from the Evans Middle School focus group stated that she had become active in ELAC at the school and was planning on continuing the Project 2-INSPIRE program through Level 3. She stated that she owed this to the continuous support and insistence to get involved that she had received from parent mentor Ileana and wanting to give back and be a support to other Latino parents as well.

The program’s three-tiered training system seemed to support the building of leadership capacity in the parents who passed the expert level to become parent mentors. As observed during the parent mentor Level 3 trainings, the Project 2-INSPIRE facilitator taught parent mentors presentation skills needed to teach the course to other parents, such as actively listening to the participants, encouraging parents to participate, staying on task, and being patient. Additionally, the parent mentors in the class presented to each other and encouraged each other through words of motivation and praise, as well as constructive criticism. Throughout the observations the parent participants were actively involved in the course, jumping in with ideas or suggestions and working with each other as a team, rather than just being passive learners. It was apparent that the parents in the Level 3 course were well informed and knowledgeable and that in itself empowered them to engage actively in the class.

All three administrators believed that the parent mentors had been empowered by the program to advocate and make changes at the schools and in turn were helping to get more Latino parents involved and “getting them in the door.” Ms. Johnson noted that she was receiving more complaints about certain teachers from her Latino parents, which showed her that
the Latino parents were more aware of what was happening in the classrooms. These complaints in turn helped her to have those difficult discussions with those teachers and work towards improving instruction for her Latino students. Additionally, Ms. Sands, the district coordinator for parent involvement, commented that the program “Really teaches them [parents] leadership skills, how to be leaders in their home, how to be leaders at the site, and at the district level. And it empowers them to go and teach other parents what they learned.” For example, Mr. Smith noted that his Latino parents became knowledgeable enough to ask appropriate questions at ELAC meetings and accept his rationale for answers or accept that he would look into matters and get back to them. He felt that emotional outbursts were left out of public meetings and scheduled for private meetings with him by his Latino parents since starting Project 2-INSPIRE. Parents now understood that public meetings were to discuss and make decisions for the school as a whole as opposed to personal concerns that should be addressed to him privately.

The ability of the parent mentors to share their knowledge with other parents throughout the district not only built on the cultural capital that they acquired, but also created a social network among the Latino parents across the district. Through these social networks Latino parents learn to communicate and are empowered to not only express their needs and the needs of their children to school officials, but to advocate for the changes needed. Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, mentioned that Latino parents at other school sites were now contacting the parent mentors and asking them to encourage their principals to start Project 2-INSPIRE at their schools.

When Latino parents can access and become part of these social networks they become empowered because they can access important resources and supports from the school through this network. For example, Ms. Johnson the principal at Evans Middle School, said that
previously her school had been divided into the “GATE parents” and all the “other parents.” She found that this group of GATE parents, who tended to be the white parents from the dominant culture, tended to take control of all parent activities at the school and had a strong voice with the administration. After bringing Project 2-INSPIRE to the school, Ms. Johnson found that the group of four parent mentors who started the program began to create a strong network of Latino parents who became more involved with ELAC and other school governance committees.

This involvement in ELAC helped the Latino parents at Evans Middle School to have a voice as well, and begin to questions such things as school finances and how funds were being spent. Similarly, during the focus group at Evans, two parent participants discussed the lack of transparency on how school funds were being spent and how several of them had questioned the principal at a recent School Site Council meeting. Empowerment and engagement is fostered when Latino parents can see themselves as part of a community where they can participate in collaborative discourse and their views and opinions are respected and heard (Miretzky, 2004; Warren et al., 2009). This type of empowerment seemed to be occurring at the schools utilizing the parent mentoring programs because parents were given the information needed to understand the system, the communication skills to make inquiries, and the social network to feel supported.

**Improving Parent-School Relationships**

The parent mentors were able to increase Latino parent involvement in their schools by becoming a communication bridge between the schools and the parents, and empowering Latino parents through a strong and supportive social network. Once the Latino parents became more active in the school, the parent mentors had to then work on building the relationship between parents and educators. Helping the parents to acquire the tools to communicate effectively with
school staff was another major factor in breaking down the barriers between Latino parents and the school.

Parent mentors, parent participants and administrators all commented on the lack of communication and fractured relationship between the school staff and Latino parents. Statements about lack of communication appeared ten times among the administrators, 19 times among the parent participants and 42 times among the parent mentors. However, all groups seemed to see the problem not as a lack of wanting to communicate on either side, but rather the school staff and Latino parents not knowing how to communicate with each other.

The parent mentors not only had to work on getting the Latino parents to be more knowledgeable but also to learn how to communicate their needs to school staff. Parent mentors were concerned that Latino parents were not sure what exactly they needed from the school to support them in the academic success of their children and then beyond that, unable communicate those needs to the school effectively. During both focus groups parent participants commented that learning to be more specific in asking for information helped the school staff to better help them in getting the information or resources needed rather than just flatly telling them no. Agreeing with them, parent mentor Lorena stated:

*Entonces siento que por ejemplo con el personal específicamente de vamos a decir de Rio Elementary si tu preguntabas algo ellos rotundamente decían, “no sé.” O [respondían] “La información que buscas no está aquí.” Pero cuando ya aprendes como un poquito más a comunicarte ya son más accesibles a ayudarte o a buscarte la información o lo que sea (So I feel for example that with the school personnel, let’s just say specifically at Rio Elementary, if you asked them a question they would always respond, “I don’t know.” Or they’d say, “The information you’re looking for is not here.”) But when you*
learn a little more on how to communicate with them they become more accessible and willing to help you or to look for the information or whatever you need.)

When the school staff realized that the Latino parents were aware of the information and services that could be provided to them and were going to be persistent in getting it, the school staff began to work with the parents as opposed to against them.

Parent mentors also focused on helping Latino parents in their relationship with teachers by promoting their sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, in the context of parent involvement, can be defined as parents' belief that their influence can positively affect their children’s academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Often teachers complained about the lack of interest Latino parents seemed to place on their children’s academic performance, showing more interest in how their children were behaving as opposed to where they might be struggling academically, which could be due in part to the parents’ collectivistic backgrounds and their respect of the teachers’ authority and ability to do their job to support student learning (Trumbull et al., 2001). Through Project 2-INSPIRE parent mentors trained the Latino parents to get positively involved in their children’s academics through purposeful communication with the teachers about their children’s academic progress, participation in leadership committees like ELAC and SSC and being present at trainings and workshops offered by the schools. Parent mentors and parent participants stated that they saw a change in the behavior of many teachers in being more responsive to parents’ inquiries and concerns about how their children were doing as a result. Parent mentor Melba explained how they did this:

*Entonces ahora hablamos con los padres y los educamos también en cómo mantener la relación con el maestro. Por email o por una llamada o decirle una palabra amable al maestro también* (So now we talk to the parents and educate them, too, on how to*
maintain a relationship with the teacher. Through e-mail, or by a phone call, or just saying something nice to the teacher, too.)

When parents started to ask questions about how to help their children and to take some of the ownership and responsibility for how their children were doing, teachers seemed to open up and be more receptive to supporting the parents.

In addition to the teachers and staff having difficulty making connections with the Latino parents, according to the mentors, the Latino parents also had some fault in the fractured relationship. Latino parents often failed to take ownership of their children’s educational progress and put the full responsibility of student performance on teachers and the school, which caused greater stress in parent-teacher relations. After initiating the program in their schools, parents stated that they felt a more welcoming and less stressful environment in the schools. Melba attributed it to less frustration on the part of teachers and administrators:

\[ \text{Se siente diferente el ambiente en la escuela como que ya los maestros no se sienten tan frustrados [con los padres], el director tampoco. Como que la escuela se siente mas aliviada porque ya no es esa pelea, esa negación de los padres si no, estamos mas abiertos.} \]

(The environment feels different in the school, like the teachers don’t feel so frustrated [with the parents] and neither does the principal. It’s like the school feels alleviated because there isn’t that fight, that lack of taking responsibility by the parents, it’s like we’re all more open.)

This newfound open two-way communication and support between parents and school staff seems to have created a more positive environment felt by parents and administrators alike.

Despite these positive changes being voiced by the parents and parent mentors, there seemed to be more positive changes felt among the elementary parent participants than the
middle school parent participant focus group. This could have been due to the parents’
perception of the willingness of the administrators to be personally involved with the parent
mentors and Latino parents. Whereas the parents in the elementary schools seemed to have more
access to the principal and wanted him present at their meetings, the middle school principal
assigned a school counselor to be a liaison to work with the parents and their “handler”. The
middle school parent participants were happy with the counselor’s involvement and felt that he
genuinely was interested in their needs; however, they felt that he was too new to his position
and lacked the authority to make any real changes or decisions. This seemed to cause a
continuing barrier or distrust between the parents and the school administration, as one parent
participant said:

Creo que en el Project 2-INSPIRE sería bueno que no viniera el administrador a nada de
esos [clases de padres]. Bueno sea que ha fuerzos tiene que estar una persona de la
escuela, que este el Sr. Alonso (pseudonym) [el consejero]. La gente se siente, me
parece, un poco comoda platicando con él. (I think that in Project 2-INSPIRE it would be
good if the administrator did not come to any of those [parenting classes]. Well, unless
we are forced to have a person from the school there, then it should be Mr. Alonso [the
school counselor]. I feel like people feel comfortable talking to him.)

Based on the responses from the middle school parent participants, it seemed as if the
middle school continued to lack the trust and communication between the parents and
administration despite there being more parent involvement. This was probably due to the fact
that the administrator had failed to create a personal relationship with the Latino parents and had
assigned this duty to someone else.
A shortcoming of this study was that it only focused on the perception of parents and administrators through interviews and focus groups. In order to get more accurate data on the impact of the parent mentoring program on the school environment, further studies would need to be conducted utilizing observations, interviews or focus groups with teachers and other school staff.

Through the parent mentoring program, parent mentors have become empowered and worked toward greater self-efficacy and empowerment of other Latino parents in the process. Becoming a “bridge” between other less involved Latino parents and the school and opening up the lines of dialogue between the two was one of the most important roles of the parent mentors. However, the parent mentors played many other important roles within the program, as will be seen in the next section.

**Parent Mentor Roles**

The role of parent mentors within the schools seemed to be the key component to the success of the program in creating better Latino parent engagement. This section will look at some of the other roles played by parent mentors, which included teaching parent classes and encouraging parent leadership, facilitating advocacy and support, and acting as role models for other Latino parents.

**Teachers, Facilitators and Learners: “It Can’t Just Stay with Me”**

One of the main purposes of the Project 2-INSPIRE program is to graduate mentors from their Level 3 course and in turn create more facilitators for the program. The ultimate goal is to create a group of parent mentors within a school or district that can help in teaching and empowering other parents. The data from this study showed teaching to be one of the main roles played by the parent mentors.
As facilitators for the program, parent mentors are expected to teach the Level 1 course to other parents, thus creating a cycle of continuous learning for the parent mentors. All nine of the parent mentors in the study had gone through the expert course at least twice and stated that they felt they had to keep up with changes in the system to best support the parents they were training. For example, parent mentors Lorena and Julia took the course again when the new Common Core standards and tests were adopted by the state so that they could learn about them, as well as the new funding systems in California. Additionally, parent mentor Zulema found that each time she took the course she discovered something new or relevant in the information presented.

During the observation of the Level 3 classes, several of the experienced parent mentors were in attendance and not only participated actively in the class, but helped to support and facilitate the newer parent mentors in the process. They modeled facilitation techniques and shared personal experiences about teaching the Level 1 classes and joined the newer parent mentors in projects and assignments for the Level 3 class.

This need to stay on top of current changes in education allowed the parent mentoring program to sustain itself a cycle of continuous learning. Most of the parent mentors commented on the fact that this continuous need for more knowledge became almost addictive, as stated by parent mentor Antonia:

Desde el principio desde la primer clase, el primer modulo, como que la base, digamos motivación, motivo verdad, uno la motivación eso te hace como querer saber más y más entonces no puedes faltar [las clases]. (From the beginning, from the first module, it’s like the basis, let’s say the motivation, the reason really; the motivation is what makes you want to know more and more and then you can’t miss [the classes].)
This eagerness to learn more information was also noted by one of the site administrators when he spoke about one of his parent mentors: “She was always seeking more knowledge and the way systems work, and not just content [with acquiring the information], but how to affect systems [as well].”

The parent mentors in this study were highly motivated to share the information they learned with other parents. All of the mentors agreed that the need to disseminate this valuable information to other parents was an obligation and a need. They saw it as their way of giving back and helping their community and all the children. Julia summarized this best when she said:

Con el Proyecto 2 Inspire toda la informacion que nos daban me di cuenta que era necesario compartir toda esa informacion tan valiosa. Que dije no nadamas se puede quedar para mi, tenemos que hacer algo para que los padres sepan que es lo que pueden hacer, como ayudar a sus hijos. (With Project 2-INSPIRE, all the information that they gave us, I realized it was necessary to share all that valuable information. I said to myself that this information couldn’t just stay with me; we need to do something so that the parents will know what they have to do to help their children.)

In the process of teaching other parents and facilitating the program at the schools, mentors surprisingly found that they, too, learned from other parents and from each other. Five of the parent mentors brought this up. Parent participants also felt the power of learning as a group and from each other’s experiences. One of the parent participants from Evans Middle School stated:

Pero aun asi platicando agarrabamos mas ‘tips’ que no venian del mismo programa pero venian muchos ‘tips’[del grupo] como pueden hacer esto pueden hacer eso, a mi si
me gusto. (But in the course of the conversations we got more tips that didn’t necessarily come from the program itself. We got lots of tips like you can do this and you can do that [from the group], I really liked it.)

This opportunity for parent participants and mentors to network, learn, and share ideas with each other once again helped to strengthen not only their cultural capital through the information that the course was offering, but built on their social capital as well.

As teachers and facilitators, the parent mentors had the responsibility to encourage other parents to learn about the school system and how to get involved so that they could help their children. In addition to sharing this information, the parent mentors also found themselves becoming facilitators that helped parents with their communication skills and helping build relationships between Latino parents and the school. Finally, the parent mentors found that they too needed to continue to learn through continuing their training and education and also learning from other parents. Through this relationship as a teacher and facilitator the mentors built the trust in the other Latino parents to become their advocates as well.

**Mentors as Advocates: “We Must Learn to Advocate, Not Argue”**

The use of parent mentors as a bridge between Latino parents and the school was previously discussed as one of the key successes of the parent mentoring program. This role of the parent mentors came mostly in the form of helping to bridge the communication gap between the Latino parents and school staff. Three of the four mentors interviewed stated that prior to their training in Project 2-INSPIRE they did not know how to communicate effectively with the school and that the program had taught them to become advocates, as Melba eloquently stated, “no exigir si no nada más abogar por lo que yo quiero (not to demand but rather to advocate for what I want.”) Previously, they said, they would come to the school in a defensive manner to try
to resolve a problem, for example coming in to argue and place blame on staff, and found themselves dealing with an equally defensive school staff member. This defensive attitude on both sides did not allow for situations to be resolved for the benefit of the children. Through the program, all the parent mentors stated that they learned how to voice their concerns in a manner that advocated for their children as opposed to arguing with the school. Four of the mentors specifically stated that they now used formal letters to communicate with teachers and administrators and understood the processes for complaints within the school system. Both parent mentors and participants stated that they now made appointments to see the teacher, kept their emotions at bay, were respectful in the way they spoke to the teachers and staff, and worked to resolve the problem rather than blame others.

Through Project 2-INSPIRE the parent mentors learned how to get things done using the processes of the school system and in turn they taught other parents to do the same. Parent mentor Lorena shared a story where a parent had concerns regarding her child’s academic progress and did not feel that the teacher was taking her seriously despite several attempts at talking with the teacher. She asked Lorena for advice and Lorena suggested she e-mail the teacher with her concerns, documenting the dates of previous conferences and giving the teacher a few days to respond. After three days, when the teacher had still not responded, Lorena told the parent to email the principal with a copy of the previous email to the teacher. A week later the parent came happily to Lorena to tell her that the teacher had contacted her and that they were currently working together on a solution to get her child up to grade level. Lorena felt that this exemplified that when parents know how to work the system correctly, their concerns are taken more seriously by school staff, and action begins to happen.
Parent participants in both focus groups discussed the great help the parent mentors were in helping them to learn how to talk to the school and feeling as if they were being heard. Much of this training was simply basic rules given to them by the parent mentors, as described by a parent participant at Rio Elementary:

*Y otra cosa muy importante también aprendemos como tratar [a los maestros], si viene uno a hablar con los maestros, que tipos de preguntas [hacer] o como tiene uno hacer la pregunta. La actitud, eso también es bien importante.* (And another important thing we learned was how to treat [the teachers], if one comes to talk to the teacher, what type of questions [to ask] or how to ask them. Attitude, that is also really important.)

The parent mentors helped other parents to understand that going into meetings with school staff as positive advocates for their children who were looking for solutions worked much better in getting teachers to collaborate with them in their efforts. They realized that a positive attitude went much further in creating allies of the teachers.

Two of the three administrators also saw the value in having the parent mentors at the school sites to help parents learn how to communicate with their children’s teachers and how to use the appropriate channels of communication to get things done. Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, stated the importance of parents learning how to advocate for their children themselves rather than having others do it for them. Similarly, Ms. Johnson, site administrator, explained the importance of parents being taught how to be productive in dealing with the school when she said:

*That's one thing I like about Project 2-INSPIRE is that it teaches those parents how to . . . be a positive and productive member of the school community because, you know,*
sometimes parents, we’ve got parents that are not as positive. . . they could be counterproductive sometimes.

The administrators and parent mentors involved in Project 2-INSPIRE wanted their Latino parents to become productive members of their school community by teaching them to be leaders and advocates for their children. The parent mentors worked on creating this collaborative relationship at their schools in part through modeling the actions that it took to be partners in their children’s education.

**Parent Mentors as Role Models: “I am the Reflection of Other Parents”**

An important function of the parent mentors is that these parents become role models to other parents in the school. As Latino parents themselves, the parent mentors developed a status at the school among the other Latino parents as the “go to” parents for information and support. Other parents saw the mentors as knowledgeable in the system and having an “in” with the principal. Throughout the study, parent mentors were constantly observed working for the school and community no matter where they were. Whether it was helping the researcher to facilitate the focus groups of parent participants, planning ELAC meetings with the principal, banding together with other parents on community issues, or working to expand the mentoring program into other districts in the surrounding areas, these mentors served as positive role models to other Latino parents around them. This section will look at how the parent mentors were models of successful parental involvement, leadership and facilitation, positive relationships with school staff, hard work and commitment, as well as life-long learning.

Utilizing parent mentors as teachers in parent mentoring programs and facilitating relationships with school officials allowed these parents to become role models and examples of what successful parental involvement could look like for other Latino parents. Having another
parent as the instructor had a greater impact on parent buy-in than when outside individuals or staff provided trainings, explained a parent participant from Rio Elementary:

*Es como un ejemplo para nosotros los papás que ya no es un maestro o es alguien que trabaja en la escuela si no que es un padre de familia el que se esta involucrando y enseñando a otros padres.* (It’s like an example for us parents that it’s no longer a teacher or someone that works at the school, but rather a parent from one of our families, who is getting involved and teaching other parents.)

Parents participating in the program could see themselves through the parent mentors, who were “from one of our families,” and could take their example of strong parent involvement and participation as actual possibilities for themselves.

Parent mentors also had to be the examples of what positive relationships with the school staff, each other and other parents looked like. During the parent mentor focus group, all the parent mentors expressed the need to maintain higher standards of behavior not just with school staff, but also with each other as a team, as an important part of their responsibilities. They were aware that all the parents were always looking to them as to how to react or work with school staff. Additionally, the parent mentors knew that if there were disagreements between the mentors as a group, this would be a negative reflection to other parents who trusted and looked at them for guidance. During the time of the study there was a disagreement happening between one of the parent mentors and the rest of the group, but throughout the researcher’s interaction with the mentors, the group showed a high level of professionalism and respect. The mentors felt that if there were to be tension between them, this would affect their classes. For example, Melba said:
Como te llevas también con tus compañeríase, porque es como dijo la compañera, uno es el ejemplo uno es el reflejo de esas personas. Y ellos lo sienten aunque no quiera uno cuando está en la clase ellos [padres participantes] sienten el ambiente [positivo o negativo]. Es una responsabilidad grande y un compromiso grande. (It’s also how you behave with your colleagues, because it’s like my colleague said, you are the example and the reflection for them [parent participants]. And they can feel it, even if you don’t want them to, when they are in class they can feel the [negative or positive] environment. It’s a big responsibility and commitment.)

The mentors were highly aware that they were being watched by other parents in the school at all times and that if they showed any level of unprofessionalism this would reflect negatively on the hard work that they and Project 2-INSPIRE were doing. They felt that being a representative of Project 2-INSPIRE was a huge responsibility and commitment that they took very seriously.

The mentors’ level of commitment did not go without notice by the other parents in the community. During both parent participant focus groups, parents commented specifically on the hard work and dedication they saw in these women. They were described as hard working, dependable, positive and helpful by more than half of the parent participants in both groups. Knowing that they acted as representatives for other parents in their community made the parent mentors want to do things better for others, Lorena said. Though some parent mentors gained official recognition, as in the case of Melba who was awarded Parent of the Year by the district, the parent mentors did not do what they did for the accolades. Rather, Melba said, it was about encouraging other parents that they could do it, too.
In addition to being role models for other parents in their community, the parent mentors also saw themselves as role models for their own children. Lorena stated that her children were not going to learn unless they learned by her example. Becoming involved in Project 2-INSPIRE as parent mentors allowed them to model the attributes of being a life-long learner and leader to their own children. Antonia stated that becoming a parent mentor had given her the confidence to stand and speak in front of other people and to show her children that nothing was too difficult to try. Although some mentors faced their own difficulties and barriers in life, such as Melba, who dealt with an older son with a drug problem, their mentor training helped them deal with these situations in a positive way. Melba described her daily family routine for motivating her children:

_Digo sí se puede ser una familia de éxito. Y siempre le digo a mis hijos cuando me levanto “recuerden, esta es una familia de éxito” y eso es lo que me ha enseñado la escuela [Project 2-INSPIRE]. (I say yes, this can be a family of success. And I always tell my children each morning when I get up “remember this is a successful family” and that is what school [Project 2-INSPIRE] has taught me.)_

As we have seen, parent mentors were the key component in building the relationship between Latino parents and the school. This position is one of great responsibility that takes on many important roles such as teaching parent leadership classes, facilitating communication between parents and the schools, and acting as role models for other Latino parents. Through these roles the parent mentors have succeeded in improving Latino parent involvement at their schools and the relationships between the Latino parents and school staff. The next section will look at how the level of district and site administrative support impacted the success of the parent mentoring program.
The Administrator’s Role in the Program’s Success

According to researchers, administrators truly interested in partnerships with their families will look for opportunities to enhance the social and cultural capital of their diverse populations through parent involvement that is culturally pertinent rather than driven by the school agenda (Auerbach, 2012). This section will look at how the site administrators built relationships with their families, how parents perceived the characteristics of the ideal principal and how the administrators worked with their staff to create buy-in and an authentic collaborative relationship with parents.

Building Real Relationships: Actions Speak Louder than Words

According to a school leader quoted in Auerbach (2012), building true, collaborative relationships with parents takes more than just telling parents and staff what needs to be done but rather going out and taking the lead to make it happen. In order to build successful relationships with Latino parents the principals had to have certain characteristics, which included being open and welcoming, connecting with families, and being visible and available.

According to all the parent mentors and both parent participant focus groups, having an administrator who was willing to be open and welcoming was an essential part of making the mentoring program a success. Four of the nine parent mentors stated that at times they found that their principal would say yes to something, but then their actions said no. For example, when the Evans Middle School program first started, parent mentors recalled that their then-principal promised them a room to conduct classes and to provide snacks or coffee for parents, but when they arrived on the day of the class nothing was ready for them. The four initial parent mentors at Evans stated that they had to fight an uphill battle to make the project happen and at times had considered quitting or giving up. Parent mentor Ileana expressed how a principal’s
actions can express their true attitude when she said, “O sea mis palabras pueden decir muchas cosas pero mi actitud puede decir mil cosas mas (Let’s just say that my words can say many things but my actions can say a thousand other things.”) According to Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, the program’s success or whether it was even present at a school site depended mostly on the attitude and philosophy of the principal. She felt that those principals who honestly believed in getting parents involved were making the program work at their schools.

Principals who were able to connect with families at their school were better at building those relationships with parents. Parent participants at Rio Elementary stated that they missed their previous principal because he used to stand outside and say hello to them and their children as they came in each day. One parent participant from Rio Elementary said that it made her feel confident when she would ask her child if the principal had been in the classroom that day and the child said yes. Seeing a principal who connected with their students and was aware of what was happening at their school on a frequent basis built confidence and trust in the parents. This level of confidence had yet to be established by the current principal.

In addition to visibility, the principal’s availability played an important role in building relationships with parents. All the parent mentors and parent participants felt that having a principal who made themselves readily available for parents was an important part of making parents feel welcomed and wanted at the school. A parent participant at Rio Elementary stated, “El otro director siempre estaba allí y si uno queria hablar con él estaba disponible (The other principal was always there and if one wanted to talk to him he was always available.”) Parents seemed to yearn for principals who wanted to talk and connect with them. Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, described one such successful principal in the district:
The principal is very open. He's willing to talk to the parents. They don't have to schedule a [personal] meeting [with him to get questions answered but rather] when they have ELAC he's there at the end [of the meeting] and says, "Do you have any questions?" like an open forum.

As discussed previously, face-to-face communication works best with Latino parents (Espinosa, 1995) and principals who understood this and made themselves physically available to parents, seemed to be more successful with creating relationships with their Latino parents.

The relationships between the parents and the principal seemed more fractured at the middle school with parents feeling a lack of trust and openness with the administration. This may have been in part due to a difference of perspective regarding the nature of relationships by the principal and parents. The principal said that she felt that assigning a “go to” person on her staff who spoke Spanish, i.e. the school counselor, helped to build the relationship with the parents. She said:

When they walk in the door, my expectation is that my counselor drops everything and does whatever they [parents] want him to do. That's really important, to find that person that's accessible enough, available enough, that when the parents need something, they [staff] can drop everything. That person needs to have access and has to understand how things work in this school.

Unfortunately, by assigning a “handler” to the parents, the principal disconnected herself from the parents, thus creating a barrier and a lack of trust. Despite the fact that she felt it would help improve the relationship with the parents, the parents saw her handing this responsibility to someone else as a failure to take personal responsibility. In fact, one parent participant during the focus group stated that she would prefer not to have the principal attend the Project 2-
INSPIRE trainings, and this opinion was supported by the rest of the parent group. The parent participants at Evans Middle School seemed to be happy with the counselor, Mr. Alonso (pseudonym), and one parent had this to say about him:

Si la escuela tuviera un director como el Señor Alonso la escuela trabajara diferente, porque el tiene muchas buenas ideas, y creo que se conecta con nosotros. (If the school had a principal like Mr. Alonso the school would be different, because he has many good ideas and I think he connects with us.)

Because Mr. Alonso had become the “go to” person for the parents they had developed the relationship with him not with the principal. Parents in the Evans Middle School focus group all agreed that they enjoyed and liked the relationship with Mr. Alonso; however, they also knew that when it came to making decisions, Mr. Alonso did not have the power or experience to do this, which left them feeling frustrated and disempowered. This perpetuated the lack of trust and frustration the parents had with the principal.

The parents agreed that in order for a principal to build relationships with their parents they needed to show that they were genuinely interested in the students and families at their school. They needed to make a personal effort to be visible and make themselves accessible to their families in order to build the trust needed in a mutual relationship. The next section will look at other characteristics that parents saw as being important for administrators to make the parent mentoring program a success.

**The Ideal Principal: “Visible, Accessible and Interested in our Families”**

According to Rapp and Duncan (2011), “It takes a certain kind of leader to create a successful, welcoming partnership with parents” (p. 4). The data in this study showed that
parents had very specific ideas about what made an “ideal principal,” one that knew how to work with their parents and create successful collaborative relationships with them.

Parent mentors and parent participants both felt that having an administrator who spoke Spanish was an ideal attribute but that it was not necessary. Ms. Sands, district parent coordinator, likewise noted that in schools where the administrator spoke Spanish she found that they were more successful with Latino parental involvement because the parents felt comfortable talking with them. Part of the reason for parents wanting a Spanish-speaking administrator was to ensure that information was being communicated correctly, as one parent participant from Rio Middle School noted:

[Una característica importante que me gustaría ver en una directora es ser]fluente en el idioma, honestamente, porque sí hay, yo se, ciertos maestros [que] hablan español pero la forma de traducir [las juntas o información escolar] no es la misma información que están dando o recibiendo o lo que quieren [los directores] decir. Como se dice, perdido en la traducción. ([An important characteristic I would like to see in a principal is] fluent in the language, honestly, because yes, I know, there are certain teachers who speak Spanish but the way they translate [school meetings or information] is not the same information that they are being given or what they [the principals] are trying to say. Like the saying goes, lost in translation.)

Parents were sometimes unsure if the information being given by the principal was accurately translated to them or, conversely, if their ideas, needs, or wants were presented appropriately to the principal. By having a Spanish-speaking principal, parents felt that the communication could be much better and clear information between the two parties could be guaranteed.
Although most parents felt that having a Spanish-speaking principal was important, it did not seem to stop them from naming several school administrators whom they felt were examples of ideal administrators, despite the fact that they did not speak Spanish. Parent mentor Julia described a meeting where two district administrators came to meet with parents and brought their own translator with them. One of the administrators made attempts to communicate with the parents in Spanish but used the assistance of the translator due to her limited speaking abilities. What impressed Julia and the other parents at the meeting most, was the two administrators’ willingness to answer questions forthrightly, open their computers and look up individual student scores immediately, and offer their phone numbers to parents who needed or wanted more information. All four mentors interviewed and the Evans parent focus group valued this willingness of administrators to be responsive beyond the call of duty.

Another prized characteristic was an “above and beyond” attitude. More than three-fourths of the parent participants and mentors in the study related a story or comment related to principals who were genuinely interested in their schools and families and showed this through their actions. A parent participant at Evans Middle School described this attitude as:

_Quetcha tenga interes si no nadamas que hace su trabajo, ”yo vine y cumpli con mis horas y me voy,” no, que le interese. (That they show an interest, not just that they do their job-- “I came, I completed my hours and now I go,”-- no, they have to show interest.)_

When parents felt that principals saw their position as more than just a job, the parents were more willing to trust them and work with them. Ileana, a parent mentor, described her ideal principal as Ms. Jones, a principal at one of the middle schools in the district. She relayed a story about how Ms. Jones was so committed to having her parents learn by attending workshops
at the CABE conference last spring, that she personally took responsibility and cared for their ten children while the parents attended. When asked if Ms. Jones spoke Spanish, Ileana responded:

[Elle habla]un poquito. [Ella] entiende mucho. Eso es lo que me tiene totalmente sorprendida. Pero ella. [Es su actitud] porque ella quiere ayudar. Porque no lo hace porque le pagan, lo hace porque lo quiere hacer ([She speaks] a little bit. She understands a lot. That is what has me completely surprised. But it’s her. [It’s her attitude] because she wants to help. Because she doesn’t do it because they pay her, she does it because she wants to do it).

In the case of Ms. Jones, speaking Spanish was not an obstacle, because she showed the parents through her actions her willingness to work with and for them in a collaborative process. According to Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, Ms. Jones personally invited the parent mentors to start the Project 2-INSPIRE program at her school and the program was becoming very successful at her middle school.

Being able to communicate with their administrators was important to Latino parents, but having a principal who showed genuine interest in their families through their actions was the most important characteristic in the ideal principal. The next section will look at how having the support of teachers and staff can significantly impact the success of parent mentoring programs and how the administrator is key in this process.

**Investing in Staff: The Need to Create Buy-In**

Although parent involvement tends to be implemented in many cases by teachers through parent meetings, conferences, and classroom volunteers, the administrator is ultimately responsible for the effective implementation of parent involvement programs (Young, Austin & Growe, 2013). The administrator plays the key role in “creating a school culture where parent
involvement is not only accepted but valued” (Ferguson, 2005, as cited in Young et al., 2013, p. 293). While all parent participants and parent mentors in this study expressed the need to have good communication and to work collaboratively with teachers and staff at the school, there was no indication that administrators had ever formally discussed the program with their staff, nor had administrators or teachers ever been trained in the program. From the interviews conducted it was apparent that most of the efforts of the site administrators to get parents more involved had mostly to do with their own personal actions versus staff buy-in.

Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, explained that Project 2-INSPIRE was brought to Sunnydays Unified School District by a grant through the teachers’ union in 2011. The district had not taken over the cost and implementation of the program until 2013 when the grant funds ended and district officials realized the benefits the program could have on parent involvement. According to Ms. Sands, trainings were originally offered district-wide to all parents by the teachers’ union; however, site-specific classes started through the sole efforts of the parent mentors who completed the Level 3 training at the district wide classes and now wanted to expand the program to their schools. Principals became aware of the program through these parent mentors who came to them asking to start the program at their schools. Although Project 2-INSPIRE pamphlets stated that staff and administrator training was available through the program, there was no indication that this training was ever offered to administrators or staff of Sunnydays Unified School District.

In order to promote the parent mentoring program and effectively engage their staff in it, it is important that the administrator be clear about the goals and purpose of the program. Because no formalized training was held for the administrators about the Project 2-INSPIRE program, experience with the program and interactions with the parent mentors became the only
ways that the principals became familiarized with it. Ms. Johnson, the principal of Evans Middle School, had been working with the parent mentors for four years and seemed to be confident in her knowledge of the program. Ms. Johnson was clear that the program was run by parents, for parents in an effort to get parents more familiarized with the school system. She also saw the benefits of having the parent mentors, who had increased Latino parent involvement at the school. She said, “It's [Project 2-INSPIRE] made those parents [parent mentors] definitely more active and more empowered as far as getting other parents in the door.”

At Rio Elementary, Mr. Smith did not have the same level of understanding about the program. This could have been due in part to the fact that the program was new to his school the year of the study and he had not attended any of the parent trainings other than to say hello. When asked how he would describe the program to another administrator Mr. Smith said:

So I would just say this, that is has all of the components and quality that keep people engaged, participating, enjoying it and gaining something from it. Plus, it increases your [parent involvement], just in general, the more you can get a parent if they have a little resistance or a little reluctance to come on school to interface.

Throughout the interview Mr. Smith was brief and general in his statements about the program, which was probably because Mr. Smith did not have sufficient knowledge of the Project 2-INSPIRE program and could not give specifics about the trainings or components of the program. In fact, Mr. Smith did not seem to understand the importance and the role of the parent mentors within the program, although when probed, he did say that the parents involved in the program were special and that he wished he could train more of them. Mr. Smith often compared Project 2-INSPIRE to Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), another traditional parent involvement program focused on Latino parents, and had difficulty clarifying
how the two were different. A lack of training on the mentoring program and his limited experience with it made it difficult for Mr. Smith to express his understanding of the program. This, in turn, would have made it difficult for him to promote it to his staff or other administrators in the district.

When administrators and staff do not have clear communication about what parent involvement is and what it should look like, the ability for the school community to engage parents becomes fractured or difficult (Ferrara, 2009). Administrators, teachers and parents must have a clear vision of what parent involvement will be, and this can only happen when information is communicated and shared between all stakeholders (Young et al., 2013). In this study, there was no evidence that all stakeholders were involved in bringing Project 2-INSPIRE to the schools. Parent mentors took the lead in approaching principals to start the program, but neither of the principals interviewed had brought the decision to the staff nor had they explained the program to their staff at any time.

Because the program had been in place much longer at Evans Middle School, Ms. Johnson, the principal there, felt that the teachers were somewhat aware of the program, but because the program was run in the evenings or during the day teachers rarely showed up to any of the activities. When asked how the staff felt about the program she responded, “I don't know how much they [teachers] really know about it with the exception of the key staff I have that work directly with those parents.” In this case her key staff were the administrators and/or counselors that she had assigned to work with the program over the years, not the teachers. Mr. Smith, principal at Rio Elementary, had not brought information about the program to staff either and could see the weakness in not doing so:
I know we didn't bring Project 2-INSPIRE into a staff meeting or into a presentation. That's a huge weakness, because if teachers knew what the content was then they can impact that in at least their interaction with parents. So, I will note that as a weakness.

Thus, according to the two principals, teachers were oblivious to the fact that Project 2-INSPIRE was on their campuses or making a difference in how their Latino parents interacted with the school. However, because this study was limited to data collected from parents and administrators, the perceptions of the teachers about the program cannot be determined.

The staff’s lack of familiarity with the program seemed to cause other problems at the two sites and in the district as a whole. According to parent mentors and parent participants at both sites, teachers and school staff were not ready for the level of involvement that happened as a direct result of Project 2-INSPIRE. Melba remembered a conversation she had with the high school principal related to this:

*Yo platicando con el director de mi escuela y con los maestros se asustaron. Pobrecito se asusto no estan inpuestos a la participacion de padres. Igual el distrito se asustaron me dijeron “Pues que esta pasando que ahora si los padres estan viniendo?” Como lo habia dicho las compañeras antes, que antes solo iban cinco padres a la junta y ahora platicando con el director dice “Es que estabamos asustados (parent mentors all laughing) no sabiamos lo que hacer”. Imagina uno como padre estaba asustad,o y en el distrito igual.* (I was talking to the principal of my school and the teachers were scared. Poor things got scared because they weren’t used to so many parents participating. The same with the district, they got scared, they said, “Well what is happening, why are the parents coming now?”) Like my colleague said previously, before there was only like five
parents at the meeting and now talking to the principal he said, “It was that we were scared (parent mentors all laughing), we didn’t know what to do.”)

As discussed previously, over time the school staff learned to work with the parents and the environment at the two schools improved, especially at the elementary school level. According to parent participants at Rio Elementary, teachers were more open and willing to discuss student concerns with parents and parents were more open to listen and help find solutions. This was due to the help of the parent mentors, however, not to the administration’s guidance or direction.

**District Program Expansion: “You Have the Right to Demand From Us”**

The success of any program lies in its ability to sustain itself as well as continuing to grow throughout an organization. Kotter (1998) emphasizes the importance of continuing to empower others within an organization with leadership opportunities, which in turn helps to support the sustainability of systems and programs within an organization. The success of Project 2-INSPIRE has been due to the leadership taken on by the parent mentors to sustain and grow the program despite the initial barriers placed on them by site administrators. This section reviews how the parent mentors overcame the initial barriers and won over site and district administrator support, which in turn has created a district where Latino parents’ needs are heard and met.

In talking to the parent mentors about the barriers they faced at the beginning of the program, all nine of the mentors agreed that they would do it all over again and not change a thing. It seemed that the parent mentors saw the initial barriers as a way for them to unite and grow as a collaborative team with one goal in mind. Julia and Lorena felt that being challenged had made them all that much stronger and willing to fight for what they believed in. Ileana said
that they learned so much from these challenges that she wouldn’t change the way things happened. Melba saw it as an opportunity to learn about the other side, the staff and administrators, and realize that they were frightened by the changes as much as the parents were. It was a learning and growth experience for everyone involved, she said:

_Pudimos abrir esas puertas y esos brazos que antes no nos recibian bien y todos vamos mejorando. Si antes no habia cafe es que no estaban dispuestos pero ahora si, es como que somos un niño que vamos creciendo [juntos]._ (We were able to open those doors and those arms that previously didn’t receive us well and everyone is improving. If before there was no coffee [at meetings], it was that they [principals] weren’t willing, but now they are. It’s like we are a small child that is growing [together.])

Schools that have had administrator support have allowed the parent mentors to expand the program and made it easier for them to access materials, a place to have meetings, and refreshments; however, even in the schools where administrators did not welcome the parent mentors with open arms, the parent mentors were able to persist and get their classes and program going.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the parent mentors at the beginning in expanding the program to their school sites, the program has grown and continues to grow each year. During the year of the study only four schools had implemented the parenting mentor program. As of the 2015-16 school year, the program had expanded to 10 out of 26 schools. According to Ms. Sands, this was in part due to the district and superintendent’s commitment to empowering parents. For example, she stated that her superintendent had told parents at a community engagement conference, “You have the right to demand from us.” When the district leadership shows this type of support it begins to send a message to the site principals that this is important.
Ms. Sands stated that her position as district parent liaison and the opening of the district-wide Parent Center was due to parents, led by the parent mentors, who had voiced this as a huge need. Ms. Sands started as a district parent liaison in November of 2014, and as part of her position was now able to oversee the Project 2-INSPIRE program at a district level. She has begun the work of expanding the program across the district to all the schools with the help of the parent mentors.

Administrators play a vital role in creating, communicating and modeling expectations for parent involvement at a school (Auerbach, 2012). Having administrators who value the relationship between parents and the school and build on that relationship through their visibility and accessibility to parents is imperative. Additionally, parents put their trust in administrators that take actions to show that they are willing to go above and beyond for the school community and see them as the “ideal administrators.” But administrators cannot do this work alone; unless they create a shared vision of parental involvement with their stakeholders (district leadership, teachers, parents, staff and community), they will find it difficult to create this collaborative relationship between their families and the school. The next section will look at whether the parent mentoring program showed better results in creating more long-term, collaborative relationships between schools and Latino families.

**Sustainability and Long-Term Collaborative Relationships: In it for the Long Run**

This study sought to examine whether a parent mentoring program helped to create long-term, collaborative relationships between the schools and Latino parents. This section will look at how parents perceived the parent mentoring program to be different from other parent programs, the difference between long-term collaboration and sustainability, and how parents took the program beyond the walls of the school.
How the Parent Mentoring Program Is Different: A Sense of Ownership

The data in this study showed that parents saw definitive differences between the Project 2-INSPIRE program and other programs they had experienced in the past. Three of the parent mentors described the program as “completo” (complete) in that it gave parents the information they need and the tools to use that information within their homes, their schools and the broader community. Both the parent mentors and parent participants stated that the program had valuable information that was presented in a way that made the parents want to keep coming to classes; however, the biggest difference seemed to be that they felt the program belonged to them. All the parent mentors felt that unlike other programs, Project 2-INSPIRE taught them to take action. Parent mentor Ileana stated:

*Project 2-INSPIRE no tan solamente nos estaban dando la información si no que estaban permitiendo escuchar las necesidades de cada una de nosotras. Y después de las necesidades de cada una de nosotras ponerlas en práctica.* (Project 2-INSPIRE was not just giving us the information but rather it was allowing us to listen to the needs of each of us. And then after expressing each of our needs, teaching us to put them into practice).

The parent mentor felt that they had received valuable information in the past from other programs such as PIQE; however, the parent mentoring program had created an action group out of the mentors and they were ready to teach, facilitate and advocate as a team.

By training mentors within the program to teach other parents, the program created a sense of ownership that other programs had not done, and this allowed for the parents to feel like the program would continue. Parent mentor Lorena explained:

*Me indentifique mas con Project 2-INSPIRE porque en este tú participas, como el ambiente que se crea allí de motiviación, de que una con otras nos apoyamos, no lo tiene*
el otro programa. Y el otro programa como que sentimos que las personas vienen de afuera, lo dan y se van y nos dejan...y como en este proyecto es diferente como que antes que se van no involucrarnos y nos tenemos unos a los otros. (I identified more with Project 2-INSPIRE because in this one you participate, and the environment that is created is motivational, like we are supporting one another, unlike the other program [PIQE]. And in the other program it was like we felt that the people come from outside, they give the class and they leave us... in this program it’s different because before they leave they get us all involved and then we have each other [for support and continuation of the program].)

Having three levels of training and then sending the parent mentors, who finish the expert level, to teach other parents in the Level 1 class allowed the parents to feel connected as a group and avoided the feeling of being left “behind” or “alone” by the program once it was over.

As discussed in previous sections, the connection made between the parents within the parent mentoring program seemed to be one of the most important components in the program, especially the relationship between parent mentors and parent participants. Parent mentor Lorena felt that the parents identified with the classes more because “como es de padres a padres sentimos como esa conexión (since it is parents-to-parents we feel like that connection).” Parent mentor Julia discussed the importance of that connection:

La diferencia es que este Project 2-INSPIRE sigue. Y como es de padre a padre yo pienso que se sienten los padres con más confianza con éste de preguntar o de decirte: “oye acompáñame”, “¿oye como le hago?”, “¿oye tu sabes esto?”, y PIQE es ya haces el primer nivel y ya se acaba. (The difference is that Project 2-INSPIRE continues. And because it’s parent-to-parent, I think that the parents feel more comfortable with asking or
saying to you: “Hey come with me”, “hey how do I do this?”, “hey do you know this?”

And PIQE is you finish the first level and then it’s over.)

The parent mentors carry on the training through their actions in helping and supporting other parents at the schools on a regular basis.

Unlike traditional parental involvement programs, the parent mentoring program allowed parents to gain a sense of ownership over the program and put information into action by making them teachers and leaders of the program for other parents. The relationships built between the participants and mentors were key in the empowerment of the group as a whole as they built on their social networks, thus building social capital. But do these aspects of the program automatically create long-term, collaborative relationships between the school and the Latino parents?

**Long-Term Collaboration versus Sustainability**

When parents and schools create long-term collaborative relationships they move away from just attending school functions, meetings and trainings, instead, parents create an ongoing partnership with the school focused on student achievement and success (Hong, 2011; Miretzky, 2004; Warren & Mapp, 2011). This study looked to see if parent mentoring programs created these types of long-term, collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the schools; unfortunately, there was limited data that addressed this question.

In order for the relationship to be considered collaborative, parents, teachers and administrators need to be working together towards one shared vision or goal. As seen in a previous section, there was little communication regarding the mentoring program between administration, staff and parents. Yet in the eyes of the parents, collaboration with the teachers and staff was vital to their goals. The term “work together with them” was brought up 17 times
during the course of focus groups and interviews by parents who simply wanted to work with teachers and administrators as a team to help their children succeed. Parents had become more active and were participating more at the school, but teachers were not well informed as to why or how this was happening. Antonia, a parent mentor, stated that Latino parents were now attending more meetings and activities than the English-speaking parents at the school and were the majority of the volunteers in the classrooms. This new level of participation had assisted teachers in gaining a new perspective of the Latino parents, as suggested by parent mentor Cora:

Viendo los padres y estar alli presentes ayudando a sus hijo y dicen [los maestros] “oh estan bien interesados en que su hijo aprenda.” ([They are] seeing the [Latino] parents be there and be present helping their children and they [the teachers] say, “Oh they really show an interest in their child learning.”)

In addition to attending more meetings and volunteering more, Latino parents at both schools had also become more involved in advisory councils such as English Language Advisory Council (ELAC) and School Site Council (SSC). At both parent participant focus groups, at least half of the parents stated that they were now more likely to attend other types of meetings at the school, which included ELAC and SSC. The four parent mentors who were interviewed stated that ELAC meetings were all much better attended at their schools since Project 2-INSPIRE. Ms. Sands, district parent coordinator, agreed that the schools with Project 2-INSPIRE all had higher levels of attendance at ELAC than the other schools.

Despite attending and participating in these types of advisory councils, however, very little data showed that Latino parents had more of a voice in school governance. For example, when Latino parents questioned the use of English Learner funds at a meeting, according to three
parent participants at Evans Middle School, it was not taken well by the administrator. One
parent participant recalled:

_Cuando yo hice una pregunta de donde vienen los fondos, eso la [directora] infado más
todavía como que me iba a regañar por hacer esa pregunta. ¡Yo nadamas estoy
preguntando!_ (When I asked where the funding came from, that upset her [the principal]
even more like she was going to reprimand me for asking that question. I was just
asking!)

Similarly, two other parent participants from that focus group discussed the confusion
they had with the budget information they had received from the principal and their feeling that
they could not, or should not, ask about it. This suggests that despite their attendance at
governance meetings, Latino parents had not truly been accepted as collaborative partners by the
school.

In speaking to both the parent mentors and participants, it was apparent that all the
parents were interested in working with their schools on a long-term basis. At least four of the
parent mentors had students at all three levels of school, elementary, middle and high school.
Lorena, who had started the program at Evans Middle School, spoke to the principal at her
younger son’s elementary school and started the program there this year. Melba, another parent
mentor, was one of the first to collaborate with the high school principal to begin the mentoring
program there to ensure that those parents who had become involved at the middle school level
could continue their involvement in the high school. Additionally, one of the middle schools
offering the Project 2-INSPIRE program not only offered it to their parents, but to the parents of
their feeder elementary schools as well. In this way they tried to guarantee that parents coming
in to the middle school would be more engaged and active in their adolescent’s schooling.
Given the fact that the highly involved parent mentors have children at different levels of school, the program has created the potential for sustainability from elementary all the way to high school. According to Mr. Smith, principal at Rio Elementary, it is about starting in the elementary grades:

If you can teach them [parents] the skills and make them comfortable in school in third, fourth, and fifth grade, they will step up and navigate for their child. There's just more interface with schools that you have to solve less problems in secondary.

By getting parents to become comfortable with the school system in the elementary years, there is more likelihood that their involvement will continue in the middle and high school. Additionally, because the parents are part of a larger network and social group, it became easier for them to start parent mentoring groups or parent involvement opportunities at other schools around the district as several of the parent mentors already had.

Parents in the study all showed a desire to have a collaborative relationship with their children’s school. Unfortunately, the data did not reveal that this was happening as a result of the parent mentoring program at the time of data collection. Rather, the data showed that the program had created long-term sustainability within the district as parent mentors and parent participants became more active and expanded the program to the different levels of the school system. The next section will look at how the program has expanded not only within the schools but into the community as well.

**Students, Parents, School and Community: “Taking it Beyond”**

Traditional parental involvement has tended to keep Latino parents in a passive role rather than seeing parents as partners in their children’s education and change agents within the school and community (Warren & Mapp, 2011). The data from the study showed that the parent
mentoring program had not only impacted the parent mentors and participants of the program, but was also making positive changes in the schools, district and community in general.

Both parent mentors and parent participants brought up the idea of the program impacting Latino students in the school through educating and empowering them. Although the Project 2-INSPIRE program is meant for parents, during the classes at the middle and high schools, some of the adolescents chose to stay in the classes with their parents. Three of the parent mentors described how many of the students became very interested in the information regarding A-G requirements for admission to California colleges, as well as grants, loans, and voting rights and registration. Melba stated that during one of her classes, four of the students had asked her why they had not been informed of these important admissions criteria or that they had to complete the federal forms for financial aid. This made Melba and the other parent mentors think about how important it was to get the information out to both Latino parents and students in their community to ensure that these students had the opportunity to go to college. All of the parent mentors and half of the parent participants stated that they saw changed attitudes in their children and their interest in doing well in class since the parents had become more involved in the Project 2-INSPIRE program, and one administrator stated that younger children said they watched less television at home since their parents had attended the classes. According to Ms. Sands, the district parent coordinator, there was a lack of quantifiable data currently to show that students were doing better academically, but that anecdotally:

Our students who have parents who participated or have participated or are currently participating in this program, their kids do a lot better in school, and parents have even said that their relationship with their child has flourished in a different way.
The program also led to improved relations between parents and their children, especially during difficult adolescent times like middle school, according to Ms. Sands the district parent coordinator. All nine mentors saw Project 2-INSPIRE as a way to increase the achievement of all Latino students in their community and impact their entire community. As Melba described, the Hispanic community is a family as a whole, and what more would they want to see than better-educated nieces and nephews?

Surveys, discussions, and information gathered by the district had led Ms. Sands to believe that there would be an increase in student achievement in those schools where Project 2-INSPIRE was active once state scores were available again. She was also aware that five of the ten active parent mentors from Project 2-INSPIRE had children in college, which she felt was in part due to their understanding of the education system and their involvement in the schools through the program. Similarly, four of the nine mentors made mention during the focus group that they wanted to see more Latino students in their community go to college. This fueled their desire to spread the information that they had learned to the other schools and to work with Ms. Sands to expand the program at the district level. Ms. Johnson, principal at Evans Middle School, stated that Project 2-INSPIRE had marginally improved grades for the students of parents involved, simply because parents understood the grading better and could now keep on top of their children about grades. Although quantifiable data was limited, Lorena reported during the parent mentor focus group that her principal at Rio Elementary had just reported at the last ELAC meeting a 10% increase in EL student test scores. This was the highest increase the school had seen in a while and Lorena and the other parent mentors felt it was due to the increased support by Latino parents at the school.
The parent mentors showed a passionate belief that the work that they did was not just for their own children, but for all Latino children in their community. Additionally, because the parent mentors were from different schools across the district, but had built a collaborative network among each other, they found that relations between students at the middle and high school had improved. Lorena noted that because the parent mentors talked to their children and told them that they were all part of one community, this had helped with students being less judgmental of each other and getting along better at the secondary schools even though they all came from different elementary schools.

In addition to expansion of the program at the schools, through the efforts of the parent mentors the district opened a new parent center and hired Ms. Sands, the district-wide parent coordinator during the year of the study. Through the new coordinator and the parent center many more classes have been offered to parents based on their voiced needs, such as children’s literacy, basic computer classes, financial well-being, and English as a Second Language. Additionally, upon learning that some parents had less than a 2nd grade education in Spanish, Ms. Sands coordinated adult literacy classes through the Mexican consulate. Parent mentors were amazed by the success of these district-wide classes among Latino parents. Julia stated that classes were almost full for the facilities available. Additionally, Zulema said that 155 parents had attended the children’s literacy and basic computer classes in one week, which was much more than any of the parent mentors had anticipated. According to Ms. Sands one parent mentor was teaching one of the courses being offered.

The parent mentors, working collaboratively with the school district and Ms. Sands, were now taking the steps necessary to expand the program beyond the schools and into the community through conversations and meeting with the superintendent and mayor. Zulema, a
parent mentor, felt that this program was a community effort that needed to obtain the wisdom and collaboration that could be offered by all Latino parents in the community. She described the need for the parent mentors to have positive attitudes in order to help in the expansion of Project 2-INSPIRE across the community. She said:

*Yo creo que la actitud sea positiva es lo que va ha abrirte mas puertas a seguir con otras escuelas. Y abrir sus puertas no solo en las escuelas pero en tu comunidad. Por ejemplo si no lo puedes tener en una escuela abrirlo en la comunidad, como en iglesias, en gyms, en YMCAs* (I believe that your [parent mentor’s] attitude, if it’s positive, is what will open more doors with other schools. . . And open doors not just at schools but in the community, like churches, gyms, at the YMCA).

Zulema and the other mentors felt that the more they presented the program in a positive way through their words and actions they would be able to expand the program across the community not just at the school level.

Finally, some of the parent mentors had moved on to community efforts to expand parental involvement among Latino parents in the area and improve opportunities for Latino students. Lorena would like to see billboards around the community telling students what the university requirements are. Melba has joined with several other parent mentors and participants in the community on a number of programs, including talking to the mayor about how to get more Latino students to graduate and go to college so that they can become productive members of the community in the future. Prior to our interview Melba was on the phone with parent advocates who were trying to keep marijuana dispensaries from opening in their community. Additionally, Ms. Sands relayed a story where a group of parent mentors were concerned with
high traffic zones in school areas, so they personally invited the police department to come and give a training on traffic safety to parents. Ms. Sands said:

They're talking to the mayor about what they can do to help the community. So, again, you know, it's academics [Project 2-INSPIRE]. It's how to build those relationships with your teachers, your principals and now, they're taking it beyond. So it is making a difference [in the community].

The parent mentors believed so strongly in the parent mentoring program that they were even trying to help expand it into other districts in the surrounding communities. When invited by the Project 2-INSPIRE CABE Instructor, Melba attended a meeting at a neighboring school district in an effort to convince the district to start the program there. “Mi sueño es que toda nuestra region haga Project 2-INSPIRE (My dream is that our entire region will do Project 2-INSPIRE).”

This study sought to look at whether parent mentoring programs can create long-term collaborative relationships with Latino parents and schools. Although there was a lack of data to show that the relationship built by the program was a long-term, collaborative one, the Project 2-INSPIRE program did prove to be sustainable across the different levels of the school system and at the district level. Latino parent empowerment has not only affected the school sites but the community as well, as the parent mentors work to promote Latino student achievement in their city and the neighboring school districts.

**Summary**

The findings from this study showed that their lack of social and cultural capital in the dominant culture hindered Latino parents from getting involved in their children’s schools. Project 2-INSPIRE helped address such barriers as the fractured relationship between the Latino
parents and the school through the use of parent mentors as a bridge of communication and support. Parent mentors also played the important roles of teachers, advocates, and role models for the other Latino parents at the schools. Data revealed that administrative support was an important factor in the success of the program, but that it was not necessary. Site administrators had not received professional development on Project 2-INSPIRE and therefore had not informed and trained their staff on the program. Thus, despite the best efforts of the parent mentors, the program was never given the opportunity to bring about a true collaboration between all stakeholders.

The next chapter summarizes the entire study and analyzes the findings in relation to the literature. This is followed by implications for policy and practice, as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a summary of the study, which includes an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, and major findings. Following this, a discussion section will provide an in-depth analysis of the findings. The analysis section will be followed by the implications for policy and practice, and suggestions for future research. The chapter will end with the conclusion.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators involved with a parent mentoring program in an effort to understand how these types of programs might create more collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools. Parental involvement and engagement are critical to improving student achievement yet research has shown that the use of traditional parental involvement strategies by schools does not always work with Latino parents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Studies suggest that many Latino parents lack the social and cultural capital associated with the American education system that is needed to help navigate their children successfully through K-12 to higher education (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Lareau, 1987). While many traditional Latino parental involvement programs have had success in increasing Latino parental involvement by building parents’ knowledge of school systems, they have been unable to truly engage the larger Latino parent community in collaborating with school staff on increasing student achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2012; Gregg et al., 2011; Miretzky, 2004). Parent mentoring programs are a newer approach that utilize other Latino parents within the school as experts with valuable knowledge and talents that can be shared with other parents to help build a
collaborative home-school relationship (Larotta & Yamamura, 2011). The main goal of this study was to build on the limited knowledge about these programs and study their effectiveness in engaging Latino parents as true collaborative partners in their children’s education. Specifically, the goal was to explore how these programs might empower more highly involved Latino parents in engaging other less involved parents in order to better meet the needs of non-dominant culture families in schools.

The study drew on Bourdieu’s (1977) theoretical framework of social and cultural capital, which argues that social and cultural capital are unevenly distributed in society and that therefore the dominant group has an advantage over other members of society. Social and cultural capital work together in that people must demonstrate knowledge of the dominant culture in order to gain membership in the relevant social networks and thus gain social capital (Monkman et al., 2005). Parents with high levels of social capital are able to gain access to resources and aids for their children through their social ties, giving their children the advantage over other students (Horvat et al., 2003). This theoretical framework was relevant to this study because the lack of American mainstream social and cultural capital that is often faced by Latino families puts their children at a disadvantage in pursuing educational success. This lack of mainstream social and cultural capital may also be one of the reasons why Latino families show lower levels of participation and involvement in their children’s education.

This qualitative case study was guided by the following research questions: What do Latino parent mentors perceive their role and influence to be in their children’s suburban elementary school? What aspects of the parent mentoring program create opportunities for more long-term, collaborative relationships with the school? What are parents’ and administrators’ perceptions of the program’s impact on parental involvement, parent-school relationships, and
student achievement? What impact does the support of the administration have on the success of parent mentoring programs?

This research study used an ethnographic case study methodology to examine the perceptions of Latino parents and administrators in schools participating in a parent mentoring program. The study used purposeful sample of nine Latino parent mentors and 11 Latino parent participants who were attending or had attended the parent mentoring classes at Evans Middle School or Rio Elementary School in the large suburban Sunnydays School District. Additionally, two site administrators from the participant schools, along with the district parent involvement coordinator, were chosen to participate. The primary methods of data collection were focus groups, interviews, and observations of parent trainings, as well as a review of program materials, student achievement and parental involvement data. Codes were developed through reading the data in depth and assigning codes to text segments that were then chunked into relevant themes. Atlas.ti software was used to organize the codes and themes based on the conceptual framework of social and cultural capital, as well as the research questions. Analytical memos were utilized to record thoughts, ideas and questions as they emerged during the data analysis process.

Findings in Chapter 4 were presented under five main themes that emerged from the analysis:

1. Latino parents’ lack of social and cultural capital in the dominant culture was a major barrier that hindered their involvement. This was manifested through their lack of English skills, the lack of knowledge of the school system and the fear of working with school personnel resulting from these barriers.
2. The parent mentoring program positively affected the relationship between Latino parents and the schools through the parent mentors, who helped to break down these barriers.

3. These parent mentors had key roles that included teaching parents about the school system, promoting parent leadership, creating a bridge between the school and other Latino parents, and acting as role models.

4. District and site administrators’ support directly impacted the success of the parent mentor program, but despite inadequate support, parent mentors were still able to develop the programs at their schools.

5. Little evidence was obtained regarding the creation of long-term collaborative relationships between Latino parents and the schools through the mentoring program; however, the program did show evidence of sustainability within the schools and the district.

Each of the research questions will now be addressed:

**What do Latino parent mentors perceive their role and influence to be in their children’s suburban elementary school?**

The data showed that the parent mentors first and foremost acted as bridges of support between Latino parents and the school, helping to break down the barriers that kept many of the other Latino parents from getting more involved. They acted as liaisons communicating the importance of trainings and meetings offered at the school to parents and personally inviting them to come and participate. Because the parent mentors were often seen communicating with the administrator and teachers at the school, they became “go to” people for other Latino parents who might be unsure on how to proceed or need an advocate or translator to help them resolve issues with the school. Many of the parent mentors felt that it was their responsibility to help
empower other Latino parents to get more involved and support their children to be more successful in school. Parent mentors wanted to see all Latino parents treated with the same respect by the school staff. They worked on empowering parents with the knowledge needed to ask the right questions and improve relations between Latino parents and school staff.

In addition to helping bridge the relationship between the school and other Latino parents, the parent mentors also saw themselves as teachers, advocates and role models for other parents. In their work as facilitators of the Project 2INSPIRE program and leaders in many of the school advisory councils, the parent mentors consistently taught Latino parents how to get involved appropriately in the school. In giving Latino parents the knowledge and information, the mentors helped parents to advocate for their children, thus supporting all Latino students within their schools. Finally, the parent mentors saw themselves as role models for other parents and took this responsibility very seriously in the way that they conducted their relationships with each other, the school staff and administration. The parent mentors understood that it was their job to teach the parents through example how to advocate rather than argue with staff for the good of the students.

**What aspects of the parent mentoring program create opportunities for more long-term, collaborative relationships with the school?**

During the course of this study, no substantial data revealed that parent mentoring programs created long-term collaborative relationships with the school. This was in part due to the fact that the administrators had not been trained in the program and therefore had not provided staff ample training or information that might help change staff attitudes or practices regarding parental involvement. Based on the information gathered from parent mentors and
participants, teachers seemed to notice and react towards the increased involvement of Latino parents but the program was not a school-wide effort embraced by all stakeholders.

Because the parents involved in Project 2INSPIRE were active across the levels of the school system and helped offer the program at the different schools their children attended, the program could be seen as long-term and sustainable. At the site level, parent mentors consistently encouraged other parents to attend the Level 3 training and become mentors to continue to grow the number of mentors. Additionally, the parent mentors created a cycle of continuous learning by re-taking classes as educational policy and procedures changed over time so that they could continue to be knowledgeable experts and teachers to other parents.

The program also was able to expand across different grade level spans. Even though the program started with the middle schools, the parent mentors helped expand the program to the elementary and high school levels. Also, as the Latino parents became more vocal in their needs, the district responded by hiring a district parent coordinator who could provide the parents with more training opportunities at a district level and support the expansion of Project-2INSPIRE to other schools across the district.

What are parents’ and administrators’ perceptions of the program’s impact on parental involvement, parent-school relationships, and student achievement?

Parent mentors and administrators noted an increase in Latino parental involvement at the schools and attributed it to Project 2-INSPIRE. Where only a handful of parents had attended school functions in the past, advisory council meetings and workshops or trainings were now full. Parent mentors and administrators found that Latino parents were more proactive in talking to teachers and communicating with them about their children’s progress. Latino parents now had more information to ask the right questions and could depend on the parent mentors to go
with them to meetings if they were hesitant or unsure. One of the administrators also noted receiving more complaints or concerns about teachers from parents.

In Level 3 training, parent mentors were exposed to facilitation techniques and practices. They learned presentation, listening and speaking skills, which not only helped them in giving the classes to other parents, but in communicating effectively to parents, school staff and community officials in general. They were able to use these skills to teach other Latino parents similar communication skills, which helped Latino parents to communicate their needs to school staff more effectively. The communication skills taught by the parent mentors to other parents manifested themselves in more effective parent meetings at the school and district levels. Latino parents were able to better express their needs, taking the emotional arguments out of the conversations and being able to let school officials know what they wanted, why they wanted it and the reasoning behind these needs.

Parent mentors and participants also referred to using strategies from the course to support their children at home. Although there was limited data to show increases in student achievement due to the increased parental involvement, administrators did see overall improvement in test scores and report cards of EL students that they felt was partly due to the parents’ increased knowledge of and to being more active with their children at home.

What impact does the support of the administration have on the success of parent mentoring programs?

The parent mentors felt that they had come across roadblocks in starting the program when dealing with the site administrators. This may have been in part due to the fact that the principals did not have training in the parent mentoring program and were not used to the sudden increase in parental involvement. The parent mentors and participants felt strongly that while
administrative support was important in the success of the program, it had not been necessary. In schools where administrators had shown dedication to families, a genuine interest in building relationships, and the ability to speak Spanish, the parents found it much easier to start and expand the parent mentoring program. In schools where the administrators were less supportive, parent mentors felt that the barriers had increased their resolve to make the program happen and had made them that much stronger as a group.

The next section will provide an in-depth interpretation, analysis and synthesis of the findings.

**Discussion**

The discussion will begin with an explanation of the importance that social capital plays in parent mentoring programs and how this was the major difference between the program in the study and other traditional parental involvement programs. Next, this section shows how parent mentors were the mechanism for empowering Latino parents to reach higher levels of parent engagement. This is followed by a discussion that examines the need for school leaders who are well-trained in parent engagement strategies for Latino families and can provide staff development on collaborative relationship with Latino families. Finally, this section will conclude with a description of the limitations to this study and contributions to the field of education.

**The Influence of Social Capital on Latino Parental Involvement**

As discussed in Chapter 2, a lack of social and cultural capital on the part of Latino families can limit the levels of involvement that they have with their children’s school (Grant & Potter, 2011). Previous parental involvement programs targeted at Latino parents have focused on giving parents cultural capital in the form of knowledge of the American school system.
“Families are persuaded that if they change their behavior at home, all will be well, in school and in the world with their children” (Valdés, 1996, p. 195). Few of these programs have focused on helping Latino parents develop their social networks and ties to the school so that they can become true partners in their children’s education.

In order to acquire social capital, Latino parents have to be able to become part of social networks, building relationships with administrators, staff, and other parents at the school that can help them in accessing institutional resources and support (Perna & Titus, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, parent mentoring programs place a high importance on the opportunities for parents to socialize and form bonds with each other (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Powell, Zembrana & Silva-Palacios, 2012). Similar to the findings in other studies (First & Way, 1995; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011; Warren et al., 2009), this study found that parent mentors helped other Latino parents to develop relationships within the school, creating a level of trust and accessibility to the school staff, programs and leadership opportunities. Additionally, Grant and Potter (2011) believe that increasing social capital in Latino parents is significant in their empowerment. It was evident from the data in this study that the parent mentors created the opportunity for Latino parents to build those networks and thus bridged the relationship between the school and the broader Latino parent community.

Latino parents often lack the social and cultural capital of the dominant society, which can socially and psychologically isolate them and make them the silent members of a school community. The Brazilian educational reformer Paulo Freire (1970) expresses clearly the relationship between the dominant culture, which he refers to as the “metropolitan society,” and the dependent society. This is similar to the relationship formed between the schools, or metropolitan society, which takes on the culture of the American middle-class parents, and the
Latino families who become the dependent society, which is silenced and can be seen as culturally poor by the schools (Yosso, 2005). According to Freire (1970), not until the dependent society “breaks out of their culture of silence and win their right to speak” can that society be transformed (p. 29). The data in the study demonstrated that Latino parents faced barriers that made them fearful of interacting with school staff, thus less likely to voice their concerns. Due to fear, they are unlikely to break from this “culture of silence” on their own, and as studies have shown, are less likely to get involved in their children’s school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lee & Bown, 2006). Additionally, the school staff did nothing to try to identify the “family languages, culture, values, and strengths” in order to give them the type of support needed to become engaged (Puig, 2012). It was the work of the parent mentors in this study that helped other Latino parents to find a voice and become active participants in the education of their children.

Coleman (1988) argues that social capital within the education system facilitates individual or collective action, fueled by “networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust and social norms” (p. 135). These four components of social capital were evident in this study. First, the parent mentoring program allowed the typically isolated Latino parents to socialize, learn and network as a group, developing relationships that are often not found or encouraged among Latino parents in schools. Through this network of relationships between the mentors and the Latino parents, many programs and changes were able to occur in the schools and district.

Second, the mentors showed their willingness to support the school in improvement efforts for the benefit of the children; in return, over time the parent mentors began to receive “red carpet treatment” from staff and administration. The parent mentors have continued to work towards involving more parents at higher levels so that all the parents can receive this same
type of treatment. Third, these efforts by parent mentors, as well as their consistent work
towards improving relationships between Latino parents and the school, allowed the mentors to
build trust with the Latino parent community. This trust was evident in the way that the Latino
parents called on the parent mentors for assistance speaking to teachers and administrators.
Through this support in developing relationships, the Latino parents began to feel more
comfortable with approaching and talking to teachers and other school staff on their own as well.
Finally, the parent mentors taught other Latino parents the social norms of the American
education system and ways to work the system to the advantage of their families. The inclusion
of these four aspects within the parent mentoring program made the key difference in the way
that Latino parents interacted with the school and the increased social capital seen within the
parents’ group.

The contrast between traditional parental involvement programs and parent mentoring
programs can be seen in the way that they deal with social capital. As seen previously,
traditional programs focus on getting Latino parents to conform to the school’s expectations of
traditional forms of parental involvement, keeping the parents in a passive role (Hornby &
Lafaele, 2010). The focus of this model is on teaching parents about the American education
system to increase parents’ cultural capital and help “fix” their parenting skills as seen by the
school. On the other hand, the focus of parent mentoring programs is on building social capital
in the Latino families through relationships that begin at a parent-to-parent level and eventually
move to “collaborative discourse” and inclusiveness between the parents and the school staff.
Parent mentoring programs thus work towards moving from traditional types of parental
involvement to higher levels of parent engagement.

Social Capital Taking it to the Next Level: Involvement vs. Engagement
There is a very clear distinction between parental involvement and parent engagement in schools, as discussed previously in Chapter 2. Parental involvement can be seen as a set of very narrow expectations and prescriptive activities or behaviors, as defined by school officials. When parents do not meet these expectations, as often happens with Latino families, schools create parental involvement programs to change those behaviors to better conform to the school’s values (Olivos, 2006). On the other hand, parent engagement looks to make parents “critical partners” in the education of their children by “building welcoming and trusting relationships, building leadership skills, and creating spaces of belongingness and awareness of how to navigate the school system” (Olivos et al., 2011, p. 11). The parent mentoring program in this study created these opportunities for the Latino parents in the school, engaging and empowering them in the process.

Figure 5.1 below suggests the difference between traditional parental involvement programs and parent mentoring programs for Latino parents. The barriers that often prevent Latino parents from getting involved in school activities are seen in the outer portion of the triangle and can be addressed to some extent through traditional parental involvement programs. However, in parent mentoring programs the parent mentors became the bridge, as seen by the arrow marked “mentors,” that moved Latino parents beyond the traditional parental involvement activities on the lower level of the triangle up to higher levels of parent engagement.

As seen in lighter colored boxes on the sides of the figure, both types of programs can provide Latino parents with many aspects of cultural capital, such as teaching them the values and norms of the dominant society by increasing their knowledge of the American school system, encouraging participation in their children’s schools and encouraging proactivity in talking to teachers and staff. These components can assist both types of programs in addressing
Figure 5.1

*Difference Between Traditional Parental Involvement Programs and Parent Mentoring Programs for Latino Parents*
some of the barriers that keep Latino parents from getting involved and can move them into traditional forms of parental involvement, as seen on the lower part of the triangle. The key difference, however, as seen in the darker boxes on the left side of the figure, is that parent mentoring programs build parents’ social capital through the support of the parent mentors, helping to move them up to a higher level of parent engagement. These higher levels of engagement include leadership capacity, empowerment, and advocacy, as seen in the upper portion of the triangle.

Parent mentoring programs increase social capital in Latino parents by actually training them to be leaders and facilitators; these trained mentors, in turn, develop the social network of the Latino parents in the school community. The parent mentors help to connect other Latino parents to each other and to school programs and supports, thus increasing parents’ social networks. Language and cultural barriers are also addressed in the program because parent mentors are used to teach and facilitate the classes. These parent mentors personally understand the cultural and language barriers that the other parents are facing and use their knowledge of the community to break down the barriers. For example, parent mentors used face-to-face interaction with parents in Spanish and personal invitations to get the parents to engage with the school. As the staff saw the parent mentors leading more Latino parents to become active in the school, the staff began to see Latino parents in a different way, engaging with them more positively and giving them a new status in the school.

Traditional parental involvement programs may get some Latino parents to participate in school-sponsored events such as open house, parent-teacher conferences, back to school night and even some volunteering, but these can be considered low levels of parental involvement that keep parents in the role of a visitor rather than an active or mutual participant (Horny & Lafaele,
2011). While traditional parental involvement programs may explain to parents about the values and norms of the school system, parent mentoring programs allow Latino parents to see and practice these norms through the support of the parent mentors. For example, in this study parent mentors modeled behaviors such as how to write formal letters or emails to teachers requesting supports for their children, or attending parent conferences with other Latino parents to model appropriate questions or requests. Parent mentors not only encouraged Latino parents to attend leadership committees at the school, but also led groups of parents to press the superintendent for a district-wide parent center and district parent coordinator.

Latino parents in this parent mentoring program were more likely than parents in past traditional Latino parental involvement programs, such as PIQE, to consistently attend school workshops and meetings, participate in leadership teams such as ELAC and SSC, communicate more actively with teachers about their children’s progress, and question the administrators regarding concerns about staffing, budgets and other school systems. Despite encouraging parents to be more proactive in leadership committees, traditional programs do not focus on the barriers between Latino parents and the school that can impede them from developing leadership skills. Parent mentors were not just leaders for other Latino parents; they also developed the leadership skills of other Latino parents in the school community. Parent mentoring programs create the social networks needed by Latino parents to move them into levels of collective action not often seen in other types of Latino parental involvement programs.

The focus on building social capital in the parent mentoring program and the role of the parent mentors as the leaders, who bind the group together, created the collective empowerment of the Latino parents. According to Trumbull and colleagues (2001), true parent activism that includes levels of decision-making is more likely when parents work together collectively.
Project 2-INSPIRE created the environment for Latino parents to work together on developing the skills needed to empower them to make changes within their schools and district. In addition to becoming members of decision-making committees in the school, some parent participants in the study aspired to become parent mentors in the near future to continue empowering other parents as they had been empowered.

Parent mentoring programs have the capacity of moving Latino parents from traditional parental involvement to parent engagement by directly addressing the barriers typically keeping them out of schools through increased cultural and social capital. As other studies have suggested (Civil et al., 2005; Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009), the data in this study also showed that the opportunity to build social networks with parent leaders in their schools gave other Latino parents the group empowerment needed to begin to become actively engaged in their children’s schools.

**Mentors: The Bridge to Engagement and Empowerment**

Advocates of Latino parental involvement have called for the creation of new models of parental involvement that move away from traditional passive parent roles within the schools to more actively engaged and empowered parents (Johnson, 2011; Olivos, 2006). Ochoa, Olivos and Jiménez-Castellanos (2011) propose five levels of transformative parent engagement, which include: connectedness, inclusion and belonging, decision making, participatory action research, and macro civic engagement. In order for Latino parents to move towards the higher levels of this transformative parent engagement, they must first achieve the first two levels of connectedness and inclusion and belonging. This inclusion and belonging is difficult to acquire when according to Mirici, Galleano and Torres (2013) about a fourth of immigrant families live in linguistically isolated situations due to the lack of the dominant language. The data in this
study showed that Latino parents had difficulty connecting to the school due to the barriers of language, lack of knowledge of the school system and the ensuing fear of interacting with school staff. Traditional parental involvement programs do not directly address the fears felt by the Latino parents enough to get them to engage and collaborate with their children’s school. By contrast, the parent mentoring programs directly addressed these fears through the use of the parent mentors as guides, supports, and role models for the other Latino parents helping them move past their fears and bridging the relationship between the parents and the school.

The use of parent mentors as a bridge to the school for the other Latino parents was the major difference between the traditional parental involvement programs and the parent mentoring program. Previously many of the Latino parents kept quiet as a sign of respect for the authority of the school staff; however, in Western society this type of behavior can be seen as non-supportive and parents might be seen as disengaged by educators (Lee, 2005). However due to Project 2INSPIRE, Parent mentors had acquired the level of confidence needed to develop relationships with teachers and administrators. This allowed the parent mentors to be seen by other Latino parents as being knowledgeable and having access to school officials. Unlike traditional parental involvement programs, Latino parents in Project 2-INSPIRE had role models in the parent mentors that they could follow and go to for information and support. The parent mentors not only became the voice for the Latino families in the school community, but also motivated other parents to become advocates and support systems for Latino parents and students.

Parent mentors’ interaction with Latino parents and the school reflects the collectivistic values of Latino culture (Trumbull et al., 2003). This type of culture is based on the belief that people form part of a group or “family” where sharing and helping each other rather than fending
for themselves is the goal. The parent mentors saw themselves as having special treatment at the school due to their high levels of involvement and wanted this same “red carpet treatment” for all the parents. The Latino parents also felt less like outsiders and more as part of an inclusive group as they came together and became involved; they stopped feeling like the “bicho raro” or strange bug at the school because now they were part of a larger group that looked just like them. According to Lee (2005), when minority parents become vocal and involved they stop being seen by educators as “uncaring” and “ignorant” which can be typical stereotypes for these families. The parent mentors seemed to be aware that the more vocal and involved the Latino parents became as a group, the more the school would begin to see them as true, collaborative partners in the education of their children. Whereas other programs had come in and “instructed” Latino parents on the school system and then “left” them, Project 2-INSPIRE offered the Latino parents the opportunity to continue working with the parent mentors. This allowed the program sustainability as more Latino parents were encouraged to become mentors and continue to grow their own leadership in other schools and throughout the district. The fact that Project 2-INSPIRE reflected more of the collectivistic culture may be why it worked in engaging the Latino parents at higher levels than other programs in the past.

The parent mentors did not limit their advocacy to the school level, but rather became advocates at a district and community level as well. Parent mentors successfully advocated at the district level for a district-wide parent center and district parent coordinator to oversee parent programs in the district, including the expansion of Project 2-INSPIRE. These efforts moved the Project 2-INSPIRE parents and parent mentors to levels three and five of Ochoa and colleague’s (2011) model of transformative parent engagement as the Latino parents became decision makers and participated in macro civic engagement.
Parent mentors are the key difference in making these programs more effective in engaging Latino parents, which can then begin to change the culture of a school community. But this change cannot be one sided; in order for mentoring programs to be successful, the administration of a school must be ready to promote Latino parent engagement.

**A Need for School Leaders Trained in Latino Parent Engagement**

In its decision on *Lau v. Nichols*, the Supreme Court stated (1974), “There is nothing more unequal than treating unequals as equals.” American schools have the same expectations for the involvement of Latino families as of dominant culture families. The history of parental involvement in the United States has been one of trying to get families of diverse cultural backgrounds to conform to traditional forms of school-initiated programs and activities without taking into account their unique needs (Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein et al., 2009). Therefore, in order to create school environments where parents of diverse cultures and backgrounds can become truly engaged, schools must have leaders that “align their own values and behaviors and the school’s policies and practices in a transformative manner to provide equitable access to learning opportunities and outcomes” (Lindsey & Lindsey, 2011, p. 39).

It takes a strong leader with a true desire to involve parents in “cohesive partnership” to create a true collaborative relationship within a school community (Young, Austin & Growe, 2013, p. 293). In the two sites in the study, the level of engagement of the Latino parents varied depending on the attitude and openness of the administrator. When the administrators made themselves available and accessible to parents and allowed them to question and comment during meetings, parents were more likely to be engaged in higher levels, as in Rio Elementary. On the other hand, at Evans Middle School, parent participants recalled feeling ostracized and as
if they had angered the administrator when they commented or asked questions regarding the budget during an ELAC meeting. Trumball and colleagues (2001) state, “It is unlikely that parents intimidated by the school would take an advocacy position” (p. 35). When the parents did not feel as if the administrator was open to having them involved in the decision-making as authentic partners, they were less likely to get involved at those levels.

The principal is the driving force in creating a parent-friendly school environment. This must begin with the mindset that focuses on a collaborative and democratic leadership style (Epstein & Rodriguez-Jansor, 2004; Rapp & Duncan, 2012). Additionally, principals must be trained in cultural proficiency and understanding more collaborative forms of parent engagement. According to Hilado, Kallemeyn and Phillips (2013) administrators with this type of training tended to have more positive views of the families they served and were overall more flexible, recognizing the different ways parents might support their children both inside and outside of school, and understanding their role in helping to support collaborative relationship with their families. A parent-friendly school environment begins when an administrator makes parental involvement a focal point in the school and not only models this behavior to their staff but expects parental involvement to be a priority for their staff. Administrators must convince their staff of the need for not just parental involvement but parent engagement, and provide them with direction on how to implement this partnership (Rapp & Duncan, 2011, p. 11). There was no evidence in this that professional development was offered to the teachers on Project 2-INSPIRE or parental engagement by the district or the site administrators.

In addition to failing to develop a culture of collaboration with parents, the administrators in this study set up barriers that kept parents from truly engaging in the school community. For example, they sent a representative to parent meetings rather than making themselves accessible
and discouraged comments at ELAC meetings. Parents were not made to feel like they were part of a democratic school community with a true voice, and this attitude most likely trickled down from the administrators to the staff. The site administrators in this study also did not involve the staff in the efforts to get the Latino parents more involved. Staff was not aware of the Project 2-INSPIRE program and became a bit intimidated when the Latino parents became more involved at the school. Thus, in both their dealings with parents and staff, administrators limited the extent to which the Project 2-INSPIRE program could create a true collaborative relationship between parents and the school.

**Active Collaboration of Latino Parents: Engaged and Empowered**

This study sought to identify if parent mentoring programs were more effective than traditional parental involvement programs in empowering Latino parents to engage in long-term, collaborative relationships with the school. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) defines empowerment as “an ongoing, intentional process center in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access” (p. 2). Despite the fact that there was not enough data to show a long-term, collaborative relationship between the Latino parents and the school, data did show that the Latino parents in Sunnydays Unified School District that were part of Project 2-INSPIRE became more engaged and empowered as a result of the parent mentoring program.

Through the support of the parent mentors in Project 2-INSPIRE, Latino parents at the two school sites began to increase their involvement at the schools not just in traditional ways through their attendance at school-sponsored activities, but through more active participation in leadership committees, their children’s educational progress and expansion of programs district-wide. Latino parents in this study were now more knowledgeable about school programs and
budgets and more likely to question school decisions and advocate for programs that would be beneficial to their children. The level of engagement of the Latino parents at the schools had definitely increased since bringing in the parent mentoring program.

True parent empowerment in schools has been characterized as the ability of parents to help make systematic school reform (Wilson Cooper & Christie, 2005). In the case of the Latino parents and mentors in Sunnydays School District, some reforms did begin to take place as a result of their involvement in the schools. Parent mentors expanded the program within the district, advocated for and opened a district parent center overseen by a district parent coordinator, opened up opportunities for more classes to be offered to Latino parents and created an environment of advocacy for parent rights supported by the superintendent of Sunnydays Unified School District. By focusing on Latino parents’ collectivistic nature, the parent mentoring program promoted successful relations with others in a group and used the idea of collective group action to get Latino parents more engaged and empowered within the school and community.

The underlying cause keeping the parent mentoring program from creating long-term, collaborative relationships between the Latino parents and the school was the disconnect with leadership and their lack of commitment and interest in parent engagement. Schools cannot create long-term, sustainable relationships with parents when there is a lack of organized focus on implementing programs that foster these ideals (Zarate, 2007). In this study, administrators were not trained in the parent mentoring programs or in parent engagement generally and thus were not able to communicate the goals of the program and train their staff in the implementation of the program at their schools. In order to create the environment for a truly collaborative relationship with their Latino parents, the administrator needs to develop a shared vision, with
the support of teachers, parents and community leaders of what parent engagement will look like in the school (Young et al., 2013). This vision must then be followed by a clear plan of implementation by the school community that is based on research grounded in successful Latino parent engagement and empowerment.

Limitations of the Study and Contribution to the Field

This study provided rich qualitative data from a variety of participants and credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of various data collection methods. These findings cannot be generalized, however, due to the small sample size and the limited time for data collection.

Although data included observations of Level 3 classes during the spring data collection time, this focused on interactions between parent mentors and the Project 2-INSPIRE facilitator rather than between the mentors and parent participants that occur in the Level 1 classes. An opportunity to observe the relationship between the parent mentors and the parent participants would have enhanced the data sources.

Another limitation was the short time frame for collecting data. A longer time frame would have allowed for more interviews of administrators at other schools, as well as focus groups of teachers. The ability to get teachers’ perspective on the mentoring program would have given the study a more well-rounded view of the impact of the parent mentoring program on the Latino parent engagement and student achievement.

Despite these limitations, this study provides several contributions to the field of education and particularly parent engagement in schools. Results from this study could be helpful to school districts interested in increasing Latino parental involvement and engagement, particularly those school districts hoping to move away from traditional parental involvement programs and toward a parent engagement approach. The study also sheds light on the need for
Latino parental involvement programs to focus not just on increasing parents’ cultural capital, but rather creating the environment that will increase their social capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintances or recognition” (p. 248). This study showed that the relationships and networks built between the parent mentors and other less involved Latino parents were the major factors in the success of the program and the increased involvement of Latino parents at the school.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Based on this study, educational leaders or educational institutions wanting to increase the level of engagement of Latino parents at their schools and create more collaborative home-school relationships and self-sustaining programs may want to consider the following recommendations:

- Replace traditional forms of parental involvement (one time workshops, parent/teacher conferences, Open House, etc..) with programs that include a parent mentoring component. This study showed that parent mentoring programs added to both the cultural and social capital of Latino parents through the use of the parent mentors. Mentoring programs can help Latino parents reach higher levels of engagement and empowerment in the school community, turning into strong advocates and leaders.

- Train administrators in collaborative parent engagement strategies, specifically in working with Latino families. As seen in this study, when administrators were more accessible and visible to the Latino families and were sincere in their efforts to build relationships with the families at their school parents were more likely to reciprocate that relationship with the school and staff.
• Involve all stakeholders in establishing parent mentoring programs and promoting parent engagement. Administrators and teachers have to fully understand how the mentoring programs differ from traditional involvement programs and be ready to embrace a more active parent community. Through highly trained parent mentors who can facilitate the relationship building between staff and parents the transition to a more collaborative relationship between Latino parents and the school should be much smoother.

• Create a warm and welcoming environment for families at each school that sincerely invites Latino parents to be a part of the community. In the study, Latino parents exhibited fear and frustration in entering the school even when office staff spoke Spanish. Training teachers, administrators and office staff on customer service and relationship building is a first step in opening the front doors of the school to Latino families. Start with a sign in Spanish and English that says “Families Welcome Here!” (Trumbull, 2001).

• Create a space specifically designated for the families in the school. Creating Family Centers where parents have the opportunity to build relationships with other parents and network are all part on the building of their social capital. When parents feel a strong relationship with a program or the people in the program, they are more likely to put effort in attending school activities. Hire a bilingual parent liaison to run the Family Center and act as a full-time communication bridge between the parents and the school.

**Recommendations on Future Research**

Recommendations for future research using qualitative and quantitative methods are:
• A comparison between schools with a parent mentoring program where staff was involved in and participated in training compared to schools where staff was not a part of the process.

• A qualitative study that includes interviews or focus groups with teachers to gain their perspective on how they feel parent mentoring programs have impacted their school and student achievement.

• A longitudinal study of parent mentors and their children to find out if the higher levels of parental involvement increased the academic achievement of mentor’s children compared to other Latino non-mentor parents.

• A quantitative study comparing EL student achievement rates in schools where parent mentoring programs were in place compared to schools where more traditional forms of parental involvement were utilized.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of Latino parents and administrators to see if parent mentoring programs are better suited at empowering and engaging Latino parents in their children’s schools. Unlike traditional parental involvement programs that focus on increasing parents’ cultural capital, parent mentoring programs focus more on increasing Latino parents’ social capital through the use of parent mentors. This study showed how parent mentors created a bridge that addressed parents’ fears and empowered them to build better relationships with the school.

In order to close the Latino student achievement gap, schools must be committed to true collaborative relationships with Latino parents that engage and empower them in supporting the education of their children. This seems to be better accomplished through parent mentoring
programs that focus on both the building of cultural and social capital in Latino parents with a collectivistic approach to parent engagement. As our country continues to see exponential growth of Latino students in our schools, the need to make Latino parents partners in their children’s education is no longer a choice but a necessity for the continued success of this country in the 21st century.
References


APPENDIX A

Parent Mentor Focus Group Protocol

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you all for taking the time to talk with me today.

Before we begin the focus group, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the
Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the focus group:

As we discussed, this focus group is part of a study of parent mentoring programs.

Ground Rules:

1. I want you to do the talking so I would like everyone to participate and I may call on you
   if I haven’t heard from you in a while.
2. There are no right or wrong answers and everyone’s opinions are important. Please
   speak up whether you agree or disagree because I want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. What is said in this room stays here so that everyone can feel comfortable
   in sharing
   when sensitive issues come up.
4. I will be tape recording the group to make sure I capture everything you have to say. I
   will not identify anyone by name in my report and everyone will remain anonymous.

Timing:

Today’s focus group will last approximately 75 minutes. Are there any questions before I get
started?

1. Let’s go around and introduce ourselves. Please tell me your name, how long you have
   been a parent at (name) School, how many children you have and what grade levels they
   are in.
2. Why did you first get involved in the parent mentoring program here at Evans Middle
   School?
3. Tell me about the parent mentoring program. How does it work?
4. What do you think it takes to be a good parent mentor?
5. What do you think the impact of the parent mentoring program has been at the school?
PROBE: Specifically what impact have you seen on parents? Teachers?
PROBE: Have you seen it having an impact on student success?

6. How do you see parent involvement at this school?
   PROBE: Why do you think it is that way?

7. Why do you think there are parents who do not get involved with the school?
   PROBE: What program does to try to involve them? Can you give me examples?

8. How about the staff at Evans, how do you feel they interact with the parent mentors?
   PROBE: Are there differences in the way that teachers and staff work with parents now than they did before the parent mentoring program started?

9. How has the administration at the school worked with the parent mentors and this program?

10. What suggestions do you have for improving the parent mentoring program?

11. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed?
    PROBE: Do you have anything else to add at this time?
    PROBE: Would it be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that may come up as I look through the information? May I get your phone number?
APPENDIX B

Parent Mentor Interview Protocol

Questions

1. Can you remind me how long you have been a parent here at (name) School?
   PROBE: How many children do you have attending (name) School?
   PROBE: What grade levels are they in?
2. In the focus group you said that you got involved in the parent mentoring program by
   (insert from focus group responses). What made you decide to become a parent mentor?
3. Walk me through a typical week/month as a parent mentor.
4. As a mentor, what do you see as your role in the school?
   PROBE: What kind of communication do you have with parents at the school?
5. How do you support parents and teachers at the school as a mentor?
6. How have your views of the school and/or staff changed or stayed the same since
   becoming a mentor?
   PROBE: Give me an example of an idea you had about the school or staff that
   changed after becoming a mentor.
7. Have you ever been involved with other parent programs at this school or another school?
   If so which ones?
   PROBE: How does getting parents involved through parent mentoring programs
   compare to these other types of programs?
8. Tell me about your relationship with other parents who are not mentors at the school?
   PROBE: Do you see that your relationship has changed with other parents since
   you became a mentor? In what ways?
9. What do you see as your role with parents who do not participate as much in the school?
   PROBE: Tell me about a time you reached out to a parent who wasn’t as
   involved, what happened?
   PROBE: What are ways that you see mentors helping to bring these parents
   closer to the school and staff?
   PROBE: What types of things do you do to help them participate or get
   involved?
10. During the focus group the majority of the parents said that they felt that the parent
    mentoring program had had a (insert from focus group responses) impact on (insert from
    focus group) at school. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
11. What is your relationship with the teachers and administration like at the school?
    PROBE: Is it different or has it changed since you became a mentor?
    PROBE: What do you think is the ideal relationship between parents and school
    staff?
    PROBE: Do you think this is possible to accomplish? How?
12. If you were having an issue with a teacher regarding your child, how would you handle the situation?
   
   PROBE: Is this the same or different in the way you would have handled it before becoming a parent mentor?

13. How do you feel the actions of the school administration impact the success of the program?
   
   PROBE: Can you give me examples of ways that the administration has worked with the parent mentoring program?
   
   PROBE: If you could create the ideal administrator for your school, what would be the things you would want from them as a parent mentor?

14. Would you recommend becoming a parent mentor to other parents at the school?
   
   PROBE: What would you tell a parent who was on the fence to convince them to become a mentor?

15. If you could change anything about the parent mentoring program, what would it be? Why?

16. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed?
   
   PROBE: Do you have anything else add at this time?
   
   PROBE: Would it be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that may come up as I look through the information? May I get your phone number
APPENDIX C

Parent Focus Group Protocol

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you all for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the focus group, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the focus group:
As we discussed, this focus group is part of a study of parent mentoring programs.

Ground Rules:
1. I want you to do the talking so I would like everyone to participate and I may call on you if I haven’t heard from you in a while.
2. There are no right or wrong answers and everyone’s opinions are important. Please speak up whether you agree or disagree because I want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. What is said in this room stays here so that everyone can feel comfortable in sharing when sensitive issues come up.
4. I will be tape recording the group to make sure I capture everything you have to say. I will not identify anyone by name in my report and everyone will remain anonymous.

Timing:
Today’s focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

Questions
1. Let’s start by going around the group and telling everyone how long you have been a parent at Evans, how many children you have attending the school and what grade levels they are in?
2. How do you see the general situation with parent involvement at this school?
   PROBE: Why do you think it is that way?
3. What can you tell me about the parent mentoring program here at Evans?
   PROBE: What do you think their job is?
4. Have any of you participated in any activities related to the parent mentoring program? Great! What kind of activity was it? Did it help you?

5. Tell me about something new you do at home or school that you learned from one of the parent mentor trainings?

6. Have you seen changes in how many parents get involved in the school since the program started?

7. How do you think parent mentors can help other parents at (name) School who aren’t able to participate as much in school?
   PROBE: Can anyone give me an example or share stories of how parent mentors may have helped parents like that?

8. How about the staff at Evans, how do you feel they interact with the parent mentors?
   PROBE: Are there differences in the way that teachers and staff work with parents now than they did before the parent mentoring program started?

9. Overall, has the parent mentoring program helped in building relationships between the school and parents? Give me examples.

10. Do you have any suggestions for improving the parent mentoring program? What are some ways you think the parent mentoring program could help other parents get more involved?

11. What could the teachers and administrators do to help get parents more involved in the school?

Closing Questions
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these interactions with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Focus Group Session: Debriefing and Closing
Thank you for participating in today’s focus group. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any
report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this focus group. Do you have any questions at this time? Before we end the session today, I’d like to take ask you if it would be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that might arise as I am going through the information from the interview? May I get your phone number please?
APPENDIX D
 Administrator/Coordinator Interview Protocol

Questions

1. How long have you been the administrator at this school (or district program coordinator)?

2. Tell me about parent involvement in general at this school (or in this district).
   PROBE: What kind of activities do parents generally get involved in here at the school/district?
   PROBE: What percentage of parents do you think are actively involved in the school(s)?
   PROBE: Do you see a difference in participation between schools? What do you attribute to these differences? (coordinator only)

3. What was the reason that the school/district brought in the parent mentoring program?

4. How would you describe the parent mentoring program to another administrator/district who was unfamiliar with it?
   PROBE: How long have you worked with the parent mentors?
   PROBE: How does your staff feel about the parent mentoring program?
   PROBE: Are they supportive of their work? How do you know?

5. Have you seen any changes in the school/district since the parent mentoring program started?
   PROBE: What specifically?
   PROBE: What do you think the parent mentoring program has brought to or done for the school/district?

6. Have you noted a difference in parent involvement in the school/district since starting the parent mentoring program? In what ways specifically?

7. What difference have you seen in the relationships between parents and teachers since starting the parent mentoring program? (site administrators only)
8. Do you see a difference in the success of the program at different schools? (coordinator only)
   PROBE: To what do you attribute these differences?
   PROBE: How do you think the role of administrators influence the success of the program?
   PROBE: Can you give me examples of what administrators are doing at the schools where the parent mentoring program is flourishing?

9. What kinds of things would you want to see happening at your school/all the schools between parents and teachers?
   PROBE: What do you think is needed to make this happen?

10. Some people say that parent mentoring programs create opportunities for parents to establish more long-term collaborative relationships with the school, would you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?

11. Have you seen a difference in student performance or success related to the parent mentoring program?
    PROBE: What aspects of the parent mentoring program do you feel support student achievement? How do you know?

12. How do you see the parent mentor’s role when it comes to bridging the school to other less involved parents at your school/district?
    PROBE: Have you been able to use your parent mentors to help you with parental relationships at the school/district?
    PROBE: If yes, give me examples of how?

13. As an administrator, what impact do you feel you have on the parent mentoring program at your school? (site administrators only)
    PROBE: Give me examples of the ways you have shown your support of the program?
    PROBE: What do you think the parent mentors would say about you and your support of the program?

14. If you could start this program all over again, what changes, if any, would you make to how you implemented and supported the program?
PROBE: What advice would you give to another administrator starting this type of parent program at their school?

15. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed?

PROBE: Do you have anything else to add at this time?

PROBE: If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

PROBE: Would it be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that may come up as I look through the information? May I get your phone number?
APPENDIX E

Table of Contents/Courses – Project 2INSPIRE

Level 1 – Awareness (12 modules 1.5 hours each presented by Parent Mentors)

Session 1 – Helping Your Child Achieve Academic Success
Session 2 – Building Bridges: Family School Communication
Session 3 – Education in the Digital World
Session 4 – Understanding the U.S. System of Education
Session 5 – Basic Components of the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA)
Session 6 - Common Core Standards: An Introduction for Parents
Session 7 – System of School Accountability
Session 8 – Academic Programs
Session 9 – Role of Parent Committees
Session 10 – Beyond High School
Session 11 – Early Childhood Education
Session 12 – Goal Setting

Level 2 – Mastery (12 modules, 3 hours each presented by CABE specialist)

*Level 2 presents the same 12 modules as Level 1, but is presented for a longer period of time at a deeper level of expertise for parents.

Level 3 – Expert Level (16 modules, 3 hours each presented by CABE specialist)

Session 1 - Community Learning Theory
Session 2 - Reaching Success
Session 3 - Leadership
Session 4 - Developing Facilitator skills
Session 5 - Building Didactic Skills

Session 6 - Reaching Best Results

Sessions 7-16 - Presentations of Level One Modules by participants with feedback, coaching and mentoring