Title

Translating "School" : : The Intersection of Teachers' and Immigrant Parents' Schemas about Public Elementary School Education

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Translating "School":
The Intersection of Teachers' and Immigrant Parents' Schemas
about Public Elementary School Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor in Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Jennifer Anne Goldston

Committee in Charge:

Professor Alison Wishard Guerra, Chair
Professor James Levin
Professor Stefan Tanaka

2013

The Dissertation of Jennifer Anne Goldston is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and

form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my grandma Margaret and to the memory of my grandmother Grace. And to my mother, Karen, who raised me to believe that I was smart and capable and that education was the most important pursuit of all. As a woman and a scholar, I am overwhelmingly grateful to those who paved the way for me and I am blessed to have inherited your strength and independence. I hope I have made you all proud.

EPIGRAPH

My hope and wish is that one day, formal education will pay attention to what I call 'education of the heart.' Just as we take for granted the need to acquire proficiency in the basic academic subjects, I am hopeful that a time will come when we can take it for granted that children will learn, as part of the curriculum, the indispensability of inner values: love, compassion, justice, and forgiveness.

-His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

-Mark Twain

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Translating "School":
The Intersection of Teachers' and Immigrant Parents' Schemas
about Public Elementary School Education

by

Jennifer Anne Goldston

Doctorate of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Alison Wishard Guerra, Chair

The goal of this study was to analyze the education-related schemas guiding teachers and highly educated, professional immigrant parents in a small southern California elementary school district, and to describe how facets of these schemas converged or diverged as parents and teachers drew upon their social and cultural backgrounds during interactions with one another.

First, participants' schemas about teaching and learning were categorized by the degree to which they identified with either a virtue-oriented, effort-based, traditionally-defined model of teaching and learning (labeled Content Classic) or a mind-oriented, innate ability-based, progressive model of teaching and learning (labeled Knowledge Construction). The teachers who participated in this study gravitated toward Knowledge Construction, while

the parents who had recently moved to the United States identified more strongly with Content Classic. Those parents who were partially educated outside the U.S. but had been in American for a decade or more tended to espouse "hybrid" schemas, incorporating aspects of both Content Classic and Knowledge Construction models of teaching and learning.

Second, teachers described parent-teacher conferences in a consistent, teacher-led style emphasizing the communication of academic information. According to the interviewed educators, the parent's role during conferences and all interactions was to demonstrate trust in the teacher's expertise, judgment, and advice, a behavior they noted when Asian immigrant parents were described as gracious and thankful during conferences. Parent participants who believed that a child's effort was the most important determinant of academic success were interested in their children's relative standing (rank) in the class and concrete, specific ways to help their children practice skills at home. Teachers, who identified more closely with a Knowledge Construction schema, felt that students' self-esteem and intrinsic motivation should be nurtured through encouragement to maximize their innate ability. Consequently, teachers at times believed that immigrant parents were pushing their children too hard or were disproportionately fixated on academic acceleration. This study's disentanglement of culture as a variable separate from SES and education illuminated key areas where educators can engage and ease the transition of immigrant students and parents into a new context, regardless of their demographics.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> Children from immigrant families always have presented one of the most significant challenges to the U.S. educational system. (Fuligni & Fuligni, 2007, p. 231)

The United States is a nation of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic

diversity. Our popular mythos is that we are a country founded by immigrants seeking

freedom and opportunity, and for thousands of new residents each year, America represents

this promise of a better life. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, 13% of those living in the

United States and nearly 30% of those living in the state of California were born in another

country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). A language other than English is spoken in 20% of United

States homes and in the state of California, 43% of households have a primary language

other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The California Department of Education

(2012c) reports that over a million English learners are currently enrolled in the state's public

schools. And as Fuligni and Fuligni so succinctly state in the above quote, these children

present a challenge to public schools.

No matter where they were born or educated, parents of elementary school children

have a set of expectations about, among other things, the way school is structured, what

learning looks like, and how teachers interact with students. However, parents born and

educated outside of the U.S. may have assumptions about motivation, discipline,

intelligence, effort, preparation, and teaching that are quite different from American-

educated parents. Not only do parents hold expectations about schools, but teachers also

have certain beliefs about how families should support their children's learning. These beliefs

include how frequently parent-teacher communication takes place, how this discourse is

structured and through what channels, how much parents should help their children with

homework, and in what ways it is appropriate for parent volunteers to participate on school

grounds. When family and school come together as both seek to prepare children for

successful futures, interactions between families and schools can cause tension as parents

and teachers do not always have common understandings of the "right" way to educate

children.

Additionally, many first- and second-generation immigrant children are faced with

"triple segregation of race, poverty, and language" (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, &

Todorova, 2008). Immigrant children, along with their native-born, ethnic minority peers

must overcome these divisive forces if they are to gain a solid foothold in school. Parents',

teachers', and children's expectations about the nature of schooling and the appropriate

roles for themselves and one another may come into conflict and contribute to scenarios

where generations of non-mainstream children are unsuccessful in formal schooling (Rogoff,

et al., 2007). In school districts across the United States this tension between different

groups' assumptions and beliefs affects the ways that adults and children interact with one

another on a daily basis. As Rogoff, et al. (2007) explain:

> Participants in an activity may vary in what they consider preferable or
> acceptable, based on differing repertoires of practice associated with their
> histories of involvement in distinct traditions of learning. … This appears to
> be a common source of many minority students' difficulties in formal
> schooling. (p. 506)

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical constructs of Activity Theory and Ecocultural

Theory. Activity Theory (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999) embeds analysis of individual action

within a social context. And according to ecocultural theory (Weisner, 2002), the schemas, or

cognitive scripts, which guide our everyday actions are heavily influenced by culture. A third

construct, Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Warren, 2005), provides a lens for analyzing how and why interactions between families and schools may either support or subvert student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. A common principle of these three theories is that neither parents' nor teachers' actions toward promoting student success can be understood in isolation. Immigrant parents and their children's teachers have ever-evolving schemas about what schools and parents "should" do in order to help students maximize their potential. These scripts are informed and influenced by the adults' own schooling experiences, by their communication with peers, and through their continuing interactions with one another. Parents' schemas may change depending on whether they are discussing education theoretically or their own children in particular. Teachers' schemas may vary as they discuss different groups of children. And none of these schemas are fixed. Interactions between parents and teachers are influenced by participants' past experiences, present conversations, and predictions for their own and their students' or children's futures. At the same time, each interaction may lead to reevaluation and reformulation of schemas. This continuous, recursive cycle of real-time interactions and socio-historically contextualized expectations transforming one another is illustrated in Figure 1. This model illustrates how parent-teacher interaction activities are influenced by the participants' schemas and how these interactions can, in turn, build social capital.
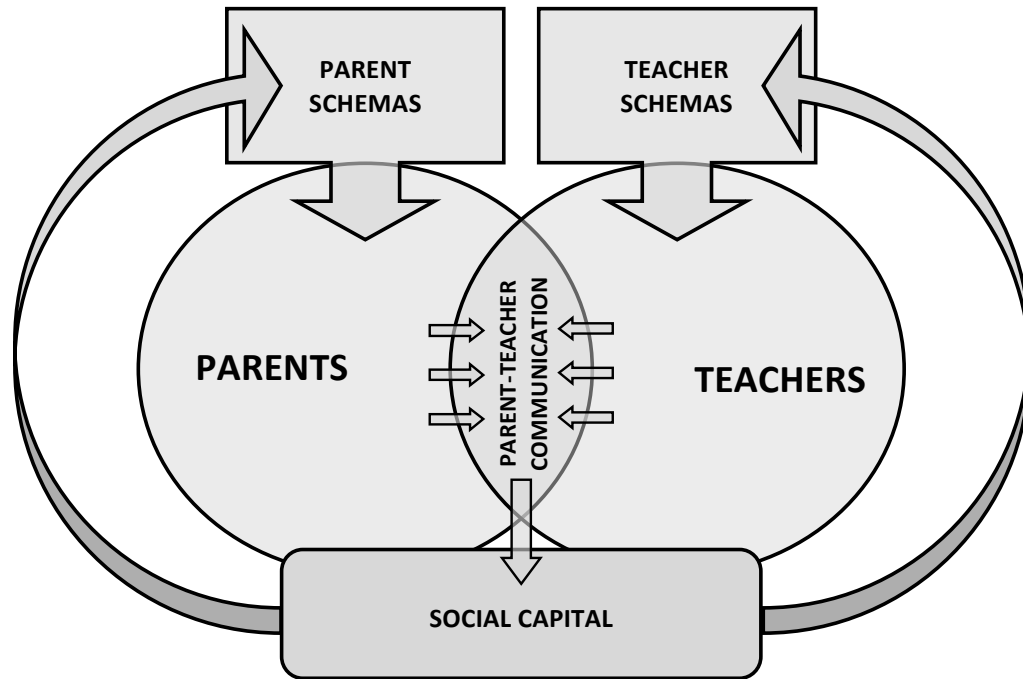
Figure 1. Model of the relationship between schemas, communication, and social capital.

Activity Theory. When studying social and institutional processes such as elementary

school education, Activity Theory is a useful orienting framework. Rooted in the tradition of

social learning theory as developed by such groundbreaking theorists as Vygotsky, Leont'ev,

and Luria, Activity Theory embeds the study of individual action within a social context. Even

the most basic, routine activities and thought processes are motivated by often-unconscious,

culturally-influenced goals, and individuals' actions to reach these goals are shaped by their

interactions with others either in the past, the present, or in the anticipated future. In this

way, according to activity theorists, human activity is "object-oriented, collective, and

culturally mediated," (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999) by tools and artifacts including

language and texts. The unit of analysis under this model shifts from individual actions, which

are not fully understandable if studied in isolation, to entire activity systems including

community and cultural influences. Activity systems are often represented visually by a complex mediational triangle where a seemingly simple subject/object relationship is inseparable from a sociocultural context (Engeström, 1999). Furthermore, Engeström states, society itself is a "multilayered network of interconnected activity systems" (1999, p. 36). Figure 2 applies this triangular model to the interaction of two activity systems – families and school – as they overlap in the context of a child's education.

Family as an activity system:

Mediating Tools
- Social networks (i.e., churches, cultural organizations)
- Publications

Subject
- Parent/Caregiver

Object
- Communication and engagement with educators

Common Goal

Student Success

Object
- Communication and engagement with families

School as an activity system:

Mediating Tools
- Educational research
- Teachers' manuals
- Study groups

Subject
- Educator

Division of Labor
- Children's roles in the home
- Adult assistance with schoolwork

Community
- Family members
- Neighbors
- Friends

Schemas
- Roles and responsibilities of parents
- Roles and responsibilities of teachers
- Roles and responsibilities of other school staff

Schemas
- Roles and responsibilities of parents
- Roles and responsibilities of teachers
- Roles and responsibilities of other school staff

Community
- Colleagues
- Administrators
- School board

Division of Labor
- Age-based leveling of students
- Departmentalization within grade levels
- Specialist teachers: P.E., music, etc.

Figure 2. Complex mediational triangles representing family and school activity systems.

The common goal, centered between the two triangles, is student success, which may be operationalized within each activity system in different ways. More than likely, success would be described by the two triangles' subjects – parents and educators – as a combination of factors including academic achievement as measured by grades and standardized tests, emotional well-being, happiness, social intelligence, and motivation.

Parents and teachers interact with one another in pursuit of the same goals, but often with entirely different sets of pressures, assumptions, background knowledge, and resources. For this study, I focused primarily on one corner of each mediational triangle: family- and school-based schemas (Figure 3).

Object
•Communication and engagement with educators

Common Goal
Student Success

Object
•Communication and engagement with families

Schemas
•Roles and responsibilities of parents

• Roles and responsibilities of teachers

• Roles and responsibilities of other school staff

Schemas
•Roles and responsibilities of parents

• Roles and responsibilities of teachers

• Roles and responsibilities of other school staff

Figure 3. Family and school schemas portions of the two mediational triangles.

Ecocultural Theory. Imagine a parent anxiously walking her child to the door of an American classroom on the first day of school. This might be the first day of kindergarten for a native-born five year-old that has never participated in formal schooling, or it could be midway through the fourth grade year for a recent immigrant who has already experienced years of school in his or her home country. In the United States, the formal education of children is a process that takes place, for the most part, outside of the home. An American public school is a social institution with relatively stable rules and procedures that "are both generated in an revealed by the language of the institution's participants" (Mehan, 1993, p. 243). But while the expectations of a mainstream public school remain fixed, the ways that students and their families conceptualize education can vary widely. No matter what their background, parents of school-age children begin their relationships with American public schools with expectations about how schools functions. These expectations are partially shaped by the adults' own educational experiences and include ideas about how children learn, what teaching looks and sounds like, how classrooms are organized, and in what ways parents should or should not become involved in their children's education.

According to Weisner's ecocultural theory, individual behaviors in daily routines and activities, such as teaching and learning, are guided by ingrained schemas or scripts (Weisner, 2002). These scripts help us contextualize and make sense of our own and others' behavior. Often, we remain largely unaware of the many assumptions we may have about "correct" or "natural" ways of going about activities until we encounter alternative ways of structuring routines. As parents communicate schemas to their children through explicit teaching, repetition, and rewarding of desired behaviors, the internalization of cultural scripts actually shapes children's cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Garrett &

Baquedano-López, 2002). So, the ways in which children, for example, approach tasks, tell stories, solve problems, and interact with adults often varies distinctly between cultural communities (Weisner, 1998). Culture, education, and socioeconomic status may also influence parents' and teachers' beliefs about the nature of intelligence, the level or amount of work that children can manage, and the degree to which parents are entitled to intervene in order to secure their children's access to resources or programs offered by schools.

Educators and caregivers each absorb some degree of responsibility for raising and educating children in the values, habits, skills, and ways of thinking that these adults believe will promote future success and optimize a child's potential in his or her current environment. From an ecocultural standpoint, as immigrant families interact with public schools in the United States, they are at least partially guided by schemas that inform everything from the ways they talk with their children about school to their level of comfort with approaching teachers about a concern. Interactions between parents and teachers provide a rich ground for studying each group's beliefs and assumptions about themselves, one other, and the nature of schooling. As illustrated in Figure 2, when parents and teachers interact with one another, each is directly and unconsciously influenced by his or her schemas. While these culturally influenced scripts typically have overlapping areas of common understanding, there are often divergent beliefs that can cause confusion when expectations about schooling or parenting are not met or when communication does not occur as frequently or in the manner that is expected. And because schemas are frequently attached to value judgments or notions of what individual "ought" and "ought not" to do, there is potential for tension when these adults do not share the same cultural scripts.

Finally, most teachers do not consciously or maliciously ignore the diverse backgrounds and cultural schemas of immigrant parents. They simply may be unaware that there are many alternative ways, none of them intrinsically more correct than another, of conceptualizing education. As Ladson-Billings (2004) explains, teachers often "have not considered that their own cultural patterns may not be the only patterns of interaction that parents can have with the school" (p. 108) and that, in order to build more productive relationships with their students' parents, teachers may need to first examine their own assumptions.

Social Capital. The lingering question is, then, to what degree does it matter whether or not parents and teachers share schemas regarding education? If parents do a good job parenting and teachers do a good job teaching, will the children for which they share responsibility turn out just fine regardless of the parents' and teachers' ways of understanding and supporting teaching and learning? While Activity Theory and ecocultural theory provide frameworks for understanding how culture can influence interactions, social capital gives us a lens for contextualizing why knowing this is important. According to Warren (2005):

> Social capital refers to the set of resources that inhere in relationships of trust and cooperation between and among people. Given whatever other resources people have, including money and expertise, when people have close ties and trust each other, they are better able to achieve collective ends. (p. 4)

The benefits received from relationships are very real and can be as valuable as material resources. Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the knowledge, information, access, and influence individuals may enjoy based on membership in a particular group.

School children draw on a variety of social resources when navigating school expectations, including teachers, peers, family, and other community members. Coleman (1991) points out that parent involvement in education is an important form of social capital. The more parents and community members are actively involved in a child's education, the more social capital he or she has (Coleman, 1991). And as Epstein (1995) writes, children are at once part of their school, community, and family. The degree to which these three spheres of influence overlap and work in collaboration rather than in isolation from one another has a profound effect on student motivation, investment in, and attitude toward school, all of which may in turn affect academic achievement, truancy, and dropout rates.

However, not only is a student's social capital meaningful - so is the social capital of his or her parents. Fortunately, parents who are immigrants or belong to underrepresented communities often have robust social networks that, as Diamond, Wang, and Gomez (2006) explain, tend to "compensate for limitations in other valued forms of capital," as individuals share resources and information with the co-ethnic friends and peers. But on the other hand, the benefits of co-ethnic social capital are not the same benefits as cross-cultural partnerships or firsthand relationships with educators. A sense of belonging to an institution generates trust, buy in, and efficacy. When parents feel as if they have a relationship with the staff at their children's schools, they will support teachers' efforts and vice-versa. But when teachers and parents are at odds with each other, this access to one another's shareable resources is shut down.

And while immigrant parents need to learn the expectations of public schools so that they can maximize their children's engagement and learning, educators, too, must recognize that relationships with families build knowledge and appreciation of the strengths of varied

cultures and communities (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). If immigrant parents feel voiceless and powerless when interacting with American schools, not only may those parents miss out on the tacit customs and assumptions of the educational system that their children need to master to succeed, but the school also misses out on the potential leadership, skills, and talents of the marginalized parents. Based on what is known about social capital and its relationship to efficacy and achievement, one would expect that parents and teachers working toward a mutual understanding of one another's schemas related to education would result in more positive outcomes for students across settings.

Research Questions

According to Weisner's ecocultural theory (2002), our daily actions are guided by schemas - culturally influenced, ingrained sets of rules. The overarching goal of this study was to describe and analyze the schemas that guide parents and teachers as they interact in a public school setting, and how facets of these schemas converge or diverge as individual parents and teachers draw upon their social and cultural backgrounds. There is a large body of research demonstrating the lack of alignment between the educational schemas of American teachers and non-mainstream, urban, and traditionally underserved student populations, including families who are in poverty, are non-English speakers, are undocumented immigrants, or are racial-ethnic minorities. However, there are growing numbers of immigrant parents who may lack understanding of aspects of American school culture but have high levels of education and the economic capital allowing them to reside in affluent suburban neighborhoods. Therefore, the research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What are elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
2. What ecocultural factors shape elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
3. In what ways do schemas about education influence the interactions between highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school teachers?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions explored in this study build upon previous literature related to the ways families make sense of and interact with American public schools as well as the ways parents and caretakers are involved in children's education. Also addressed here are studies that describe educators' assumptions about and expectations of students' parents. One cannot underestimate the influence of underlying assumption - schemas - that an individual has about education, i.e., how teachers should deliver content, the best ways to motivate and engage children, how parents can help their children, and the degree to which parents should give input on school-based decisions such as child placement. These schemas, which often carry distinct moral weight, are part of the very fabric of human development, and are determined in large part, as Weisner (2002) asserts, by where in the world a person happens to be born.

Often, the influence of schemas becomes particularly relevant in the context of communication between parents and teachers. In the United States, there are frequent unstructured and structured opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate regarding a child's behavior, well being, and academic progress in school. Teachers and parents have quick check-ins at the classroom door before and after school, emails are sent back and forth, phone calls are made, and typically, once or twice a year, parents and teachers sit down together for conferences, where parents are updated on student progress via the sharing of assessments and observation data. Parent-teacher communication is one example of a goal-driven, object-oriented activity as described by Engeström and Miettinen (1999). When mediating shared understanding about a child's education, parents and

teachers use language, facial expression, and gestures as tools to negotiate from their positions within overlapping activity systems.

Parent and teacher schemas that guide involvement, interaction, and communication are influenced by each individual's prior experiences as well as cultural norms regarding education. And if parents have been raised and/or educated in cultural communities that are different from those in which their children are being educated, the potential for confusion, misunderstanding, and conflict increases. When studying the ways in which immigrants interact with American schools, unpacking the ecoculturally-bound schemas that guide routine, everyday activities is critical to determining how parent-teacher communication and collaboration may be strengthened or subverted. This section begins with a broad overview of relevant research on immigrants in American schools, continues with literature which contextualizes the entanglement of socioeconomic status with race and ethnicity, and finishes with a discussion of research on parent and teacher education-related schemas.

Immigrants in American Schools

The idealized immigrant narrative of American lore, characterized by notions such as a "melting pot" of cultural assimilation and upward mobility earned through education and hard work has been challenged by the realities of the past fifty years. For today's diverse immigrants, there is no simple formula for success in the United States. Individual, family, institutional, and broad societal factors all contribute to whether or not immigrants and their children will succeed in school and beyond. Whereas the primarily European immigrants of our nation's early history had to face culture and language differences, the arrival of the post-industrial era coupled with the implementation of the Immigration Reform Act in 1968

have diversified the range of arriving immigrants' race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status

(Banks, 2008).

Traditionally, American public schools have been structured in order to provide

native-born and immigrant children with an education that emphasizes mainstream cultural

values and behaviors as the keys to success (Banks, 2008; DeFeyter & Winsler, 2009). The

societal and institutional expectation is that by working hard and adopting white, middle-

class ways of speaking and behaving, anyone can achieve. These schematized "rules" have,

over time, led to a stratified power structure in the United States (Delpit, 1988), and schools

as institutions tend to "[reinforce] the status quo and the dominant power relationships in

society…and [do] not challenge or disrupt the class, racial, or gender discrimination in the

schools and society" (Banks, 2008, p. 135).

As immigrant and native-born residents with varying schemas routinely interact with

one another in the course of daily activities, misunderstandings and miscommunications

arise, at times leading mainstream Americans to believe that immigrants are not trying hard

enough to fit in. First or second generation immigrant children entering American schools

from a wide range of backgrounds may find that their cultural or linguistic differences are

misinterpreted or indicative of moral failings. As Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) write:

> Culture creates lenses or frames for interpreting the meanings of interaction.
> When teachers and students do not all share the same frame, their reactions
> to each other's behavior can range from feeling that something is slightly out
> of kilter to gravely misjudging the meaning of events and participants'
> intentions. (p. 73)

Immigrant families negotiate attachments to their native identities while navigating the

sometimes conflicting expectations of American society, including pressure to assimilate to

mainstream cultural values while receiving explicit and implicit messages that only those who

are white, middle-class, and fluent English speakers are "true" Americans (Gibson, 1998).

But despite potential barriers to success such as language, cultural mismatch, and

racism, Fuligni (1997) writes, "many immigrant students do not have as much difficulty with

schools as might be expected," (p. 351). In fact, in contrast to native-born, minority students,

the first- and second-generation children of immigrants in the United States often do well in

school (Feliciano, 2006; Fuligni, 1997; Louie, 2001), at least at first (Goldenberg, Gallimore,

Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). However, the

ongoing paradox of expected acculturation and simultaneous marginalization has

contributed to the persistent academic underachievement of the descendants of certain

immigrant groups over time (Banks, 2008; Gibson, 1998; Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008).

A complex network of interlinked variables influences the degree to which

immigrants and their children will experience upward or downward movement in status over

time. While the children of some immigrant groups are at high risk of dropping out of school

prior to high school graduation and of eventual incarceration (Portes & Fernández-Kelly,

2008), other groups seem to do quite well. Louie (2001) details how researchers have offered

cultural and structural explanations for why some groups of first- and second-generation

children tend to outperform others on various measures of school success. Cultural

explanations attribute group differences in academic achievement to cultural schemas that

align with the expectations of Western schooling and access to economic and social capital.

Structural theories ascribe group differences to the education level and socioeconomic status

of those who immigrate relative to those who remain in the home country as well as the

political climate and mainstream attitude toward various racial, ethnic, and national groups

in the receiving country. However, neither cultural nor structural theories alone can fully

account for achievement patterns among cultural communities.

Second-generation children who achieve academic success are more likely to live

with two parents who have higher levels of education and higher socioeconomic status than

other immigrants on average (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-

Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). While many new immigrants are received by robust co-ethnic

support networks that provide valuable social capital, others are relatively isolated in their

new context (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Moreover,

policies related to family reunification contribute to varying family patterns among

immigrant households. And the likelihood that immigrant children will grow up in poverty is

"double that of native-born families in the United States" (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008, p. 9).

According to Portes and Fernández-Kelly (2008), the material gap between the "haves" and

the "have nots" continues to widen as,

> Today's second generation faces a labor market decisively transformed by
> deindustrialization, with opportunities becoming increasingly bifurcated
> between the low-paid manual jobs accessed by first-generation migrants and
> occupations in the high-paid service sector requiring an advanced education.
> (pp. 15-16)

The Role of Socioeconomic Status

Many immigrant families in the U.S. face a "triple threat" of an unfamiliar culture and

language, possible racism, and, quite frequently, poverty (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, &

Todorova, 2008). Currently there is a broad base of research with data either related to

underprivileged, underserved immigrant populations (i.e. Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Moll, 1992;)

or comparing two socioeconomic levels within the same ethnic group (i.e. Lareau, 2000;

Louie, 2001). However, aside from a handful of studies regarding high-status immigrant

families in Canada (i.e., Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 2008; Ley, 2010; Waters, 2003, 2005), it is much more difficult to locate research disentangling race, socioeconomic status, and family immigration history and exploring how these variables may separately impact how students and their families interact with schools.

  Low SES Families. Educational researchers have offered multiple explanations to explain the persistence achievement gaps between groups based on race, ethnicity, culture, language, and socioeconomic status (SES) (Coleman, et al., 1966; Ogbu, 1978; O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). Because immigrants and native-born minorities are more likely than European Americans to live below the poverty line, race, culture, and class have become inextricably linked in public perception (Gorski, 2008). From this convergence of demographic characteristics and patterns of low achievement, a "culture of poverty" model has emerged (Payne, 2005). The culture of poverty theory centers on the notion that the families of children in poverty, who often happened to be children of color, embody pathological deficiencies in cognition, behavior, and language that lead to a generation cycle of stagnation in the lower class (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). Furthermore, a culture of poverty model includes the notion that "poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education." (Gorski, 2008, p. 33). The natural conclusion of this model is that certain groups are virtually uneducable due to their linguistic and material deficits, seen as products of cultural and moral failings.

  In educational research, if not in general society, essentializing and unhelpful views of children in poverty have fallen by the wayside in recent decades. Researchers such as Delgado-Gaitan (1992), Delpit (1988), Moll (1992), and Oakes and Rogers (2007) have noted the many overlapping factors that may limit the achievement of poor and working-class

immigrant children, while Carter (2006), Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier (2001),

Valencia and Black (2002) and many others have provided evidence that, regardless or race,

ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or cultural background, parents overwhelmingly value

education for their children. These authors have emphasized an additive or strengths-based

approach to educating immigrant children in American schools. Drawing on the idea of social

capital, Moll writes:

> In contrast to many classrooms, households…are always connected to other
> households and institutions through diverse social networks. For families
> with limited incomes, these networks can be a matter of survival… (p. 21)

High SES Families. Academic success has been correlated with parent education

levels, employment and family structure (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

And in contrast to the deeply held American belief in meritocracy – the value that every

person has an equal opportunity at success if only he or she works hard enough – a major

variable related to students' ultimate academic achievement is socioeconomic status.

According to Weis (2010), "the production of broad structure can never be understood with

sole reference to the poor and working class or, in the instance of the United States, people

of color" (p. ix). It is only in relation to the "haves" that the "have nots" exist. Not only does a

lack of capital place a student at a disadvantage relative to the institutional norms and

expectations of public elementary schools, an abundance of capital gives some students a

distinct edge.

Lareau (1987, 2000) has written extensively about the role of SES in majority

European American communities. According to Lareau's seminal work on class, capital, and

advantage (2000), upper class parents tend to view direct involvement in their children's

formal education not just as an expected part of the role of a parent, but as an entitlement.

Specifically, Lareau has shown that parents of middle-class status have greater access to information and are more involved in managing children's day-to-day educational activities than their working-class contemporaries. The later works of Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) as well as Lareau (2011) have further shown that socioeconomic status has a greater influence than race on the ways that parents will maneuver in order to secure advantages for their children. When families are of relatively equal standing in terms of class, "strategies for interacting with institutions that were exhibited by middle-class Black families were extremely similar, and in many ways indistinguishable, from those of their White counterparts" (Horvat, et al., 2003, p. 342).

In affluent communities, the phenomenon of "too much" parent involvement has been documented in instances where, to the frequent dismay of school employees, parents with high socioeconomic status demand the rights to secure what they perceive as the most desirable teachers, programs, and resources for their children (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Brantlinger, 2003; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Yonezawa, 1997). Deemed "helicopter parents" in popular culture due to their tendency to hover closely around their children, these parents assert themselves as partners in their children's education, intervene and involve themselves more frequently and in more diverse ways than those of lower socioeconomic status, and are often hyper-vigilant and critical of school practices (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Lareau, 2000). Because of this level of access and involvement, higher SES parents are able to secure the most advantageous teachers, programs, and placements for their children, thereby reproducing social structures across class lines. As Lareau (1987) writes:

> The level of parental involvement is linked to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yields in American society. By definition, the educational status and material resources of parents increase with social class. (p. 81)

High SES Immigrant Families. Whereas immigrant parents may feel disconnected

from their children's schools, highly educated, affluent parents do not hesitate to claim space

in what they describe as "their" schools. Parents of high socioeconomic status are

comfortable initiating contact with teachers, asking questions, and taking action on behalf of

their children, even when their wishes conflict with educators' (Lewis & Forman, 2002).

However, there is currently very little research on professional immigrant families who have

settled in affluent public school communities and the ways in which these families'

involvement in their children's education resembles that of underprivileged immigrant

populations and/or that of non-immigrant families of high socioeconomic status. Horvat,

Weininger, and Lareau (2003) call for researchers to investigate the ways that immigrant

families may differ in the ways they draw upon social capital based on their socioeconomic

status. And as Louie (2008) writes:

> In order to understand why members of any group parent as they do…we
> should consider such factors as the social class background of parents…In the
> case of immigrants, we should consider the kinds of education parents carry
> with them from their homelands. (p. 257)

A notable study on the dual effects of class and immigrant status on the way parents

navigate public schools is Louie's (2001) research on the ways in which East Asian immigrant

children in New York benefit from economic and ethnic resources to which other groups do

not have access. Louie's work details the experiences of middle- and working-class Chinese

immigrants. Because of immigration policies, those moving from China to the United States

are likely to have middle-class socioeconomic status and therefore have the surplus

economic resources to pay for "extras" such as tutoring or private school tuition. But even

those Chinese immigrant parents from a working-class background are able to tap into a rich

"ethnic economy" – an information network of co-ethnic peers with a focus on how to gain

admission into the "best" schools (Louie, 2001). With these structural supports in place, the children of Asian immigrants may have less opportunity to fail than their Latino peers despite equally high aspirations among both groups of parents. In contrast, Southeast Asian groups, such as Hmong and Cambodians, who lack the economic and social resources of Chinese communities, tend to have academic struggles similar to those of Latino immigrant students (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

A handful of studies have focused on highly educated East Asian immigrant families in Canada (i.e. Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 2008; Ley, 2010; Waters, 2003, 2005) and the United States (i.e. Ong, 1992, 1999). These "flexible immigrants" are described by Ong (1999) as elite business leaders from Hong Kong and Mainland China who view geographic and national boundaries as minor obstacles in their quest to "accumulate capital and power." A side benefit to this international lifestyle is the opportunity to enroll school age children in American elementary and high schools. Because getting into a university depends up on a highly competitive test-based college admission system in Hong Kong, the children of flexible immigrants have a much greater opportunity to attend prestigious western universities (Waters, 2003, 2005). Upon returning to Hong Kong, these young adults are then desirable employees due to their "fluency in the English language as well as less obvious qualities, such as confidence, sociability, cosmopolitanism and possession of valuable social capital" (Waters, 2005, p. 363). However, privileged east Asian immigrant parents, despite their material resources and education, have reported facing stereotyping, racism, and a sense of diminished status and prestige as part of living in the west (Ong, 1992). To compensate for this loss of status, as Louie (2001) noted, immigrants from China and Hong Kong build (or enter preexisting) social and cultural networks to boost their power and access (Ong, 1992)

and often look to their children to overcome social barriers through academic and job

success (Louie, 2001).

Parent and Teacher Schemas

> Like the fish that is unaware of water until it has left the water, people often
> take their own community's ways of doing things for granted. (Rogoff, 2003,
> p. 13)

Within the ecology and culture of the American public school, there exist norms and

values inherent in every educational and social activity and interaction (Weisner, 2002).

Mainstream, middle-class European American cultural norms have become institutionalized

in public schools and, consequently, are taken for granted as the "right" ways of supporting

children's learning. Immigrant children and those raised in non-mainstream cultural

communities may be used to different modes of communication, structures for learning, and

tacit standards for child behavior (Rogoff, 2003). Lack of familiarity with mainstream

American cultural routines, coupled with accented or not-yet-fluent command of the English

language, frequently results in immigrant children and families being viewed by even well

meaning educators and peers from a deficiency perspective (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Ladson-

Billings, 2006). Furthermore, immigrant parents may not become involved in their children's

education in ways that are typically valued in the United States. Therefore, a common

misconception among educators is that some groups of immigrants have a cultural

predisposition to not "care" as much as other groups about their children's education

(Delgado-Gaitin, 1992; Gorski, 2008; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). However, as

Weisner (1998, 2002) would point out, this mismatch between the ways immigrant parents

and teachers operationalize parent involvement highlights how schemas differ based on an

ecocultural context.

Hopes and Promises: Schemas Regarding Aspirations and Expectations. At any

point in time, parents will have certain aspirations and expectations for their children's

educational future. As defined by Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001),

aspirations refers to "the educational level [parents] hope their child attains" while

expectations refers to the "level the child is realistically expected to attain" (p. 548). Parents'

aspirations and expectations for a child are shaped by a family's ecocultural positioning.

Parents draw upon their schemas for the purpose and trajectory of education when

articulating their hopes and promises for their children's future. Although aspirations and

expectations do not guarantee that the child will achieve accordingly, there is evidence that

aspirations and expectations, whether they are high or low, can function as a sort of "self-

fulfilling prophecy," compelling students to live up to their parents' vision (Fuligni, 1997;

Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Jeynes, 2005). But aspirations and expectations are not fixed –

they can be adjusted upward or downward over time based on the experiences families have

with actual success or failure in school (Goldenberg, et al., 2001). A popular assumption

among the general public and some education professionals is that parents' aspirations and

expectations for their children can be predicted based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic

status, or culture. For example, the "model minority" myth purports that "Asian American

children of immigrants are disproportionately high achievers in school because of their

parents' belief in the importance of education" (Louie, 2008, p. 257). The stereotype of Asian

immigrant parents' high aspirations and expectations is often contrasted other immigrant

groups who, out of supposed ignorance or even outright defiance, are said to have "low

aspirations and expectations for their children because of ambivalent attitudes about the

benefits of formal education" (Goldenberg, et al., 2001, p. 548). As explained by Gonzalez, et

al. (1995):

> Rather than focusing on the knowledge these students bring to school and
> using it as a foundation for learning, the emphasis has been on what these
> students lack in terms of the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned
> by the schools. This emphasis on 'disadvantages' has provided justification
> for lowered expectations in school and inaccurate portrayals of the children
> and their families. (p. 445)

But contrary to these popular beliefs, research has shown that immigrant parents,

regardless of their ethnicity, national origin, educational level, or socioeconomic status, come

to the United State with high aspirations and expectations for their children's education

attainment (Fuligni, 1997; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). As Goldenberg, et

al. write:

> At their child's entry into kindergarten, almost all [Latino immigrant] parents
> expressed a belief that doing well in school increases the likelihood of
> children's getting a good job and making more money; somewhat less so,
> parents saw educational attainment as linked to future happiness and
> satisfaction in life. (p. 564)

And Fuligni (1997) found that immigrant students from Latino, East Asian, Filipino, and

European backgrounds all believed that their parents "placed great expectations on their

performance and held high aspirations for their eventual educational attainment" (p. 361).

Furthermore, whether they are first generation (born outside the U.S.), second generation

(born in the U.S.), or 1.5 generation (emigrated to the U.S. before or during the elementary

school years), children often feel a sense of obligation to repay their parents for the sacrifices

of immigration. By achieving in school and attaining a respectable career, these children feel

that they can make up for the confusion, racism, family separation, and downward career

mobility that their parents most likely endured when they chose to establish roots in a new

country (Louie, 2001; Fuligni & Fuligni, 2007). Gonzalez, et al. (1995) explain that poor,

migrant Latino parents often have not received comprehensive formal educations in their native countries. They are frequently motivated to move to U.S. in order to create more opportunity for their children. When asked, these parents express both a desire for their children to be academically successful along with a wish to be involved in their children's education.

And while there is evidence that immigrant children are driven to succeed academically, recent work suggests that the longer they are enrolled in American schools, the more these students' motivation and achievement decline, along with their parents expectations (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). As Goldenberg, et al. (2001) point out, Latino immigrant parents may adjust their expectations downward over time in the wake of their children's academic struggles as a result of structural and institutional practices that disadvantage non-mainstream students. Parents' beliefs that education is important for future success and individual aspirations for their own children, however, tend to remain high despite these struggles.

Offering Help: Schemas Regarding Parent Involvement. A parent's schema regarding home-school interaction will influence the ways in which parents describe their involvement in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) define parental involvement as encompassing a variety of home- and school-based behaviors, including:

…reviewing the child's work and monitoring child progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues with the child, providing enrichment activities pertinent to school success, and talking by phone with the teacher. They also include driving on a field trip, staffing a concession booth at school games, coming to school for scheduled conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school, serving on a parent-teacher advisory board. (p. 6)

Research has shown that parent involvement does make an impact on student outcomes across racial groups and socioeconomic categories, in both elementary and secondary education, and regardless of whether the parent involvement efforts were purely voluntary or were required to some degree by the school (Jeynes, 2005, 2007). By getting involved, parents not only help advance their children's development of academic skills, but may also enhance their children's intrinsic motivation for learning (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). However, of the long list provided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler above, isolating which components of parent involvement are the most beneficial is somewhat problematic. According to Jeynes (2005), the most influential parent practice is a rather general one: parent expectations, or "The degree to which a student's parents held high expectations of the student's promise of achieving at high levels" (p. 246). In this same study, reading with children on a regular basis also correlated with higher academic outcomes, however other specific activities such as regularly checking homework and volunteering in the classroom did not have as much of an impact. On the other hand, some research has suggested that the relatively low effects of direct involvement practices may be partially attributed to related variables, such as low-achieving students requesting more homework assistance than their proficient peers, or poor program design, implementation, and timing (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). And still other work (Pomerantz, et al., 2007) has concluded that school-based forms of involvement such as attending parent-

teacher conferences and volunteering the classroom actually have more consistently positive

effects than home-based habits. Pomerantz, et al. (2007) go on to theorize that there are

multiple interrelated values and assumptions embodied by both parents and children that

would affect the quality of both at-home and in-school involvement practices, concluding

that:

> Parents' involvement may be particularly beneficial for children when it is
> autonomy supportive, process focused, characterized by positive affect, or
> accompanied by positive beliefs. However, parents' involvement may have
> costs for children if it is controlling, person focused, characterized by
> negative affect, or accompanied by negative beliefs. (p. 388)

Assumptions about parent involvement reveal parents' and teachers' underlying

ecocultural schemas and the activities that parents and teachers define as involvement are

guided by these schemas. While school and home can come together in ways that lead to

positive gains in student self-efficacy, motivation, and achievement, mismatched parent

involvement schemas may lead to confusion, conflict, and power struggles. Regardless of

ethnicity, level of education, or socioeconomic status, parents who emigrate to the United

States tend to have high aspirations for their children and place a great deal of value on

education, perhaps even more so than their American-born peers (Fuligni, 1997). However,

belief in education as a source of betterment does not always translate into obvious parent

involvement in ways that are valued by educational institutions, and the schemas of low-

income, ethnic minority, and immigrant families tend to be misaligned with the expectations

of teachers and other school employees (Lareau, 1987, 2000). Fuligni and Fuligni (2007) sum

up this challenge for foreign-born students and their parents: "A mismatch between

immigrants' beliefs about education and the mainstream educational system in the United

States may contribute to a lack of integration of immigrant parents in to the educational experiences of their children" (p. 240).

In spite of having high aspirations and expectations for their children, immigrant families often do not conceptualize education or operationalize parent involvement in the same ways as the employees of mainstream American public schools. As a result, immigrant parents frequently end up feeling disengaged from their children's education, unsure about how to access programs or voice concerns. As Fuligni and Fuligni (2007) state:

> Cultural variation in beliefs about how children learn and the role of the parent in educating children may reduce the likelihood of immigrant parents engaging in activities that may be common among middle-income U.S. families of European background. (p. 239)

A school's definition of parent involvement may not include the ways in which non-mainstream or immigrant families structure their involvement. Because cultural communities have different assumptions about the appropriate roles of teachers and parents, families are sometimes labeled by educators as uninvolved or uninterested in their children's education. According to Lareau (1987, 2000), parents with low levels of income, education, and job status are less likely to participate in their children's education in the ways that teachers believe most helpful, such as helping with homework and attending school events. Teachers and other school employees, in turn, are likely to interpret parents' low participation as indicative of a lack of interest in or valuing of formal education. Epstein (1995) identifies six levels of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating. Parents with low incomes and low levels of education often describe their involvement role as what Epstein calls "parenting"– they discipline their children, dress them, feed them, and take care of their emotional needs, trusting in the school to attend to the academics. But for some immigrant families, "parenting" means

instilling a strong work ethic and sense of respect for authority (López, 2001). This interpretation of what it means to be an involved parent would differ from that of most mainstream American educators, but that does not make it any less intrinsically valuable. The five children in López's study were highly successful in school even though their parents were not involved in ways traditionally recognized by American schools.

A disconnect between a mainstream schema of parent involvement and the sets of rules internalized by immigrant parents may cause tension. But In order to build the kind of social capital that leads to parent efficacy and student achievement (Warren, 2005), it is important that educators "seek to make meaningful connections with parents even though parental involvement may come in different forms" (Diamond, 2008, p. 256). Co-constructing an understanding of parent involvement between home and school requires fostering an "ecology of parent engagement" (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Engaging immigrant families begins when school employees reject a deficit view of the background knowledge, language skills, or resources that a family does not have and instead recognize that immigrant children and parents possess rich "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) across a wide range of content areas. A school that fosters an ecology of parent engagement values school-based practices and assets as well as community-based forms of capital. As teachers begin to respect and welcome the inclusion of families' funds of knowledge into the classroom, there develops a mutual trust between school and home (Gonzalez, et al., 1995). Engaged parents are then positioned to mediate between the school and the community in order to support their children's academic growth (Barton, et al., 2004). When school employees welcome and invite parents as collaborators and mediators,

a community's funds of knowledge may merge with typical school structures and practices in order to create a positive, fulfilling environment for learning.

Summary

There exists a literature base that informs us about immigrant families' high aspirations and expectations for their children upon moving to the United States (Fuligni, 1997; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). We also know that parents born outside the U.S. often do not become involved in their children's education in ways typically expected or valued by teachers, such as volunteering in the classroom or helping with nightly homework (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). At the same time, parents with high levels of education and social status tend to overtly demand what they perceive as the most advantageous placements for their children, such as honors-level classes or the most experienced teachers (Brantlinger, 2003; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Yonezawa, 1997). However, we have very little information about what happens when these two "types" of parents are combined – that is, when the child of a highly educated, professional immigrant parent enters the American school system. Thus, the research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What are elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
2. What ecocultural factors shape elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
3. In what ways do schemas about education influence the interactions between highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school teachers?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This is a mixed-methods study of the schemas guiding interactions between teachers in a small, high-achieving, upper-middle-class public school district and students' parents or guardians. The overarching goal of this study was to examine how elementary school teachers in a small, suburban, upper-middle class public school district and educated, professional immigrant parents of those teachers' students define their roles and one another's roles and responsibilities in the effort to achieve positive student outcomes, both academic and social-emotional. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
2. What ecocultural factors shape elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
3. In what ways do schemas about education influence the interactions between highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school teachers?

In order to provide the most complete possible answers to these questions, this study was conducted using a mix of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Numerical analyses, including frequencies, averages, and means, were used to establish patterns in the data. Then, an ethnographic approach was used to develop and illustrate the meaning embedded in participants' words. As Weisner (1997) explains, ethnography positions the researcher as a learner, seeking to describe and make sense of a culture. According to Weisner, "ethnography's comparative advantage in the social sciences begins with this insistence on being there in the local culture, embedded in relationships in a human community, and therefore forced to make explicit the usually implicit prior schemas guiding our work" (p. 181). In particular, adds Erickson (1973), ethnography is a powerful method for

studying educational contexts. Similar to anthropological fieldwork, educational

ethnographers embed themselves in an environment and construct meaning from

participants' words and actions. And yet, cautions Erickson, educational ethnography

requires a researcher raised in the institution of American schools to pay extra attention to

her or his own assumptions while out in the field:

> Upon entering a non-Western society the fieldworker doesn't have to do this. Everything is unfamiliar and much is strange. But when describing institutions of his own society, the ethnographer must adopt the critical stance of the philosopher, continually questioning the grounds of the conventional, examining the 'obvious' which is so taken-for-granted by cultural 'insiders' that is becomes invisible to them. (p. 16)

If falls upon the educational ethnographer to "make the familiar strange." (Erickson,

1973, p. 16). As an ethnography, this study was designed to elicit participants' education-

related schemas to interpret these schemas in comparison to one another and in comparison

to broader institutional and societal schemas. In this way, participants' description of their

actions (the emic) and researcher's interpretation of participants' words and actions (the

etic) can come together to create a rich description of the way a community creates meaning

(Erickson, 1977; Glesne, 2011).

Research Design

This study was designed to include two distinct phases, the first targeting a broad,

diverse sample, and the second honing in on a small, targeted group of parents and teachers.

During Phase One, an online questionnaire was used to gather data on parents' and

educators' beliefs about, expectations of, and experience with American public elementary

schools. The questionnaire's closed-ended items were quantitatively analyzed for descriptive

characteristics while the open-ended questionnaire items were both quantitatively and

qualitatively analyzed through a process of coding for patterns related to the research

questions. Ten highly educated immigrant parents who responded to the Phase One

questionnaire invitation also agreed to participate in Phase Two of the study. Nine of these

parents' corresponding classroom teachers also agreed to participate in Phase Two, as did

one school principal. Aside from the school principal, who was only interviewed once, all

parent and teacher participants were interviewed twice – once before parent-teacher

conferences and once after conferences. The interviews were audio recorded and

transcribed, and the transcripts were qualitatively analyzed through a process of coding for

patterns related to the research questions.

 Context. The setting for this study was the Birdsong School District (in order to

maintain study participants' anonymity, the district name, school names, and all participants'

names have been replaced with pseudonyms), a kindergarten through sixth grade public

school district located in a small, affluent suburban enclave in southern California. This study

took place during the fall of 2012, during which time Birdsong's enrollment included students

from transitional kindergarten (TK - those turning five years old during the month of

November) through sixth grade. According to the California Department of Education (2013),

there were a total of 4,384 students enrolled in Birdsong's eight schools during the 2012-

2013 school year. Enrollment at these eight schools varied in size from just over 400 to nearly

800 students. As shown in Table 1, Birdsong's ethnic composition was primarily White (58%)

and Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino (29%). A further breakdown of the Asian, Pacific

Islander, and Filipino students by national origin, gathered from Birdsongs internal data

management system, Illuminate Education (2012), shows a range of diversity within that

subgroup (Table 2).

Table 1. Ethnic distribution of students enrolled in the Birdsong District during the 2012-2013 school year.

	White	Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Two or More Races	Black / African American	American Indian or Alaska Native
Number	2544	1281	340	182	30	7
Percentage of Total Student Population	58%	29%	8%	4%	1%	<1%

Table 2. Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino students enrolled in the Birdsong District during the 2012-2013 school year.

	Chinese	Korean	Asian Indian	Japanese	Vietnamese	Filipino	Other Asian and Pacific Islander
Number of Students	633	275	250	83	77	64	62
Percentage of Total Student Population	14%	6%	6%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Percentage of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino population	44%	19%	17%	6%	5%	4%	4%

In the fall of 2012, according to Illuminate Education (2012), 8% of Birdsong students were classified as English Learners (EL) and 28% of students' parents reported a primary home language other than English (Table 3). Only 3% of Birdsong students were eligible for free- or reduced-price meals and 94% of parents reported having graduated college or beyond (Illuminate, 2012). Overall, Birdsong parents, including immigrants, had higher socioeconomic status and more education that the average parent of a California public school student (Table 3). As shown in Table 4, 92% of Birdsong's teachers during the 2010-2011 school year were White, as compared to 67% of California's teachers. In addition, during the 2010-2011 school year, Birdsong teachers had an average of 12 years of experience as compared to an average of 14 years of experience statewide (California Department of Education, 2012a).

Table 3. Language, income, and education demographics for students enrolled in the Birdsong District and California public schools.

	Classified as English Language Learner	Primary Language Other Than English	Eligibility for free or reduced-price meals[a]	At least one parent has a post-secondary degree
Birdsong	8%	28%	3%	94%
California	23%[b]	37%[b]	55%[c]	33%[d]

[a]In order to qualify for free meals during the 2012-2013 school year, a family of four in California must have a combined income of $29,965 or below. (California Department of Education, 2012b). [b]Data is from the 2010-2011 school year, kindergarten through grade 12 (California Department of Education, 2012c). [c]Data is from the 2011-2012 school year, kindergarten through grade 12 (California Department of Education, 2012a). [d]Data is from the 2011-2012 school year, Grade 2 through grade 11 (California Department of Education, 2012a).

Table 4. Ethnic distribution of the Birdsong District and California public school teachers.

	White	Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	African American	Two or More Races	Not Reported
Birdsong	92%	6%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
California	67%	7%	17%	1%	4%	1%	3%

Note. At the time of this study, the most recent data available regarding teacher demographics at both the district and state levels was from the 2010-2011 school year (California Department of Education, 2012a. These percentages may have changed slightly by the time data collection began in September, 2012.

Positionality. As the sole researcher, it is important to consider my position in the institutional setting of this study as well as in a broader societal context. I am a European-American woman, 37 years old at the start of data collection. At the time of this study, I had sixteen years of teaching experience, making me a fairly typical California and Birdsong District elementary school teacher. I had been employed in the Birdsong School District for thirteen years. After teaching for eleven years at two Birdsong schools, I had been for two years classified as a teacher on special assignment (TOSA). I did not have a classroom assignment during this time. Instead, I was working as the district's Lead Teacher in Curriculum and Instruction. In this role, I mentored Birdsong's first- and second-year teachers as they cleared their California multiple-subject teaching credentials by documenting evidence of having met the state induction standards. I also led district curriculum

committees and assisted in organizing professional development workshops for the Birdsong teachers. As Birdsong's sole TOSA, I had access to the teachers, staff, and parents of all eight schools, but was not an "insider" at any one school. My positionality was beneficial, as it allowed me to recruit participants across the district and to be relatively objective in analyzing their questionnaire and interview data.

As a teacher on special assignment, I was not a part of the district administration. I remained on a certificated teaching contract and was a part of the teacher's union. However, I suspect that because of my position of leadership, there were some teachers who may not have felt comfortable sharing their experiences and beliefs with me, despite my official status and my reassurances that my role as a researcher was completely separate from my role as Lead Teacher. At the same time, parent participants may have had reservations about sharing their true impressions with a teacher, even though I was not the teacher of their children in particular. As a European-American mid-career teacher, I was particularly cognizant throughout the planning of this study, gathering of data, and analysis and interpretation, of constantly checking my own schema, assumptions, and tendency to identify with the teacher participants. The diverse parents I interviewed were of great help in "making the familiar strange" as they contrasted their experiences in the United States with the various educational practices with which they were accustomed.

Finally, in order to avoid any conflicts of interest, I planned this study with the intention of excluding from the interview phase the first- and second-year teachers who I was mentoring. I further planned to exclude any of the small number of teachers with whom I had close, personal friendships. However, none of the teachers who I had planned to exclude had a highly educated immigrant parent from their class volunteer to participate in

Phase Two, so I there was no need to explicitly exclude any participants based on a potential conflict of interest.

Participants

Study participants included both parents and teachers from the Birdsong School District. Data was drawn from two samples: a broad sample consisting of those who replied to an anonymous questionnaire that was open to all parents and self-contained classroom teachers in the district; and a narrow sample of eleven immigrant parents and their children's classroom teachers. All participants were adults over 18 years of age and participation was completely voluntary.

Phase One.

Teachers. In August of 2012, all Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 6 self-contained classroom teachers employed by the Birdsong School District (n=111) were invited to become participants in this study by voluntarily and anonymously completing a brief questionnaire (Appendix A). At the end of the questionnaire, teachers were able to express their willingness to participate in the second phase of the study by agreeing to be interviewed and allowing a questionnaire invitation to be distributed to the parents of their students.

Parents. During the 2012-2013 school year, there were 4,384 students enrolled in the Birdsong School District (California Department of Education, 2013). Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 6 students' parents were invited to become participants by voluntarily and anonymously completing a brief questionnaire (Appendix B), provided that these students' teachers had given their consent. Approximately 570 parents were invited to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by a wide range of parents,

including those who were born, raised, and educated in the United States, those who had

immigrated to the U.S. permanently, and those who planned to reside in the United States

for a finite period due to a short-term work or study agreement. At the end of the

questionnaire, parents were able express their willingness to participate in the second phase

of the study by consenting to be interviewed. Unfortunately, the scale of this study did not

allow for written materials to be translated into the varied languages represented in the

Birdsong or for translators to be present during interviews. Phase One parent questionnaires

were written in English, and when parents were invited to participate in Phase Two of the

study, it was stipulated that the interviews would also be conducted in English.

Phase Two.

Parents. Of the approximately 570 parents who were invited to complete the

questionnaire, 49 parents chose to participate. From those 49 parents who completed the

questionnaire and gave their consent to participate in Phase Two, a narrower sample of ten

immigrant parents was drawn. Parents qualifying for Phase Two were those who indicated

on the questionnaire that they were born outside the United States and had continued their

education beyond high school. Nine of the ten Phase Two parent participants had at least a

post-secondary degree, and one parent was in the final stages of completing a Paralegal

certification.

Teachers. The ten classroom teachers of the parents selected for interviews were

invited to participate in Phase Two. Nine of them agreed to participate.

Procedures

From broad teacher and parent samples, both quantitative and qualitative data were

gathered using questionnaires (Appendices A and B) during Phase One of this study. The

parent questionnaire also served as a screening tool for the purpose of drawing a narrower sample of parent participants for Phase Two. Phase Two parent participants were selected using immigration history and education level as criteria. The teachers of these parent participants' children were then invited to become participants in Phase Two as well.

Recruitment Procedures.

Phase One. In late August, 2012, an email was sent out to all Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 6 self-contained, regular education classroom teachers in the Birdsong School District (n=111). The email included information about this study's background, purpose, and voluntary nature and contained an invitation to participate in a brief, anonymous online questionnaire (Appendix A). Participants were able to indicate during the questionnaire whether they were willing to participate in Phase Two of the study. Teachers who wished to participate in the interview portion of the study were asked to give consent before submitting personal information for screening and basic contact information. Those who did not wish to participate in the interview completed the online questionnaire anonymously. In order to minimize selection bias, descriptive characteristics of the teachers who completed the questionnaire were compared to averages district-wide.

The distribution of teacher participants across Birdsong's eight schools was fairly closely matched to the percentage of classroom teachers at each site (Table 5). One notable exception was the low response rate of Shearwater Elementary. Only two of the 34 teachers working at Shearwater completed the questionnaire after multiple invitations to do so. This may have been due to a particularly busy fall trimester for the staff of Shearwater, with the introduction of a progressive new methodology for teaching math coupled with the implementation of a student laptop program in many classrooms.

Overall, however, the demographics of teacher participants closely matched the population of Birdsong School District teachers, with the vast majority of respondents being White (Table 6). According to the California Department of Education (2012a), Birdsong teachers employed during the 2010-2011 school year had an average of 11.9 years of experience in the classroom. Those participating in this study ranged in experience as shown in Table 7, with the majority of teachers falling in the 11-15 Years range.

Table 5. Percentage of teacher participants and Birdsong teachers employed at each school.

	Oriole	Sandpiper	Quail	Condor	Sparrow	Shearwater	Pelican	Lark	Not Reported
Study Participants	7%	10%	14%	7%	10%	5%	14%	19%	14%
Birdsong Teachers	9%	11%	10%	8%	19%	16%	11%	16%	0%

Table 6. Ethnic distribution of teacher participants and Birdsong teachers.

	White	Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	African American	Two or More Races	Not Reported
Study Participants	81%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	14%
Birdsong Teachers	92%	6%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%

Note. At the time of this study, the most recent data available regarding teacher demographics at the district level was from the 2010-2011 school year (California Department of Education, 2012a). These percentages may have changed slightly by the time data collection began in September, 2012.

Table 7. Years of teaching experience of teacher participants.

1-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-10 Years	11-15 Years	16-20 Years	21-30 Years	> 30 Years	Not Reported
2.5%	10%	20%	35%	15%	12.5%	2.5%	2.5%

On September 9, 2012, the teachers who had agreed to participate in Phase Two of this study (n=24) were asked to forward an email to the parents of their students and to distribute an identical letter in students' weekly folders of work and news from school. As with the email to teachers, this email and identical letter both contained information about

the study's background, purpose, and voluntary nature and included a link to a brief, anonymous online questionnaire (Appendix B). Once again, participants were able to indicate during the questionnaire whether they would like to participate in Phase Two of the study. Parents who wished to participate in the interview portion of the study were asked to give consent before submitting personal information for screening and basic contact information. Those who did not wish to participate in the interview were able to complete the online questionnaire anonymously.

By September 16, 2012, only 21 parents had completed the questionnaire. In order to increase the low response rate, the 24 teachers who had agreed to participate in Phase Two were asked to email a reminder to the parents of their students and to send home a paper version of the questionnaire in the next weekly student folder. As of September 20, 2012, the number of parents who had completed the questionnaire had risen to 42, of which 7 were paper and 35 were submitted electronically. However, only four of the 42 respondents had agreed to continue with Phase Two and met the criteria for Phase Two parent participants: born outside the United States and had continued their education beyond high school. Therefore, a targeted recruitment period took place from September 23 to October 5, 2012, when a snowball sampling strategy was employed. First, all eight school-site principals were contacted by email and asked to identify potential parent participants based on the Phase Two parent selection criteria. In response, two principals directly recruited parent participants and one principal supplied the contact information for an English as a Foreign Language instructor who taught classes for adults on the school campus two mornings a week. This English instructor was able to recruit two additional parent participants. Together with the four who had originally agreed through the questionnaire to

participate in Phase Two, there were now seven Phase Two parent participants. Finally, all

seven of these parent participants were asked whether they had friends who were born

outside the United States and might be interested in participating in the study. One

participant invited four other mothers to attend the interview we had scheduled. These

recruitment efforts brought the final total of parent participants to 49, with ten agreeing to

participate in Phase 2. As with teacher participants, in order to minimize selection bias,

descriptive characteristics of parent participants were compared to averages district-wide.

Because parents were recruited for this study through teachers who had already

agreed to participate and through snowball sampling methods, the distribution of parent

participants was not even across the school sites (Table 8). However, the ethnicity of parent

questionnaire participants closely matched the overall population of Birdsong School District

students, with most respondents identifying themselves as White, Asian, Pacific Islander, or

Filipino (Table 9).

Table 8. Percentage of parent participants and student distribution across Birdsong schools.

	Oriole	Sandpiper	Quail	Condor	Sparrow	Shearwater	Pelican	Lark
Study Participants	8%	8%	14%	2%	8%	2%	22%	36%
Student Distribution	10%	10%	10%	7%	18%	17%	11%	16%

Table 9. Ethnic distribution of parent participants and Birdsong students.

	White	Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Two or More Races	African American	American Indian or Alaska Native
Study Participants	60%	36%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Student Distribution	58%	29%	8%	4%	1%	<1%

Phase Two. When Phase One of this study ended on October 5, 2012, a total of 42

teacher participants and 49 parent participants had completed the online questionnaire.

Phase Two parent participants were selected from the broader sample of those who

completed the online questionnaire and agreed to participate in Phase Two. As this study's

research questions focused on the education-related schemas of educated, professional

immigrant parents, the ten parents selected for Phase Two were all immigrants with high

levels of education and/or professional careers (Table 10). Nine of the Phase Two parent

participants were mothers and one was a father. All Phase Two parent participants were

born and at least partially educated outside the United States and had completed at least

some college. In fact, all participants excepting one possessed a postsecondary degree. The

lone parent who did not possess a degree reported that she was nearly finished with a

paralegal certification at the time of the study.

Table 10. Descriptive characteristics of Phase Two parent participants.

Participant	Gender	Age	Home Country	Years in U.S.	Education Level
Jiao	Female	37	China	<1	Professional Certification
Yun	Female	40	China	<1	Bachelor's Degree
Wen	Female	34	China	<1	Bachelor's Degree
Fei Yen	Female	32	China	<1	Master's Degree
Hazel	Female	35	China	6-10	Bachelor's Degree
James	Male	44	Taiwan	>30	Master's Degree
Ellen	Female	45	Hong Kong	20 (+10 in Canada)	Master's Degree
Lisa	Female	36	Korea	>30	Bachelor's Degree
Isold	Female	36	Northern Europe	<1	Bachelor's Degree
Bianca	Female	38	South Africa	11-15	Some College

The classroom teachers of the Phase Two parent participants' children were then asked if they were still willing to continue with Phase Two of the study as well. Nine teachers agreed to be a part of Phase Two. These nine teachers represented a range of ages, levels of experience, and grade levels (Table 11). All nine teachers were women and eight described themselves as White while one self-identified as Hispanic. Seven of the nine teachers were clustered at one school, as this was the school where the English as a Foreign Language instructor was instrumental in recruiting parent participants. Due to this clustering and based upon the comments of some of the Phase Two parent and teacher interview participants, Cathryn, the principal of Lark School was also recruited to be interviewed in December, 2012.

Table 11. Descriptive characteristics of Phase Two teacher participants.

Participant	School	Age	Grade Taught	Years of Experience	Ethnicity
Toni	Sandpiper	44	K	11-15	White
Leah	Lark	44	K	16-20	White
Lydia	Lark	31	1	7-10	White
Vivian	Lark	48	2	11-15	White
Stacey	Lark	32	3	7-10	White
Robin	Lark	30	5	4-6	White
Iris	Lark	41	5	11-15	Hispanic
Meredith	Lark	53	6	11-15	White
Meagan	Oriole	32	6	7-10	White

Upon confirmation of the Phase Two participants, those parents and teachers who had indicated in their questionnaires that they were willing to be interviewed but were not ultimately selected received a brief email thanking them for their interest and informing them that they would not be a part of the interview phase.

Data Collection Procedures. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the course of this study, although there was a heavier emphasis on the qualitative. Data were collected during an approximately 16-week period, beginning in late August 2012 and ending in mid-December 2012. During Phase One, teacher and parent participants voluntarily and anonymously completed a brief questionnaire. Then, teacher and parent participants were interviewed during Phase Two.

Phase One. All classroom teachers in the Birdsong District received an email invitation and link to anonymously complete a brief online questionnaire within a two-week window. The teacher questionnaire items, listed in Appendix A, included both closed-ended questions regarding teacher demographics and experience as well as open-ended questions about teachers' interactions with parents. Teachers who agreed to continue with Phase Two of this study were asked to forward to the parents and guardians of their students an invitation to anonymously complete a brief online parent questionnaire within a two-week window. Similar to the teacher questionnaire, parent questionnaire items (Appendix B) included both closed-ended demographics questions and open-ended questions about interactions with teachers. Prior to data collection, parent and teacher questionnaire items were piloted with individuals who were not eligible for participation in this study and refined based on those individuals' feedback. Parent and teacher participants answered basic demographic and background questions on the online questionnaire. These data were analyzed for relevant descriptive characteristics including the means and frequencies of responses related to age, gender, ethnicity, country of origin, and level of parent education. Qualitative responses to open-ended questionnaire items were categorically analyzed for broad themes in answer to the research questions. Selected categories of open-ended

questionnaire responses were analyzed in order to compare means between groups.

Because the initial response rate to the parent questionnaire was low, paper invitations and

questionnaires were distributed to parents as a follow up and additional parent participants

were recruited through snowball sampling.

Phase Two. Phase Two of this study consisted of initial interviews lasting from 25

minutes to three hours with each participant early in the fall trimester of the Birdsong

academic year and follow-up interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes following parent-

teacher conference week at the end of the fall trimester. Parent interview participants were

selected on the basis of their immigration history and education level. Concurrently,

individual interviews with the classroom teachers of parent participants' children were also

conducted.

Initial interviews with parents and teachers took place between October 11, 2012

and November 2, 2012 and follow-up interviews were conducted between November 9 and

November 30, 2012. On December 19, 2012, the principal of Lark School was interviewed.

All participants were interviewed individually by the researcher, with two exceptions. When

scheduling initial interviews, parent participant Yun asked if she might bring a friend who was

a Lark School parent and who, like her, was from China. I agreed, but was surprised when I

arrived at the scheduled time to find that Yun had in fact brought four friends! So, Yun, Wen,

Jiao, Fei Yen, and Hazel were initially interviewed together in a group format. I then

scheduled individual follow-up interviews with these five participants, but once more Yun,

Wen, and Jiao surprised me by arriving together. They explained that they were not

confident enough with their English to be interviewed alone and felt more comfortable being

able to draw upon one another as resources for translating words or ideas from Mandarin to

English. Both of these group interviews were conducted in English, but the participants would periodically seek clarification in Mandarin before answering questions. These were not extended discussions, but were rather one- or two-word "check ins," which I surmised were instances of asking for the translation of a particular concept before answering me in English.

All interviews were semi-structured, following Bernard's (1988) advice to "get an informant on to a topic of interest and get out of the way. Let the informant provide information that he or she thinks is important" (p. 207). The predetermined interview questions, listed in Appendices C, D, and E, were designed to generate data in response to one or more research questions. However, the tone of each interview was conversational and each question and follow-up probe was used flexibly in order to keep the interview flowing naturally or to dig deeper about a particular issue or in relation to a research question. On the day following each interview, the researcher sent out a thank-you email inviting the participant to respond with any additional thoughts about the topics discussed. One parent participant sent an email following the first interview in order to share additional thoughts. Following the second interview, one teacher participant telephoned the researcher in order to share the details of what she felt was an additional memorable interaction with a student's parent.

Following each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher using InqScribe (2012). Interviews with parents who were not fluent in English were transcribed within 48 hours of their completion, in order to help ensure that the participants' words would be preserved as accurately as possible. The remainder of the interviews were transcribed within seven days of their completion. During the transcription process, grammatical errors such as missing articles and subject-verb disagreement that were clearly

made due to partial fluency with the English language were corrected. In addition, most speech disfluencies and hesitations such as uh, um, and you know were eliminated. Although participants' words were not always transcribed verbatim, every effort was made to preserve the meaning and intent of their utterances. For example the spoken sentence:

> Um, for me to, um my husband transfer to [this city] come here and then and all of umm my family member saying um if we like to stay here and when we like to stay here and then we will stay here uh stay here longer. And if we don't like, we'll go back.

was transcribed as:

> For me too, my husband transferred to [this city] and all of my family members say that if we like to stay here, then we will stay here longer. If we don't like it, we will go back.

Data Analysis

This mixed-methods study includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data gathered from a large-scale questionnaire and in-depth interviews with a narrower range of participants. Ninety-two parents and teachers participated in this study by filling out questionnaires related to their schemas about education. Of those 92, nine teachers and ten parents were selected for in-depth interviews. One additional participant, a school principal, was also recruited and interviewed without having participated in the questionnaire.

Parent and teacher participants answered basic demographic and background questions on an online questionnaire. This data was descriptively analyzed to examine how groups differ from the school district averages, giving more information about the generalizability of results. Open-ended questionnaire items were also quantitatively coded using an emergent coding process and univariate analysis was used to identify significant group differences. Finally, responses to open-ended questionnaire items were qualitatively analyzed using both a priori and emergent codes in order to answer the research questions.

Interview participants addressed the same topics as they had in the questionnaires, but with much greater scope and depth than a short questionnaire response would prompt. Each interview was transcribed within seven days of completion, and those with parents who had limited verbal English proficiency were transcribed within 48 hours in order to preserve their words as effectively as possible. Analysis of interview transcripts began upon completion of the first transcript. Data collection and analysis were ongoing, recursive processes, a cycle of inquiry following Maxwell's (2005) admonition that, "collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions…are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others" (p. 2). The process of analyzing interview data began as soon as the first interview was complete. The researcher wrote a reflection following each interview in order to capture initial thoughts about impressions, tone, and topical themes that stood out. This noticing and memoing of emergent themes continued during the transcription process. Interview transcripts were categorically analyzed using both a priori and emergent codes. Each transcript was reviewed two to three times. The first pass through the data was focused on deductively applying a priori codes and inductively identifying additional emergent codes. This first pass through the data also included open coding for substantive categories. As described by Maxwell (2005), substantive categories "are primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants' concepts and beliefs…Substantive categories are often inductively developed through a close 'open coding' of the data" (p. 97). Substantive codes are necessarily emergent, as they are based on the participants' words, which cannot be predicted in advance.

Following the hand coding of the first three to five interview transcripts, the second round of analysis began, this time using the data-analysis software Dedoose (2012), which was developed by ecocultural theorists and is designed to support mixed-methods research. Dedoose was used to apply a priori and emergent substantive categories that had been discovered through open coding. During these two analyses of each transcript, a priori and emergent codes eventually enveloped, fractured, and merged with organizational categories to more precisely describe analytic themes. A third coding pass through transcripts was then needed to apply the newly reorganized categories based on theoretical constructs. Gradually, a consistent set of categories emerged, for example "communication," and "cultural information." Codes within these categories were applied to the data, and then were recombined under broad theoretical generalizations. Table 12 gives a sample of how codes were categorized and generalized, and a complete listing of codes and their corresponding descriptions is included in Appendix F. Descriptions of participants' schemas related to education, presented in Chapter 4, were constructed based on analysis of the data through coding patterns and themes and interpretation through an ecocultural lens.

Table 12. Sample codes organized by category and theoretical generalizations.

Theoretical Generalization	Category	Sample Codes
School Schemas	Schemas about teaching and learning	Mastery of skills
		Critical thinking
	Schemas about parent role	Parent as role model
		Involvement at school
Communication	Parent-teacher interactions	Answer parent questions
		Communicate with teacher
Information Seeking and Finding	Relationships	Language barrier
		Desire for social capital
	Culture	Heritage language
		Global perspective

CHAPTER 4: SCHEMAS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the schemas that guide teachers and highly educated, professional immigrant parents as they help children learn in a high-income, high-achieving public school district. This chapter addresses the first two of this study's three research questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
2. What ecocultural factors shape elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?

The third research question, regarding the relationship between schemas and the interactions between highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school teachers, will be addressed in Chapter 5. Using a mixed-methods approach, questionnaire and interview data were analyzed for a priori and emergent themes related to parent and teacher participants' beliefs about teaching and learning. An analytical framework based on activity theory (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999) and ecocultural theory (Weisner, 1998; Weisner, 2002) will be used to describe the findings.

According to Weisner (1998), when engaging in everyday activities and routines, people's behaviors are guided by internal scripts or schemas that are "shaped by ecology and broader socio-historical circumstances, the structural constraints of our social address, class, and other features" (p. 70). Analysis of questionnaires and transcripts of interviews with study participants led to the first major finding of this study: that participants' schemas about teaching and learning were associated with their cultural backgrounds and length of

time living in the United States. This chapter will detail the similarities and differences between participants' schemas about teaching and learning and how these schemas connected to participants' ecological contexts. Although there are various possible ways of categorizing schemas about teaching and learning, participants' schemas will be organized and defined by their relative placement on a descriptive matrix based on three overlapping constructs: traditional/progressive; effort/innate ability; and mind-oriented/virtue-oriented.

Traditional/Progressive Schemas of Teaching and Learning

Beliefs about education in the United States have long been described by the degree to which they more closely match a "traditional" or "progressive" stance. In their study of American pre-service teachers, Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James, (2002) classified their participants' beliefs as transmissive, progressive, or eclectic. Transmissive, or traditional teachers were said to "prefer lecture, demonstration, and recitation as teaching methods," and "advocate curricula that are subject centered, organized and sequenced, and focused on mastery of specific skills and content" (p. 124). On the other hand, according to Minor, et al., in a progressive classroom, "teachers tend to present curricula holistically and in an open-ended manner to help students develop problem-solving skills" and "students of progressive educators tend to engage in active learning, both independently and cooperatively, which focuses on solving learner-generated problems" (p. 124). Interestingly, the majority of teachers studied by Minor, et al. held eclectic or moderate beliefs about education, rather than being wholly aligned with either a transmissive or progressive approach.

When comparing classrooms in China, Sargent (2009) applied a traditional/progressive descriptive model, summing up the key differences in this way:

Traditional education has been characterized as fostering docility, receptivity, and obedience in students, depending heavily on texts and

teachers, and making use of drill. Progressive education, on the other hand, is used to describe methods that foster the development of self-expression, the cultivation of individuality, learning through experience, purposeful activity, acquaintance with a changing world, and the development of thinking. (p. 638)

And according to Li (2006), Chinese immigrant parents in Canadian schools may be used to what Western educators deem a traditional education system: skill-based and teacher-led, with an emphasis on accuracy and following a prescribed sequence of learning.

Were all the participants of this study educated in the United States and of similar cultural backgrounds, one might argue that the traditional/progressive dichotomy would be adequate to analyze and categorize parent and teacher schemas about teaching and learning. However, since one of the goals of this study was to interpret participants' schemas through a cultural lens, and since eight out of the ten parents interviewed for this study were at least partially educated in east Asian nations, it was important to look beyond a one-dimensional traditional/progressive interpretation. Two alternative models of teaching and learning and their relationships to cultural communities are detailed next.

Effort/Innate Ability - Schemas about the Nature of Learning

Several researchers have documented cultural differences in the ways Asian and American parents define the nature of learning (Li, 2012; Stevenson, Lee, & Stigler, 1986; Stevenson, et al., 1990; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1995). When reflecting on a child's performance in school, a parent tends to attribute the child's success or failure to some combination of the child's ability and the amount of effort the child has expended. A student might do well on a test or get a good grade because he or she is smart, good at that subject, or because he or she studied hard and did all of the required homework. According to Stevenson, et al.'s (1990) study of mothers in three countries, "the emphasis given to effort

relative to ability is much higher among Japanese and Chinese mothers than among American mothers" (p. 60). American mothers in Stevenson, et al.'s study also identified effort as an important factor in student outcomes, but they assigned a much higher relative value to ability than did the mothers from the Asian countries. When mothers from all three nations were isolated for high levels of education, the Chinese mothers attributed success to "studying hard, having a good teacher, and having a good home environment," (p. 62) while mothers from the United States emphasized intelligence and luck. Therefore, one way to add complexity to a continuum contrasting traditional/progressive schemas of teaching and learning is by layering on beliefs about whether effort or innate ability is the greater determinant of a student's academic outcomes.

Mind-Oriented and Virtue-Oriented Schemas of Teaching and Learning

Finally, the traditional/progressive and effort/innate ability schemas are complemented by a framework that draws upon Confucian and Western traditions of education, a third interpretive construct which is helpful for organizing the beliefs of the participants of this study. The work of Li (2012) categorizes schemas of teaching and learning into mind-oriented and virtue-oriented models. Li traces modern eastern and western cultural schemas of teaching and learning back to early Chinese and Greek civilizations, detailing characteristics of learners and of learning institutions that can be directly related to deeply ingrained beliefs and traditions. In the Western-Influenced, mind-oriented model, the purpose of learning is to cultivate the individual mind. Students are, from the very beginning, encouraged to think critically, to interpret and make personal sense of content, to contribute to collaborative discussions, and to innovate. According to Li, "the inquiring and examining spirit in any form (soft or confrontational) is highly prized." (p. 32). A Confucian-Influenced,

virtue-oriented model of teaching and learning also values the building of knowledge, however the process of learning is deeply tied to moral development. A student has a responsibility to patiently and respectfully receive and master basic information before being considered ready to contribute his or her own impressions. The achievement of levels of mastery and the resulting access to the construction of knowledge is considered a lifelong process and gaining knowledge is inseparable from growing as a person. Confucian texts, Li writes, "unambiguously and unanimously emphasize the cultivation of one's morals and one's self, which must precede inquiry into the world" (p. 54) and, "one's moral self-perfection and skill acquisition are not conceptualized as separate or sequential processes. They take place simultaneously from early on and continue throughout life" (p. 91).

Layered Schemas about Teaching and Learning

While analyzing the data generated for this study, it became clear that no single dichotomous model could account for the complex, shifting schemas that emerged from participants' words. Therefore the research on traditional and progressive schemas, beliefs about effort and innate ability, and mind-oriented and virtue-oriented models of teaching and learning were combined in order to facilitate analysis. Figure 4 depicts an interpretive continuum of schemas about how school can best achieve student success. On one end is a schema about teaching and learning that emphasizes receiving and mastering presented material. Through discipline and systematic effort, a student in this model will learn academic skills in a sequential manner and will enjoy the satisfaction of learning as a product of hard work. The teacher is the expert and the student is expected to respectfully listen and learn. On the other end of the continuum is a schema about teaching and learning that emphasizes interpreting and transcending presented material. This model integrates critical

thinking, collaboration, and inquiry. The teacher is a facilitator and the student may question or disagree with the teacher's perspective as the student seeks to construct his or her own understanding of the world. For ease of discussion, the two ends of the continuum have been labeled "Content Classic" and "Knowledge Construction."

Content Classic Schema   Knowledge Construction Schema

Receiving and Mastering Content	←→	Interpreting and Transcending Material
Teacher as Expert	←→	Teacher as Facilitator
Sequential Academic Skills	←→	Open-Ended Critical Thinking
Effort and Practice	←→	Innate Ability
Discipline and Obedience	←→	Collaboration and Inquiry
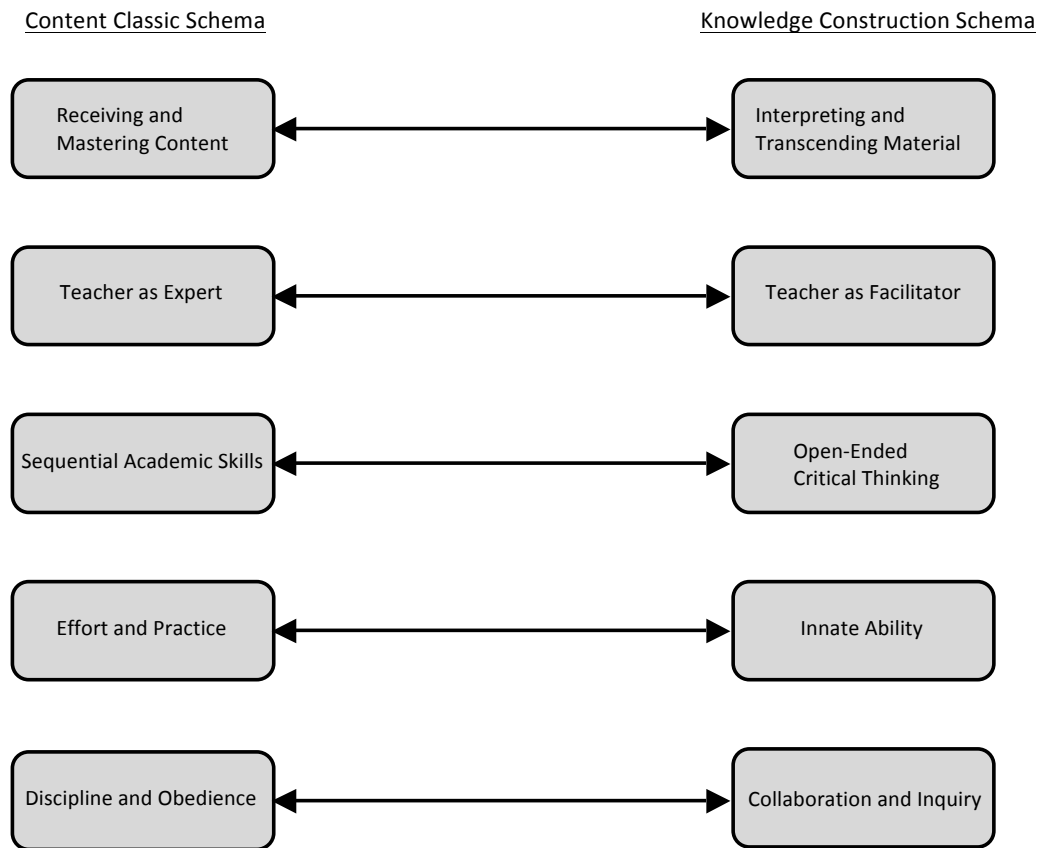
Figure 4. Continuum of schemas about teaching and learning.

This is not to imply that elements of both a Content Classic Schema and a Knowledge Construction Schema cannot coexist within one system or one classroom. Furthermore, it was expected that the education-related schemas of individual study participants would encompass aspects of both a Content Classic Schema and a Knowledge Construction Schema.

And finally, any individual's schema is in a continual state of evolution based on experiences and interactions with others within a sociocultural context (Rogoff, 2003). Each snapshot of a participant's schema is merely that - a representation of that participant's thoughts at one moment in time. Keeping in mind the elusiveness and fluidity of schemas regarding education, the following sections detail Birdsong District teacher and parent schemas related to the main goals to which schools should be attending and how the two groups of participants believed schools could best achieve those goals. Furthermore, the remainder of this chapter will describe the patterns that emerged from the data where participants' schemas connected to cultural background and number of years in the United States. Finally, some of the relationships between parent and educator schemas about the purpose of education and the interactions between these two groups will be explored in greater detail.

Table 13 displays how a selection of codes were categorized based on their relationship to either a Content Classic Schema or a Knowledge Construction Schema. These codes were applied to recurring topics and themes across parent and teacher participants' questionnaires, interview transcripts, and follow-up email communications where applicable. Each code listed in the Content Classic column corresponds with the matched code in the Knowledge Construction column. So, for example, "Mastery of skills" and "Critical thinking" would be at opposite ends of the continuum of schemas pictured in Figure 4. These codes range from academic elements of teaching and learning at the top to social and affective elements of a school and classroom culture that would match the corresponding schema at the bottom.

Table 13. Codes organized according to their relationship to schemas about teaching and learning.

	Content Classic Schema	Knowledge Construction Schema
Academic <---->Social/Affective	• Mastery of skills	• Critical thinking
	• Fixed curriculum	• Exploration, questioning, inquiry
	• Ranking, competition (+)	• Ranking, competition (-)
	• U.S. too easy	• Parent expectations too high/pressure to achieve
	• Academic expectations	• Happy in school
	• College/career aspirations	• Let kids be kids
	• Effort/work hard	• Best of ability
	• Unsatisfied with progress	• Happy with progress
	• Point out weaknesses	• Protect self-esteem
	• Discipline	• Intrinsic motivation/engagement
	• Respect for teacher	• Speaking/participating in class

Commonalities Among Participants' Schemas about Teaching and Learning

School is an Institution for Preparing Children for the Future. According to Li (2012),

"A very well-established theoretical outlook among contemporary Western or Asian

researchers alike is that school learning has one overwhelming purpose: providing an

individual with knowledge and skills to make a good living and increasing opportunities for

social mobility" (p. 68). Based on the analysis of questionnaire responses and interview

transcripts, it was clear that Birdsong School District parents and educators who participated

in this study agreed that schools are important institutions for preparing children for the

future. Every participant had something to say about school in relation to positive students

outcomes. For example, one teacher questionnaire participant wrote:

> I want my students to feel valued, comfortable and cared for in my
> classroom so they can take risks and enjoy learning. I want to provide the
> environment, instruction, and tools that will help them develop critical
> thinking skills and meet their potential academically, emotionally, and
> socially. The ultimate goal is for students to develop the skills to be
> successful, informed, caring, involved citizens.

While a parent questionnaire respondent explained:

> [The purpose of kindergarten is] to get them prepared for 1st grade. That is
> their job. Beyond that...and I in fact have a teacher that does go
> beyond...they want my child to develop social skills, learn how to operate in
> a classroom environment, learn to respect authority and follow rules, and
> learn to LOVE to learn :)

For parents and teachers alike, whether they were primarily educated in the United States or in other nations, the schemas of all participants in this study included a belief that schools are a place for children to learn the necessary skills to become productive adults and successful human beings.

Social Development and Friendships. Another commonality among participants was that an important function of elementary school is for children to develop socially and maintain friendships. The majority of parent questionnaire participants (n=39, 62%) and teacher questionnaire participants (n=33, 73%) mentioned social development and friendships when discussing their beliefs about education. Additionally, all parent interview participants and nine out of ten educator interview participants discussed this topic as well. Toni, a kindergarten teacher, said the following about her experiences during parent-teacher conferences:

> Most of their questions are non-academic. It has to do with, is my child
> playing with anybody on the playground? Are they eating their lunch? Are
> they getting along with others? Those sort of things, you know, they worry
> about their babies.

Fei Yen, the mother of a kindergartner who, at the time of this study had been in the United States for less than a year, agreed with Toni: "I hope the teacher can say more things about the character - the friendship and these kind of things. They do not give the scores for his human relationships."

Academic Expectations and Mastery of Skills. A final theme that was mentioned by

all groups of participants was that school is a place for children to master skills and that

teachers have a responsibility for helping students learn academic content standards. While

only 55% of teacher questionnaire participants and 64% of parent questionnaire participants

discussed academic expectations when describing their beliefs about teaching and learning,

all teacher interview participants (n=10) and most parent interview participants (n=8, 80%)

talked about the importance of academics. Similarly, all parent interview participants (n=10)

and nearly all teacher interview participants (n=8, 80%) mentioned the mastery of skills as

part of their schema about teaching and learning. As one teacher questionnaire respondent

wrote, when asked about her goals for her students:

> There are a multitude of items, but foremost their academic progress laced
> with their social growth. The academics is a strong vehicle for the success
> that I believe many parents want which is for their child to go to college and
> continue to meet more interesting people that they may collaborate to
> change the world for the better.

While a parent questionnaire respondent had the following goals for his child:

> To learn how to read, write, and do math proficiently. I want him to excel in
> school so that he can attend college and possibly graduate school. For my
> student in particular, I hope he gets more practice with writing and reading
> comprehension.

Summary of Commonalities Among Participants' Schemas about Teaching and

Learning. As illustrated in Figure 3 (p. 6), parents and teachers share a goal of student

success, shown at the center of two intersecting activity systems (Engeström, 1999;

Engeström & Miettinen, 1999) – family and school. Parent and teacher participants

expressed common beliefs that schools are institutions to help prepare children for

successful futures, both through the development of academic skills and the fostering of

social skills and friendships. However, Ecocultural Theory (Weisner, 1998) explains that

although individuals' beliefs and behaviors may appear to be consistent on the surface, the underlying schemas that drive behaviors may influence the way individuals experience and interpret events. The sections that follow will detail how parent and teacher participants operated from ecoculturally-related assumptions (schemas) about teaching and learning. In addition, the association between participants' cultural educational backgrounds, length of time living in the United States and his or her schemas about teaching and learning will be explored in greater detail.

Differences Between Participants' Schemas about Teaching and Learning

While participants' talk about their schemas of teaching and learning revealed some similar goals and expectations, there were also key differences in espoused beliefs between groups of teachers and parents. In Figure 5, the 20 interview participants have been placed on a matrix of schemas about teaching and learning. The x-axis on this matrix represents the eleven codes related to a Content Classic Schema and the y-axis represents the eleven codes related to a Knowledge Construction Schema (Table 13). Each circle represents an individual parent participant and each triangle is an individual teacher participant. The matrix has been further divided into four quadrants. The quadrant lines were determined based on the mean application of Content Classic codes (m=6.75, range=8) and Knowledge Construction codes (m=6.3, range=9) across all twenty interview participants. Based on the application of codes across all interviews, follow-up phone calls, and follow-up emails, study participants in Quadrant A expressed a high number of beliefs related to a Knowledge Construction Schema and a low number of beliefs related to a Content Classic Schema. All participants in Quadrant A are teachers. Conversely, study participants in Quadrant D, which are all parents at least partially educated outside the United States, talked in ways that demonstrated a low number

of beliefs related to a Content Classic Schema and a high number of beliefs related to a

Knowledge Construction Schema.
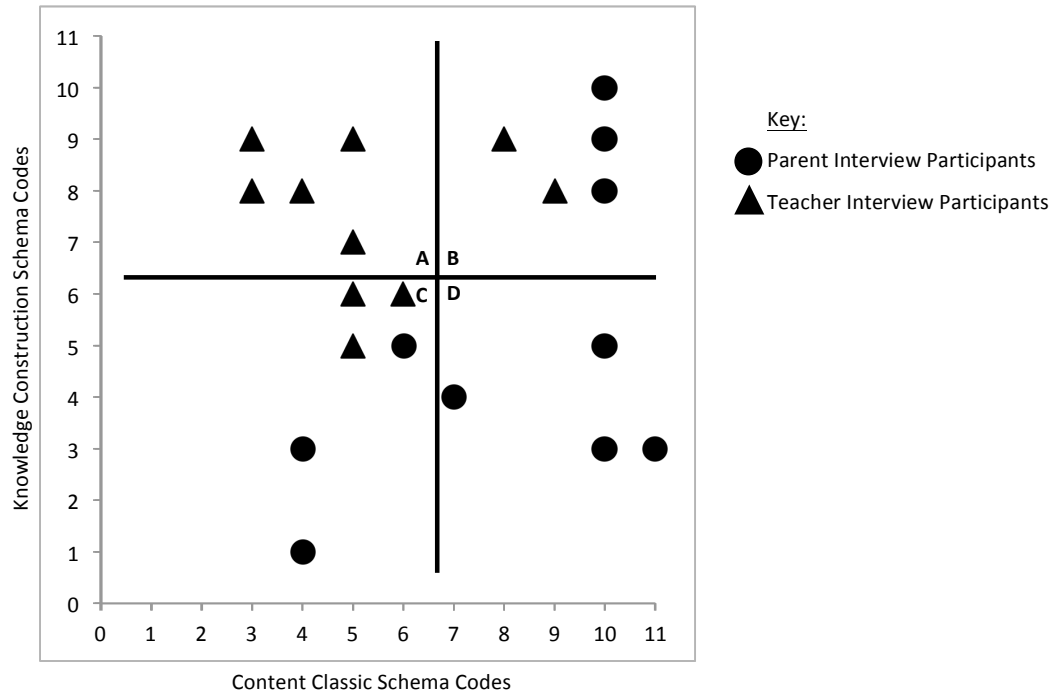
Figure 5. Matrix of participants' schemas about teaching and learning.

Teachers' Schemas about Teaching and Learning. Analysis of the responses of the

33 teacher questionnaire participants and ten educator interview participants revealed a

tendency to prioritize the descriptors of a Knowledge Construction Schema more highly than

those of a Content Classic Schema. The most commonly applied codes to teacher

questionnaires were "Protect self-esteem," applied to 82% of questionnaires, and "Intrinsic

motivation/engagement" applied to 73% of questionnaires. The content of teacher

questionnaire participants' responses further reinforced that they believed it was important

for students to feel positive about school and be intrinsically motivated. One teacher who

responded to the questionnaire discussed her beliefs about building positive self-esteem:

> Inside of my classroom, I work to create a supportive and productive learning
> environment for each child. My vision throughout the year is to offer every
> opportunity for the students to feel academically successful and to have this
> confidence reflected in their daily lives. I encourage students to be
> independent thinkers, to make mistakes and learn from them, and to ask
> questions. I make every effort to provide a learning environment that is
> motivating, safe, and fun!

And regarding intrinsic motivation, another questionnaire respondent wrote, ""I want my

students to love learning! I of course hope that they will master content standards, but I

want them to have fun while learning. I want my students to be problem solvers, critical

thinkers, and respectful citizens." Touching on both self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, yet

another teacher questionnaire participant summed up her schema of teaching and learning

in this way:

> My overall goal for my students is to create independence to think deeply
> about their world. In doing so, my hope is that they can find a comfortable
> place in it, to change it for the future generations that come to layer upon
> their experiences... When I think about what to teach I'm not just thinking
> about my grade I'm thinking about them as adults.

In addition to self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, a third important topic for

teachers was "Best of ability," which 61% of teacher questionnaire respondents mentioned.

In this way, teachers in the Birdsong District revealed schemas about learning that aligned

with the beliefs of American mothers documented by Stevenson, et al. (1990). While

teachers did not directly say that they believed student achievement in school was

determined more by intelligence than effort, they did tend to frame their own role as one of

helping children to maximize their innate abilities. When asked about their overall goals for

their students, teacher questionnaire participants responded with goals such as: "I want

them to reach their potential both academically and socially," and "I hope for each student
to reach his or her highest potential." These references to students meeting their potential
are congruent with a schema that attributes student achievement to innate ability.

For each of the 22 codes related to schemas of teaching and learning, Table 14 lists
the most frequently occurring among teacher interview participants as well as the average
number of applications of each code across all teacher interview participants. The most
commonly applied codes, highlighted on the table, will be further expanded up with
qualitative data.

Table 14. Content Classic and Knowledge Construction code frequency across teacher interview
participants.

	Code	Percentage of Teachers	Average Frequency Per Teacher
Content Classic Codes	Academic expectations	100	4.1
	Point out weaknesses	90	3.1
	Mastery of skills	80	1.3
	Effort/work hard	50	0.8
	College/career aspirations	50	0.7
	Unsatisfied with progress	50	0.7
	Discipline	40	0.6
	Fixed curriculum	30	0.7
	Respect for teacher	30	0.5
	U.S. too easy	10	0.2
	Ranking, competition (+)	0	0
Knowledge Construction Codes	Parent expectations too high/pressure to achieve	100	6.9
	Best of ability	100	6.9
	Protect self-esteem	100	3.8
	Exploration, questioning, inquiry	90	3
	Critical thinking	90	2.6
	Happy in school	70	1.8
	Intrinsic motivation/engagement	60	0.7
	Ranking, competition (-)	50	1.2
	Let kids be kids	40	1.4
	Speaking/participating in class	40	0.8
	Happy with progress	10	0.1

When discussing their beliefs about teaching and learning it was not a surprise that all teacher interview participants acknowledged the importance of ensuring that their students met state-defined educational content standards. It was, however, interesting to note the brevity of teachers' references to traditional academic content areas. In their interviews, teachers referred to academic expectations and mastery of standards as an obvious part of their job, a topic not really needing expansion or elaboration. As Toni, a kindergarten teacher, explained, "My role as the teacher during class is to educate them on all the different content areas – science, social studies, math, reading, all that stuff." Leah, also a kindergarten teacher, said her priority was, "absolutely emphasizing reading, early literacy skills, obviously beginning math skills…" Fifth grade teacher Robin referenced content in this way: "I think that's our role as teachers - is to teach the content and to teach critical thinking."

The teacher interview participants tended to go into more detail about cognitive traits that could be connected with a progressive, innate-ability-based, mind-oriented schema of teaching and learning. These habits and traits, while not explicitly addressed in mandated academic standards, were pronounced by teachers to be at least as important as more traditionally defined curriculum. According to Cathryn, the school principal:

> We need to make sure kids meet or exceed standards, all of that. But, our job is more than that. I think our job is really to get our kids thinking and understanding in ways that we haven't had to do in the past or we should have been doing in the past but we haven't.

Cathryn's use of the phrase "all of that," demonstrated the understanding among educators that helping students meet benchmarks in traditionally-defined academic content was such a fundamental and obvious goal of schooling that it did not need to be explained or expanded upon. Cathryn then went on to detail what she meant by "thinking and understanding":

> These kids are going to have to think, they're going to have to talk, they're going to have to problem solve, they're going to have to create, they're going to have to work together. And it's that piece that is our responsibility- I believe - our responsibility over topics like the weather, the ocean, the history of [our city].

Contrasting content standards with real-life thinking skills, Cathryn went beyond the "obvious" responsibility of teachers to present content and made it clear that she believed a narrow definition of academics would not prepare children for success in their futures.

Birdsong District teachers working with a range of student developmental levels expressed ideas similar to Cathryn's about the skills children need to learn in school. During an interview, kindergarten teacher Toni explained her main goals for the school year:

> How do we learn and play together? How do we find out about things? And how can I be a friend to other people or to nature or to myself? So, those are pretty big questions, but that's what we're here for. We're learning how to take directions. We're learning how to work together. We're learning how to tolerate other and accept others. And, so really it's citizenship.

Stacey, who taught third grade, explained that, in addition to meeting content standards, her students "have to interact with each other, they have to learn how to interact and how to speak appropriately to one another. So I also believe that's my job, too – social interaction, teaching them how to communicate." And sixth grade teacher Meredith expressed a similar belief when she said: "I think it's important for us to emphasize the importance of learning, the importance of expanding your mind, taking in as much as you can. I think being organized, learning life skills are hugely important, especially at this age." Finally, Meagan, also a sixth grade teacher, explained:

> In addition to academics obviously – but I also think that teachers should also teach the character traits and how it – what it means to be a good person… I think it's important that it's not just, like I said, it's not just us to teach them how to survive academically in the world. It's how to just have survival skills in general to function in our society. Yes, to be a successful personal all around. Well-rounded person.

These Birdsong educators expressed beliefs that while teaching the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and mathematics was important, it was also critical for educators to provide opportunities for their students to hone what Meagan termed "survival skills" such as collaboration, communication, responsibility, and problem-solving which would help students not only master academic content but were important skills in and of themselves for future success.

The educators of the Birdsong District were adamant that content knowledge alone would not ensure a child's future success. Instead, their schema encompassed a broad conceptualization of academics that included thinking habits and non-cognitive traits such as curiosity and collaboration – tools they believed were critical for lifelong fulfillment and accomplishment. The Birdsong teacher schema about the teaching and learning can be summed up as one that emphasized habits of mind and character traits that educators believed would help students become productive and successful adult citizens of the world. While academics were mentioned as important, high self-esteem, a love of learning, and the ability to think and reason critically were given equal or greater weight when educators described what children should be learning at school.

These commonly understood and agreed-upon ideas about teaching and learning among educators participating in this study were no doubt related to two ecocultural factors. First, since Birdsong was a high-achieving public school district with annual standardized academic test scores that consistently far exceeded state and national averages, teachers and principals were able to look beyond skills and standards, whereas teachers in districts with more high-stakes pressure to improve their test scores would likely place more emphasis on academic content when describing the purpose of education. The second

ecocultural factor that may help account for consistencies in teachers' educational schemas was that all educators participating in this study were born and educated in the United States and had similar educational backgrounds and professional status. It may be the case that their remarkably similar schemas about the purpose of school were representative of a larger American schema of school as a place where children should learn to be independent thinkers. The possible relationship of both of these ecocultural factors to schemas of teaching and learning were further demonstrated in American parent participants' espoused beliefs about education.

   Parents' Schemas about Teaching and Learning. While the teachers participating in this study were quite homogenous in the ways they schematized teaching and learning, parent participants' schemas about education tended to differ in relation to their cultural backgrounds and experiences with education in the United States. For the parent questionnaire participants who were born, raised and educated in the United States (n=24), the most commonly applied codes related to schemas of teaching and learning were the same as those for teacher questionnaire participants: "Protect self-esteem" (67%), and "Intrinsic motivation/engagement" (63%). Like the teachers, parent participants educated in America believed that school should help their children become critical thinkers while simultaneously building confidence and making learning interesting and fun. When asked to explain their goals for their children's education, non-immigrant parent questionnaire participants gave responses such as, "Equip him to go into life with a sense of wonder, curiosity, and with keen critical thinking skills," "I would like my daughter to become a confident, independent learner," and "Love of learning, creativity, asking good questions, working as a team, critically think, academics, reading, writing, math." These responses

prioritized self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and critical thinking above the mastery of academic skills. Just as with the Birdsong teachers, American parents' emphasis on these Knowledge Construction components may have been related to the consistent high achievement of their children, negating the need to worry about basic skills as well as the existence of a larger cultural schema that prizes high self-esteem and the ability to think independently.

However, among parents who were not solely educated in the United States, different schemas emerged about teaching and learning. Table 15 lists the codes related to teaching and learning that most frequently occurred among parent interview participants and the average number of applications of each code across all parent interview participants. Whereas teacher participants and parents who had been educated in the United States espoused schemas that foregrounded self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and students working to the best of their ability, parent participants who were at least partially educated in Asian nations were much more likely to focus on discipline and student effort and hard work, consistent with the findings of Stevenson, et al. (1990). Of the ten parent interview participants, eight mentioned effort and hard work while only two talked about children working to the best of their ability. In contrast, five of ten educators interviewed discussed effort and all ten mentioned children working to the best of their ability.

Table 15. Content Classic and Knowledge Construction code frequency across parent interview participants.

	Code	Percentage of Parents	Average Frequency Per Parent
Content Classic Codes	Mastery of skills	100	2.9
	College/career aspirations	90	2.4
	Academic expectations	80	4.2
	Discipline	80	2
	Effort/hard work	80	1.8
	Unsatisfied with progress	70	3.7
	Fixed curriculum	70	3
	U.S. too easy	70	2.4
	Respect for teacher	70	2
	Point out weaknesses	60	1.9
	Ranking, competition (+)	50	1.1
Knowledge Construction Codes	Happy in school	80	2.9
	Parent expectations too high/Pressure to achieve	70	1.5
	Happy with progress	70	2
	Protect self-esteem	60	3.3
	Exploration, questioning, inquiry	60	1.5
	Intrinsic motivation/engagement	50	1.5
	Critical thinking	30	0.5
	Let kids be kids	30	0.3
	Best of ability	20	1.3
	Ranking, competition (-)	20	0.4
	Speaking/participating in class	20	0.3

Figure 5 displays parent and teacher participants on a matrix based on the application of codes related to Content Classic and Knowledge Construction Schemas. Figure 6 eliminates the teacher participants in order to highlight the placement of the ten parent interview participants, all of whom were at least partially educated outside the U.S. Each circle has been labeled with the parent's name and number of years living in the United States at the time of this study.
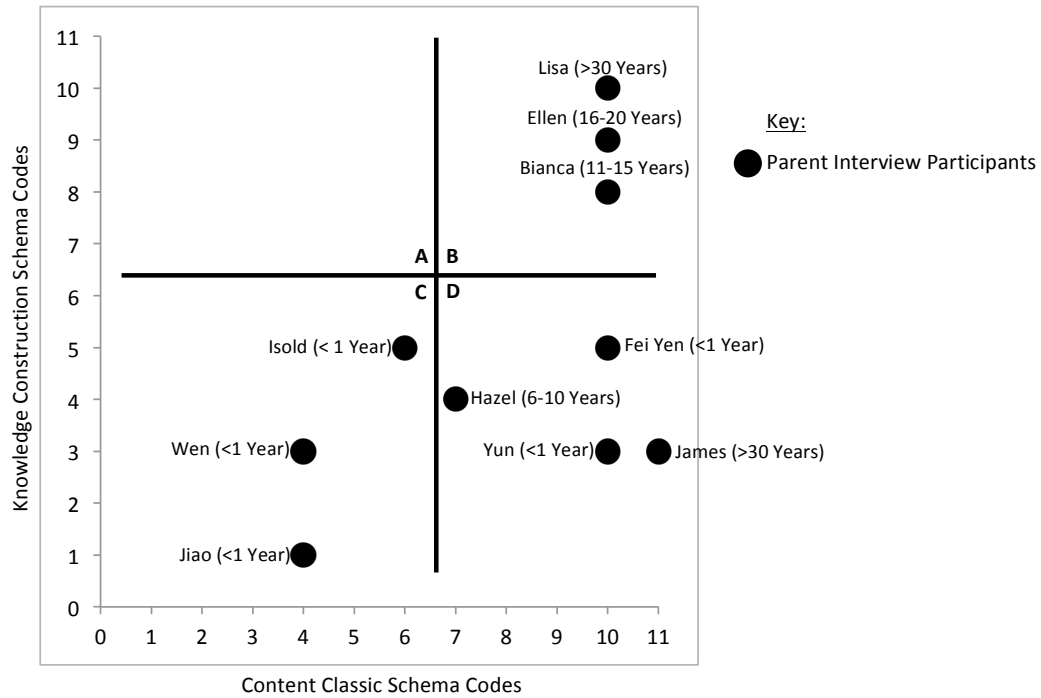
Figure 6. Matrix of parent participants' schemas about teaching and learning.

For most of the ten parents depicted in Figure 6, the placement of his or her schema about teaching and learning corresponded with his or her cultural background as well as length of time living in the United States. One notable outlier was James who, despite having lived in the United States for more than 30 years at the time of this study, espoused a schema of teaching and learning that contained more elements of a Content Classic schema than a Knowledge Construction schema. It is important to note that because James was the only male interview participant, there may have been qualitative differences in his schema as compared to the other participants' schemas that were related to his gender.

Quadrant B: Hybrid of Content Classic and Knowledge Construction. In general, for those participants who were above the median on application of Content Classic codes, the

more recent the immigrant, the more he or she connected to the descriptors of a Knowledge

Construction Schema. The mothers in Quadrant B all espoused "hybrid" schemas about

teaching and learning. These three participants had been in the United States for a longer

period than most of their fellow parent participants and their schemas reflected a blend of

the two ways of conceptualizing teaching and learning. Ellen and Lisa were mothers who had

both experienced education in Eastern and Western societies. Ellen, the mother of a third

grader, spent her early years in Hong Kong and had been living first in Canada and then in the

United States for 20 years at the time of this study. Lisa, the mother of a fifth grader, was

educated both in Korea and the United States. Lisa and Ellen both would have liked to see

more rigorous academic standards in the Birdsong School District. In reference to a gap

between math expectations in Hong Kong and in the United States and Canada, Ellen

explained:

> Mathematics standards are much higher in Asia. They rely a lot more on rote
> memorization. And there's pros and cons to that as well. There is a lot more
> homework. It is a lot more rigorous compared to the American standards,
> without a doubt.

Ellen went on to say that she would, "definitely raise the math level over here." In addition to

addressing the higher academic standards in Hong Kong, Ellen also referred to the notion of

hard work and effort when she mentioned "rote memorization" and homework. While she

did not explicitly condone one system or the other, she did note that, in Asia, students are

expected to spend much more time practicing and mastering skills than are children in the

West.

Like Ellen, Lisa also noted the differences in academic expectations between the two

school systems with which she was familiar:

> Well, I can tell you that it's very different from schools in Korea than here. They cover… almost twice as many topics, subjects, from first grade. And here it's just reading, writing, and math, you know? Over there they start off with science and everything from the beginning. History, science, social studies, and all that.

Ellen and Lisa revealed that their desire for their respective daughters' academic success guided their process of choosing a home. Ellen described choosing to live in the Birdsong District because she knew it "had high, strong academic standards," and high standardized test scores. Lisa had consulted a "school rating website," noting that "school was of course a primary factor" in deciding where to live. However, despite having chosen what she believed was the best possible school district for her daughter, Lisa hinted at a greater societal concern when she wished that American culture included a greater emphasis on the importance of education. Lisa believed that her daughter and other school children received the message that, "graduating high school is your choice... even going to high school is your choice too." U.S. schools, Lisa explained, could benefit from being like Korean schools by increasing the "emphasis on the importance of education and that college is important."

In addition to their desire for strong traditional academics, both mothers went on to reflect that they, like the teacher participants and parents educated solely in the United States, valued the development of critical thinking skills in school. Summing up her observations about eastern and western education, Ellen said, "One is incredibly disciplined, very rigorous and whereas the North American standard's more based on critical thinking and allows the child to think independently. So, there's pros and cons to both sides." Ellen went on to explain that schools in Hong Kong are, "more rigorous initially, but the American style somehow translates to a more autonomous child, actually. A more autonomous being eventually that's able to analyze and think independently. And that's what I love about the

American education." She concluded that, "it's important out in the career field to be an

independent thinker and that's what America teaches you." In order to illustrate her desire

for her daughter to learn to think critically and independently, Lisa contrasted the discussion-

oriented reading program in which her daughter was participating at Lark School with the

more structured Korean style:

> They sit in a circle and it's almost like a book club. They discuss. I really like
> that idea, because it's more - everybody gets to participate and it's not so
> mundane and it's more creative ideas, exchange of ideas. That kind of thing
> doesn't happen over there. The teachers are like police officers - they're very
> authoritative and you do not, you know, it's not like that.

In contrast to a highly disciplined environment where "the teachers are like police

officers," Ellen and Lisa both felt strongly that school should be a place where children feel

encouraged, enjoy learning, and gain confidence. In Asian societies, said Ellen, the purpose of

school is to produce "disciplined individuals, but they're more followers," whereas

"Americans are creating a very self-reliant, independent child that is able to think on his or

her own terms without following, you know, just following the leader and not processing the

ideas and seeing if they actually make sense." Ultimately, said Ellen, "I don't really have any

goals, you know, major goals, because it's - to me, it's elementary school, you know? I want

her to have fun, I want her to enjoy learning." Lisa explained her goals for daughter's

elementary education as:

> Just [to] be confident and know that… she's intelligent and that she's learned
> a lot and that she's a good student - those types of things. Just confidence, I
> think. Because I think… one of the things about going to school and doing
> well, as well as you're - you feel you're doing well - I think it, more than just
> the learning aspect, it has… a big effect on confidence, overall. And I don't
> really ever want her to feel like, you know, 'I'm not smart enough' - that type
> of thing. So I just want her to… have confidence that she's a smart person.

As parents with diverse educational experiences, these two mothers clearly labeled what they found beneficial about the Asian style and the Western style. Ellen and Lisa both espoused a belief that while the development of core academic skills is an important part of education, school also should be a place where students develop independence, autonomy, and the ability to think critically. They appreciated that Birdsong schools were teaching their daughters to be confident, independent thinkers, but also valued traditional academic standards and high achievement.

Bianca hailed from South Africa and had lived in the U.S. for twelve years. In describing her expectations for her children's educational experiences, Bianca first reflected on her schooling in Johannesburg:

> They were very focused on the academics, you know, like I always found that we had a lot of work to do. Like, real academic work. You would get home and you'd have five or six subjects where you would do different things – geography, math, English, history.

Bianca's experiences in school included a sense that academic meant a lot of work and a variety of subjects. Structure and discipline were defining components of her years and school, and Bianca described her school day in terms of a rigid schedule:

> We each had a lesson plan for the day, so we knew it would be today English, math, history, geography, whatever. You know, the seven subjects. And in that hour, you would put away your stuff and start the next subject. And then you would get tons of homework to go with it.

However, Bianca went on to explain how her schema was continuing to evolve over time as she interacted with her children's school. She offered the following example of an experience while volunteering in her son's classroom:

> They were watching a Scholastic cartoon about a policeman and a dog. And I was like, is this what they do in school?... And here I'm watching my child watch a cartoon in the classroom and I'm like, well he could do that at home, you know, but I'm, so I'm like, okay, let's see how this goes. But, inside I'm

> boiling. I'm like, is this - this is top class education? … And then [the teacher] switched off the T.V. and then she started… talking to the children: 'If it was you, what choice would you have made? If it was a different animal, what do you think would have happened?' And I was like, it blew my mind, because she was actually making them think outside of the box. Like, giving a three-dimensional viewpoint. And I though wow, they're not just watching T.V. They're actually learning something, and learning to think.

On another occasion, Bianca recalled her son coming home having just learned even and odd numbers in school:

> And here he comes home and says, '…if they have a partner then they're even. If they have an odd then they don't have a partner.'…So I was impressed at how they taught it in a fun way… I realized you can have fun and learn.

Over time, Bianca came to understand that pedagogical practices in Birdsong, while unlike those she experienced as a child, were just as valid as more traditional methods. While her own schooling followed a more traditional model, Bianca was accepting of the progressive practices she noted in her son's classroom. She believed that her children's teachers were able to teach academic content while motivating the students by making learning fun. While Bianca conceded that although she didn't necessarily understand all of the techniques and strategies teachers were using, but that "whatever they're doing, they're doing right…definitely there's something very special going on in the school."

Quadrant C: Neither Content Classic nor Knowledge Construction. Only three of the ten parent interview participants were below the median for application of Content Classic codes: Wen, Jiao, and Isold. Wen and Jiao, both from China, were the two parent participants with the lowest level of fluency in English. Because they did not feel comfortable enough with their language skills to be interviewed individually, they participated in group interviews and tended to allow the more fluent participants to speak for them, leading to the low frequency of either Content Classic or Knowledge Construction codes. Qualitative analysis of

Wen's and Jiao's statements confirmed that their relatively low rate of talk compared to the

other interview participants appears to have skewed Wen's and Jiao's placement on the

matrix. Therefore, their beliefs about teaching and learning will be discussed in the next

section together with the parents placed in Quadrant D.

Isold, a northern European mother who had been in the United States for less than a

year, had a schema more similar to that of the interviewed teachers than her fellow

immigrant parents and, in fact, her placement on the matrix is the closest of all parent

interview participants to Quadrant A. Despite her relatively short time living in America, Isold

drew many parallels between educational approaches in her home country and the Birdsong

school district. The ways things were done in Birdsong were quite familiar to Isold because,

as she said, "I knew the school system in [Northern Europe] so well and I could tell right away

that this is very similar." Because she was an educator back home, Isold was comfortable

with the practices she saw being enacted at her daughter's school:

> Isold: If they are learning or something, that's - everything is very similar. But
> the math is - I think we are behind… in math. And science. But we all are -
> everything else is very similar.
> Interviewer: Okay, so the math… is behind?
> Isold: Yeah, I think maybe one year or one and a half or something like that.
> It's my feeling, I'm not - I haven't checked it out for real, but yeah.

In contrast to Ellen and Lisa, Isold believed that the math and science in the United States

were more advanced than they would be back in her home country. Isold did not, like her

fellow immigrant parent participants, critique the lack of academic rigor in American schools.

Explained Isold, "Of course I want them to do well at school. I don't want them to fail or

something. But I think there are more important things in life than your grades." Isold's goals

for her children included learning English, how to finish tasks, taking responsibility, and, as

she explained, to "learn to look at things with different eyes. Not just see more and just

judge people from just looking at it or just hearing them talk or something." For Isold, the

purpose of school, at least during her time in the United States, was to broaden her

children's worldview and to give them the skills to be productive young adults. Like the

teachers and parents educated in the United States, Isold's schema placed non-cognitive,

critical thinking, and social skills on a level equal to academics. When explaining her ideas

about the purpose of school, Isold said, "To be good at social skills, I think it's maybe

sometimes more important than what says your grades on the paper…try to, yeah, be nice

with your friends, or something. Not so much books."

Quadrant D: High Content Classic, Low Knowledge Construction. Parents in Quadrant

D were those with a high number of code applications related to a Content Classic Schema

and a below-average number of code applications related to a Knowledge Construction

schema. All four of the participants in Quadrant D hailed from China and Taiwan and, except

for James, these parents were primarily educated in their home country. In contrast to

teachers' and American-educated parents' framing a teacher's role in terms of creating a

nurturing, safe environment where students would be encouraged to live up to their ability,

Quadrant D parent participants looked to the teacher to help ensure that their children put

in the effort needed to achieve high standards. James, the only male parent participant to be

interviewed for this study, had lived in the United States for over thirty years, but was

adamant that some of the more virtue-oriented, traditional, and effort-based features of the

Taiwanese system in which he was educated until high school were superior to the American

way. James, who had emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan during his high school years and

was, at the time of this study, the parent of a kindergartner, explained how important he felt

key subjects were for his daughter's future:

> Keep in mind this world just becomes much flatter. You're competing against other children around the world. So we try to basically teach [my daughter] the basic skills to be prepared to go into first grade. So I think the teacher should do the same thing. I think teachers and parent should both – I know we are trying to focus in on the main subjects rather than… finger painting, you know, things like that. Personally, I think there's – it's fun, but… doesn't help them to become successful compared to other children in the world.

James went on to define what he called the "main subjects": "They emphasize physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics… people outside the United States put more emphasis on those science subjects than the United States." When reflecting on how his daughter's educational experience would differ were she in Taiwan, James said, "In terms of math, [in Taiwan] they definitely learn much younger in terms of counting, how to write. Here it seems to me it's more relaxed. They don't put as much emphasis on mathematics." Similar to Ellen in Quadrant B, James was not only pointing out the differences he observed between the academic expectations in math, but also the expectation that in Taiwan, students would work hard to master basic skills such as counting and writing. He contrasted the degree of effort students in Taiwan expected to put forth with the "relaxed" attitude of American schools.

James included in his academic schema an emphasis on discipline. And in contrast to the teacher belief that students need to learn to think critically and problem-solve in the classroom, James believed that:

> Kids [in kindergarten] require some discipline so they can learn. Versus… let's say in third grade and up – that's when they can, once they learn the good habits of how to learn, then they can have their free thinking. But before that, I think maybe some discipline to properly absorb the material.

When asked what he felt the teacher might do differently in order to help his daughter learn the basic skills kindergarteners needed, James put forth the following example:

> Just doing some - like a repeating thing. For example, a good example is [my daughter's] handwriting, in my humble opinion, is fairly poor, especially the numbers. I just remember when I was that age it's - we keep on writing numbers repeatedly, make sure the teacher's happy. And right now, [my daughter's] numbers - I can barely understand them… I'm sure people are going to think that I'm kind of strict on that. But, that's just the way I am, unfortunately.

In James's educational experience, the teacher's role was to direct a child to practice printing numbers until those numbers met an acceptable standard of quality. Having lived in the United States for more than thirty years, James acknowledged that the way he would have liked to see his daughter educated was not necessarily the most popular method and that, in fact, other might judge him as "kind of strict." However, to him, allowing for sloppiness simply did not match the belief that a child will rise to a set of high standards if he or she puts in enough effort. In James's opinion, a kindergarten teacher should enforce discipline and high standards for respectful behavior, accuracy and neatness so that students will internalize positive learning habits at an early age. Just as with the teachers, James wanted his daughter to have the "survival skills" necessary to achieve success, however he believed that these survival skills were best taught in an orderly classroom with a rigorous curriculum. In order to compete in a global marketplace, James reasoned, children needed to be taught the basic skills and fun activities only usurped time that would be better spent on the main subjects, such as hard sciences and mathematics.

Yun, Jiao, Wen and Fei Yen were all mothers from China who had been in the United States for less than a year at the time of this study. These four mothers participated in a group interview along with their friend Hazel, who also hailed from China but had lived in the U.S. for eight years. As discussed earlier, Wen's and Jiao's placement in Quadrant C of the matrix in Figure 6 appears to have been because of their relatively limited amount of talk

compared to the other participants. Qualitative analysis of their statements has confirmed

that their espoused schemas are in closer alignment with Hazel, Fei Yen, and Yun than with

Isold. For this reason, Wen's and Jiao's beliefs about teaching and learning will be discussed

in this section.

Like James, Yun, whose son was in first grade, mentioned discipline as an important

part of Chinese education:

> In China, at elementary school, I think the most important thing for the
> teacher, for the first [grade] teacher is to set the rules and make sure they
> can follow all the rules and you have good habits, like writing, reading, finish
> your homework one time – all this kind of thing. And you have to sit very
> straight in the classroom and you have to raise your hand when you want to
> answer a question or say something.

Hazel, the mother of a second grader, also described the expectation for strict discipline in

Chinese schools:

> Back in China, when you go to elementary school, it should be a serious
> thing. And here, it's just like, to be happy… In China, when you're at
> preschool, maybe, kids are much happier. But in elementary school…most of
> them are suffering and hard work.

In addition to noting the differences between the elementary school classroom behavior

standards in China and the United States, these mothers were certain that their children

needed and could handle more academic work than their teachers were requiring. Regarding

the level of rigor in Birdsong schools, Yun said that, "The math part is really easy. And I think

they could go a little bit faster or they could set a higher education standard for some kind of

science subject." The recurring critique of America's low standards and achievement in math

and science is not without warrant. According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(2013), Americans ranked 24th in mathematical literacy and 19th in science literacy, based

on a 2009 assessment of fifteen year-olds worldwide. Korea, China, Singapore and Hong

Kong were among the places with higher average mathematical and science literacy scores than the United States. Since Yun, Jiao, Wen, and Fei Yen were all planning to return to China within three years as their husbands were on limited-term work visas, they may have been concerned about their children struggling to catch up with grade-level peers once they were back in their home country.

All four of the mothers from China who had arrived in the United States within the year prior to this study mentioned a concern that their children were not doing well in English. Whereas an American-educated teacher or parent might be content with a young student's lack of proficiency in a second language after only a few months, these mothers were eager to find ways for their children to catch up as quickly as possible. Consistent with a belief that effort is the key to progress, these mothers expected the teacher to follow a structured curriculum, to hold all students to the same high standards, and to let the parents know explicitly how they should be helping at home. Regarding her first grade son's English, Yun explained: "Teacher wants everyone in the same level or at least that's not - I think it's kind of, you know - he is, my boy, is kind of way behind his classmates. So, that's a problem." Yun believed that every first grade student in her son's school should demonstrate proficiency with a certain level of English, and that the teacher had the job of making sure that all students met this level regardless of those students' previous experiences. When pressed about whether it was critical for her son to become fluent in English when her family planned to return to China within a year or two, Yun replied:

> It's not a big problem, but - yeah. But I just want him to do his best in the class now. I don't care about how much, how better he did, but I want to see that he - he's trying… Maybe he just needs some more help and then he will be willing to try. Because it's too difficult for him at this stage and maybe I can be some of help to make him to be willing to try.

As with the Chinese mothers in Stevenson, et al.'s (1990) study, Yun believed that, with effort, her son would be able to advance in his English learning. She also worried that without some basic proficiency in the language, her son was falling behind in meeting his "academic requirements." Yun acknowledged that she was willing to help at home, but needed direction in how to do so.

However, these mothers' schemas of the purpose of school did not unilaterally foreground discipline and a focus on basic skills. In fact, each of their sets of beliefs about teaching and learning contained elements of a Knowledge Construction schema. Most notably, Yun, Hazel, Jiao, and Fei Yen all talked about their children being happy in school. In contrast to James's desire for more discipline in his daughter's American kindergarten class, both Yun's and Hazel's discussions of discipline implied a criticism of their home country's perhaps overly harsh or high-pressure environment for children. Hazel used the word "suffering" to describe elementary school children in China and Yun further explained how her son was enjoying school in the Birdsong District in a way that would not be possible in China: "He feels that it's not tedious – like you have to sit there straight and learn the same subject every day. They've got a lot of different activities and he feels very excited about it." Fei Wen, the mother of a kindergarten boy, explained that:

> If you want your child to be happy, actually, we will choose the American education. And if you want your children maybe to be - to succeed more quickly, you just force him to work on the Chinese way. Because, actually, it leads to success more easily. You just enter the first-rate university and you find a good job. But mostly, children are not very happy that way. Because they feel a lot of pressure in China… So, personally, I will choose the American way.

Yun, Hazel, and Fei Wen all contrasted a rigorous, academically focused Chinese style of education with an American system that emphasizes a child's happiness. And all three of

them expressed pleasure that their children were enjoying school and were currently experiencing less academic pressure than they would have in China. While the notion of critical thinking was not explicitly mentioned by any of the Chinese mothers, Wen summed up the differences between American and Chinese education in this way:

> I think in China, they focus on what do you learn, and here they focus on how do you learn, or what do you like to learn. And in China the teacher will teach you a lot of things to students. But here, I think the student can choose something they like and focus on the communication. And in China we focus on the math or on other things.

These Quadrant D mothers' schemas about teaching and learning included high standards for their children's academic achievement, something at which they hinted the Birdsong District might be falling short. But at the same time, they questioned the level of discipline and strict focus needed to ensure that students learned basic skills.

Summary

In this chapter, participants' schemas of teaching and learning were analyzed through an ecocultural lens. The beliefs of teachers and parents were described in relation to their placement on an interpretive continuum of schemas about teaching and learning comprised of overlapping dichotomies: traditional/progressive, effort/innate ability, and virtue-oriented/mind-oriented. All categories of participants frequently mentioned academic expectations and mastery of skills. However, teachers in the Birdsong District shared a schema about teaching and learning that emphasized not just high academic standards but also high self-esteem, a love of learning, and the ability to think independently and critically. This teacher schema, similar to that of American-educated parents, led Birdsong teachers to look for ways to foster students' critical thinking, intrinsic motivation, and self-esteem in addition to improving their academic skills.

Parents who were educated at least partially outside of the United States, on the other hand, were more likely than teachers and American-educated parents to discuss the importance of such qualities as discipline, effort, and hard work. In addition, immigrant parents were much less likely to talk about critical thinking and inquiry as important parts of the educational experience. Interestingly, though, the frequency of talk related to a progressive, innate ability-based, mind-oriented schema of teaching and learning tended to be higher the longer a parent participant had lived in the United States, although this increase did not necessarily coincide with a commensurate decrease in topics related to a traditional, effort-based, or virtue-oriented schema. Instead, those parents who had been educated elsewhere but had lived in the United States for ten years or more appeared to have developed a "hybrid" schema of education encompassing traits of both types of schemas. In the chapter that follows, teacher and parent participants' schemas about education will be related to the structure and purpose of parent-teacher communication.

**CHAPTER 5: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHEMAS ABOUT
TEACHING AND LEARNING AND PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS**

Introduction

Chapter 4 described how the teachers and parents of the Birdsong School District,

regardless of the cultural community in which they were primarily educated, commonly

believed that schools should prepare children academically and socially for a future of

success. Despite this common goal, however, teachers' and parents' beliefs about how

student success could best be accomplished in the school setting varied in relation to their

ecocultural contexts and length of time living in the United States. Interviewed parents and

teachers revealed beliefs about education that determined their placement on a matrix of

schemas about teaching and learning (Figure 5, p. 64). Placement on the matrix was

established based on the degree to which each interview participant espoused beliefs more

closely aligned with a Content Classic schema or a Knowledge Construction schema of

teaching and learning. Each interview participant discussed elements of both a Content

Classic and a Knowledge Construction schema, however teachers, recently arrived immigrant

parents, and immigrant parents who had been living in the United States for an extended

period described beliefs about teaching and learning that differed from one another in

conspicuous ways. This chapter will illustrate how at-times mismatched beliefs and

expectations about teaching and learning complicated interactions between parents and

teachers. In doing so, the findings of this chapter will address the third and final research

question:

3. In what ways do schemas about education influence the interactions between
   highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school
   teachers?

The connection between a shared participant goal of student success and underlying ecoculturally-influenced schemas can be modeled through the theoretical framework of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). This study focuses on two intersecting activity systems: family and school. As detailed in Chapter 4, Birdsong parents, as representatives of the family activity system and educators, as representatives of the school activity system, both viewed school as a place that prepares children for successful futures. However, diverse schemas about teaching and learning meant that parents and teachers did not always agree about the ways in which the institution of school could best accomplish their common goal. Figure 2 (p. 5) displays two overlapping mediational triangles representing the intersection of school and family activity systems in pursuit of a common goal. Figure 3 (p. 6) hones in on the family and school schema portions of the two mediational triangles. In order to represent the relationship between ecocultural context, parent and teacher schemas, and the pursuit of a common goal of student success, Figure 7 displays a revised version of the schema, object, and goal portions of the two mediational triangles. The elaboration of the original mediational triangles to include Ecocultural Context as an influence on parents' and teachers' schemas of teaching and learning is labeled the Ecocultural theory of change.

Original Mediational Triangles   Mediational Triangles with Addition of Ecocultural Context
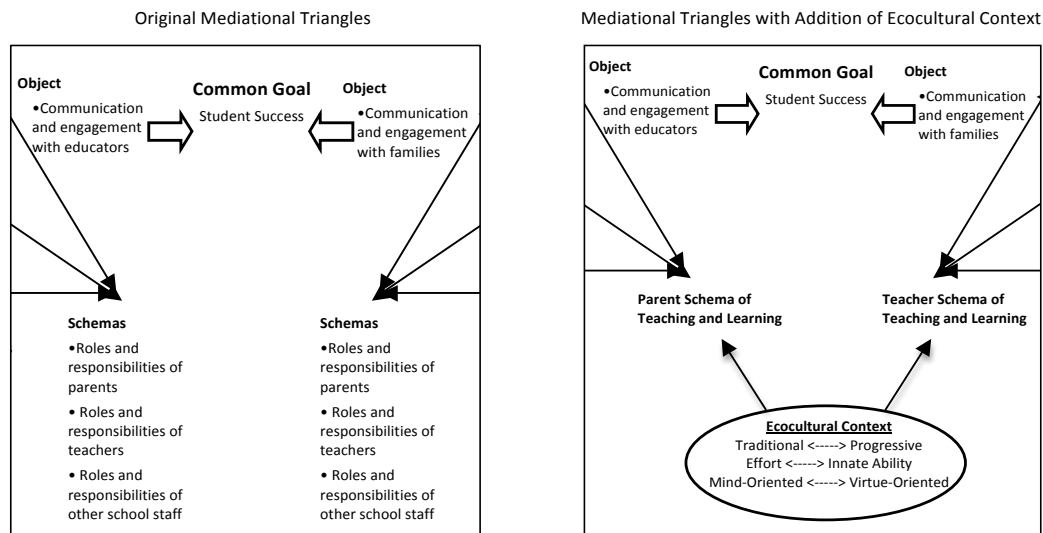
Figure 7. Ecocultural theory of change.

Figure 7 illustrates how the common goal of student success is pursued by parents and teachers through the object of communication. An individual's schema of teaching and learning, influenced by his or her ecocultural context, will in turn have an impact on the decisions he or she makes about when to communicate, where to meet, how often, with whom, and about which topics. Determinations about word choice, tone, the use of questioning, and the use of silence are among other communication decisions that may be influenced by a parent's or teacher's ecoculturally-influenced schema of education. This chapter will present an analysis of questionnaire and interview data to illustrate how the common goal of student success is pursued through the object of parent-teacher communication and how the purpose and structure of parent-teacher communication relate to parent and teacher participants' beliefs about teaching and learning.

Both questionnaire and interview data revealed that all groups of participants agreed that parents and teachers have a responsibility to communicate with one another in support of student learning. The vast majority of teacher questionnaire participants (n=33, 82%) and parent questionnaire participants (n=39, 92%) talked about the importance of teachers communicating with parents. Furthermore, teacher questionnaire participants (n=33, 82%) and parent questionnaire participants (n=39, 79%) discussed the need for *parents* to communicate with *teachers.* However, while parent and teacher participants agreed about the importance of communication, they espoused disparate opinions about the purpose for and structure of parent-teacher communication. The remainder of this chapter will separate findings about communication into those related to *why* communication takes place (purpose) and *how* communication takes place (structure). Additionally, teacher and parent participants' beliefs about the purpose and structure of communication will be connected to facets of their schemas of teaching and learning in order to explicitly draw connections between the four components of Figure 7's revised mediational triangles: ecocultural context, schemas of teaching and learning, parent-teacher communication, and a shared goal of student success.

The Purpose of Communication

Birdsong teacher and parent study participants agreed that it was important for parents and teachers to communicate with one another in order to ensure student success in school. This section will detail how participants' ecocultural backgrounds and differing schemas about teaching and learning led to varied expectations about the purpose of these conversations.

Communication from Parent to Teacher. Study participants' discussions of the

purposes for parents to communicate with their children's teachers fell into four major

categories: Individual Needs, Social/Emotional, Concerns, and Academics. Questionnaire data

gathered from a sample of teachers (n=33), non-immigrant parents (n=24), and immigrant

parents (n=15) were analyzed for the presence or absence in participants' responses of each

of the four purposes for parents to communicate with teachers. A one-way ANOVA analysis

was conducted In order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences

in mean mentions of individual needs, social/emotional topics, concerns, and academics

across teachers, non-immigrant parents, and immigrant parents. Table 16 displays the means

and standard deviations of the occurrence of talk related to the four purposes across

teachers, non-immigrant parents, and immigrant parents.

Table 16. Means and standard deviations of purposes for parents communicating with teachers across participant questionnaires.

		n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Individual Needs	Teacher	33	.36	.49
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.29	.46
	Immigrant Parents	15	.13	.35
	Total	72	.29	.46
Social/Emotional	Teacher	33	.61	.50
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.54	.51
	Immigrant Parents	15	.27	.46
	Total	72	.51	.50
Concerns	Teacher	33	.42	.50
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.54	.51
	Immigrant Parents	15	.33	.49
	Total	72	.44	.50
Academics	Teacher	33	.49	.51
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.58	.50
	Immigrant Parents	15	.47	.52
	Total	72	.51	.50

The ANOVA analysis revealed that there were not statistically significant differences

between group means. However, the difference between groups on the social/emotional

topic of communication from parent to teacher (F(2,69)=2.50, *p*=.089) was .089, which is approaching a significant *p*-value of .05. As displayed in Figure 8, teachers who responded to the study questionnaire were most likely to cite the sharing of social/emotional information as a purpose for parents to communicate with teachers (n=33, 61%). Based on this analysis, it appears that teachers expect parents to share information about social/emotional topics more often than other groups, a finding that will be discussed in further detail below.
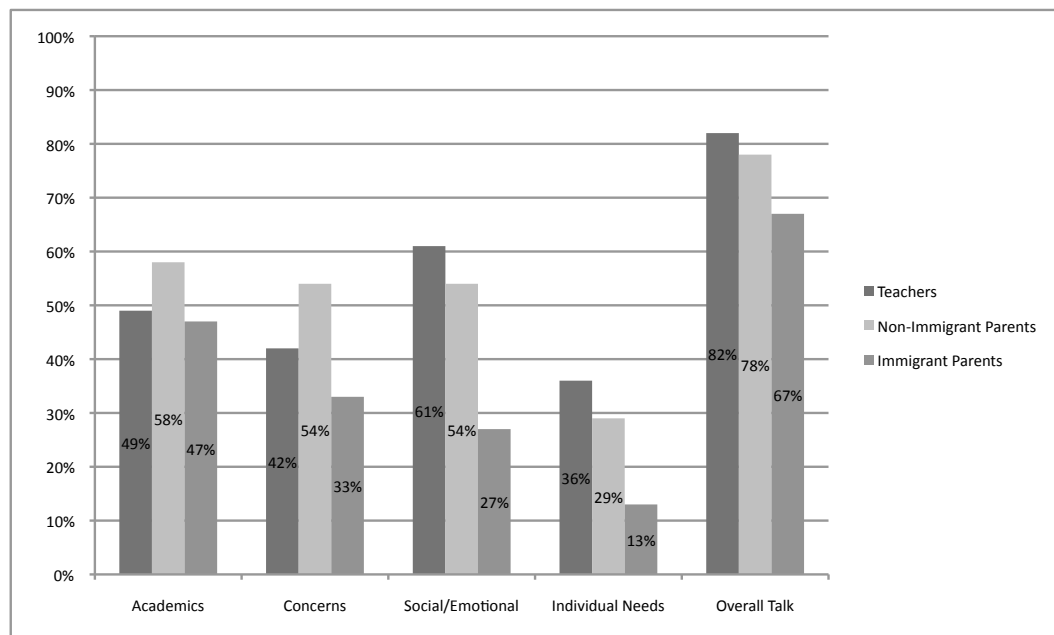
Figure 8. Proportion of questionnaire participants mentioning each of four purposes for parents communicating with teachers.

Figure 8 displays the proportion of immigrant parents, non-immigrant parents, and teachers who mentioned each of four purposes for parents to communicate with teachers. The Overall Talk column shows that, as a whole, teacher questionnaire participants most frequently discussed teachers communicating with parents, while immigrant parents were the least likely to bring up the same topic. Teachers who responded to the study

questionnaire were most likely to cite the sharing of social/emotional information as a

purpose for parents to communicate with teachers (n=33, 61%). Birdsong teachers' desire for

parents to share social/emotional information may be related to their close identification

with a Knowledge Construction schema of teaching and learning. As demonstrated in

Chapter 4, in a mind-oriented, innate-ability-based, progressive model of education, a

teacher's role is to foster students' intrinsic motivation by engaging curiosity and critical

thinking. According to Li (2012):

> Research provides a consistent picture of a specific set of affects that
> Western learners experience in the learning process. Their curiosity and
> interest direct them to explore the world with personal initiative and
> autonomy. Such motivation is intrinsic by nature and generates excitement,
> enjoyment, and fun within the individual learner.

For teacher participants, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and the enjoyment of

school would mean that students' emotional states could affect their ability to learn. It

makes sense, then, that the participants who most closely identified with a Knowledge

Construction schema would also be those who believed most strongly that parents should

communicate with teachers about the events and contexts that might affect children's

emotions. For example, one teacher who responded to the questionnaire wrote:

> I think that parents need to realize that their child is with us for
> approximately seven hours per day and that if there is something happening
> in the child's personal life, we need to know so that we can effectively
> monitor the child in the areas of academics, social, or emotional.

Parent questionnaire participants who were educated in the United States

mentioned social/emotional (n=24, 54%) purposes for communicating with teachers nearly

as frequently as the teacher participants. One mother wrote the following statement,

strikingly similar to the teacher questionnaire respondent quoted above:

> We feel it is important to communicate anything happening outside of school that might give the teacher insight into our child (family situations, illness, etc.). We also communicate (or have our child communicate) about any school issues (including social) that may be influencing her emotional state throughout the day, if we think it might impact her learning or ability to focus.

As with the teacher participants, American-educated parents' belief that it is important to inform teachers about their children's social and emotional state of mind may be related to an ecoculturally-influenced schema that links a child's level of happiness with his or her motivation to learn. By keeping teachers informed about any issues that might impact their child's emotions, parents could help teachers maximize a positive learning environment.

Figure 9 displays the proportion of interviewed participants who mentioned each of the four purposes for parents communicating with teachers. As illustrated in the Overall Talk column, all interviewed educators (n=10) discussed teachers communicating with parents. However, only half of the ten total parent interview participants brought up the topic of parents communicating with teachers at all, and four of the five parents who did discuss parents communicating with teachers were those who had lived in the United States for more than five years.
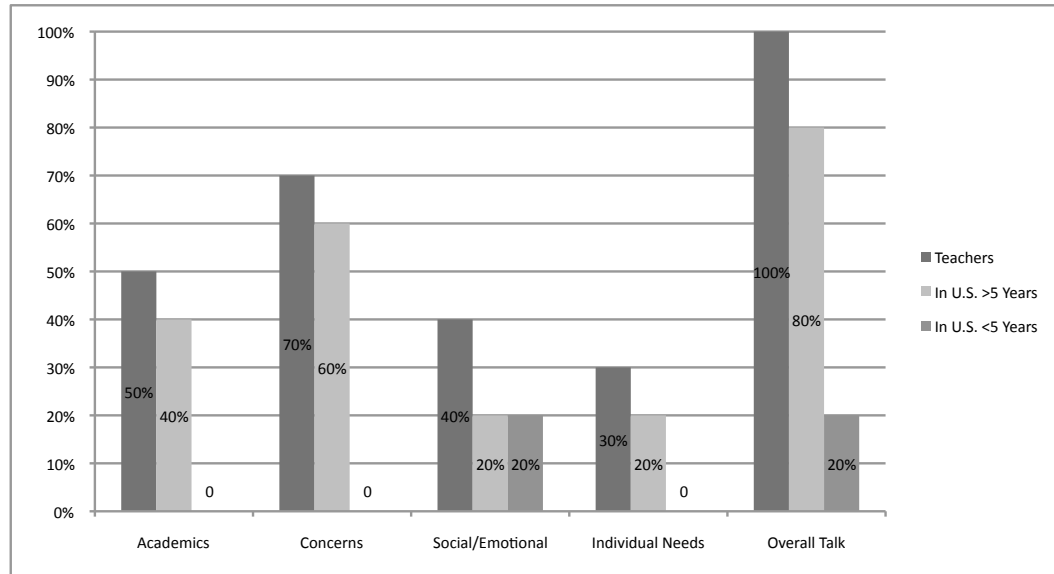
Figure 9. Proportion of interview participants mentioning each of four purposes for parents communicating with teachers.

While teachers who responded to the questionnaire most commonly mentioned social/emotional topics, those who were interviewed were more likely to say that they wanted parents to approach them with concerns. Seven of the ten teachers participating in interviews discussed the importance of parents being up front with their concerns, as encapsulated by this statement from Stacey, a third grade teacher:

> I always tell the parents… if there's a problem and I don't know about it, I can't help you. So if you're having a problem with me, or if your child is having a problem with another child, or if your child is having a problem with me, you need to tell me. Because I can't fix it if I don't know. So, I do prefer them to come to me.

One possible reason that concerns may have been mentioned more frequently among teacher interview participants than those who responded to the questionnaire is that teachers were interviewed shortly after parent-teacher conferences. All seven teachers who

talked about parents communicating with them about concerns did so at least once in the context of discussing conferences.

The only recent immigrant parent who mentioned initiating communication with her child's teacher was Isold, the northern European mother. Although she had lived in the United States for less than a year a the time of this study, Isold mentioned how she felt comfortable approaching her child's teacher to discuss her child's Social/Emotional well-being. Regarding some personal challenges her daughter was facing, Isold explained:

> I just emailed the teacher and the principal, just let them know, "Can you take extra care of her? Look at her extra now? It's because maybe she will be emotional, I don't know. She hasn't showed it back home, but maybe she will at school, can you let me know if you see anything?"

In Chapter 4, it was explained how Isold's schema of teaching and learning was most similar to that of the teacher participants (Figure 6, p. 73). Her placement on the schema matrix was closest in proximity to Quadrant A. Like the teachers and parents educated in the United States, Isold's schema placed non-cognitive, critical thinking, and social skills on a level equal to academics, likely because the ecocultural schema of education in her home country was built upon a Western-Influenced, mind-oriented, innate-ability based model similar to the United States.

Isold was the only immigrant parent in the United States for less than a year who discussed initiating communication with her child's teacher. However, most of the parents who had been living in the U.S. for more than five years (n=5, 80%) also talked about parents communicating with the teacher. Among these parents who had been living in the U.S. for an extended period, the most commonly mentioned topic for approaching teachers was concerns. As Lisa, the mother of a fifth grader, explained:

> I notice some parents, they don't like to email their teacher when their child
> comes home, but I'm pretty vocal. Well, because my daughter is very vocal
> about everything that happens at school. So the more I communicate with
> the teachers, the better the relationship gets even in tough situations. And it
> just makes for a better everything, really. A better experience for everybody.

In Chapter 4, it was shown that parent participants who had been educated outside The

United States but had lived in the U.S. for more than a decade tended to espouse "hybrid"

schemas of teaching and learning. Unlike the mothers who had been in the United Sates for a

short time, Bianca, Lisa, and Ellen had all lived in the U.S. for more than ten years.

Commensurate with their development of hybrid schemas of teaching and learning, these

three participants expressed comfort with communicating exactly what their children's

teachers believed was most important for them to share: concerns.

The five parent interview participants who did not discuss parents communicating

with their children's teachers at all were Yun, Wen, Hazel, Jiao, and Fei Yen. These five

parents, all originally from China, were shown in Chapter 4 to relate most strongly with the

schema labeled Content Classic, a virtue-oriented, effort-based, traditional schema of

teaching and learning. Confucian-influenced systems of education include a high degree of

respect for teachers as experts, and East Asian cultural beliefs do not encourage openly

challenging educators (Li, 2006; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Li, 2012). These ecoculturally-

influenced schemas of teaching and learning help account for the absence of talk about

parents communicating with teachers among the interview participants who were placed in

Quadrant D (Figure 6, p. 73). Recently arrived immigrant parents' lack of discussion related to

initiating communication with teachers has some important implications, which will be

further discussed in Chapter 7.

Communication from Teacher to Parent. When shifting the talk about the purpose

of communication from what parents should tell teachers to what teachers should tell

parents, some different themes emerged. Study participants' talk about the purposes for

teachers to communicate with their students' parents was organized into seven major

categories. The first four were the same as in the previous section: Individual Needs,

Social/Emotional, Academics, and Concerns. However three new categories of talk came up

as well: Home Practice, Behavior, and Curriculum. Data gathered from a sample of teachers

(n=33), non-immigrant parents (n=24), and immigrant parents (n=15) were analyzed for the

presence or absence in participants' questionnaire responses of each of the seven purposes

for teachers to communicate with parents. A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted In

order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in mean mentions

of the seven purposes for teacher to parent communication between participant groups.

Table 17 displays the means and standard deviations of the occurrence of talk related to the

seven purposes across teachers, non-immigrant parents, and immigrant parents.

Table 17. Means and standard deviations of purposes for teachers communicating with parents across participant questionnaires.

		n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Individual Needs	Teacher	33	.18	.39
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.25	.44
	Immigrant Parents	15	.20	.41
	Total	72	.21	.41
Social/Emotional	Teacher	33	.24	.44
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.46	.51
	Immigrant Parents	15	.47	.52
	Total	72	.36	.48
Concerns	Teacher	33	.21	.41
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.75	.44
	Immigrant Parents	15	.53	.52
	Total	72	.46	.50
Academics	Teacher	33	.46	.51
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.54	.51
	Immigrant Parents	15	.53	.52
	Total	72	.50	.50
Home Practice	Teacher	33	.24	.44
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.25	.44
	Immigrant Parents	15	.20	.41
	Total	72	.24	.43
Behavior	Teacher	33	.09	.29
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.33	.48
	Immigrant Parents	15	.20	.41
	Total	72	.19	.40
Curriculum	Teacher	33	.36	.49
	Non-Immigrant Parents	24	.08	.28
	Immigrant Parents	15	.27	.46
	Total	72	.25	.44

The ANOVA analysis revealed that teachers were statistically less likely than non-immigrant parents to mention concerns as a purpose for teacher to parent communication ($F_{(2,69)}=10.36$, $p<.001$). There was no statistical difference on the topic of concerns between teachers and immigrant parents or between non-immigrant parents and immigrant parents. The comparison of means related to the topic of curriculum revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between groups. However, between teachers and non-

immigrant parents (F(2,69)=3.05, *p*=.05), the p-value of .05 was approaching significance,

suggesting that teacher participants were more likely than non-immigrant parents to name

curriculum as a topic of communication from teacher to parent. Figure 10 displays the

proportion of questionnaire participants mentioning each of the seven purposes for teachers

communicating with parents. The differences between teachers' and non-immigrant parents'

beliefs about communication from teacher to parent as related to the topics of concerns and

curriculum will be discussed in further detail in the remainder of this section.
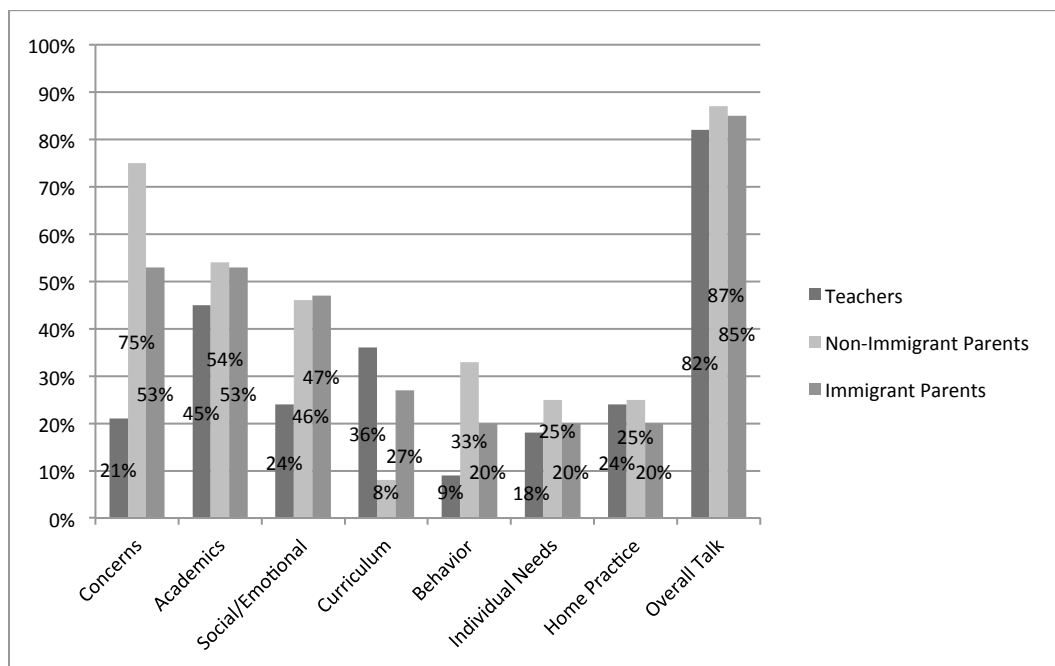
Figure 10. Proportion of questionnaire participants mentioning each of seven purposes for teachers communicating with parents.

As shown in the Overall Talk column of Figure 10, over 80% of the participants in all

three subgroups brought up the topic of teachers communicating with parents. Whereas

teacher questionnaire respondents most commonly mentioned social/emotional content as

the purpose for parents to communicate with teachers, academics was the most common

topic about which teachers who participated in the questionnaire believed they should

communicate with parents (n=33, 45%). However, while academics was mentioned most

frequently, the range of teachers mentioning each of the seven purposes for communication

did not vary widely: at the low end, three of the 33 teachers talked about behavior while the

highest number, 15, mentioned academics. Instead, their goals for communication with

parents appeared to be quite diverse and varied. A typical response from a teacher when

asked about what needed to be communicated to parents was:

> Parents need to know first what their child is doing well and that the teacher
> is noticing some things about the child that are special. They need to be as
> informed about the structure and curriculum of the classroom as possible.
> They need to know what the standards are and how their child is performing.
> They need to know how to best support their child at home with regard to
> classroom goals. They need to know if any concerns arise and how those
> concerns will be addressed.

As demonstrated in this response, which touches upon academics, individual needs,

curriculum, home practice, and concerns, teacher respondents had a multitude of ideas

about the purpose of communication from teachers to parents. No single purpose for

communication was strongly favored by most teacher questionnaire participants.

Among American-educated parent questionnaire participants, however, there was a

clear common understanding that it was important for teachers was to communicate their

concerns to parents (n=24, 75%). As revealed in the ANOVA analysis, non-immigrant parent

questionnaire participants were significantly more likely than teachers (n=33, 21%) to

mention concerns when discussing topics about which teachers should communicate to

parents. One typical response was from a mother wanted to know, "When my son is

misbehaving or needs extra help with his studies in school." And for immigrant parents who

responded to the questionnaire (n=15), responses were evenly distributed between two

most frequently mentioned purposes for teachers to communicate with parents: academics (53%) and concerns (53%). Even though there was not a statistically significant difference between teachers' and immigrant parents' mentioning of concerns as a purpose for teacher to parent communication, it is interesting to note that this topic was the most commonly mentioned by both immigrant and non-immigrant parents. Furthermore, as with communication from teacher to parents, concerns became a much more salient topic in the context of participant interviews, perhaps due to the timing of interviews right after parent-teacher conferences.

Figure 11 displays the proportion of interview participants mentioning each of the seven purposes for teachers to communicate with parents. As shown in the Overall Talk column, all interview participants discussed teacher communication with parents. Nearly all interviewed teachers mentioned academics (n=10, 90%). Parent interview participants, too, most frequently talked about academics as a purpose for teacher communication with parents (n=10, 70%). As mentioned in Chapter 4, a commonality between parent and teacher interview participants' schemas about teaching and learning was that school is a place for children to master academic skills. It fits then, that both parent and teacher participants believed that they should communicate with parents about academics. Commonalities and differences in the structure of this academic-oriented communication will be further discussed in the next section on the Structure of Communication.
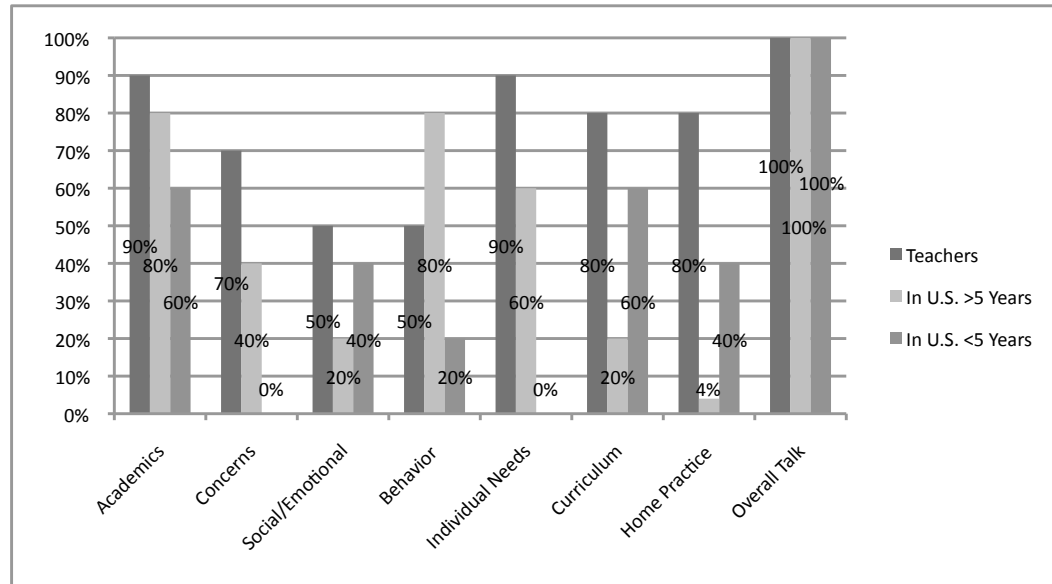
Figure 11. Proportion of interview participants mentioning each of seven purposes for teachers communicating with parents.

In addition to Academics, interviewed teachers also discussed the importance of communicating to parents about students' Individual Needs (90%). When referencing Individual Needs, teachers typically talked about how it was important to mention a student's specific traits, gifts, and capabilities during interactions with parents. As fifth grade teacher Robin explained:

> I think one of [my goals] is to reiterate to the parents that I care and that I know your kids aren't just students or learners, but they're children and I love them and I care about their well-being. And I think parents often want to hear that you care and that you know them. And I think I got from the parents of sense of, wow, you really do know my kid and you got to know them really quickly and that was a main goal of mine.

Once again, the consideration of students' individual needs as a key purpose for teacher to parent communication fits with the Birdsong educators' ecoculturally-influenced schema of teaching and learning. Teachers whose beliefs about education include maximizing children's

innate ability through intrinsic motivation would need to learn about each student's

individual strengths and learning preferences in order to plan individually targeted

instruction.

Explaining to parents how to support Home Practice of skills learned in school was

also frequently mentioned by teachers (80%) as a purpose for communication. By helping

children practice at home, through homework assignments and projects, teachers felt that

parents could stay engaged with their children's learning and be up-to-date on what was

happening in the classroom. Leah, a kindergarten teacher, said:

> I will always suggest different ways they can help at home or, here's where
> we'd like to get the student and here's where we're going by the end of the
> year and as you're working with him at home, here's some things you can
> try. So I always am suggesting things in the parent-teacher conference as we
> go along, depending on the student.

The frequent inclusion of home practice as a topic of communication implies that part of

Birdsong teachers' schema about education is that parents have a responsibility to ensure

that their children continue learning once the academic day has ended. A teacher

communicating with parents about home practice sets an expectation that both parent and

child will expend further effort at home in order to ensure that the student meets the goals

of school. Although effort was not a top discussed by the majority of teacher questionnaire

participants (n=33, 9%) or teacher interview participants (n=10, 50%), the frequency with

which teachers mentioned home practice may mean that teachers had underlying

expectations about effort beyond what was explicitly said.

Three of the five parents who had lived in the United States for less than a year at

the time of this study mentioned curriculum as an important discussion topic, as did the

majority of teacher interview participants (n=10, 80%). However, the nature of the talk

differed greatly between these two groups. Teachers' ideas about sharing curricular

expectations with their students' parents were aligned with their schema of teaching and

learning. Consistent with a belief that their job was to foster intrinsic motivation and nurture

curiosity through inquiry and critical thinking, teachers talked of "educating" parents on

these Knowledge Construction schema-related values. For example, Toni, a kindergarten

teacher, recounted a conference with a parent who was frustrated that her child's

educational experiences did not match her expectations:

> So, you know, so obviously my mission was to help to educate her on how
> children learn. And with the help of my principal, who did the "dirty work" of
> pointing out that the examples [the parents] gave were - this is copying. This
> is not a demonstration of thinking. And she was really good about, you know,
> for example, looking at the writing assessment and saying, let me show you
> how this is an example of thinking. That they're actually spelling this
> sentence even though it's inventive spelling and here's the good things - the
> spaces in between words and things like that.

Vivian, a second grade teacher, talked about how she worked to explain to parents that her

math curriculum may not look that same as it did when the parents were in school, even to

the point of combating parents' perception that Vivian herself did not understand how to do

the math:

> I'm looking for them to be able to stand up in front of this class and say,
> "How I know it's subtraction is because we're looking at the difference
> between two numbers. How I might do that is on the number line. How I
> might do that on the hundreds chart is this and how I might draw that is
> this." … And I want to teach the parents to ask that of their children and not
> say, "It's too easy. It's too easy. This is too easy. Look how easy this is."… And
> I've had parents come in my room - in twelve years, maybe two - and
> participate in math and actually say to me, "Why don't you have a seat and
> I'll show you how to do this?" And, like, I'm speechless [laughter].

While teachers were eager to explain to parents how their curricula were designed

to flexibly support students' inquiry and critical thinking skills, Yun, Wen, and Jiao, the three

mothers who had recently moved from China, expressed frustration because they felt that

teachers were not communicating with them about curriculum at all. Yun explained her lack

of clarity regarding the first grade expectations following her first parent-teacher conference

in the United States. She still wanted information, she explained:

> About the academic standard - what my boy should reach, or what level he
> should reach and how can I help him, in details. Because he got so many
> difficulties in the language and I really have no idea how to help him. And I
> want to help him systematically, like, you need to do this first, then when
> reaches what kind of a level and then what he could do and then I can move
> to the next level and the next level. But I didn't get this kind of information. I
> still got confused about how to help him.

Yun's words revealed her confusion about the American education system. Her schema

about school included a systematic sequence of skills that a child can be taught one at a time,

to mastery. Without a clear curriculum set by a textbook, Yun felt lost. She even mentioned

asking the teacher for the names of the textbooks so that she could purchase them online in

order to help her child at home. Yet, she was frustrated because, "there's no teaching

schedule, no textbook, so I just say, okay, this is this week's homework, let's do that. Or this

is next week's, let's do that. It's kind of - I don't know." Added Yun's friend, Jiao, "I wish the

teacher showed me how she in the classroom studies. I don't know she - her - in the

classroom, what study. Example - English book or test, I wish teacher give me something."

Yun, Jiao, and Wen were three of the four interviewed parents who mentioned Curriculum as

a purpose for teachers communicating with parents. Their shared schema about teaching

and learning, formulated based on their own educational experiences in China, led them to

expect material about curriculum either through a daily textbook lesson or, at the very least,

during parent-teacher conferences. When this curriculum was not made available, Yun, Jiao,

and Wen felt they were missing key information. Consistent with a schema that emphasizes

student effort and hard work as determinants of success, these three mothers wanted

materials that would help them help their children practice and study at home. Teachers, on

the other hand, believed that students should be working to the best of their ability at school

and following the teacher-given homework guidelines at home. Providing the parents of

young children with textbooks and daily lesson plans was viewed by teachers as over the top

and unnecessary. As explained by Lydia, a first grade teacher:

> There was one parent who wanted a list of all the curriculum that we use
> because she wanted to buy [our reading program] and our science program.
> She wanted to buy all those things for her child. So, that was a question that
> came up before conferences and then I just asked her to hold off until we
> can meet, because her daughter was already - I mean, her daughter is
> already advanced beyond anything that this math curriculum is going to give
> her. She doesn't need to buy it and have it at home too.

Lydia went on to reflect on how several other parents asked for materials and

comprehensive teacher lesson plans during conferences, concluding that, "The main thing

that I couldn't give them that they're asking for is this outline of everything that I do each

week." For Lydia and the other Birdsong teachers who believed that children should be

allowed to learn at a pace commensurate with their ability, requests for curriculum materials

such as textbooks represented parents' overly ambitious expectations for their students and

a degree of pressure that they felt was inappropriate for young children. However, for

parents who identified with a Content Classic schema more strongly than a Knowledge

Construction schema, a desire for textbooks and a lesson sequence was tied to a belief that

children need to practice and study in order to achieve, and those parents were willing to

facilitate that practice at home, if only they had the materials telling them how to do so.

The next section will go into more detail about the ways in which participants'

ecocultural schemas about teaching and learning related to their beliefs about the structure

of communication between parents and teachers.

The Structure of Communication

In addition to the purpose of communication, study participants espoused beliefs about the ways in which communication between teachers and parents should be structured. This section will detail key differences in beliefs about the structure of communication and how these beliefs relate to schemas about teaching and learning. Figure 1 (p. 4) provides a visual representation of ever-evolving schemas about education influencing the ways in which parents and teachers approach communication with one another. In Chapter 4, participants' schemas were placed into four quadrants based on the degree to which they individually espoused characteristics of either a Content Classic or a Knowledge Construction schema (Figure 5, p. 64). This section will detail the ways in which participants' schemas about teaching and learning related to the structure of their interactions. Figure 12 provides a revised visual representation of the relationship between schemas, parent-teacher communication and social capital.
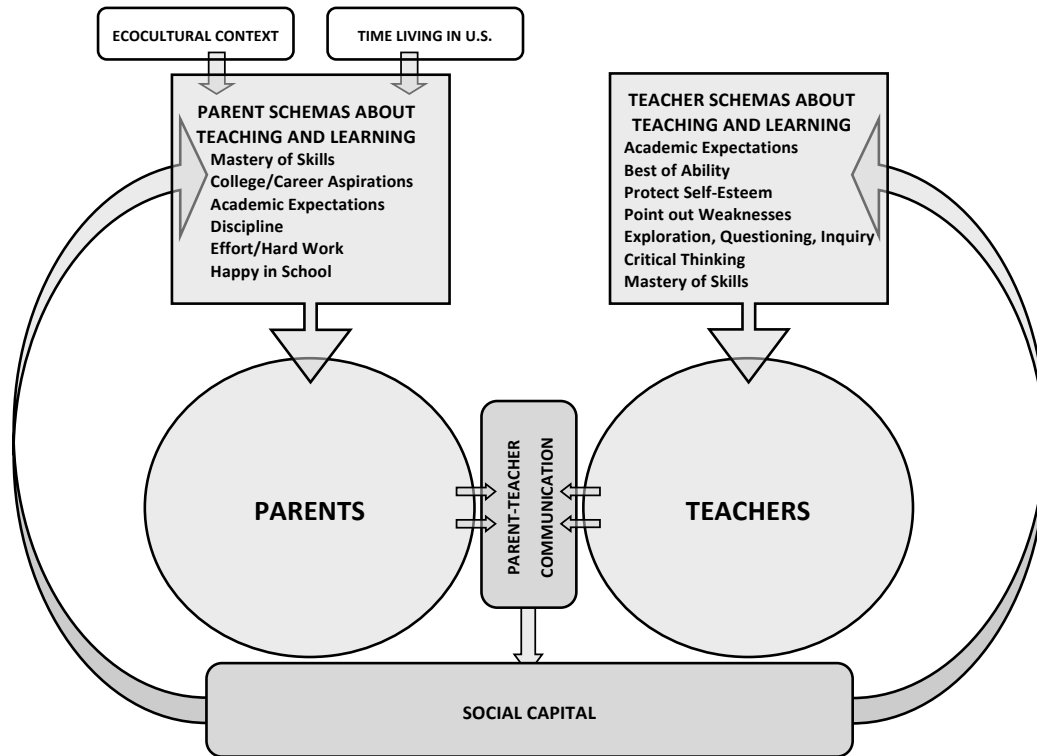
Figure 12. Revised model of the relationship between schemas, communication, and social capital.

Figure 12 models how parent participants' schemas about teaching and learning are formed and reformed over time based on, among other factors, their ecocultural background and length of time living in the United States. As described in Chapter 4, parents' diverse schemas included beliefs about the key concepts listed, including mastery of skills and college/career aspirations. Teacher schemas, on the other hand, were much more consistent with one another, likely due to the similarity in participants' backgrounds and educational experiences. The Birdsong teacher schema included beliefs about such concepts as academic expectations and students working to the best of their abilities. Parents' and teachers' schemas of teaching and learning, as shown in Figure 12, had an impact on the way each

individual parent participant approached communication with his or her child's teacher and vice-versa. What follows is a description of how the schemas parents and teachers carried with them related to the structure of parent-teacher communication.

Teacher Schemas and the Structure of Communication.

Academics. The majority of interviewed teachers (n=10, 90%) and parents (n=10, 70%) believed that teachers should communicate with parents about academics. As one might predict, beliefs about the structure of academic communication varied in accordance with participants' own schemas of teaching and learning detailed in Chapter 4. However, as will be demonstrated in this section, teachers also described the structure of their communication about academics in relation to their perception of parents' schemas about teaching and learning. So, not only did teachers communicate about academics based on what they believed, they attempted to tailor their comments to what they thought parents believed.

As explained in Chapter 4, teacher interview participants believed that they were responsible for teaching not only academic fundamentals such as reading and math, but also "survival skills" such as collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. However, despite schemas about teaching and learning that emphasized traits such as the ability to collaborate and think critically, teachers' discussion of parent-teacher conference structures were almost exclusively focused on relaying academic information. As Meagan, a sixth grade teacher explained:

> A typical conference would mean the parent sits down, we usually start with something positive, something that we noticed and we - I start with their report card and just kind of go through everything that I've noticed, we go through the grades, and then, effort grades, then we move to citizenship, go through all of that. And then we - I set goals in the comments section and we

> talk about the different goals. And then - then I'll pull out some student work samples so they can kind of see some of our benchmark assessments.

And Toni, a kindergarten teacher, described a framework for her conferences that was remarkably consistent with that used by Meagan:

> I greet the parents first and first set them at ease and say to them, don't worry, there's no surprises here, it's all good news, that kind of thing, just in case they're anxious about anything. And then just go down the line and show evidence, give a few examples of their work and their progress… So just going down the line explaining what everything is and then going to the citizenship things as well. And then, you know, talking goals or places where their strengths are and then how they can be supportive. And then, asking the parents if they have any questions, which they usually do.

The sequence of giving praise, "going down the line" of academic grades and ending with citizenship, was similarly described by all ten teacher participants, revealing a schema of a parent-teacher conference structure that seemed to be agreed upon across the Birdsong District. Even though teachers expressed beliefs that teaching children how to think and be good citizens were as important or more important than meeting academic standards, their descriptions of parent-teacher conferences emphasized academics. Perhaps this was because the delivering of the district report card was such a central part of the parent-teacher conference and the report card was organized around numerical scores and letter grades. Or, it may have been because students' progress in non-cognitive skills such as critical thinking and organization are much more difficult to measure objectively than are explicit academic skills. A third reason teachers may have reported communicating with parents as readily about the components of schooling they believed to be most important may be related to their perception of what parents prioritized. Fifth grade teacher Robin put it this way: "Many times, parents in Birdsong so desperately want to see the criteria, the data, the raw - you know, where is my kid, why isn't he at an A, why is he at a B?"

Furthermore, all ten teacher interview participants described how they believed some parents held too high of expectations for their children. As fifth grade teacher Iris replied when asked what she felt were Birdsong parents' goals for their children, regardless of those parents' country of birth or immigrant status:

> They always want them to be higher than they should be. They really want them to be learning the next grade level up, you know, especially for math I feel like. They always want them in the higher class, the accelerated class, or they always want them to be challenged.

Vivan, a second grade teacher, expressed a similar sentiment when she explained:

> The parents are very involved and very demanding and they really want their children to excel, of course. And to be challenged. And they sometimes seem to feel like, if you don't give them hard enough work when they're seven, they're going to not make it into pre-calc when they're sixteen. They're really, legitimately concerned about the track and whether one exists in elementary school or not, but just the life track. That if you don't - if I'm not putting them in the enrichment 20 minutes, they're not going to go to M.I.T. If they're not, you know how they're really worried. And I spend a lot of time balancing that, saying… I know how you feel, and they're seven.

It may be that because some Birdsong teachers believed that parents were mainly concerned with the rate and proficiency with which their children were advancing through specific academic standards, when meeting with parents during parent-teacher conferences, the teachers made an effort to give parents the academic information they thought parents wanted.

Trust. In addition to academics, when discussing interactions with parents, a common theme among teacher questionnaire respondents was trust. Beliefs about trust were closely tied to the way that teachers structured communication with parents. Teachers who responded to the questionnaire (n=33, 82%) stressed the importance of parents deferring to the knowledge and training of their child's teacher, as encapsulated by one questionnaire participant who said that parents could best support her by "Trusting my

expertise that I am trying to reach the same goals as they (parents) are." All ten interviewed

educators also mentioned the importance of parent trust when discussing interactions.

Typically, interview participants' reflections about trust were contextualized within a "non-

example" when teachers contrasted an ideal trusting parent with a story of a parent either

questioning teaching methodologies or not accepting an analysis of a students' behavioral or

academic progress. For example, Robin, a fifth grade teacher, recounted the following

experience with a non-immigrant parent who would not accept the teacher's attempts to

give feedback about a student's challenges in class:

> I had a very, very difficult parent last year who in many ways was not a
> typical Birdsong parent. And in many ways was the epitome of a Birdsong
> parent - my kid can do no wrong, my kid - everything is somebody else's
> fault… if she didn't turn her homework in, it's because it was too much or we
> didn't have time, or whatever. So, it was - the blame game was often and
> apparent… the problem was never solved because we were constantly - I
> was constantly feeling like I had to justify myself or my actions or my request
> to meet. And I was constantly given the "it's not our fault" scenario.

For teachers, successful communication events were ones in which parents demonstrated

trust by agreeing with the teacher about a child's strengths and, more importantly,

shortcomings. As sixth grade teacher Meagan explained:

> When you are on the same page it's just so much easier… It doesn't even
> seem like I'm talking to a parent and I'm a teacher… Those walls are down
> and you're just having that conversation and you can just be really up front
> about everything and just speak your mind and tell them how it really is.

For Meagan, and other teachers within the Birdsong district, a parent's role during a

conference was to enact that trust that educators saw as an essential part of a parent's role.

By demonstrating that they were "on the same page," as teachers, parents could eliminate

barriers to communication and implicitly give teachers the go-ahead to speak freely about

students' strengths and weaknesses.

Interviewed teachers held up parents who were immigrants from Asian countries as models of trusting parents. As Stacey, a third grade teacher, explained: "They're very grateful. Very grateful for everything that they say I do for their child. Just thanking me over and over and over and over and over again. Just very polite, very quiet."

Added second grade teacher, Vivian:

> Well, one thing is they're… very appreciative of what kind of work is going on and they're always very kind and generous with their compliments and saying how much they value the kind of work that I do and that I care about their children. That I've tried to make them feel welcome. Even if I myself would not say I've done a very good job of that with their particular child, you know, it just seems to me that to a family that they are - really extend a lot of gratitude for what we do here. And if their student's involved in the pull-out English program, so extra time with another teacher, they're always really appreciative of that and, that kind of thing feels so good. And so that difference is really palpable.

These characterizations of Asian parents as thankful and gracious provide evidence that teachers' schemas include a belief that parents should trust their children's teachers as professionals and experts at their job. The perceived compliance of parents who had emigrated from Asian nations may have been equated with a respectful deference to teachers that American-educated parents in the Birdsong District did not exhibit. For the teachers, being viewed as professionals, honored and thanked for the work they do, was a welcome and refreshing change.

Summary of Teacher Schemas and the Structure of Communication. The ways in which teachers structured communication with parents were related not only to their own schemas about teaching and learning but about the ways in which they interpreted parents' beliefs about education. Because teachers believed that parents were mainly concerned with academics, they reported communicating mainly about students' progress as related to academic content standards during conferences. By displaying evidence to back up scores

and grades while minimizing discussion of non-academic skills such as independence and critical thinking, teachers may have been deferring to what they thought were parents most important concerns. And teachers believed that parents should be trusting and deferential in instances of communication, a stance they articulated by pointing to Asian-educated parents as models of the gratefulness they would prefer all parents to exhibit.

Parent Schemas and the Structure of Communication.

American-Educated Parent Schemas and the Structure of Communication. Teacher participants' belief that parents were mainly concerned with their children's academic progress was not without reason. As reported in the previous section on the Purpose of Communication, a one-sample ANOVA test on parent and teacher questionnaires revealed that non-immigrant parents were significantly more likely than teachers to mention concerns as a topic for teachers to discuss with parents. Furthermore, the ANOVA test revealed that non-immigrant parents seemed less likely than teachers to expect that teachers would communicate with parents about curriculum. So, teachers tendency to structure parent-teacher conferences in a way that reported students' academic progress, goals, and citizenship matched non-immigrant parents' expectations in that individual student growth and concerns would be addressed, although these same parents did not seem as interested in specific information about curriculum.

Hybrid Schemas and the Structure of Communication. Lisa, Ellen, Bianca, and Isold were the four mothers who, as explained in Chapter 4, espoused schemas of education that blended Content Classic and Knowledge Construction beliefs. Isold had a schema of education most closely resembling that of the teacher participants whereas Lisa, Ellen, and Bianca described teaching and learning-related beliefs that were high in aspects of both

Content Classic and Knowledge Construction schemas. These four parents' comments

following conferences revealed some ambiguity in their expectations for conversations

around academics. At the time of this study, kindergarten through third grade students

received report card scores ranging from 1 to 4. A score of three would have been

considered "proficient," while a 3.5 or a 4 would have been "advanced." When reflecting on

her daughter's progress in the first trimester of third grade, Ellen, a mother originally from

Hong Kong who had lived in Canada and the U.S. for thirty years, said:

> She's doing very well. I'm not the kind of mother that's interested in the
> grades itself. So, even though she did very well, she got 3.5, 3, yeah, I think
> most of them are 3.5's, and excellent and good. And that's great, I'm very
> happy about that. I'm more interested in the teacher's comments on how
> she does - her overall enthusiasm, does she take pride in her work? Those
> are the things that are very important to me.

Ellen initially insisted that she was not interested in grades, but then her very next sentence

conceded that perhaps this lack of concern was made a bit easier since her daughter was in

fact earning high scores. Educated in both Korea and the United States, Lisa, the mother of a

fifth grader, also revealed her pleasure that her daughter was motivated to do well

academically:

> Some of the other kids in her class, they, I guess, talk to each other and ask
> each other, "Oh, what did you get on that test? How many did you get
> wrong?" They kind of do it with each other, where, "Oh, you know what,
> next time I'm gonna beat - next time, I'm gonna get an A because you got an
> A." And you know it's - I love that they're doing that, so I don't have to work
> so hard... And then, just, I want her to be satisfied with where she's at and
> what she's learned and the grades that she's getting.

Like Ellen and Lisa, Isold, a Northern European mother who had been living in the United

States for less than a year at the time of this study, insisted that she was not so much

worried about her sixth grade daughter's grades as she was concerned that her daughter

have positive experiences in school:

> When we moved, I decided - I told them, 'Now, we are going to go to new schools. Don't think so much about your grades the first one or two semesters. Just go, relax, enjoy, try to look at it as an adventure. Just learn some - learn a new language, don't be stressed if you're not an A, or...' But they - my older one, she got an A in everything last semester. I was so proud. The younger one, she is doing well, but sometimes she is getting not as high scores as if she was in [our country], I think. But I think now - the first semester is more like a trial or something, but now she can do better.

Although Isold wanted her daughters to view their time in the United States as an "adventure," she followed up by saying how proud she was that her older daughter was earning A grades in school, and that she expected her sixth grade daughter's grades to improve in the near future. For mothers with hybrid schemas of education, there appeared to be contradictions in their expectations for whether teachers should communicate about topics related to a Content Classic or Knowledge Construction model of teaching and learning.

Apparent contradictions in parents' discussions about the structure of communication could be tied to the very nature of a hybrid schema and the competing values contained therein. For example, a parent who was raised and educated in a cultural community that favored a virtue-oriented model of teaching and learning might have deep-rooted beliefs that academic skills should be mastered in a particular order. However, a decade or more of socialization in an ecocultural context that collectively espoused a mind-oriented model of teaching and learning might challenge those underlying beliefs with an alternative view of education. Over time the parent might begin to internalize some of the new cultural beliefs, such as expecting learning to happen in a holistic, inquiry-based manner. As a result, parents with hybrid schemas might be voicing the internal struggle between two competing models of education played out over time. However, alternative explanations for apparent contradictions that emerged during parent (and teacher)

discussion of their espoused schemas and the enactment of these schemas during interactions will be presented in Chapter 6.

Quadrant D Schemas and the Structure of Communication. The five parent interview participants who were placed in Quadrant D of the matrix of schemas of teaching and learning (Figure 6, p. 73) most closely identified with a Content Classic model of teaching and learning. Of these parents, four were recent immigrants from China at the time of this study while the fifth, James, had emigrated from Taiwan more than thirty years prior. Parents in Quadrant D espoused beliefs about teaching and learning that emphasized the importance of student effort, whereas Birdsong teachers identified more closely with a model of teaching and learning that attributed student success to innate ability. The divergence between these two ways of schematizing education and the structure of parent-teacher communication was most salient in the context of two themes: pressure on students and ranking.

As mentioned above, teacher interview participants expressed pleasure that parents from east Asian nations were gracious and thankful, as this was an enactment of the parent trust that teachers highly valued. However, parents whose schemas about the nature of learning led them to emphasize hard work and effort were also viewed by educators as sometimes being too hard on their children. The concern that children in the Birdsong District were under too much pressure was linked by several teachers to Asian parental beliefs in particular. Meredith, a sixth grade teacher had the following to say about Asian families: "They place such an importance on education. I mean, it's - they have high expectations of their children, almost to their detriment sometimes," and, "I think Asian parents typically push their kids a lot harder and therefore can push the teachers a bit harder, but I guess I've just - I've taught for so many years, I feel like I kind of get it."

Meredith also explained how she tries to help Asian immigrant parents walk the line

between being helpful and supportive and putting too much pressure on their children:

> I know I have their support. I know I've got their encouragement of their children. I try to help educate them that their child doesn't have to have 100% all the time because I feel like a lot of time the kids get worried and nervous if their scores aren't perfect, worrying about how their parents are going to respond. So, I mean, there's kind of a catch-22 there, but they're very supportive of teachers and what we want their children to do.

Stacey echoed Meredith's sentiment that although she felt Asian parents could be unrealistic

in their expectations, she had come to more or less expect it:

> Are their expectations higher? Absolutely. Do I think they're somewhat ridiculous? Absolutely. Your child is eight years old, let them go play. So, not that it's challenging, it's just different. And it's just something that you have to - not accommodate to, but understand when you're dealing with all these different cultures that we have here.

Cathryn, the school principal, felt that Asian immigrant parents seemed overly concerned

with acceleration at times:

> I feel the pressure on the children doing well is more from the parents of Korean descent or Japanese or - so, of the Asian population. They tend to be very - harder on their kids than White parents are on their kids. I had a group of parents last year, fifth grade parents, met with me around mathematics. They wanted to make sure that their children, when they go into seventh grade, that they're able to take eighth grade honors algebra. Not just eighth grade, eighth grade honors.

Explained Robin, a fifth grade teacher: "I had a girl cry because she got a 92% and it wasn't

100%... And she does have immigrant parents, but they're permanently southern California

residents." And Meagan, also a sixth grade teacher, said the following about parents from

Asian countries:

> They're not okay if their child isn't getting an A. They want that A grade. Even an A minus in some cases isn't okay… So, I mean, and I've had when they - they clearly still have an A, they got a 93%, but that's - they get their grade and they're bummed, you know?

The idea that Asian parents were not comfortable with less than perfect grades made interactions especially difficult when students were struggling because of their lack of proficiency with English. It was a delicate business to communicate progress to parents when children were assessed in a language with which they were still largely unfamiliar. Second grade teacher Vivian explained:

> We also end up talking about how - that it's - that we're more interested in progress than really where you are right now because many times when you're learning English, you're not getting a 3. You're not secure in the standard because your English skills are really what the standard - the standards you're working on are grow your English skills. So, you may not be able to get a secure grade in writing because you can't really even write an English sentence. So, to kind of reassure them that what we're really looking for is growth and progress and that by the end of the year they'll - they'll leave with a report card that reflects better what they're learned all year long and that this is just a goal-setting, kind of progress-setting report card, that kind of thing. Or to reassure them, because the parents who've been here a few years or who are English speakers, they seem to have a better sense of that scale and that system and what we expect from the primary students. And the parents from other countries sometimes have a little higher expectation and they - they expect their student to get all A's, all 4's, all E's, all [laughter] - to be really stellar.

When communicating with parents who believed effort is the most important factor in student success, teachers felt that it was especially tricky to suggest suspicions about as-yet unidentified learning disabilities. As Leah explained:

> I know sometimes if there are problems or you have maybe some learning concerns - and this hasn't happened to me personally, but it has happened to people on my [grade level] - that often times, the families from other cultures have a hard time accepting or don't want to believe that. That's one thing I've - that hasn't happened to me personally, because I haven't had that issue come up with families of different cultures.

The concern that Asian parents had sometimes unrealistically high expectations for their children was illustrated by several teachers who mentioned that immigrant parents were familiar with the practice of ranking students in order to determine how well they were

doing compared to the rest of the students in the class. Some parents, it seemed, behaved as if they were overly fixated on the notion of rank, whereas teachers were uncomfortable with ordering their students in this way. For teachers who believe that the purpose of school is to help children live up to their individual potentials, ranking went against their belief that children should be nurtured and encouraged to achieve to the best of their abilities. Toni, a kindergarten teacher, talked about her interactions with family who was curious about their child's rank:

> They were raised in a society, an educational society where you're ranked - it's constantly, "Where's your ranking? Where's your ranking?" So, they were looking for that sort of ranking and it wasn't happening so they were feeling frustrated about, "But, how is my child compared to everyone else?" So it was always, "But, where is my child compared to this child?" And it was tough for them that I wasn't offering that up. And so, even with some coaching they would still send in pages and pages and workbook pages that had nothing to do with anything we were doing in class, but they wanted me to see all the work the child was doing at home, you know, this poor kid. So, that was challenging. But at the same time, they're - this was a happy child, this was a successful child. They cared about their child, so, you know, there were worse problems to have.

First grade teacher Lydia shared a story of a mother who was so concerned about her child's standing in the class that she violated student confidentiality:

> Lydia: They have a hard time, even as you explain... each child has their goals, they all have their own areas that they're working on, and it's not about that, they still - because that's how they were raised and... they still can't get their head around that I can't tell them that their child is number one or number two or number three. They really want this quantitative... - I mean, it was to the point, I had a mom - and they moved here from, I think it was China - and I take my kids out to library this way and then I came back in through this back door. And I can see - there's the window there. She was volunteering, so I had left her in that room which is where my filing cabinet was... I had come back to that other door and I saw her through the window and she was in there with the other Chinese children's files out to compare their report cards...
>
> Interviewer: That's really awkward.

Lydia: Yeah. It was very awkward. But she - and I think she - she just, she really - she was one that was just really, really concerned that her daughter be the top. And I wouldn't give her a ranking and so she, I think, felt the need to figure out where she was compared to the other kids.

Teachers worried that Asian immigrant parents could put too much pressure on their children, as exemplified through an expectation of ranking. This concern may stem from a fundamental difference between the Knowledge Construction and Content Classic schemas: effort versus innate ability (Li, 2012; Stevenson, et al., 1990). For teacher participants, whose schema about teaching and learning included beliefs that children should be encouraged to work to the best of their ability and that self-esteem must be protected, it would be inappropriate to rank children based on the academic performance. However, for parents who were educated in cultural communities where effort is a highly deterministic factor in student success, ranking would be a powerful motivator – both for students and for parents.

From the parent point of view, James and Fei Yen, both parents of kindergartners, noted how differing beliefs about effort and hard work versus innate ability led to parent-teacher communication that did not completely meet their expectations. When reflecting on how the teacher had described his kindergarten daughter's progress, James said:

Well, uh, academically - according to [the teacher] - very well. But, of course, I - as a parent, I probably have a higher standard for [my daughter], so - I think she can do better. I was hoping she can be taught how to properly learn things. Because, well, granted she's only in kindergarten, but still I believe she has developed some bad habits as far as how to go to class, listen to teachers, things like that. Because she's - I was told, okay, by - she was easily influenced by other kids. Distracted, shall we say.

Although he believed that schools should emphasize discipline and basic skills much as his early education in Taiwan had done, James seemed reluctant to challenge or question the teacher, who he described as "kind of like a free-spirit kind of person," outright. However, although he believed that the teacher was very nice and that his

daughter was doing well by the standards of the school and the classroom, he was

adamant that his daughter should be pushed to strive for higher academic standards.

Fei Yen summed up the structural differences between parent-teacher

communication in China and the United States in this way:

> Chinese teachers will be extremely direct in pointing out the shortcomings of
> students to let them improve. Therefore students know what they lack even
> at an early age, causing them to be more realistic and reserved while
> Americans are more idealistic and optimistic.

Since Fei Yen had been in the United States for less than a year at the time of this study, her

expectations about the way her son's teacher would communicate about academics had

been shaped by her educational experiences in China. She was used to teachers "pointing

out shortcomings" so that students would be motivated to improve, a practice consistent

with a virtue-oriented schema which, according to Li (2012), includes a belief that "children

know that a mistake does not indicate an inherent flaw in themselves, but rather an

opportunity to self-improve...What is important is the focus on the improvable nature of

oneself" (p. 318). Explained Fei Yen, "In China, the teacher will tell you what level you child

are, but here, actually, the teacher didn't mention that, so, and I don't know whether my

child did very well in the school or not."

Interviewed teachers appreciated Asian families' respectfulness and gratefulness,

which matched with their beliefs that parents should trust and accept their teaching

methodologies. However, teachers were also concerned about these same parents' high

expectations and requests to rank their children, which did not coincide with the teachers'

schemas of teaching and learning emphasizing innate ability and self esteem. Parents who

identified with a Content Classic schema of teaching and learning, on the other hand, did not

see anything wrong with expecting their children to work hard in order to master rigorous

academic standards. And, for these parents, ranking was simply a familiar cultural practice with a purpose of motivating students to do their best.

Summary

Birdsong teacher and parent study participants agreed that it was important for parents and teachers to communicate with one another in order to ensure student success in school. This chapter detailed how participants' diverse ecocultural backgrounds and differing schemas about teaching and learning led to varied expectations about the purpose and structure of these conversations.

The purposes of communication from parent to teacher mentioned by participants were: individual needs, social/emotional, concerns, and academics. Among interview participants, teachers and American-educated parents most commonly mentioned social/emotional topics, as their schema of teaching and learning included a belief that a student's emotional state could affect his or her performance in school. Interviewed teachers, on the other hand, were most likely to talk about concerns as a topic about which parents should be forthcoming. The favoring of concerns over social/emotional topic during teacher interviews may have been due to the scheduling of the second round of interviews in the days following parent-teacher conferences. Parent interview participants who had been in the United States for at least five years also mentioned concerns most frequently as a reason to approach teachers. However, immigrant parents who had more recently arrived in the United States almost never mentioned communicating with their children's teachers at all.

The purposes of communication from teacher to parent mentioned by participants, in addition to individual needs, social/emotional, concerns, and academics, included home

practice, behavior, and curriculum. Teacher questionnaire respondents did not clearly favor

any one topic for communicating with parents. Instead, their fairly evenly distributed

responses suggested that teachers believed that each of the eight purposes was important.

There were key differences, however between the number of teacher questionnaire

participants and American-educated parents mentioning curriculum and concerns. Concerns

were the most frequently mentioned topic about which American-educated parents believed

teachers should communicate and curriculum was the least frequently mentioned. The

differences in means between American-educated parents and Birdsong teachers who

participated in interviews were large enough to be statistically significant in the case of

concerns and approaching significance in the case of curriculum. Among interview

participants, on the other hand, academics was the unanimously most commonly mentioned

topic by teachers and parents. Teachers and immigrant parents both wanted teachers to

discuss curriculum, however divergent schemas about the nature of teaching and learning

led some participants to feel frustrated when the information being offered or asked for did

not meet participants' ecoculturally-defined expectations related to curriculum.

For teachers and parents who were educated in different contexts, diverse schemas

about teaching and learning led to different beliefs about the way parent-teacher

communication should be structured. As with communication about academics, the ways in

which teachers interpreted the schemas of parents appeared to have a bearing on the ways

in which teachers approached communication with parents. Despite having espoused beliefs

that such non-cognitive skills as collaboration and self-esteem were important outcomes of

school, teachers emphasized academics when recounting interactions with parents.

The relationship between teacher schemas, teachers' beliefs about parent schemas, and diverse parent beliefs about teaching and learning came into sharpest contrast during interactions between Birdsong educators and immigrant parents who had been in the United States for less than a year. Parents from east Asian nations, raised in an ecocultural context that attributed success to effort rather than innate ability, looked to teachers for ways to support students' hard work through additional practice and were familiar with student ranking as a motivational tool. Teachers, on the other hand, were concerned that Asian parents pushed their children too hard and believed that ranking was not useful and might, in fact, be detrimental to students' self-esteem. These divergent beliefs resulted in miscommunication and misunderstandings that may have been avoided had teachers and parents had a better sense of the origins of one another's schemas.

The following chapter will summarize and analyze the findings detailed in Chapters 4 and 5 using the theoretical lenses of socioeconomic status, ecocultural context, social capital, and historically shaped assumptions about how learning occurs. In Chapter 6, the major findings of this study will be channeled into recommendations for practices within the Birdsong district, broader educational policy, and future research.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Overview of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to build upon existing research on the ways in which

the school-related schemas of public elementary school teachers and their students' parents

influence teachers' and parents' interactions with one another. Teachers, as representatives

of an established cultural and societal institution of "school" are charged with organizing

curriculum, planning learning activities for students, and setting expectations for classroom

behavior, decisions made largely based on their ecoculturally-influenced beliefs about

teaching and learning. In the Birdsong School District, however, teacher autonomy in

planning and decision-making was made complicated by interactions with parents who were

highly educated and high in socioeconomic status and whose schemas about teaching and

learning, at times, were formed in a completely different ecocultural context than that of the

teachers. This inquiry into the complex relationships between Birdsong teachers and parents

was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
2. What ecocultural factors shape elementary school teachers' and highly educated, professional immigrant parents' schemas about the education of students in a high-income, high-achieving public school district?
3. In what ways do schemas about education influence the interactions between highly educated, professional immigrants and their children's elementary school teachers?

In Chapter 4, the first two research questions were addressed as participants'

schemas about teaching and learning were categorized by the degree to which they

identified with either a virtue-oriented, effort-based, traditionally-defined model of teaching

and learning (labeled Content Classic) or a mind-oriented, innate ability-based, progressive

model of teaching and learning (labeled Knowledge Construction). In general, the teachers who participated in this study gravitated toward Knowledge Construction, while the parents who had recently moved to the United States from east Asian nations identified more strongly with Content Classic. Those parents who were partially educated outside the U.S. but had been in America for a decade or more tended to espouse "hybrid" schemas, incorporating aspects of both Content Classic and Knowledge Construction models of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 answered the third research question by connecting participants' schemas about teaching and learning to their beliefs about the purpose and structure of parent-teacher communication. The most commonly agreed-upon topic of conversation between Birdsong parents and teachers was student academic growth and development, a finding that aligns with a key commonality between both groups' schemas of teaching and learning: that school is a place for children to master skills and that teachers have a responsibility for helping students learn academic content standards. However, the most salient differences between parents and teachers arose around the way this academic communication was structured. Teachers described parent-teacher conferences in a consistent, teacher-led style beginning with the recounting of academic strengths and weaknesses (typically, through a discussion of grades), continuing with a summary of citizenship, and ending with an opportunity for parents to ask questions. According to the interviewed educators, the parent's role during this and all interactions was to demonstrate trust in the teacher's expertise, judgment, and advice, a behavior they noted when Asian immigrant parents were described as gracious, thankful, and respectful. However, parents who more closely identified with a Content Classic schema and believed that a child's effort was the most

important determinant of academic success were interested in their children's relative standing, or rank, among peers and expressed a desire for concrete, specific ways to help their children practice skills at home. Teachers, who identified more closely with a Knowledge Construction schema, felt that students' self-esteem and intrinsic motivation should be nurtured through encouragement to maximize their innate ability. Consequently, teachers at times believed that immigrant parents were pushing their children too hard or were disproportionately fixated on academic acceleration.

Over the course of conducting this study, it became clear that answering the research questions was not a simple matter of identifying patterns in participants' schemas and drawing clear connections between schemas and the ways in which teachers and parents interacted. Participants' descriptions of their actions were, at times, difficult to interpret as within-group contradictions came to light. The remainder of this chapter will lend further interpretation to the key findings though the lens of implicit cultural assumptions about how learning occurs, socioeconomic status (SES), and ecocultural context.

Implicit Assumptions about How Learning Occurs

This section will provide an examination of some of the key contradictions that emerged in this study through the historical context of education in the United States and how assumptions about how learning occurs have become deeply ingrained in the cultural consciousness over time. Teachers who participated in this study espoused what has been labeled a Knowledge Construction schema of teaching and learning, emphasizing students' inquiry and critical thinking skills, innate ability, and self-esteem. However, as described in Chapter 5, teachers communicated with parents in ways that seemed more consistent with a Content Classic schema. Similarly, parent interview participants who had been at least

partially educated in a western nation seemed conflicted about their goals for their children

and the types of communication they desired from teachers. As quoted in Chapter 5, Ellen, a

mother originally from Hong Kong, who had lived in Canada and the U.S. for thirty years,

discussed her third grade daughter's progress in this way:

> She's doing very well. I'm not the kind of mother that's interested in the
> grades itself. So, even though she did very well, she got 3.5, 3, yeah, I think
> most of them are 3.5's, and excellent and good. And that's great, I'm very
> happy about that. I'm more interested in the teacher's comments on how
> she does - her overall enthusiasm, does she take pride in her work? Those
> are the things that are very important to me.

While Ellen on the one hand valued her daughter's intrinsic motivation as expressed through

"enthusiasm" and "pride in her work," she simultaneously expressed pleasure that her

daughter was earning good grades in school. The ambiguities present in teacher and parent

talk about the importance of academics versus qualities such as intrinsic motivation may

have their roots in the lingering influence of early western theories of cognitive

development.

According to Byrne (2008), despite decades of research and theoretical advances on

the nature of learning, the model that persists in an American cultural schema of "school" is

one of transmission, practice, and assessment, based on the early 20th century work of

Thorndike. Writes Byrne:

> Although Edward Thorndike's (1913) classic theory is out of favor (and has
> been since at least the 1960s), it is still useful to examine it for two reasons:
> (1) many teachers seem to implicitly rely on Thorndike's principle when they
> teach, and (2) many contemporary theories can explain aspects of learning
> that Thorndike's theory cannot explain. (p. 11)

Thorndike's description of an ideal learning environment includes the practice of isolated

skills until mastery and affirmation for correct answers as students sequentially build

knowledge piece by piece. In these key ways, Thorndike's model aligns with a Content Classic

schema of teaching and learning, however, according to Byrne, it is highly influential for contemporary teachers. Despite teacher training and current research that favors pedagogical practices consistent with a Knowledge Construction schema, teachers (and parents) may, at time, "fall back" on what feels comfortable or familiar: an environment that emphasizes individual achievement, centrality of the teacher as the possessor of knowledge, and a question-answer-feedback routine between teacher and students. When explaining contradictions in the espoused schemas of Birdsong teachers and parents at least partially educated in Western nations, it seems that a Knowledge Construction schema of teaching and learning is, at times, subsumed by a deeply entrenched, broader social schema of "school" that is still largely based on century-old theories of teaching and learning.

SES and Parent-Teacher Interaction

In addition to implicit assumptions about how learning occurs, socioeconomic status may play a role in how parents and teachers espouse and enact schemas of teaching and learning. According to the work of Brantlinger (2003), Lareau (2000) and Lareau and Horvat (1999), upper-middle-class families intervene and involve themselves in more ways and more frequently than do their working-class peers. High-SES families often believe strongly that education is a shared responsibility and they are hypervigilant and critical of schools. In response, teachers of children from high-SES families may become frustrated when they feel as if their training and expertise in the field of education are unrecognized. As Lareau and Horvat explain, educators:

> …repeatedly praised parents who had praised them. They liked parents who were deferential, expressed empathy with the difficulty of teachers' work, and had detailed information about their children's school experiences. In addition, the teachers often stressed the importance of parents "understanding" their children's educational situations, by which they meant

that the parents should accept the teacher's definitions of their children's educational and social performance. (p. 43)

Consistent with Brantlinger's, Lareau's, and Lareau and Horvat's theories on the relationships between social class and parent-teacher interaction, the highly-educated, high-SES Birdsong parents were not shy about inserting and involving themselves in school-based academic and social decision-making, a quality that teachers consistently described with mixed feelings. On the one hand, teachers welcomed the involvement and interest in education demonstrated by Birdsong parents, however, they were frustrated by involvement seeping into over-involvement and interest becoming entitlement.

Ecocultural Context and Parent-Teacher Interaction

For decades, a societal expectation has been that immigrant students enrolled in American schools would learn and assimilate to mainstream practices and culturally defined expectations as quickly as possible (Banks, 2008; DeFeyter & Winsler, 2009). A critical finding of this study was that Birdsong educators believed east Asian immigrant families had beliefs about teaching and learning that were in alignment with those of the teachers. Highly educated east Asian immigrant parents were described by educators who participated in this study in ways that implied these parents were successful because of their ability and willingness to assimilate to the institutional and cultural expectations of American school. When thinking about why teachers may perceive Asian parents as easier to work with than other groups of parents, school principal Cathryn said, "The parents who come here, their belief systems about school match ours. And so it's easier to work with them. Much easier to work with them than somewhere else where it didn't match." Cathryn's statement communicates an assumption that Birdsong's immigrant families have similar beliefs to those of educators and it is because of their desire to assimilate and integrate that their children

are successful in school. The belief that Asian immigrant parents and Birdsong educators conceptualized teaching and learning in the same way was something that the other interviewed educators addressed as well when discussing Asian parents' commitment to education or expressions of respect for the teacher. This perceived alignment between teacher schemas and Asian parent schemas was challenged when teachers reported that immigrant parents were likely to push their children too hard or request that teachers rank children based on academic performance. Consequently, teachers reported misunderstandings and tension during communication with Asian immigrant parents, and immigrant parent participants expressed confusion and frustration following parent-teacher conferences.

The assumption among Birdsong educators that highly educated immigrant families from east Asian nations were successfully adapting to the institution of American public school appears to have been related to four factors. First was that Asian immigrant parents were described by teachers as thankful, gracious, and respectful of teachers, in contrast to many of the American-educated parents who were more likely to overtly challenge and question teachers' actions and decisions. This appreciativeness was easy for teachers interpret as acceptance of a institutional structure when, in fact, aspects of this structure were at times confusing for parents educated in a culture guided by a virtue-oriented model of teaching and learning.

Second, immigrant parents' emphasis on students' individual effort as a determinant of success was similarly welcomed by teachers as a contrast to American-educated parents who made excuses for or constantly rescued their children from difficult situations. Cathryn

addressed this contrast when she explained her admiration for how Asian parents at her

school valued effort and hard work:

> Their child has to do well and it's the child - and if they're not doing well,
> then the child has to work harder. It's that kind of a thing, where the White
> parents, I wish they would take some of that on because the White parents
> tend to protect their child and, no, it wasn't his fault and it was the other
> kid's fault and all of that kind of stuff. So, yes, I wish the White parents would
> take on some of that.

As with gratefulness and respect being misinterpreted so as to fit in with the teacher schema

of an ideal trusting parent, parents' belief in hard work and effort may have been seen by

teachers through an ecocultural lens that prized self-determination and individual

achievement. This resulted in teachers not understanding why, then, Asian immigrant

parents seemed preoccupied with ranking children or pushing them to achieve at levels

beyond what teachers might believe was developmentally appropriate. Although both

teachers and immigrant parents shared a schema that effort was important, teachers were

also guided by a ecocultural construct that innate ability was a determinant of success and a

belief that students should be motivated to meet their individual potential rather than a

fixed, external standard.

A third factor that may have led Birdsong educators to overlook differences between

their own schemas and those of highly educated immigrant parents was that in the Birdsong

District, Asian children tended to score at exceptionally high levels on standardized measures

of achievement. According to the California Department of Education (2013), Asian students

in the Birdsong district outscored their classmates on both the English Language Arts and

Mathematics domains of California's annual Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test

administered to students in public schools (Table 18).

Table 18. Percentage of Birdsong students scoring at or above proficient on California's annual STAR test.

	Asian	White	Filipino	Black / African American	Hispanic / Latino	Two or More Races
Language Arts						
2012	96	92	88	100	76	92
2011	96	89	92	86	72	90
2010	95	90	87	83	74	88
Math						
2012	98	91	91	92	76	93
2011	98	90	92	77	74	88
2010	99	90	95	83	72	85

Finally, the immigrant families of the Birdsong School District typically possessed high levels of financial and education capital. According to Portes and Fernández-Kelly (2008) and Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008), immigrant children who achieve academic success are more likely to live with two parents who have higher levels of education and higher socioeconomic status than other immigrants on average. And the work of Lareau (1987, 2000) and Louie (2001) further underscores the idea that family socioeconomic status does make a difference in student outcomes. In the case of Birdsong District, immigrant families' resources and children's academic success may mask the divergent schemas of teaching and learning that were detailed in this study.

Core Tensions. Among participants in this study, differences in schemas led to different ways of pursuing education-related goals and ultimately, to instances of miscommunication, as when parents requested information about their children's rank. These requests mildly frustrated teachers as they were interpreted through an ecocultural lens that included a belief that students' self-esteem should be protected, making ranking an inappropriate practice. What teachers may not have realized was that underlying tension in communication with immigrant parents, especially those who had moved recently from east

Asian nations, was a fundamental divergence in schemas about teaching and learning.

Schemas are inherently imbued with value, and teachers were appreciative of parents who

viewed teaching and learning from the "correct" frame of mind, which is to say in ways that

were similar to them. Educators appreciated how immigrant parents prioritized education,

were respectful of teachers, and put the onus of achievement on their children. However,

despite these outward indicators of agreement, analysis of parent participants' talk about

their expectations, experiences, and perceptions since coming into contact with American

public schools demonstrated immigrant parents who participated in this study espoused

schemas of teaching and learning that were different from those of teachers.

Table 19 displays a summary of the core tensions identified in Chapters 4 and 5.

These core tensions highlighted contrasts in participants' schemas of teaching and learning

and the ways in which these schemas related to communication. Some of the core tensions

were within groups, but most emerged as the result of comparisons between parents and

teachers.

Table 19. Core tensions between study participants' schemas of teaching and learning.

Parent participants appreciated:	Contrasted with:
That their children were happy in school.	A very strict, disciplined classroom common in China or Korea.

Parent participants were concerned about:	Contrasted with:
Low academic expectations, particularly in math.	A higher level of rigor in Asian countries.
Little information on the structure of the curriculum that would assist parents in at-home practice.	A textbook laying out a sequential, daily curriculum.

Teacher participants appreciated:	Contrasted with:
That Asian immigrant parents were gracious and respectful.	American-educated parents who overtly challenged teachers' decisions and practices.
That Asian immigrant parents held their children individually responsible for their actions and achievement.	American-educated parents who made excuses for their children or did not allow their children to solve their own problems.

Teacher participants were concerned about:	Contrasted with:
Asian immigrant parents pushing their children too hard or pressuring them to do well in school.	A belief that children should work to the best of their ability in order to maximize their potential.
Asian immigrant parents wanting their children to practice by rote copying or solving algorithms.	Teachers prioritizing critical thinking skills.
Asian immigrant parents asking about the relative rank of their children within the classroom.	Teachers prioritizing protecting students' self-esteem by not ranking them.

The core tensions displayed in Table 19 were most salient in the contrast between the teacher interview participants and the six parent interview participants who identified with a Content Classic schema of teaching and learning: Wen, Jiao, Hazel, Fei Yen, Yun, and James. However, despite these core tensions, there was a sense of satisfaction among Birdsong educators that highly-educated immigrant families from east Asian nations were doing just fine – that they were assimilating and adapting to a mainstream American schema of what it meant to be a good learner and therefore did not need further support in order to be engaged in their children's education.

In sum the outward behaviors that led educators to conclude that the beliefs of highly educated east Asian immigrant parents "match ours" were guided by underlying ecoculturally-influenced schemas about education that were, in fact, quite different from those of teachers solely educated in the United States. However, the respectfulness of parents, intense effort of students, high rates of achievement, and immigrant families' financial and educational capital make it tempting to be complacent as a district when it comes to engaging parents from east Asian nations. But the core tensions identified in this study (Table 19) have led to some important implications for practice, policy, and research.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

As with all California public elementary school districts, racial, ethnic, cultural,

religious, and linguistic diversity are ongoing realities in the Birdsong school district. During

the 2011-2012 school year, one in four students enrolled in Birdsong schools had a primary

home language other than English, with the most common first languages being Korean,

Spanish, and Mandarin (California Department of Education, 2013). Nearly a third of Birdsong

students during the 2012-2013 school year were Asian, with Chinese and Korean again

representing the proportionally largest ethnic groups other than White. The steady flow of

newly-arrived immigrants from China, Korea, and other nations, along with those immigrant

parents living in the United States for several years, present what Fuligni and Fuligni (2007)

referred to as a "significant challenge" for any American public school system.

Limitations of this Study

One possible limitation to this study was my positionality within the Birdsong School

District. Because I was a teacher, parent participants may not have been completely

forthcoming during interviews if they were concerned that I would be offended by their

response or that I would share information with their children's classroom teachers.

Teachers may also have been reluctant to completely share their thoughts out of a concern

that their responses could be used in an evaluative manner since I was employed in a

coaching role in the district at the time of this study. This study also has limited

generalizability. Since it took place within the context of one small, suburban elementary

school district in southern California, the results may not apply to schools in other regions,

neighborhoods, or socioeconomic conditions. Furthermore, since I relied on volunteers to act

as interview participants, these participants may not necessarily represent a cross-sectional sample of the broader teacher and/or immigrant parent population of the Birdsong District.

Although my positionality as a teacher in the Birdsong District led to some possible limitations, it also afforded me a degree of access to this understudied population. By engaging study participants from this specific context and describing how they made sense of events and behaviors in their own words, I was able to hone in on the relationship between context and actions. And although the specific context may not allow the results of this study to be generalized across varied situations, I have added to a research base that seeks to disentangle the relationships between parents' and teachers' socioeconomic status, culture, and individual experience as they influence schemas related to the education of children.

Implications for the Birdsong District

The high rates of achievement among students in the Birdsong District, coupled with immigrant families' being perceived by educators as thankful, respectful, and motivated to assimilate to American educational norms, mean that it is remarkably easy for the gap between immigrant parents' and educators beliefs about teaching and learning to remain unseen and unacknowledged. Indeed, a busy Birdsong teacher might wonder why, if students are doing well and parents seem happy, it is important to acknowledge and make sense of differences in schemas. Therefore, the results of this study will ideally be shared with teachers and administrators within the Birdsong District so that all stakeholders may be informed about some of the ways that culture and personal history affect parents' schemas and how parent-teacher interactions may be complicated by the values and assumptions implicit in these schemas. There are four reasons why educators and administrators within

the Birdsong School District as well as other similar districts in the United States can benefit

from putting into practice some of the recommendations proposed in this section.

First, in order to provide the opportunity to all students for an equitable education,

educators have a responsibility to take into account the diverse backgrounds of their

students when making decisions about classroom environment and lesson design.

Furthermore, not all immigrant families in the Birdsong District have high levels of capital

and if Birdsong educators are in the habit of simply dismissing the ecocultural context of

immigrant students, these students may not fare as well as their high-SES peers.

In addition to equity, it is important to recognize that immigrant students and their

families' schemas of teaching and learning are worth acknowledging in service of student

well being. Not all student outcomes are measured by test scores. Although standardized

measures of achievement indicate that Asian students are doing exceptionally well (Table

18), encountering a daily dissonance between the expectations of home and the

expectations of school may wear on children's social-emotional well-being.

Third, a major nationwide educational reform, the adoption of the Common Core

State Standards (CCSS) promises to change the way students across the United States are

expected to demonstrate their learning. At the time of this study, the CCSS were in their

earliest stages of implementation and a CCSS-aligned standardized achievement test was not

expected to be administered to California students until the 2014-15 school year (Smarter

Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2013). Whereas the previous California STAR test relied

on low-level recall and multiple-choice questions, according to the Smarter Balanced

Assessment Consortium (2013) the newly designed standardized test "will go beyond

multiple-choice questions to include extended response and technology enhanced items, as

well as performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills." This assessment description, with its inclusion of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, seems to coincide with a Knowledge Construction rather than a Content Classic schema of teaching and learning. Whereas a Content Classic schema emphasizes the mastery of academic skills in a sequential manner, oftentimes through rote learning and practice, a Knowledge Construction schema requires students to think critically about presented content. So, it will be important for the educators of the Birdsong school district to help parents and students who are more familiar and comfortable with a Content Classic schema to understand the key components of a Knowledge Construction model.

And finally, one must acknowledge the importance of social capital. At the elementary school level, parents' connection with one another, their children's school, and the community are important factors in student learning and emotional well being (Diamond, Wang, & Gomez, 2006; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). The analysis of participants' talk about social capital was not a main part of the research design of this study. However, there was some discussion of the ways in which parents gain information about school and other cultural institutions. One point that became abundantly clear, especially during discussions with the five parent interview participants who had been in the United States for less than a year at the time of this study, was that highly educated immigrant parents inherently understood the need for social capital. Perhaps as a function of their education and SES, parent participants' talk revealed a fundamental assumption that there was information they needed to acquire through social channels. And they reported actively pursuing social capital in a multitude of ways, including through co-ethnic parent relationships, relationships with American-born and –educated parents, by asking their

children's teachers, other teachers, the principal, coaches and tutors, and several times even the interviewer herself. The desire to learn the tacit rules and information needed to most efficiently navigate American schools was summed up by Ally, the mother of a second grader who had moved from China to the United States eight years prior to the study:

> I hope there will be a community like us, parents from other countries, and they discuss how to raise your children in America, because we have a different background. And Americans have so many communities, like every kind - lose weight, or - so I hope that there will be a community like that so we can get help. Right now, we can only help ourselves, personally. And it's very hard… We need help.

In an effort to maximize proactive and positive engagement of families in their children's education, I plan to share with Birdsong teachers, as well as a broader audience, the stories of the parents and teachers who took part in my study. However, since this study was a snapshot of a small group of parents and their teachers during a brief period of time, an ultimate goal is to generate ongoing inquiry among Birdsong educators as immigration patterns and, consequently, student and family demographics shift over time. It is my hope that, from this inquiry, three ongoing practices will emerge: learning from and about the families we serve, applying the results of these learnings to classroom practice, and partnering with families in ways that support community building and student learning.

Structures Already in Place. Any changes that come about within the Birdsong District as a result of this study will be built upon a foundation of multiple promising practices already in place. In the spring of the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, a district information night was held for parents of English learners. This event was held both years on a Thursday evening and included free childcare and light refreshments. The information night featured a panel of experts on English language acquisition prepared to give information and answer parent questions. Holding this annual information night was intended to send a

message to parents of English learners that they are important and valued members of the

Birdsong community. Scheduling the event to take place in the evening and providing free

childcare additionally communicated that the presence of all parents was valued, as it

minimized the exclusion of parents who worked full-time or were not equipped to arrange

their own childcare. In addition to annual parent information nights, the Birdsong District

English Learners Action Committee (ELAC) also offered to partner immigrant parents with

same-language mentors and offered family support handbooks in English, Chinese, Spanish,

and Korean.

At Lark School, where the principal and most teachers and parents interviewed for

this study were employed or attended, bi-weekly English classes were offered for parents.

These classes were not just a place for the parents of English learners to build language skills,

they were also a forum for the principal and the English instructor to help generate social

capital. As Cathryn, the Lark School principal explained:

> Getting the English language class here on site has been wonderful, because,
> number one, we're giving the message that even though you don't speak
> English quite yet, you are welcome on our campus. That's number one. And
> number two…I can go to the class and…talk to the parents and say things to
> the parents. And, like, before parent conferences, [the instructor] and I role-
> played what a parent conference was.

The English classes provided a way for Cathryn to welcome families into her school

community and help them feel more comfortable, a practice that, according to Hoover-

Dempsey and Sandler (1997) would encourage parent involvement both on campus and at

home.

Finally, at the individual classroom level, a positive, strengths-based attitude toward

immigrant parents was evident across all teachers interviewed for this study. Elementary

school education is a fast-paced, intense, and exhausting profession, and in the daily flurry of

tasks to be accomplished, inquiry into the varied teaching and learning schemas of a culturally diverse community was not always the top priority. However, teachers unanimously expressed a desire to learn more about the families they served. The remainder of this section will offer practical suggestions on how to support the ongoing engagement of immigrant families in the Birdsong School District.

      Learning From and About Families. In order to build upon the practices already in place toward an environment of greater inclusion and engagement of immigrant parents, the first step for Birdsong educators is to learn from and about the families they serve. According to Arzubiaga, Noguerón, and Sullivan (2009):

> Ecological and cultural (Weisner, 2002) understandings on how families organize their lives within specific contexts of reception can afford us ways of understanding the wide range of experiences children live. Families' organizations are arranged within the constraints and affordances of the ecologies of where they live but are based on family members' ingenuity and histories. These organizations provide children with practices and activities that constitute their developmental pathways.

For Birdsong educators, learning about the diverse and varied practices of their students' families could generate a powerful context of understanding, appreciation, and engagement. As detailed in Chapter 4, American-educated parents, those who had been living in the United States for more than a decade, and parents who had emigrated from Western nations talked about communicating with their children's teachers regarding their children's individual needs, social/emotional topics, concerns, and academics. However the recently arrived east Asian immigrant parents who were interviewed for this study did not mention initiating communicating with their children's teachers at all. The educators interviewed for this study remarked on this absence of communication from immigrant parents and expressed their curiosity about ways that American educational practices and parent-teacher

communication differed from their students' home countries. The Lark School principal, Cathryn, lamented that she felt she needed to do a better job engaging east-Asian immigrant parents, saying, "I think if we did a better job of communicating in different languages, welcoming, some of that - because they want to help. They want to be part of this schools, that's important to them."

However, despite a desire to reach out to families, the many other tasks demanded of a principal and teachers may result in outreach efforts being pushed to the bottom of a list of priorities. Therefore, it would be helpful if the Birdsong District created a structure for teachers and site administrators to begin to learn from and about immigrant families. These efforts could begin with a small group of principals and teacher volunteers who might be paid a stipend or given release time from their classrooms in order to engage in local community research. This group, possibly called the Community Outreach Action Committee, could include reading literature related to the largest cultural communities, such as Li (2006) and Li (2012). The Community Outreach Action Committee might partner with the English Learner Action Committee in order to facilitate home visits and opportunities for teachers to attend cultural community social events. And perhaps most importantly, the committee would invite immigrant parents to share their reflections, experiences, and concerns in a non-threatening, casual format. Despite study participants' apparent reluctance to approach their children's teachers, it was not at all difficult for the researcher to elicit talk from immigrant parent participants during interviews. On the contrary, study participants were eager to share their thoughts with me and were very articulate in their self-expression. By sitting down with parents and beginning with, "Tell me about…," the Birdsong educators could learn so much. Finally, the Community Outreach Action Committee would ideally meet

regularly in order to discuss their learnings and could offer seminars and professional development sessions for the rest of the Birdsong educators in order to share their reflections.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Once teachers have a greater base of knowledge on how children are used to learning in their home countries, they might choose to integrate their understanding into their own pedagogical practices. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), "culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (p. 161). As teachers begin to learn through conversations with families, home visits, attending community events, and reflection with colleagues, they might begin to brainstorm ways to integrate their knowledge of cultural practices into lesson design. For example, Wu (2011) suggests incorporating not only language, literature, and games from students' cultural communities, but also considering ways in which students might discuss content through the lens of cultural values, i.e. considering how a literary character's actions reflect the Chinese value of filial piety.

Engagement of Families. Not only would it make sense for teachers to integrate their increasing knowledge of second-generation students' home cultural practices into their pedagogical decision-making, teachers might also use information about cultural differences to facilitate more productive parent-teacher interactions. According to López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001), parent involvement is defined differently between cultural communities. Attempts to "educate" parents or get them to change their ecoculturally-informed involvement practices at home may meet with resistance and compound feelings of marginalization. Instead, it is important for educators to inquire into families' practices and build personal relationships in order to understand individuals' histories, unique

contexts, and needs. By building and maintaining personal relationships with parents, educators can position themselves as learners and parents as honored, respected "clients".

One recurring concern among parents who recently emigrated to the United States from China was that their children were not coming home with resources enabling parents to help their children practice at home. As Yun, the mother of a first grader who had been in the United States for less than a year at the time of this study, explained:

> With a textbook, you could have a clear idea that - what he's learning every day. Yeah, yeah. He's in this page, and what this page taught, and you have a very clear idea, but here if you - you don't have textbooks, I don't - I just don't know what he's learning every day, except he talks to me a lot, but you know for a boy or for a six year-old boy, he doesn't talk a lot. And sometimes he just tells me, oh, I forgot.

Teachers interpreted parent requests for textbooks and curriculum guides as intrusive or as parents' attempts to accelerate their children rapidly through the grade-level standards. In order to address this tension, it would be beneficial for teachers and parents to dialogue about the differences between the structuring of lessons in China and the United States. By understanding one another's background experience and points of view, parents and teachers would be more likely to come to agreement on the best ways for parents to support their children's education while living in the United States. This might mean, for example, teachers begin sending home weekly newsletters detailing key standards that have been addressed in the classroom along with suggested home follow-up activities. Following up on her earlier comment about textbooks, Yun gave the following suggestion for the Birdsong district:

> I mean, I think it might be better if, at the beginning of the semester, the teacher or the school told me that - okay, if your kid didn't speak English at all, then you have to do this, this, this, every week or something. Before, and not just in the middle of the semester. And the school told me, okay, your kid got so many problems with English and I just don't know where to start.

Recently arrived immigrant parents like Yun were particularly concerned that their children receive help in learning English, and teachers' reassurance that children would acquire the language naturally at their own pace may not have been adequate to alleviate parent concerns. Perhaps each school site could hold monthly informational meetings to give parents materials and strategies for supporting their children's ongoing language acquisition outside of school. As with the annual parent information night, it would be most helpful if these meetings were scheduled outside the school day in order to accommodate parents who work full time. The offering of childcare and light refreshments would also go a long way toward sending a welcoming message to parents who might otherwise be nervous about attending.

In addition to helping parents understand expectations for home, Birdsong educators could begin to explore ways of inviting recently-arrived immigrant parents to become involved at school. Parents interviewed for this study realized there were expectations for involvement in school, but they expressed insecurity with their ability to help due to their growing fluency in English and unfamiliarity with American school practices. Li (2006) discusses how there is often a mismatch between immigrant parents' and teachers' conceptualizations of involvement. In her study of Chinese immigrant parents in Vancouver, Li wrote about teachers wanting parents to come in to the classroom and help students with literature circles while parents did not feel as if they were qualified to do so (and in some cases judged that teachers were trying to get parents to do their work for them!). As part of an ongoing effort to engage immigrant parents in the Birdsong educational community, it would be useful to dialogue with parents about ways in which they feel comfortable helping out at school. For example, it might be beneficial for parents to come in during a writing

period to help children access vocabulary in English. A young English learner who is composing a story may know how to write "bird" in his or her native language, but may not know the word in English. If a parent were present who spoke the child's first language, the parent could either provide the word or could help the child look it up in a translation dictionary.

Implications for Broader Educational Policy

With relatively high socioeconomic status (SES) and high levels of education, the families who participated in this study are not typical California immigrants. And because Birdsong children are not typically viewed as at-risk or high needs students, one might wonder how research on these families can inform broad educational policy. However, this study's disentanglement of culture as a variable separate from SES and education illuminated key areas where teachers, principals, and other representatives of American schools can ease the transition of immigrant students and parents into a new context, regardless of their demographics.

The highly educated immigrant parents of the Birdsong District reported feeling marginalized and isolated at times. They expressed a desire to access social capital as a channel for learning how to navigate the American school system, but did not always know how they might go about doing so. And even though the parents who participated in this study were highly educated, those who had been in the United States for less than a year rarely mentioned communicating with teachers about their children. Simply put, this study serves as an important reminder that no group of students can be simply categorized, described, or pigeonholed based on demographic characteristic. Whether high- or low-income, native born or immigrant, or White, Black, Latino, or Asian, the impetus is on

educators to become as informed as possible about students and their families. For principals and teachers in any district, it is important to not only give parents information and communicate expectations, but to create a structure where parents, as valued partners in their children's education, have a forum to speak and be heard.

Implications for Future Research

This study was an important inquiry into the ways that highly educated, professional immigrant parents and their children's classroom teachers position themselves in relation to one another in the context of the American public school institution. A goal of this study was to disentangle families' immigrant status from their socioeconomic status (SES) and level of education, so that schemas of teaching and learning could not be attributed to high poverty or low levels of education, two demographic variables commonly linked to immigrants in the United States. In the most general sense, this study represents an addition to the field of research on immigrant population with American schools. More specifically, non-native-born families with high socioeconomic status have previously been the subjects of relatively little research in the field of elementary education. Since this study was limited to a small sample of parents and teachers, it would be beneficial for future studies to more systematically examine the ecoculturally-influenced schemas based on demographic factors such as the country in which they were primarily educated, their gender, number of years living in the United States, and whether they intend to return to their home country or remain permanently in the U.S.

While this study examined and categorized participants' schemas of teaching and learning, it did not go in depth into the varied experiences, contexts, and home practices of individual immigrant families. It would be important for future research to investigate and

construct immigrant stories based on participants' ecocultural niches. As described by

Goldenberg, Gallimore, and Reese (2001) an ecocultural niche is a "constellation of proximal

influences in the child's day-to-day life that shape developmentally significant child

experiences" (p. 26). By delving more deeply into parents' and children's individual

immigrant stories and routine family practices over time and connecting these ecocultural

factors to both schemas and school-based outcomes, future research could continue to

identify the nuanced ways in which high-income, high-SES families support their children's

learning. And with a more complete picture of these students and their families' ecocultural

niches, educators will be better equipped to communicate and collaborate with parents in

service of student learning.

Final Thoughts

The ninety-two Birdsong District parents and educators who participated in this

study provided a great deal of insight into the complex and varied relationships between

schools and families. In some ways, Birdsong's highly educated, professional immigrant

parents were, like their American-educated peers, able to draw on their educational

experiences and available social resources in order to successfully navigate the institution of

school. But in other ways, these same parents spoke of feeling confused, frustrated, and

marginalized when their schemas of teaching and learning did not align with those of their

children's teachers. The intersection between class and culture enabled the isolation of

socioeconomic status as a variable so that the schemas and practices described in this study

could be related to ecocultural context. However, that hardly made the study simple. Parent

participants' schemas about education were as complex and varied as each individual's

constellation of demographic variables and life experience. Ultimately, this study ends on a

note of extreme optimism. Despite at-times divergent ecocultural schemas of education,

parents and teachers share a common goal of student success. With a structure in place to

support mutual understanding and productive two-way communication, parents and

teachers could truly work as a team to ensure that this goal of success becomes reality.

Appendix A – Teacher Online Questionnaire

Teacher Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire. All replies are anonymous and all information gathered from this questionnaire is completely confidential. I appreciate your time!

Please describe your overall goals for your students:

How do you think that your students' parents can best support these goals?

What do you think the parents of your students would say are their overall goals for their children?

How do you think you can best support parents' goals?

What kinds of things are most important for you to communicate to parents?

Please list all of the methods that you use to communicate with parents of your students and place a * next to your two most preferred methods:

What kinds of things are most important for parents to communicate to you?

Please list all of the methods that parents use to communicate with you and place a * next to the two most common methods:

Describe a memorable interaction you've had with a student's parent or guardian:

Why was the above interaction memorable?

Continue »

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Teacher Questionnaire

So that I can better understand your responses, it would be helpful to have the following information. Feel free to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering:

Cumulatively, how many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher (including this year)?

◯ 1-3 years

◯ 4-6 years

◯ 7-10 years

◯ 11-15 years

◯ 16-20 years

◯ 21-30 years

◯ More than 30 years

At what school do you teach?

[   ]

What grade level(s) do you teach this year?

[   ]

What is your gender?

◯ Female

◯ Male

How would you classify your highest level of education?

◯ Multiple-Subject or Single Subject Teaching Credential

◯ Special Education Credential or Certification

○ Supplementary Certification or Authorization

○ Master's Degree

○ Doctorate Degree or other advanced degree

○ Other: [   ]

What is your age?

[   ]

How would you categorize your race/ethnicity?

[   ]

In what country were you born?

[   ]

If you were not born in the United States, how many years have you resided primarily in the United States?

○ Less than 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ 3-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ 16-20 years

○ 21-30 years

○ More than 30 years

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Appendix B – Parent Online Questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire. Please answer the following questions regarding the *oldest* child whose teacher invited you to participate in this questionnaire. All replies are anonymous and all information gathered from this questionnaire is completely confidential. I appreciate your time!

Please describe your overall goals for your child:

How do you think that your child's school can best support these goals?

What do you think your child's teacher would say are her or his overall goals for your child?

How do you think you can best support the teacher's goals?

What kinds of things are most important for you to communicate to your child's teacher?

Please list all of the methods that you use to communicate with your child's teacher and place a * next to your two most preferred methods:

What kinds of things are most important for your child's teacher to communicate to you?

Please list all of the methods that your child's teacher uses to

communicate with you and place a * next to the two most
common methods:

Which adult tends to help most often with your child's
homework?

Which adult attends your child's parent-teacher conferences
most frequently?

Please describe a memorable interaction you've had with your
child's teacher or another member of the school staff:

Why was this interaction memorable?

Continue »

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Parent Questionnaire

So that I can better understand your responses, it would be helpful to have the following information. Please answer the following questions regarding the *oldest* child whose teacher invited you to participate in this questionnaire. Feel free to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering:

What school does your child attend?

In what grade is your child?

How old is your child?

What is your child's gender?

◯ Female

◯ Male

Does your child have any siblings? Please list their ages:

What is your relationship to your child?

◯ Mother

◯ Father

○ Other: [_____]

How would you classify your highest level of education?

○ less than High School

○ High School

○ Some College

○ Associate's Degree or Professional Certification

○ Bachelor's Degree

○ Master's Degree

○ Doctorate Degree or other advanced degree

○ Other: [_____]

What is your occupation?

[_____]

What is your age?

[_____]

How would you categorize your race/ethnicity?

[_____]

In what country were you born?

[_____]

If you were not born in the United States, how many years have you resided primarily in the United States?

○ Less than 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ 3-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ 16-20 years

○ 21-30 years

○ More than 30 years

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Appendix C – Teacher Interview Questions

Initial Teacher Interview

1. Tell me a little bit about your background. Where were you born, raised, and educated?

2. Now tell me about your path as a teacher. How did you get started in this profession, where have you taught, and how did you end up in Birdsong?

3. How did you choose to work in Birdsong instead of in another district?

    a. Before becoming a teacher in Birdsong, did you already know someone working here?
    b. What did they tell you about the district?

4. What is the best thing about working in Birdsong? What is the most challenging part?

5. It is generally accepted that, in Birdsong, parents are involved in their children's education. How would you describe parent involvement in Birdsong?

    a. What types of involvement do you, as a teacher, feel are important or necessary for student success?
    b. Are all parents involved in their children's education?

6. Some teachers have said that parents from particular countries are especially challenging or are especially easy to work with. Has that been your experience?

    a. Tell me about a strategy you have used in your interactions with more challenging parents?

7. In what ways do you wish immigrant parents were more like those who were born and raised in the U.S.? Are there any ways you wish U.S.-born parents were more like those who've come from another country?

8. One type of parent involvement is just staying in communication with the teacher. Many parents even say that they want to work together with the teacher as a team in order to educate their children. To what degree do you think parents and teachers need to communicate and work together?

    a. What barriers to communication with parents have you encountered in your career?

9. How does the way parents in Birdsong relate to schools compare with how your parents related to your elementary school?

10. What do you think are the most important things parents can do to help their children do well in school?

11. Children are in school for about six hours each day. What kinds of things do you think teachers should emphasize during that time? Is there anything you believe is a parent's responsibility to teach?

12. What do you think most Birdsong parents would say are their long-term goals for their children?

    a. Do you feel that parents prioritize some goals more than others?
    b. Do you think that the school district helps children progress toward these goals?

13. If you had a friend whose child was starting school in Birdsong what would you tell them?

    a. What if they specifically wanted to know about how to help their kids be successful in school, what would you tell them?

Follow-Up Teacher Interview

1. You just finished up parent-teacher conferences - please walk me through your typical conference.

2. How would you describe your overall goals for parent-teacher conferences?

3. Please tell me about a conference where you felt that you and the parents were "on the same page" – where your goals for the conference were more or less the same.

4. Please tell me about a conference where it felt as if you and the parents had different goals. How did you approach this conference?

    a. Do you have a follow-up plan or next steps?

5. Do you have an example of another conference that stands out in your mind as particularly memorable?

6. Can you think of an example of a parent who asked for help with something? Where did you direct him or her for assistance?

    a. Did any parents ask you for something that you just felt you could not deliver?

7. Please think back to one of your conferences with a family that is not from the United States. How was this conference different from the other parent-teacher conferences?

   a. What are some things that you value and appreciate about the way this family communicates?
   b. Is there anything you do not like about the way this family communicates?
   c. What are some things that you value and appreciate about the way the "typical" American-born and educated Birdsong family communicates?
   d. Is there anything you do not like about the way the "typical" American-born and - educated Birdsong family communicates?

8. When talking with your parents from other countries, have any parents shared with you how conferences in the U.S. are different from their home countries? What have they shared?

9. Several teachers have mentioned inviting translators to attend parent-teacher conferences. Are there any other ways in which you have found yourself taking steps focusing on building communication or relationships with immigrant parents?

Appendix D – Parent Interview Questions

Initial Parent Interview

1. Tell me a little bit about your background. Where were you born, raised, and educated?

2. How did you come to live here (this city and/or United States)?

3. How did you choose to settle in the Birdsong school district instead of another neighborhood in this city?

   a. Before coming here, did you already know someone who was here? What did they tell you about the area? Anything in particular about the schools?

4. Think back to your earliest interactions with a U.S. school. What was surprising to you? What has been the hardest thing to get used to?

   a. Is there anything that has made it easier?

5. How would it be different for your child if he/she were going to school in your home country?

6. Some parents have said that the education in the U.S. is not as good as maybe in ___. Has that been your experience?

   a. How do you help your child get as good of an education as they would get in ___?

7. What is the biggest advantage to being here, for you and your children? What is the biggest disadvantage?

8. What are some goals you have for your child's future?

9. In what ways do you communicate your hopes and expectations to your child?

10. Do you think he/she understands these hopes and expectations? How do you know?

11. What are some goals you have for your child for this school year?

    a. How do you feel that your child's school helps with progress toward those goals?
    b. How do you help your child progress toward those goals?
    c. What have you noticed or heard about how other parents help their children?
    d. Do you feel as though any of your goals for your child are not being met?

12. Sometimes parents learn about schools and teachers by talking to their friends, neighbors, coworkers or people they know from church or other organizations. How do you find out information about your child's school?

    a. Have these friends/neighbors/coworkers ever told you about extra opportunities to help your children academically, like classes or programs either at school or outside of school.

13. Children are in class for about six hours each day. What kinds of things do you think your child's teachers should emphasize during that time?

    a. Is there anything you believe is a parent's responsibility to teach?

14. If you had a friend whose child was starting school in Birdsong what would you tell him or her?

    a. What if they specifically wanted to know about how to help their kids be successful in school, what would you tell them?

Follow-Up Parent Interview

1. Please tell me about how your parent-teacher conference went.

2. How do you feel your child is progressing in (student's grade level) grade?

    a. Do you have any concerns about his/her progress?
    b. Do you have any concerns that are not related to academics - maybe having to do with behavior or friendships?

3. What were your goals for the parent-teacher conference?

    a. Do you feel that the teacher had similar goals?
    b. Do you feel as if your goals were met?
    c. If your goals were not met, do you have a follow-up plan or next steps?
    d. What will you do next to help get your goals met?

4. How are parent-teacher conferences in the United States different from those in your home country?

5. Did you prepare for the conference ahead of time or bring anything with you to the conference?

    a. How did you know what to prepare or bring?

6. Is there anything you wish you had communicated to the teacher?

7. Is there anything that you with the teacher had communicated to you?

8. Do you have any questions now that the conference is over?

   a. Who will you go to for help in answering those questions?

9. How was your conference different from the way teachers conference with parents in your home country?

   a. What are some things that you value and appreciate about the way parents and teachers communicated in (home country)?
   b. Is there anything you do not like about parent and teacher communication in (home country)?
   c. What are some things that you value and appreciate about the way parents and teachers communicate in Birdsong?
   d. Is there anything you do not like about how parents and teachers communicate in Birdsong?

10. Think for a moment about all of the people who you go to when you have questions or need information about school.

   a. When your child complains about something that happened at school that day – maybe another child bothered him/her or maybe he/she felt like the teacher didn't treat him/her fairly – who do you ask for advice?
   b. When your child doesn't understand his or her homework and you don't feel able to help, who do you ask?
   c. When you don't understand paperwork sent home from school, who helps you with that?
   d. Tell me about another time when you had a question or there was something related to your child's school that you did not understand and someone helped you?

Appendix E – Principal Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about your background. Where were you born, raised, and educated?

2. Now tell me about your path as an educator. How did you get started in this profession, where have you taught, and how did you end up as a principal in Birdsong?

3. How did you choose to work in Birdsong instead of in another district?

   a. Before becoming a principal in Birdsong, did you already know someone working here?
   b. What did they tell you about the district?

4. What is the best thing about working in Birdsong? What is the most challenging part?

5. It is generally accepted that, in Birdsong, parents are involved in their children's education. How would you describe parent involvement in Birdsong?

   a. What types of involvement do you feel are important or necessary for student success?
   b. Are all parents involved in their children's education?

6. One type of parent involvement is just staying in communication with the teacher. Many parents even say that they want to work together with the teacher as a team in order to educate their children. To what degree do you think parents and teachers need to communicate and work together?

   a. What barriers to communication with parents have you encountered in your career?

7. Some teachers have said that parents from particular countries are especially challenging or are especially easy to work with. Has that been your experience?

8. As a site leader, how do you facilitate the involvement of parents?

   a. How do you specifically reach out to or facilitate the involvement of those who are newcomers to the country or are not familiar with the U.S. school system?

9. Parent-teacher conferences just took place a short time ago. What differences have parents shared with you regarding how parents and teachers conference at your school in comparison to their home countries?

10. In what ways do you wish immigrant parents were more like those who were born and raised in the U.S.? Are there any ways you wish U.S.-born parents were more like those who've come from another country?

11. Think back to your interactions with parents or guardians over the years. Tell me about one event or relationship - positive or negative - that stands out in your mind.

12. How does the way parents in Birdsong relate to schools compare with how your parents related to your elementary school?

13. What do you think are the most important things parents can do to help their children do well in school?

14. Children are in school for about six hours each day. What kinds of things do you think teachers should emphasize during that time? Is there anything you believe is a parent's responsibility to teach?

15. What do you think most Birdsong parents would say are their long-term goals for their children?

16. If you had a friend whose child was starting school in Birdsong what would you tell them?

    a. What if they specifically wanted to know about how to help their kids be successful in school, what would you tell them?

Appendix F – Coding Scheme

Code	Description	Example
Academic expectations	Discussion of academic expectations as part of schooling.	*I think every conference I had this year, we were pretty much on the same page and we were seeing the same things at home that we were at school. Expectations were the same at home that they are at school, you know, which does vary from child to child - what the expectations are behaviorally and academically, socially. I - every conference this year, we were on the exact same page, definitely.*
Answer parent questions	Instances of teachers being available to and/or being expected to provide answers to parent questions about academics or other issues.	*And then I hand them the copy of their child's report card. I have a copy in front of me also. And I'll start off with - first of all, let me tell you how much I love having your child in my class for x, y, z reasons, and then we go on to the report card. Why they got what they got and then if they have any questions or concerns that they want to share with me.*
Assertiveness/advocacy	Segments that express a belief relating to or give examples of parents being proactive or assertive in asking for/demanding resources for their children.	*Well, the parents had a lot of say and had a lot of influence towards principals and the board and the district. So, if parents were unhappy, they voiced their concerns and it would trickle down and one way or another, they had a lot of influence in what was being done.*
Best of ability	References to students being expected to work to the best of their ability.	*I hope for each student to reach his or her highest potential. In doing so, I want all of them to develop a love of learning.*
College/ career aspirations	Segments where participants discuss future aspirations for children related to either college or career.	*I guess one thing would be maybe the emphasis on the importance of education and that college is important. That, I think, might be - I don't think that really is there in the American schools, you know, it's like your choice, and graduating high school is your choice too, even going to high school is your choice too. But maybe if there was a little bit more emphasis on the importance of it, maybe that. You know, a little bit more structure, I guess.*
Communicate importance of school	Expectation that parents should communicate to their children the importance of school.	*Talk to kids about school (in detail....don't let them get away with saying they didn't learn anything)*
Communicate with parents	Discussion of the ways in which teachers maintain lines of communication with parents.	*I need to listen as much as I need to speak. If we use data, conversation can be more specific. Information needs to be timely and often.*
CP-Academics	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing the child's academic development/progress.	*I appreciate knowing when my child has performed well in school work and areas where he needs additional work. I also appreciate the teacher providing books to read that are appropriate for his reading level.*
CP-Concerns	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing concerns.	*Last year, I had a parent that was really concerned about how her child would be perceived - sort of an atypical learner - and felt they had had a negative experience from their preschool, apparently and the child had been labeled as some things they disagreed with.*
CP-Social/Emotional	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing the child's social/emotional development.	*Actually, yes. I'm actually a little worried about his friendships, but the teacher said he is doing pretty well. He makes friends with everybody, so, actually it's a little relief when I heard that.*

Code	Description	Example
CP-Behavior	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing behavior.	*But the - there was a - two children at a school that I was at where I could not get the parent - they were so busy - one little girl was climbing trees, screaming - they were so busy saying that what - looking at what we were doing wrong at the school. They didn't want to see or - I think they see, they just - that - they fight rather - they blame rather than giving the kids help. So that is - that's my big - that's - that goes with me all the time. Like, what am I doing wrong that I can't get you to understand that your kid is crying for help.*
CP-Individual Needs	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing the child's education based on his or her individual strengths, personality, challenges, etc.	*I just acknowledged all the positive qualities in the child and then, okay, and here's the things we can work on. And cared for the child.*
CP-Curriculum	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing the structure, format, or expectations of the grade level curriculum .	*About the academic standard - what my boy should reach, or what level he should reach and how can I help him, in details. Because he got so many difficulties in the language and I really have no idea how to help him. And I want to help him systematically, like, you need to do this first, then when reaches what kind of a level and then what he could do and then I can move to the next level and the next level. But I didn't get this kind of information. I still got confused about how to help him.*
CP-Home Practice	Communication with parents for the purpose of discussing how the parents can help their child practice at home.	*And then we just rely on the student and the parents to help put together some kind of a toolbox that the student can have as far as being able to refer to for certain study skills. If they need to make flash cards for certain tests, then that's what they know they need to do. If they need to type up their notes, then - just so that they become confident in a strategy that works best for them. So, we have a really good conversation about that.*
Communicate with teacher	Discussion of the ways in which parents maintain lines of communication with teachers.	*When their child has had a social issue that they have not shared with me so that I can help them work on it. When their child is feeling anxious about something that I can help them with. When they have questions about what they have heard is going on in the classroom or questions about something curricular so that I can clarify.*
CT-Academics	Communication with the teacher for the purpose of purpose of discussing the child's academic development/progress.	*He's below average on the literary skills and I'm having a meeting with his other teacher, because they have two teachers.*
CT-Concerns	Communication with teacher for the purpose of discussing concerns.	*Every Back to School Night, I always tell the parents if there's a problem and I don't know about it, I can't help you. So if you're having a problem with me, or if your child is having a problem with another child, or if your child is having a problem with me, you need to tell me.*
CT-Social/Emotional	Communication with teacher for the purpose of discussing the child's social/emotional development.	*My son's preferences, strengths and weaknesses, and recent family changes that could affect his emotional status and thus his effectiveness at school.*
CT-Individual Needs	Communication with the teacher for the purpose of discussing the child's education based on his or her individual strengths, personality, challenges, etc.	*I want to know what talents a child has from the parent's perspective. I want to know what they enjoy most about school.*

Code	Description	Example
Create balance	Segments where participants discuss balancing a child's academic pursuits with extracurriculars such as sports, dance, religious education, or unstructured recreational time.	*Yeah, I think it's not just through academics. So, I believe that teamwork - playing a team sport is important. So she's on a basketball league. She plays piano and that - I'm - I - they say they've done the research, there's a correlation between math and English, er, and music. I don't know, but I played piano when I was young and then I think it teaches you to be more - to be perseverant. And it teaches you the discipline of practice and so, you know, that she does. She's interested in piano. She also takes swimming. I think sports is very important. And then sometimes she takes Chinese lessons. But that's extremely important to me that she's doing all of these extracurricular activities. I don't think a child should be sitting 24/7, studying the whole time. That's just not my philosophy.*
Critical thinking	Discussion of school as a place where students learn to think critically.	*Teaching children to understand why a concept exist, not just memorization. Focusing on teaching critical thinking skills that can be applied to various subject matters.*
Desire for social capital	Segments that refer to parents desiring information about cultural practices.	*Yeah, maybe - yeah, I know Halloween, but yeah, more specifically, I know trick-or-treat, but yeah, more specifically - yeah, for example, when he's invited to attend a child's birthday party, so what I should do. Yeah, these kind of things. Sometimes.*
Discipline	Talk about managing student behavior through specific discipline practices.	*In China, at elementary school, I think the most important thing for the teacher, for the first year teacher is to set the rules and make sure they can follow all the rules and you have good habits, like writing, reading, finish your homework on time - all this kind of thing. And you have to sit very straight in the classroom and you have to raise your hand when you want to answer a question or say something, and you won't be able to, say like, go to the restroom or do whatever, you know, during the classtime. So it's really strict.*
Effort/ work hard	Discussion of student effort and/or hard work.	*Yeah, I think that's the most important part. I'm trying to raise them like that. You have to do something that you love to do. But, of course sometimes the work is hard, even though you love to do it. That's - it's okay. And of course I have taught them if they are saying, "Oh, it's so hard. School is hard." If they are doing something that they just don't like, and I say, "It's okay if it's hard. It's just good for you. Just try to do it anyway."*
Exploration, questioning, inquiry	Discussion of students being encouraged to explore, question, or inquire about the material with which they are presented by their teacher, parent, or in the world at large.	*Parent involvement shouldn't be the parents doing the work for the students, but rather asking them questions, supporting studies by doing more in-depth research or exploration, and reading and discussing what they've read together.*
Fixed curriculum	Segments where participants describe a curriculum that is sequenced and structured, allowing for predictability.	*But, with a textbook, you could have a clear idea that - what he's learning every day. Yeah, yeah. He's in this page, and what this page taught, and you have a very clear idea, but here if you - you don't have textbooks, I don't - I just don't know what he's learning every day, except he talks to me a lot, but you know for a boy or for a six year-old boy, he doesn't talk a lot. And sometimes he just tells me, oh, I forgot.*
Follow up on behavior issues	Parent's responsibility is to follow up at home when a child does not follow behavior expectations at school	*I appreciate teacher informs me my child's classroom behavior (always talking with other kids), so that we can work on it and fix the issue.*

Code	Description	Example
Global perspective	References to an explicit desire for children to have an understanding of and appreciation for a range of cultures.	*So, for me number one is good manners, you know? And then part of that is obviously respecting other cultures. And that's what I explain to him. The USA doesn't talk like us, so you have to be careful and respectful.*
Happy in school	Some adults may express a belief that a child should be happy or is/isn't anxious in a particular school environment.	*I think the good thing here for my boy is that he doesn't speak English now and he can't understand, but he feels really happy every day in the school. And he says, "I couldn't understand, but I can guess. And most of the time my guess is wrong. But I'm still happy."*
Happy with progress	Expressions of parents being happy or satisfied with their children's academic progress.	*She's doing very well. I'm not the kind of mother that's interested in the grades itself. So, even though she did very well, she got 3.5, 3, yeah, I think most of them are 3.5's, and excellent and good. And that's great, I'm very happy about that. I'm more interested in the teacher's comments on how she does - her overall enthusiasm, does she take pride in her work? Those are the things that are very important to me.*
Help at home	Discussion of whether parents should or do help their children at home with school work.	*Let me think... I don't know - one parent just wanted the copy of the narrative writing rubric, so, while she's helping her son write at home she can use that as a point of reference. So I copied that for her. I guess that's helping her, giving her the tools that she needs. Other than that, no. No.*
Heritage language	References to preserving a heritage language.	*To be himself, and I - because the most thing I worry about my boy is he's Chinese. And the only hope is I hope he can speak Chinese fluently and can read and can write. And other things he can do what he likes to do.*
Homework	Mentions of homework as a student responsibility.	*Homework time should be sacred at home, and parents should provide a designated work space with the necessary supplies. If support is needed with homework, parents can assist as needed. Parents should read with children nightly in the younger years, asking them questions about their reading at all ages. In addition, if additional support for learning is needed, parents can work together with teachers to determine how to best support the child.*
Intrinsic motivation/ engagement	Discussion of students needing to be engaged or motivated intrinsically as part of doing well in school.	*I want my child to be engaged in his studies. I want him to be inspired and motivated to learn.*
Involvement at school	Discussion of whether parents should or do help out in the classroom or on site.	*I have sent out specific emails to Korean parents about the ESL classes taught at our school site and sent home flyers with their names on it. To build relationships, I always invite them to our parties and events and school.*
Language barrier	Segments that refer to language as a barrier to parents connecting with other parents or parents connecting with teachers.	*Well, I had a translator there, because I wanted them to be able to fully understand what it is I was saying. They're very grateful. Very grateful for everything that they say I do for their child. Just thanking me over and over and over and over and over again. Just very polite, very quiet. The translator had to ask the parents if they had any questions for me. They weren't very forthcoming in asking me the questions of their own will. I think that was all that was different. And I guess it has to do with the language barrier, you know. They don't know - there's not that natural back and forth. So it's like they're waiting for the translator to say something and I'm waiting and I'm like, okay [laughter].*

Code	Description	Example
Let kids be kids	Some adults may express a belief that children should not be pushed or pressured to work to hard, but should be allowed to enjoy childhood.	*But then at the same time, I would want to transfer some of the more - you know, "children should be children" aspect to Korea because they really don't get to be kids once they start school. They're - it's very regimented and everybody has to do what everybody else is doing.*
Mastery of skills	References to the mastery of explicit academic skills as part of teaching and learning.	*To learn how to read, write, and do math proficiently. I want him to excel in school so that he can attend college and possibly graduate school. For my student in particular, I hope he gets more practice with writing and reading comprehension.*
Parent as a role model	Segments where participants express a belief that parents need to act as role models in order to be supportive of their children's education.	*Parents best support these goals by modeling them and providing loving and consistent home life full of educational experiences.*
Parent expectations too high/ pressure to achieve	Discussion of parents having too high of expectations for their children or putting undue pressure on their children to achieve in school.	*I had a girl cry because she got a 92% and it wasn't 100% the other day. And she does have immigrant parents, but they're permanent southern California residents, so not having this, "It all matters - your grade," but kind of combined into have fun, do the best job you can, but also giving the support that needs to be given.*
Physical education	References to sports and physical education as part of the school's schedule/program.	*My goals for my students are to walk out of my classroom with an appreciation for their minds as well as their bodies. I want students to know there is direct correlation between a healthy physical body and a powerful brain.*
Point out weaknesses	Segments where participants express a belief that teachers do or should highlight their students' weaker academic areas when communicating with parents or whether teachers should emphasize strengths.	*Parents like to hear positive feedback on how their child is doing. They also just like the nitty-gritty information that they might need such as upcoming important dates. In addition, they like to know if their child is having difficulty with something right away, be it behavior or academic, so that they are not shocked to hear about it later.*
Protect self-esteem	References to teaching demeanor or practices for the purpose of protecting students' self-esteem.	*I also praise as needed and encourage children to take risks and create a safe environment in which to do so.*
Provide experiences	Discussion of parents needing to enrich their children's education by providing experiences such as visiting museums, camping, or travelling.	*We'll go camping, like, we love to go to the desert. And it's not like - one mom, she makes it an educational trip - what's this plant, what's that plant. I'm like, look, just watch out for the snakes and the scorpions and maybe some black widows. Take your bikes and go and be free and enjoy the space because we're in an apartment.*
Ranking, competition (+)	Segments that refer to a system of competition or ranking institutionalized at the school level.	*In China, actually, the teacher will not speak with parents individually. They just tell you, actually, speak to all the parents. But here, the teacher points out very specifically what your children need to improve. And I think this way is much better. But in the - in China, the teacher will tell you what level you child are, but here, actually, the teacher didn't mention that, so, and I don't know whether my child did very well in the school or not. Yeah, the rank. Maybe you rank - in China, the teacher will tell you, yeah, you child is a top student or not. But here, the teacher didn't say anything about the - about the comparison between other students.*

Code	Description	Example
Ranking, competition (-)	Segments that refer to a system of competition or ranking institutionalized at the school level.	*And then I have had some that yet don't understand why we don't, like, drill and kill math facts or why I won't tell them where their child is compared to other children. They always want to know - yeah, but is he number one? Is he number one in the class? And they want - and they don't understand that that's not how we look at education or goals and so, I've had both.*
Recognition/thanks from parents	References to teachers being thanked or recognized by parents.	*Last year I had a parent thank me for all of my hard work with their student. They said that I was a "game changer" for their student and that they now see a bright future for him. They said that it sincerely was me that changed the direction that their student was headed.*
Respect boundaries	Discussion of parents needing to respect boundaries between themselves and teachers, i.e. respecting time, teacher expertise.	*I'm not going to commit myself to updating my website every weekend and that - I tried to explain, I have limited time and in that time, it - I think it's most beneficial that I'm doing stuff that directly benefits their child in the classroom. And then that, for my time, isn't my focus. And I can't agree to do things that are going to take my family time on the weekend or after school, I'm not going to commit to that. So, I think that was the main thing. Although I did come up with a rough outline, like a general one that I can give them for science and social studies that I'm working on. But that was the main thing that I couldn't give them that they're asking for is this outline of everything that I do each week.*
Respect for teacher	Talk about whether children should/do show respect for their teacher.	*But then I try not to tell him, "Oh, just ignore the teachers," because I want my kids to learn respect, and that to me is very important, that they respect their elders, the teachers, you know, hold open the door for an adult. Say please, say thank you, you know, to me that's very important.*
Speaking/ participating in class	Passages where participants discuss student participation as an important or necessary part of school.	*This year, they're doing a lot more presentations and she's - everybody I think has more anxiety over it, but I know that she can do really well, because when she practices with me, she's on it, you know, she's on point, and eye contact and everything. But when she gets in front of the students in class, she - you can't hear her voice anymore, and she doesn't look at anybody, so - and I shared it with her teacher to because she asked me the same thing and I said, you know, build up confidence. Public speaking is - can be huge and it's going to be just, there's going to be more and more of it.*
Trust in teachers/school leadership	Discussion of the degree to which parents should/do trust teachers or administrators to make the right decisions for their children.	*Parents like to hear positive feedback on how their child is doing. They also just like the nitty-gritty information that they might need such as upcoming important dates. In addition, they like to know if their child is having difficulty with something right away, be it behavior or academic, so that they are not shocked to hear about it later.*
U.S. too easy	Passages where participants describe the education system in the United States as too easy compared with the education system in another country.	*Well, mathematics standards are much higher in Asia. They rely a lot more on rote memorization. And there's pros and cons to that as well. There is a lot more homework, it is a lot more rigorous compared to the American standards, without a doubt.*

Code	Description	Example
Unsatisfied with progress	Discussion of parents or teachers being unsatisfied with a student's academic or social progress.	*For me, it's always like, if the child is struggling in school, it's something to do with the teacher. Or the teaching. And so, when I emailed the teachers about that and said, look, this is like horrific. I mean, a simple thing like that, he should have got it just from the answers alone. Estimated or guess and exact - right there is your answer. Your range. And so that's why I'm going to meet with the teacher. The teacher set it up*

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