SENSE OF BELONGING AND IMMIGRANT PARENTS:
STRENGHTENING THE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

by

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Abstract

Immigrant students and families are increasingly becoming important members of our education system. In 2014, Canada welcomed more than 200,000 newcomers (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015). The experiences and successes of immigrant students have been linked to many school and home factors (Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987; Fuligini, 1997). Culturally based explanations of success argue that immigrant students' success and experiences in school can be fully explained by their race or socioeconomic status (Trueba, 1988). The effectiveness of their home (family) and school environments should also be considered (Trueba, 1988). Research has also demonstrated that immigrant families contribute to their child's education in different ways (Fuligni, 1997; Lopez, 2001). Therefore, family-school partnership is very integral to immigrant students' success. While schools have focused on different ways of integrating students and families in schools, some scholars argue that studying how immigrant individuals experience sense of belonging is a more appropriate direction (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, research is unclear on how immigrant families, who are new members of the community, can become part of the school community (Puig, Erwin, Evenson, & Beresford, 2015). Employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this study used semi-structured interviews to explore immigrant families' perceptions and experiences of sense of belonging in their child's school, and teachers' perceptions of sense of belonging for school community members and experiences of enhancing sense of belonging for immigrant families. The findings suggest that families perceive sense of belonging as being informed, having a support system, and feeling emotionally safe. They experienced sense of belonging in their children's schools when they felt included, and had effective communication. Teachers perceived that sense of belonging for school community members means having a welcoming environment. Teachers

also discussed communication and relationship building as some of the strategies they use in enhancing sense of belonging for immigrant parents. Relevance of these findings with their implications in a broader sociocultural understanding is discussed.

Preface

The content of this thesis is based on the unpublished work conducted by Dorna Rahimi, the Graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Ford. The research conducted for this study was approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia under the certificate number H16-00580.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents whose courage and sacrifice during our immigration process to Canada taught me resilience, compassion, hope, and ambition. I would also like to thank my wonderful friends and my outstanding cohort members for their encouragements in this journey. In addition, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Laurie Ford for her continuous guidance and supervision, and my committee members, Dr. Gunderson and Dr. Talmy, for their contributions. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Iranian-Canadian community and the teachers in the Metro Vancouver for sharing their experiences with me.

To My Parents, Soodabeh Bazrafshan and Mojtaba Rahimi, and All the Other Immigrant Parents.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

Schools in Canada are becoming increasingly diverse. According to the 2011 National Household Survey in Canada, 20.6% of the population in Canada was born outside of Canada, the highest proportion among the G8 countries (Statistics Canada, 2011). The largest proportion of immigrant youth in Canada were born in Asia, Middle East, Europe, Africa, and South America. In 2014, 19% of the total immigrant and refugee population arriving in Canada were under the age of 15 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). Such growing diversity in the larger population results in unique environments in the schools.

Research has long documented an achievement gap for immigrant students in comparison to non-immigrant children (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009; Kao & Tienda, 1995). However, recent research has diverged from this notion reporting that there is variability of achievement success within immigrant students, and controlling for socioeconomic status and race cannot fully explain this achievement gap (Fuligini, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Therefore, scholars have been examining school and home factors as additional variables explaining the achievement gap.

Research suggests that school factors such as teachers' expectations and relationship with the student, and the school environment, can impact immigrant students' success in school (Alexander et al., 1987; Tetenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Alternatively, the understanding of the immigrant family's relationship and their impact on children's success has evolved over time. Immigrant families are often conceptualized as having lack of knowledge in navigating the new environment and their contribution to their children's education was not realized (Arzubiaga et al., 2009). However, other scholars suggest that immigrant families contribute directly and indirectly to their children's success (Fuligini, 1997; Lopez, 2001). This contribution may be in a different format that nonimmigrant

parents. The importance and interplay of school and home factors is related to Trueba's culturally based explanations of success (Trueba, 1988).

According to Trueba (1988), immigrant students' success is partly based on the effectiveness of home and school environment in supporting the child. In North America, the process of immigrant students' integration has been used as a way to build effective home and school environments, which is an important component of family-school partnership (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992). However, recent researchers suggest that sense of belonging is a more appropriate concept to study as it highlights the reciprocal relationship between home and school environments. While a number of studies have identified sense of belonging as an important factor in building family-school partnership, few have studied how sense of belonging is developed and experienced by immigrant families (Francis et al., 2015; Puig et al., 2015), Understanding how immigrant parents experience sense of belonging with their child's school, and how teachers enhance this sense belonging, can provide a useful insight on how to strengthen the home-school connection and support immigrant students.

Definition of Key Terms

Immigrant families. In the present study, this term will be used to describe families who are immigrants (not refugees) to Canada and were born in a country that was both linguistically and culturally different from Canada. "Family" can refer to many different individuals who provide care for children. For the purpose of this study, the terms "family" refers to the legal parents of the students.

Sense of belonging in a community. Sense of belonging is also referred to as "membership" or identification with a community. For the purposes of this study, sense of belonging refers to the feeling, belief, and an expectation that one fits and is feeling accepted in the group and is willing to personally invest and be involved in the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The individual also

feels an "emotional safety", that the community provides structure and security that protect the group intimacy. As a consequence of this personal investment and involvement in the group, the sense of belonging becomes more valuable and meaningful.

Family-school partnership. Family-school partnership is also referred to "parental involvement", "parental engagement in schools", and/or "parent-school relationship" in the literature. In this study, family-school partnership refers to a belief of shared responsibility, which indicates that both educators and parents are essential in providing resources for children's learning and progress in schools (Christenson, 2004). There is an emphasis on the quality of the connection between parents and schools and creating a constructive relationship between these two parties. In this definition, educators and parents are partners and schools actively reach out to negotiate feasible roles for parental engagement. A philosophy of shared responsibility between families and educators permeates school policies and practices.

Summary

Immigrant students greatly add to the diversity of Canadian schools. However, their achievement and success in school is related to many school and home factors, which are components of family-school partnership. As a result, researchers have examined different ways that family-school partnership can be enhanced through integration. However, recent researchers suggest that integration does not capture the immigrant families and students' experiences. Sense of belonging can capture the relationship between home and school. The purpose of the current study is to explore the immigrant parents' sense of belonging and explore different approaches that the teachers perceive can foster sense of belonging in immigrant parents.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Historical Perspectives on School-Family Partnerships

Previously, "parental involvement" was used to describe the relationship between parents and schools. The involvement was usually referred to as an objective, and a highly visible activity only by one agent (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanely, 2011). Schools were the typical site for involvement. Education was also referred to as the primary role of the school and the role of parents in their child's education were unclear or limited. An important shift in the mid 1990s redefined the role of parents and schools in improving student's success. The shift involved both a change in terminology and in the ideas about the role of parents and schools and how they can work together. The change in the terminology from "involvement" to "partnering" is the most reflective of this shift since it demonstrates a relationship involving cooperation between parties that have joint rights and responsibilities. Family emphasizes all primary caretakers that contribute to the student's life, including the student. School refers to the all school staff: administrators, teachers, specialists, office personnel, support personnel. The term partnership is preferred over other terms such as involvement, engagement, participation, or collaboration because it reflects an intentional, bidirectional, equal positions, and emphasizes a shared focus on the students by all parties, highlights relationships and communications, and depicts an ongoing, continuing relationship. The core substance of the family-school partnership is student success. Student success has been found to have many indicators. Most indicators include continuous academic progress, engaged learning, pro-social/coping skills, and high school completion. (Lines et al., 2011)

Positive Impacts of Family-School Partnership

Family-school partnership is important because it contributes resources that support students' academic motivation and places emphasis on the importance of education for the child (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008). Parents' influence at home and school promotes norms of

obligations and reciprocity and conveys the importance of education to the child (Kuperminc et al., 2008). This can lead to a greater engagement with school and more responsible and independent behavior by the child in school (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

A range of positive outcomes related to family-school partnership and a range of achievement and motivational outcomes have been documented in the literature (Kuperminc et al., 2008). A recent meta-analysis revealed that across most studies, family-school partnership is positively associated with student achievement and the relation between paternal or maternal involvement and achievement was equally strong for both parents (Sung & Hill, 2015). In individual studies, the more involved parents were in children's learning, the more motivated their children were to do well in school (Cheug, Pomerantz, & Eva, 2012). The family-school partnership contributed to children's enhanced self- regulated learning and improved their grades. Furthermore, parents' motivation contributed to the child's motivation and uniquely explained the positive effect on children's grades (Cheung et al., 2012).

While the importance of family-school partnership has been extensively documented in the literature (Kuperminc et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2012), scholars have developed different models that explain why family-school partnership is important and what factors influence this partnership (Downer & Myers, 2011). The three prominent models in the literature that help us better understand family-school partnership are the bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner,1986), theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1990), and Hoover-Dampsey's model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Major Influences on Family-School Partnership Philosophy

Bio-ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory provides a framework to understand the interrelated influences at home and at school settings that can promote or enable family-school partnership and ultimately enhance the child's success (Bronfenbrenner,

1986). The child's growth and developments are conceptualized as bidirectional interplays of factors across environments. These bidirectional interplays are called *proximal processes* and are defined as the complex reciprocal interactions between an evolving bio-psychological organism, in this case the child, and the external environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The strength of the processes depends on the Person-Context-Time model. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) described this model as,

> The power of such processes to influence is presumed,…to vary substantially as a function of the characteristics of the developing *Person*, of the immediate and more remove environment *Contexts*, and the *Time* periods, in which the proximal processes take place. (p. 795)

Through the proximal processes, "genetic potentials for effective psychological functioning are actualized" (Bronfebrenner & Cecil, 1994, p. 568). When proximal processes are not strong, the genetic potential of the organism is not developed. Proximal processes and the person-context-time model develop in a series of nested system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The microsystems refer to the context that has the most immediate impact on the child, such as home and school, and include the individual attributes and exchanges within these settings. The mesosystems refer to the quality and quantity of these interpersonal interactions among the individuals of these settings. The exosystems refer to the contexts that indirectly influence these relationships or institutions that can influence these relationships, such as the workplace, community, and church. The macrosystems refer to the political, economic, and cultural influences that indirectly impact the conditions and access to resources for the children.

This theory suggests that intrapersonal differences such as intelligence, motivation, or self-regulation do not sufficiently describe the person (Downer & Myers, 2010). Rather, the child has continual, reciprocal interactions with all the surrounding environmental contexts. This ongoing interchange results in child outcomes, both academically and socially. In this theory, the child is

forever "fused" with the environment and therefore the connection between their families and schools become an increasingly important indicator of their academic success.

Many researchers have documented the impact of school and family factors that mediate and moderate the child's success (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). In a review of related research, the effect of family and school processes were greater than those attributable to socioeconomic or race. Students from homes or schools that had more access to communication and opportunities showed more initiative and independence and received higher grades in high school (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Epstein, 1983). Overall, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model has received empirical support and is widely accepted and widely utilized in the study of family-school partnerships (Lines et al., 2014).

In the most current model of the systems theory, the chronosystem is depicted through a "dual lens" (Downer & Myers, 2010). The concept of chronosystems takes into account changes within the student and their environment over a period of time and how these changes can impact the other elements of the student's ecology. The chronosystem underscores the development of the student and its interaction with the family-school partnership. Additionally, it also highlights that as the students are developing and changing, so are the systems around them. A shift in any part of the systems holds implications for the student's success, therefore making it important to study and understand how these changes in the student's ecology and in the school may contribute to the family-school partnership. Considering the development of the student and the school can provide directions for further studies on the family-school partnerships.

Theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Theory of overlapping spheres of influence, created by Epstein in 1987, recognizes that there are three major contexts in which students learn and grow: the family, the school, and the community. These three spheres are referred to as "overlapping spheres of influences". Interpersonal relationships, attitudes, and patterns of interaction between teachers, parents, and community member are at the intersections of these spheres (Nzinga-Johnson,

Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). This model locates the student at the center of these spheres. School, family, and community partnership may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). A major assumption of this theory is that students do the best when there is a shared (overlap) goal between the spheres (Lines et al., 2011). Therefore, this model emphasizes the continuity and relationship between home, school, and community and directly links it with the student's success.

Epstein posited a six-component typology of activities/behaviors that are critical to the development of family-school partnership (Lines et al., 2011). These typologies include: parenting, communicating between home and school, volunteering at school, fostering learning at home, sharing responsibilities or decision making at school, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2010). Research has shown that students benefit greatly when their parents support school activities and these spheres overlap (Epstein, 1990). Each of the typologies have been found to independently and collectively influence the parent's motivation to become further engaged with their child's school over time and the students' schooling outcomes (Epstein et al., 2002).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have conducted research on the internal processes and psychological motivators that can influence parents to be more involved (Lines et al., 2011). These researcher have elucidated five key levels of involvement factors: a) personal motivation and life context, such as time and energy, knowledge, and skills, b) parent mechanism of involvement, c) student's perception of these parent mechanisms of involvement, d) the student's motivation to learn and self-efficacy, e) student achievement outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These factors emphasize the need to understand the psychological motivators as well pragmatic issues regarding family-school relationship. They also address the need to take into account student's perception of this partnership

and argue that certain actions by the school staff can serve as a motivator for parents' ideas about their roles and their decision to be more involved in schools (Lines et al., 2011).

Creating a Core Family-School Partnership Philosophy

Bio-ecological systems theory, theory of overlapping spheres of influences, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement have all influenced our understanding of the family-school partnership. The bio-ecological systems theory underscores the quality of interactions among different individuals and how they influence the child. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence emphasizes that the more "overlap" there is between the different influences, the better the child can succeed. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement highlights the importance of motivation and desire in parents that can promote the family-school partnership. Although these three models all focus on different aspects, they commonly emphasize the importance of understanding the uniqueness of families' ways of interacting and how these can be important in their relation to their child's school (Lines et al., 2011). Understanding this unique interaction is important for the benefit of all students. However, considering the growing diversity in demographics of the student body, it is essential to investigate how the philosophy of family school partnership can be applied to immigrant families and their interactions with the children's schools. Immigrant families have unique home cultures and their contribution to their child's academics can distinctly make their partnership to their child's school different than other families.

Immigrant Students and Parents in Schools

As the schools in North American are becoming more ethnically and racially diverse, the discourse around how the education system can support this diversity is becoming more prominent. The role of race and ethnic diversity in education is not new in the literature. In fact, scholars have argued for culturally responsive models that take into effect the importance diversity since the 1960's (Howard & Navarro, 2016). However, ongoing discussion on the importance of race and ethnicity in

education is still developing because minority students experience school differently than their majority counterpart (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Milner, 2013). For example, despite large policy reforms in the United States education system, research has documented an achievement gap and learning outcomes between African American, Latino/a, Aboriginal Americans, and certain Asian American students and their majority counterparts (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Ethnographic and quantitative studies that have investigated immigrant students' educational achievements, report that immigrant students tend to score lower on standardized reading tests than their non-immigrant counterparts (Kao & Tienda, 1995). The focus on the achievement gap in minority and immigrant students presents these populations as "deficits" to the education system. This is an interesting paradox; as the demographic is becoming more diverse and the need for recognizing other cultures is highlighted, immigrant and minority children are still viewed as draining the education system, slowing other students' learning, and preventing districts from reaching their standards (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009).

While the deficit theories have been common in the discourse regarding immigrant students, focus on the achievement gap does not fully represent the immigrant students' adjustments to schools. For example, research has consistently demonstrated that immigrant students tend to receive higher grades in English and Mathematics than their peers (Kao & Tienda, 1995). Even more interestingly, the academic performance of immigrant students tends to vary considerably according to their ethnic backgrounds (Fuligni, 1997). Although many immigrant and minority students have faced discrimination, some immigrant minority groups have significant better academic achievement than other groups (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Knapp, 2005). For example, Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1991) investigated the educational achievement of the refugee children whose families were considered to be low SES and faced many hardships. A study of the children's GPA and school records concluded that the refugee children were able to attain high educational achievements

(Caplan et al., 1991, Fuligni, 1997). Considering how ethnic background and social class are interconnected in research and the society, controlling for socioeconomic status is often not enough to explain the variations of educational achievement among immigrant and minority students (Fuligni, 1997). Therefore, researchers have examined other school and familial factors that could contribute to the immigrants' academic achievement in the school. Other factors, such as teachers' social status and expectations, families' involvement and sense of belonging to the community, can also impact the immigrant students' success in schools.

School factors. Some factors that may contribute to the immigrant students' academic success are related to the school. One of the main factors studied is the teacher-student relationship. A number of studies have investigated the teacher expectancy and its impact on the minority students' achievement. Two meta-analyses by Dusek and Joseph (1983) and Baron, Tom, and cooper (1985) found small but significant effect sizes indicating that teachers held lower expectations for their minority students than European American students. A more recent meta-analysis by Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conducted four quantitative meta-analyses and investigated whether teachers' expectation differed toward African American, Asian American, and Latino/a students. The results indicated that teachers hold the highest expectation for Asian American students and more positive expectations for European American students than for Latino/a and African American students. They also made more positive referrals (for gifted programs) for European American than Latino/a and African American students. The teachers also directed more positive and neutral speech toward European American than Latino/o and African American students. These results demonstrated that teachers' expectation may vary as a function of the students' background and race

In a study Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson (1987), the researchers examined how the teacher-student relationship can impact the education success. The researchers argued that previous research on minority and low SES students' achievement has only focused on high school or post-

secondary students and therefore could not detect a teacher-student relationship as a factor. The authors examined how the interaction among students' race and SES, and teachers' race and SES impact the students' academic performance in the first grade. The researchers selected random samples of 825 children from 20 schools in a heterogeneous community. About 800 parents, 825 students, and 50 teachers were interviewed and given questionnaires. School grades were obtained from school records. Results indicated that teachers' high status, not their race, exercised a strong influence on how they viewed and reacted to the social and race status of their students. Low status and minority students experienced the greatest difficulty in the classrooms of teachers that had high-status. For example, these students were viewed as less mature, were scored low on perceived school climate measures, and their teachers had lower expectations for them. The authors attributed this to the social distance between the teacher and the pupil. Teachers from high status backgrounds are less familiar and less comfortable with students of minority origins and Low SES backgrounds. This situation can foster stereotyped response patterns, which can result in misjudgments and misinterpretation of the students' functioning in school.

A literature review conducted by Hill and Torres (2010) explored factors that could explain the achievement gaps in many American Latino/a students. In their literature review, they reported that Latino/a students attend poorly equipped schools in impoverished school districts, which often result in inadequate instructions (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Conchas, 2001). Similar to the findings in the meta analyses, Latino/a students are underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs, and are less likely to be placed on college preparatory track (Baker & Velez, 1996). This trajectory coupled with the differential treatment from the teachers, can result in lower academic motivation and engagement with schools (Hill & Torres, 2010).

The works cited in this section highlight the importance of considering school factors when evaluating immigrant and ethnic minority students' achievement in schools. The research also

demonstrates that the school processes and factors can differentially impact different races and ethnicities. For example, the meta analyses by Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) revealed that Asian American were held to higher expectations than European Americans, referencing to the common notion of Asian students as "model" students in North America. However, other research has also demonstrated how positive school environment and procedures contribute to the achievement of minority and immigrant students.

In a research by Conchas (2006), the author interviewed high achieving immigrant students in California. The researcher identified that school environments such as cooperative versus competitive learning environments, and a strong teacher student relationship influenced how immigrant youth achieved academically and maintained their ethnic identities. In another study, Ladso-Billings (1994) identified that students who had teachers with cultural sensitivity training have strong achievement in school. Dual-language programs where students read the book in English and in their own language provided immigrant students with an environment where their home culture was valued, which resulted in higher academic achievement (Torres-Guzman, 2007).

Home factors. Majority of research describes immigrant families' relationship with the schools in a deficit narrative framework (Arzubiaga et al., 2009). The argument in many research studies usually centers around lack of social and cultural capital (Arzubiaga et al., 2009). For example, research frequently cites immigrant parents' lack of understanding of North American school culture as one of their barriers to contribute to their children's education. Immigrant parents are characterized as needing guidance to navigate the social rules in the schools, their rights in the educational system, and the organization of school system (Arzubiaga et al., 2009). Research has also documented that immigrant parents are less likely to attend school meetings, volunteer, or serve on school committees (Kao & Tienda, 1998; NCES, 2003). However, number of scholars believe that

these studies primarily studied school based involvement, and did not consider unique ways that immigrant families contribute to their child's success (Desimone, 1999; Kuperminc et al., 2008).

Researchers have investigated family and personal factors that could contribute to the immigrant students' achievement in schools. A series of ethnographies and qualitative studies suggest that immigrant students usually have family lives that put a strong emphasis on academic achievements. For example, in a study by Fuligni (1997), approximately 1,100 students with Latino, East Asian, Filipino, and European backgrounds reported on their views on academic achievement as well as on their parents' views on academic achievement. Their course grade and tests scores were obtained from school files. Results suggested that immigrant students demonstrated remarkable adjustment in school. Only a small portion of their success could be attributed to their parents' education. Their success was more significantly correlated with the strong emphasis on education as shared by themselves, their parents and peers.

However, some research argues that while immigrant parents might have high expectations or aspirations, that is not necessarily related to their children's academic achievement. In a study by Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001), 81 Latino children and their immigrant parents were followed from kindergarten through grade 6. In this mixed methods quantitative and qualitative study, the immigrant parents' educational aspirations were high through the elementary school years. The parents' expectations were lower than their aspirations. The authors attribute this to insecurities that immigrant parents experience in their new country. These results were substantiated by a literature review conducted by Yamamoto and Holloway (2010). In their review, the authors concluded the link between parental expectations and student achievement is inconsistent for minority families within different ethnic groups. The authors attribute this inconsistency to different mechanisms that impact academic outcomes. These mechanisms may vary across different ethnic groups.

In Yamamoto and Holloway's (2010) review, the authors also found inconsistent and limited research associating parental involvement and student outcomes in immigrant families across different ethnicities. For example, Peng and Wright's (1994) re-analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, revealed that Asian American parents held higher expectations for their children, but assisted their children less than African American or European American parents. Asian parents provided more after school learning opportunities for their children than other ethnic groups. In another study, Sy and Schlenberg (2005) analyzed data on 514 Asian Americans and 7,857 European American kindergartners. They concluded that Asian American parents' participation in school events was not significantly related to their children's math and reading scores. However, their involvement at home was significantly associated with the reading and math scores. The inconsistencies in the findings highlight the importance of considering both home and school involvement as part of the immigrant family partnership with schools. This has led some researchers to consider a more multi-dimensional approach to study the impact of the immigrant parents' involvement in schools.

In a case study by Lopez (2001), the author studied a Mexican immigrant family in Texas. The study described how the immigrant family conceptualized involvement as mechanisms to teach the importance of education to their children through hard work. Lopez argued that by taking their children to manual labor in the field, the parents were able to teach their children that without education, they have to do this type of hard labor. In a study by Kuperminc et al. (2008), the authors used questionnaires to assess 195 middle school and 129 high school immigrant students' perceptions of parent involvement, school belonging, and school competence. Path model analysis revealed that immigrant parent involvement would indirectly contribute to their children's adjustments by enhancing their children's sense of belonging in the school, and enhancing the teachers' expectation for the students' academic success. These studies suggest that immigrant parents' contribution to

their child's success through their partnership with school may be different and through different mechanism than non-immigrant parents. These results are also supported by what the educational anthropologist, Henry Trueba, refers to as "culturally based explanations" in an attempt to explain the variability of academic success in immigrant students.

Culturally Based Explanations of Academic Success

In his paper called "Culturally based explanations of minority students academic achievement", Trueba (1988) argued that minority and immigrant students' academic achievement could not be fully explained by differences in their ethnic, societal, or historical background. Rather, it is based on how effective home and school learning environments are. His view is substantiated by the results summarized above. As previously stated, despite the documented achievement gaps within immigrant students, socioeconomic status, parents' education and hardship, did not fully account to explain this trend. Rather, school and home factors directly and indirectly contributed to the immigrant students' achievement. Trueba (1988) referred to these school and home factors as contributors to "culture". Culture is defined as knowledge acquisition and what happens in the home, school, and community and it is imperative for understanding how children, including minority and immigrant students, learn.

Trueba (1988) further explained that for children to become independent in their performance and skills, they require effective communication and guidance from their adults, such as parents and teachers. There must be shared cultural values and assumptions, and common goals and activities. These theoretical underlining suggest that there must be a strong connection between home and school cultures of the students. However, this connection is more unique for immigrant families, as often there are difference between home and school cultures, making it more challenging for immigrant families to be involved in schools (Delgado-Gaiton, 1991). In response to these differences, researchers have studied the mechanisms that promote family-school partnership for

immigrant parents by integrating their culture in the school community (Francis et al., 2015; Haines, Gross, Francis, Blue-Banning, & Turnbull, 2015; Puig et al., 2015).

Sense of Belonging

A number of researchers have linked the immigrant students' educational success to their ability to integrate in their society (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). They highlight the importance of integrating involvement, engagement, and affiliation as key contributors to immigrant students' achievement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, many have criticized this notion of integration by questioning its applicability to diverse students and families (Tierney, 1992). In their study of Latino/a college students' experience in college, Hurtado and Carter (1997) asked, "do some [diverse] students perceive themselves as marginal to mainstream life of a campus? What contributes to students' sense of marginality, and does this sense of marginality contribute to students' lack of success in college?" (p. 324). In addition, they argue that integration does not capture the culturally supportive explanation of the experience of immigrant students'. Instead, Hurtado and Carter (1997) offer the concept of sense of belonging as it "captures the individual's view of whether he or she feels included" (p. 327). Sense of belonging illustrates the relationship between the institution, such as schools, and diverse individuals' success is dependent on how they feel welcomed in the institutional environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, sense of belonging is the "membership" to a community. In Mcmillan and Chavis's (1994) definition of sense of community, they define membership as the "feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness" (p. 9). Membership includes boundaries indicating that some people belong and some people do not belong in the community. There is also an "emotional safety" that provides security and structure to protect the group. Members feel "a sense of belonging and identification" that involves "the feeling, expectation, that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance, and a willingness to sacrifice for

the group" (Mcmillan & Chavis, 1994, p. 10). Identification to the group is also essential. Lastly, members feel that they have made "personal investment" as being part of the group and as a consequence their membership is meaningful and valuable.

Studies on diverse students' post-secondary experience of sense of belonging in college have been conducted in the recent years. However, studies on immigrant parents' sense of belonging in school and teachers' strategies in enhancing the sense of belonging have been scarce. Most studies on immigrant parents have focused on inclusive education and environment and how that contributes to family-school partnership for immigrant parents. These studies have concluded that sense of belonging or membership is an important component of an inclusive education and family-teacher partnership (Francis et al, 2015; Puig et al., 2015). For example, in a series of research projects by Francis et al. (2015), 58 family members participated in multiple focus groups to explore what factors contribute to a strong family-school partnership for families with diverse needs. The authors identified the themes school culture of inclusion, administrative leadership, attributes of partnership, opportunities for family involvement, and positive outcomes for all students. School culture of inclusion showed that a positive school culture consists of inclusive beliefs, values, and attitudes, and leads to a caring and respectful behaviors from all parties involved. This study cited the positive school culture as the ubiquitous factor that strengthens the family-school partnership by creating a sense of belonging for the parents (Francis et al., 2015; Haines et al., 2015).

In a recent qualitative study by Puig et al. (2015), five staff and 15 family members were interviewed to share their perspectives on what it means to be inclusive. One of the themes identified as part of an inclusive environment was membership to the community (Puig et al., 2015). An important aspect of this theme was the desire of exposure to various cultures. However, the authors discussed that while schools attempt to be more inclusive, schools' policy of "mere exposure" to various cultures and other kinds of individual differences may not necessarily create a strong sense of

membership within different families (Puig et al., 2015). Mere exposure to different cultures might place people into multiple groups according to their ethnicities (Puig et al., 2015). However, a true appreciation of individual's diversity includes recognizing that different cultures fuse to create new, distinct, and ever changing identities (Puig et al., ,2015). This is different than the idea of "mere exposure" which may coincidentally categorize and stereotype people. It also highlights the difference between assimilating traditionally endorsed in special education versus more culturally responsive education models endorsed more recently. Rather than "mere exposures" as a way to build inclusive schools, Puig et al. (2015) explain that fostering community membership and belonging "must be an active, intentional, and systematic effort across classroom, stand, and whole school" (p. 198).

While it is evident that sense of belonging is an important factor for immigrant families' partnership with the school, the development of sense of belonging may be different for immigrant families. As Hurtado and Carter (1997) wondered about the Latino/a students' experiences of marginality and sense of belonging in an environment that is new for them, immigrant families are also new members to the community and may not have established relationships to develop identification and emotional safety to the school community. To begin to understand how to enhance sense of belonging for immigrant families in their partnership with their child's school, it is important to start to explore how immigrant families experience sense of belonging and what approaches educators are currently taking to foster this sense of belonging.

Summary

Family-school partnership encompasses the ongoing relationship at home and at school between families and educators. Major theoretical influences on family school partnership all highlight the uniqueness of this relationship. However, the relationship between immigrant families and their children's school often has a distinct and unique nature. Immigrant families often have

home cultures that are very distinct from school cultures. Research has demonstrated school communities that are inclusive have been able integrate the families' home culture in the community. In order to understand how to bring home and school culture together, immigrant parents' sense of belonging is an important factor to consider.

Chapters 3: Methodology

Overview

The aim of this study was to explore and better understand immigrant parents' sense of belonging and experiences, and the teachers' strategies for enhancing sense of belonging for immigrant parents. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was applied to determine themes emerging from the data. In this chapter, the design of the study, including the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, ethical considerations, data collection, participants' characteristics, and approach to data analysis are presented.

Purpose of the Study

Exploring approaches that can make the transition between home and school culture more harmonious can add important and positive implications for immigrant students' achievement. Strengthening the family-school partnership by fostering immigrant parents' sense of belonging can bring home and school cultures closer together for immigrant students (Chu, 2011). However, fostering sense of belonging, in terms of the meaningful family-school partnerships, in diverse settings needs to move past mere exposure to different cultures and affiliation with a group to fostering a more active and meaningful community membership (Puig et al., 2015).

The primary purpose of this research was to explore how sense of belonging is perceived and experienced by the parents of culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant students in their children's schools. The secondary purpose of this research was to explore what approaches teachers perceive they can take in fostering a school environment that helps to build a sense of belonging for immigrant parents. The objective of this research was to provide a foundation for the ongoing research studies on cultural sharing between educators and immigrant families in hopes of creating a greater sense of belonging in Canadian schools for immigrant parents and their children.

Research Questions

1. How do immigrant parents:

    a. Perceive sense of belonging in their children's school communities?

    b. Experience sense of belonging in their child's school communities?

2. How do teachers of immigrant students:

    a. Perceive what sense of belonging means the members of the school community, including immigrant families?

    b. Engage in practices that foster a sense of belonging for all families?

    c. Engage in practices that foster a sense of belonging for immigrant families in the school community?

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the research problem outlined above, the lived experiences of immigrant parents and the teachers, and the meaning they make of them was explored via interviews in an in-depth, comprehensive, and flexible manner. The methodological approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used. IPA is an idiographic mode of inquiry, in contrast to the common nomothetic approach traditionally used. Rather than making generalization about a large population, IPA involves the use of thick description and in depth, case-by-case analysis of lived experiences to understand how meaning is created of these experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

At the center of IPA is the clearly declared phenomenon with emphasis on the lived experiences and the concerns of the subject of interest (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The researcher tries to understand the participants' world and describes the essence, or "what is like". This aim leads to a focus on a particular participants' relationship, event, or process. IPA is concerned with how reality is perceived by an individual (Eatough & Smith, 2008). From an epistemological standpoint, the assumption in IPA is that nothing is ever perceived as real until

individuals encounter it and attribute meaning to it (Polt, 1999). Therefore, we as human beings are the ones who decide what is allowed to be real and what is not. As its name suggests, IPA is phenomenological and it is concerned with individuals' perceptions of objects or events (Smith, 2004). Some scholars agree that this point of view is consistent with the constructivism epistemology, which postulates that human subjects engage with objects in the world and make sense of them (Crotty, 1998). However, IPA also recognizes the important role for the researcher, or the analyst, in interpreting the personal experiences of the participants (Smith, 2004). Thus, IPA is strongly connected to the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition (Palmer, 1996). There is double hermeneutic involved in the IPA: the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world, and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants' experiences. Therefore, IPA goes one step further than a phenomenological study and aims to develop an interpretative analysis, which positions the participants' experience and the researchers' interpretation of the participants' experience in a wider social, cultural, and theoretical context (Larkin et al., 2006). The researcher aims to provide a critical and conceptual commentary on the participants' sense making experience of their activities (Smith & Osborne, 2003). The researcher has the opportunity to reflect on what it means for the participant to have made these specific concerns or expressions in this particular situation (Larkin et al., 2006).

IPA has three distinct characteristics. At its core, IPA is strongly *idiographic* (Smith, 2004). The analysis starts with one case and does not move on to another case until some degree of closure with the first case has been achieved. When all cases have been analyzed through detailed examination, a cross case analysis is conducted and common themes are interrogated for convergence or divergence. The idiographic approach presents two values. At the face value, the researcher learns a significant deal about the particular participant and their experiences. At a deeper level, the detailed analysis allows the researcher to position her/himself to reflect on how they might navigate the

particular phenomena being explored. In that sense, it may demonstrate the common values with the person whose circumstances at the glance seemed separate from our own. Therefore, the detailed analysis can highlight a shared humanity and contain an "essence" (Warnock, 1987).

IPA is also *inductive*, in that the researcher uses techniques that are flexible to allow for surprising or unaccepted themes to emerge from the data (Smith, 2004). Therefore, the researcher does not establish a specific hypothesis prior to the data analysis. Rather, they construct broad themes and research questions to explore. IPA is also *interrogative*. The results from the data analysis attempt to contribute and engage in constructive dialogue with mainstream psychology. While IPA is focused on case-by-case analysis, the results are eventually discussed in a broader social, political, and cultural psychological context.

Due to its idiographic and inductive approach, IPA studies often employ a small sample size. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the suggested number of participants for a phenomenology studies ranges from 1 to 10. IPA researchers also try to rely on homogenous samples in order to find a more closely defined group for whom the questions will be meaningful (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Therefore, an individual IPA study does not attempt to generalize its finding to the larger population (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Generalization can be possible when subsequent studies with the same population are conducted. However, IPA is concerned with theoretical generalizability rather than empirical generalizability (Smith & Osborne, 2003). In this case, readers of the study can make connection between the IPA study, their own experiences and believes, and the literature. Therefore, an IPA study aims to shed a light in a broader context (Smith & Osborne, 2003).

These features of IPA make this approach an appropriate methodology to use with individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds (Eatough & Smith, 2006). IPA allows the researcher to understand the experiences of individuals through the cultural lens they use in their lives. It allows for the experience to be expressed in a culturally specific language. IPA also does not assume that all

experiences are the same, and concerns itself in the diversity and variability of human experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2006). Schweitzer and Steel (2008) emphasize that IPA is a suitable method to capture the salient experiences of diverse individuals because it is a narrative method that highlights the temporal and sequential of life events, and allows the participants to reflect on those events. Therefore, it allows for a "return to human experiences" and a deeper socio-cultural understanding of human nature (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008).

Through the use of IPA in this study, the researcher was able to fully engage with the teachers and immigrant families and conduct a case-by-case analysis of their experiences. The use of IPA allowed for examination of experiences of an abstract phenomenon, sense of belonging, in the lived experiences of the participants. Since this phenomenon is not frequently understood or researched in the literature, IPA was a suitable qualitative approach to initialize the exploration of this topic.

Procedures

Research approval & ethical considerations. Ethics approval was obtained through the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia. After BREB approval was obtained, School District Research Approval was obtained in order to recruit through schools. Contact information of the researcher and the supervisor was provided in case the participants had any questions. Upon participants' show of interest, the researcher explained the consent form to the participants. If the participants agreed to continue with the study, they signed the consent form and completed a background questionnaire (see Appendices A and B). Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants & selection. Inclusion criteria for participation in this study was established before the recruitment process begins. The participants' inclusion criteria, described more in detail below, was set to specify and draw participants from similar context and situations to ensure a

homogenous sample (Smith & Osborn, 2003) and thus a particular region in the lower mainland of British Columbia was targeted.

Earlier elementary grades are critical ages for the scholastic achievement of immigrant students; indicating that interventions at the elementary grades are more likely to be effective than those at later ages (Di Liberto, 2007). Elementary grades are critical periods and teachers' and parents' contributions are important in determining the children's success at that stage (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009). At the same time, the nature of the study required that parents have had adequate opportunities and experiences with their child's schools while still adjusting to their new lives in Canada. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the parents was set to reflect both their *recent* experiences with the Canadian school system, and their thought processes as a relatively new immigrant family. The inclusion criteria for the teachers was set to reflect their experiences with working with immigrant families in the Canadian schools.

Parent participants. The criteria for the immigrant parents included that the parents:

1. Immigrated to Canada in the last 3-5 years.

2. Were from a culturally and linguistically different country than Canada.

3. Had at least one child who was born in a culturally and linguistically different country than Canada. The child should have attended a Canadian elementary school at some point after their arrival in Canada.

4. Be comfortable enough at speaking English to have a conversation with the researcher. This is due to the researcher's lack of access to interpreters in an unfunded study.

Teacher Participants. The inclusion criteria for the teacher participants were that the teachers:

1. had experience teaching culturally and linguistically diverse and immigrant students in their classroom.

2. Were elementary school teachers.

Recruitment. Since IPA is concerned with detailed case-by-case analysis, purposive sampling strategy is often recommended (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This strategy aims to recruit individuals that have very specific experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Recruitment was initiated in a variety of contexts via the professionals, social media, community organizations, and schools. For the ***school recruitment***, research approval was obtained from the Vancouver School Board to contact schools in this district. After the permission was obtained, email was sent to the teachers with the study information and poster. Interested teachers were asked to contact the researcher. For the ***community recruitment***, community organizations that assist immigrant families, such as Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC) were contacted and received information about this study. Flyers, posters, and recruitment letters were distributed to these organizations. For recruitment through ***social media***, electronic flyers were posted on different social media groups (Facebook groups) that had teachers or immigrant families' members. Such social media groups included "UBC Families", "Immigrant Women In Vancouver", and "DIVERSEcity". Interested participants could use the information on the flyer to contact the researcher. The recruitment also employed ***snowball sampling strategy.*** The existing participants were asked if they would like to distribute the study's information and flyer to any potential interested colleague or acquaintances. Upon their request, information about the study was sent to them. Interested participants contacted the researchers. Recruitment through social media and snowball sampling strategy proved the most effective recruitment strategies. All participants in the final study recruited either through social media and/or snowball sampling strategy.

When the interested individuals contacted the researcher via phone or email, the researcher explained the study. If the interested individuals were still willing to participate, the researcher asked a brief set of screening questions. If the participants met the inclusion criteria, the researcher then met

with the participants at a location of their choice, which included a local library, their offices, or schools, to obtain informed consent and conduct the interview (Appendices C and D).

Context

Sociocultural context. This study was conducted in Lower Mainland Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Metro Vancouver is an extremely diverse and multicultural city in Canada. In 2011, Canada had the largest population of foreign born individuals (approximately 7 million people) among the G8 countries (Statistics Canada, 2011). According to the National Household Survey in 2011, 44,000 of Vancouverites were immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011). Statistics Canada recently projected that nearly one in two Canadians could be a first generation immigrant or a child of an immigrant by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). The immigrant population will continue to be heavily concentrated in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Therefore, studying immigrant families and students' experiences in schools can have important implications for the directions of our communities and school system.

The researcher. The researcher is a first generation immigrant from Iran. She attended elementary school and high school in Metro Vancouver. She has been involved with immigrant communities in different capacities and worked as a school psychology practicum student in North Vancouver, where many Iranian-Canadian families reside. Her interest in this topic is a result of her academic interest and also personal experiences as an immigrant student to study immigrant families' experiences.

Participants. The researcher was successful in recruiting the goal of four teachers and four immigrant parents outlined in her original proposal for the study. Each participant was given a pseudonym and is described below in Tables 1 and 2. All teacher participants had more than a BA degree and were teaching in the metropolitan area of the lower mainland of B.C. for more than ten

years. Further, they had extensive experience teaching immigrant students working with their families.

All the immigrant family participants held a university degree and had immigrated to Canada in the last three to five years. Their children's ages ranged from 6-10. Although the recruitment efforts were targeted at all eligible immigrant families, all the immigrant participants who agreed to take part in the study were originally from Iran. While somewhat surprising initially, upon reflection there may be some reasons for this. Iranian immigrants are large members of the immigrant population in Canada. In 2014, Iranian immigrants were the fourth largest group of immigrants to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). Iranian immigrants are also a large minority population in the metropolitan area where recruitment was conducted. While it is difficult to know, the researchers wondered if the surname of the co-investigator (noticeably of Iranian decent) impacted parent interest in the study. After discussions with the thesis committee, it was deemed that this homogenous sample of only Iranian immigrants was consistent with the IPA methodology and acceptable without recruitment of immigrants from other countries for the thesis.

Zara. The mother of this family was interviewed. This participant was 33 years old and was originally from Iran. The primary language spoken at home was Farsi. They had immigrated to Canada in 2013 and they have a 6-year-old son in the grade one. The participant had a bachelor's degree.

Maryam. A 38-year-old mother of this family with a Ph.D. degree, originally from Iran was interviewed. They had lived in UK and Iran before immigrating to Canada in 2013. They had a 10-year-old and a 3-year-old son. The participant had a Ph.D. degree and the main language spoken at home was Farsi.

Melissa. This participant was a 44 years old mother who immigrated to Canada from Iran in 2012 and had a Ph.D. degree. At the time of their arrival, their son was in grade six. The main language spoken at home is Farsi.

Gizelle. The mother for this family who immigrated to Canada in 2013 from Iran was 39 years old and had a Bachelor's degree. The family had a six-year-old daughter. The main language spoken at home was Farsi.

Christina. This participant has been a teacher for 20 years in the Canadian public elementary schools with a Master's degree in education. They had taught more than 100 immigrant students.

Annalise. This participant has been a teacher for 19 years and was in the process of completing their Master's degree. They had taught over 200 immigrant students in the early grades (kindergarten and grade 1) in their teaching career.

Olivia. This participant has been teaching grade six and eight students for 11 years and had a Master's degree. They had taught over 300 immigrant students in their teaching career.

Meredith. This participant had been teaching grades 5-7 for 14 years and has a MED degree. They had taught more than 200 immigrant students in their teaching career.

Table 1.

Characteristic of Family Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Highest Education Level	Immigration to Canada	Country of Origin	Child's age
Zara	33	Female	BA	2013	Iran	6
Maryam	38	Female	PhD	2013	Iran	10
Melissa	44	Female	PhD	2012	Iran	10
Gizelle	39	Female	BA	2013	Iran	6

Table 2.

Characteristics of Teacher Participants

Pseudonym	Years as a Teacher	Sex	Education	Grades Taught	# of Immigrant Children Taught
Christina	20	Female	MA	1-3	100+
Annalise	19	Female	MED	K-1	200+
Olivia	11	Female	MA	6-8	300+
Meredith	14	Female	MED	5-7	200+

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted through semi structured interviews and use of a reflexive journal. The content of these data collection methods are described in this section.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection strategy. Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The objective of the interview was to elicit participants' experience with the researcher presenting herself as the listener who aimed to understand the phenomenon under study (see Appendices E and F). Follow up questions were asked to further encourage the participants to elaborate on their story and stay close to the lived experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Parents were asked to reflect on their perception of what sense of belonging in their child's school means to them. They were invited to reflect about their experiences with their child's school and how those experiences have impacted their sense of belonging. The educators were prompted to reflect about the approaches they have taken or would like to take to foster an environment that helps to build immigrant parents' sense of belonging.

Consistent with similar studies using the same techniques, the interviews were audio recorded to ensure flexibility and fluidity in the process. The researcher reviewed the audio recordings to make sure that all questions initially planned were covered. All the interviews were transcribed prior to the coding process.

Reflexive journal. In IPA, the researcher must be honest and vigilant about their own perspectives, pre-existing thoughts, and developing hypothesis (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In order to set aside any a priori knowledge and assumptions, reflexive journals were used to help the researcher examine how their thoughts and ideas evolve during the interview process. Reflexive journals also served to help keep track of emerging impressions of what the data meant, and how the interviews relate to each other.

Data Analysis

Method. The aim of the analysis was to identify and explore themes that emerged from the interview data. These themes led to a better understanding of the immigrant parents' perceptions in experiencing sense of belonging in their child's school. It also highlighted ways or approaches that educators are taking in fostering this sense of belonging.

Process. Consistent with the IPA approach, a systematic process for coding data were used to inquiry in which specific statements are analyzed and categorized into clusters of meaning that represent the phenomena. Larkin et al. (2006) break down the analysis of IPA studies into two segments. The "phenomenological" segment requires the researcher to identify, describe and understand two aspects of the participant's story: the concern and the experiential claims. The "interpretative" segment requires the researcher to offer an interpretative account of what it means for the participant to have such concerns in this particular context. This approach generates an insiders' perspective that may transcend or exceed the participants' own terminology and

conceptualization. However, the researcher's interpretation should not follow a single, closed, a priori, theoretical assumption about how the participants' story should be interpreted.

Data analysis for this study were conducted in three stages as suggested by Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999) and Smith and Osborn (2003).

Stage 1: Looking for themes in the first case. Consistent with Smith and Obsorn's (2003) outline, the first participant's transcript was read multiple times. After the researcher was comfortable with the content, they made notes about comments made by the participant that seemed relevant to the research questions. The researcher then assigned concise phrases that captured the meaning of what was said. When similar themes emerged, the same theme name was used.

Stage 2: Connecting the themes. After the initial completion of theme identification in the first transcript, themes were grouped together and reordered to make connections between them. The clusters of themes were named and became the broad themes. The broad themes consisted of smaller subthemes. Each broad theme was written with subthemes beside it. Each subtheme had an identifier line which stated where it came from (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The subthemes were once again checked to ensure they are relevant to the broad theme.

Stage 3: Continuing the analysis with other cases. The steps highlighted above were repeated with the remaining transcripts one at a time while using the broad and subthemes from the first interview. The researcher remained aware of new issues or topics that emerged in the subsequent interviews. The researcher was also aware of convergences and divergences of different themes across participants.

The reflexive journal was used to assist and further add to the interviews. It was used to inform the researcher about their initial reactions and decisions and inform interpretation. However, data from the reflective journal was not coded and analyzed for themes.

Procedures to Ensure Trustworthiness

In qualitative inquiry, the reliability and validity of study is discussed in terms of the trustworthiness of the data (Shenton, 2004). The following steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and were consistent with the established procedures in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). The trustworthiness of the data was evaluated through strategies that ensure credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and conformability (objectivity) (Guba, 1981).

Credibility. The researcher scheduled frequent debriefing sessions with the supervisor and as needed with the supervisory committee. Through these discussions, the researcher's vision for this study was widened and attention was drawn to details in the proposed course of actions. The meetings provided the researcher with the opportunity to share ideas and also check for any biases or preferences. The interview questions used follow up probes and iterative questioning to explore the lived experiences of the subjects. The interview questions were discussed with supervisors and experts in the field who work with immigrant families in schools. Pilot practice interviews were conducted to ensure that the researcher was asking the appropriate questions and that the questions worked for the study. During the interviews, the method of "member checks" was used on the spot to verify that the participants consider if their words match what they intended to say (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). For example, if the participants stated that "community is where I get support for my problems", the researcher asked in return " If I am understanding you right, community is a support system for you?" to determine if the researcher's perception matched the participant's intention.

Triangulation of different methods of data analysis was used as a strategy to provide a rich and complex picture of the parents' sense of belonging. The different methods of data analysis included discussing the coded data and themes with a colleague who was familiar with IPA, checking reflexive journals and its consistency with the coded data, and using on the spot member check ins to

verify the codes. The findings from these different methods of data analysis were compared with the main researcher's findings. Traditionally, triangulation of data analysis is supposed to yield convergence of results that point to one coherent explanation of the data. However, using an alternative approach outlined in Mathison (1988), this study used triangulation of different data analysis methods to explore the data in three different levels. When the data converged it provided evidence that resulted in a single explanation about the phenomenon at hand. When the data was inconsistent, it indicated an alternative explanation about the phenomenon that was not as coherent or clear. At times, triangulation of the data presented opposing views of the phenomenon at hand. If the triangulation of data resulted in these outcomes, an explanation was provided in order to make sense of the findings using a holistic understanding of the situation and knowledge about the phenomenon. In this manner, triangulation ensures the construction of more plausible explanations about the phenomena being studied. This alternative approach to triangulation was consistent with the theoretical framework of this study that assumed that individuals perceive reality in different ways and therefore there is no one reality. In this sense, the different outcomes from triangulation led the researcher to understand how the participants perceive the realities, and also how the researcher interpret the participants' realities.

 Transferability. In order to provide context regarding the generalization of the findings in this study, adequate information about the participants' background, inclusion criteria, the number of participants, the length of the interview sessions, and other characteristics of the study were reported. This procedure is consistent with established steps in the literature (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative research, the generalizability of the data is regarded in the context and the research is believed to provide a "baseline understanding" of the phenomena, setting the stage for the other studies to look closer at the phenomena (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability & confirmability. In order to ensure that the data collection was done reliably and objectively, detailed explanation of the research design and implementation were explained (Shenton, 2004). The operational detail of data gathering and analysis were fully reported. Reflexive journals, on the spot member checks, and data analysis were used to ensure that the findings are reflective of the informants' intentions and not the researcher's biases or preferences.

IPA Quality Evaluation Guide

IPA is relatively new in its development and usage in the research (Smith, 2011). It is also a flexible approach to data collection and employs the researcher's interpretation with the text. Therefore, prominent researchers with this method refrain from suggesting a pre-determined checklist for the evaluation of the method in studies (Smith, 2011). However, Smith (2011) conducted an analysis of the current peer reviewed studies that employed IPA and designed a guideline for assessing the quality of the studies that use this particular method. According to his guideline, an "acceptable" IPA study clearly employs IPA correctly in that it is phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic. The procedures are sufficiently described for the readers with coherent, plausible, and interesting analysis. In addition, there should be sufficient sampling from the participant corpus to demonstrate the prevalence and density of each theme. Smith (2011) suggested that for a study with 4-8 participants, the theme must be present in at least three participants. However, the guideline allowed for some flexibility with criteria. A study could be acceptable if it presents a number of themes that are mostly well evidenced, with a few themes that are not as ideally dense, as long as the account of the less prevalent themes are sufficient and idiographic. The density of the themes in the current study, as quantified by their presence in number of participants, are demonstrated below in Table 3. As indicated, most themes had appeared in 3 or more participants' interviews. The theme "support system" for the families appeared in only two families' interviews. After discussion with the supervisor, this theme was included in the analysis because it was a very

integral aspect of the two participants' experiences. Sufficient idiographic description of this theme is presented in the findings.

Table 3.

Prevalence of Themes

Themes	Density of Evidence
Families	
Theme 1. Being Informed	
• *Subtheme 1.1: My child's development*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 1.2: Understanding of the school environment*	In 3 participants
Theme 2. Support System	In 2 participants
Theme 3. Emotional Safety	
• *Subtheme 3.1: Positive emotions*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 3.2: Respect and recognition*	In 3 participants
Theme 4. Inclusion	In 3 participants
Theme 5. Communication	
• *Subtheme 5.1 :Multi modal communication*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 5.2: Communication as a demystifying tool*	In 4 participants
• *Subtheme 5.3: Communication with other families*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 5.4: Feedback about child's academic growth*	In 3 participants
Teachers	
Theme 1. Welcoming Environment	
• *Subtheme 1.1: Feeling connected*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 1.2:Positive emotions*	In 3 participants
Theme 2. Communication	
• *Subtheme 2.1: Face to face meetings and events*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 2.2: Challenges with face to face meetings and events*	In 3 participants
• *Subtheme 2.3: Overcoming the challenges*	In 3 participants
Theme 3. Relationship	
• *Subtheme 3.1: Positive interactions*	In 4 participants
• *Subtheme 3.2: Cultural understanding*	In 3 participants

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand and explore how immigrant parents experience and perceive sense of belonging in their child's school. The secondary purpose of this study was to understand the approaches that teachers take to foster a sense of belonging in their relationship with immigrant families. Semi structured interviews were used and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was applied to determine themes emerging from the data. The participants were recruited through the schools and/or different community organizations. Proper ethical permission and considerations was taken to ensure confidentiality for all participants. The data from the interviews was coded through pre-determined steps. These codes will be arranged into themes. Strategies and methods consistent with established procedures in qualitative research was in place to ensure trustworthiness in the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences of immigrant families regarding sense of belonging in their child's schools, how teachers perceived sense of belonging in schools, and how they believe they can create the sense of belonging for immigrant families.

The findings in this chapter are summarized by the themes identified through the analysis of the semi structured interviews. For the immigrant families, first themes regarding their perceptions of sense of belonging in schools are discussed. Further, themes regarding their experiences with sense of belonging in Canadian schools are discussed. For teachers, themes regarding their perception of what sense of belonging means for school community members are explored. Finally, themes regarding their experiences creating sense of belonging for immigrant families and non-immigrant families are explored. Cross group comparison of themes regarding perceptions and experiences of sense of belonging is explored at the end.

Perspectives of Immigrant Families

Immigrant families shared rich and detailed descriptions of their perceptions and experiences of sense of belonging in their child's school. They described the school community as a very integral part of their children's growth. They also emphasized the importance of sense of belonging and described multi-layer definitions of what sense of belonging means to them. When inquired about their experiences in the Canadian schools, they described both positive and challenging experiences.

The themes are grouped together to represent what sense of belonging in their child's school meant for them, and what were their experiences of sense of belonging in their child's school. These emergent themes are discussed below with detailed descriptions of the themes and the corroborating text quotes.

How Do Immigrant Parents Perceive Sense of Belonging in their Children's School Communities?

Overarching theme. Immigrant families shared their perception and understanding of sense of belonging to their children's schools. In total, three themes and four subthemes were identified. They attributed positive feelings and emotions to feelings of sense of belonging. They also discussed how their sense of belonging is connected to their children's experiences at the school. They also revealed that the school community's respect for the families' backgrounds and their interest in the families' cultures enhance their sense of belonging. Further, most of all, they all emphasized the importance of feeling emotionally safe in their children's school. One overarching theme of *Supporting My Child* was identified to capture the relationships between emergent themes.

Every participant demonstrated a desire to learn about the education system, their child's social-emotional and academic growth, and different ways that they could support their child. They also expressed that they would like to depend on the school community to provide them with resources and support for their child's well-being. By learning and depending on the school community, they would feel a sense of security and safety for themselves and for their children. Through these experiences, the families can gain information, knowledge, and the confidence. Therefore, belonging to the school community was a mechanism to support their children. Refer to Figure 1 for a visual representation of the overarching theme and the themes, and subthemes.

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                    Supporting My child



    Being informed                              Emotional Safety
My child's development        Support System      Positive emotions
   Understanding the                            Respect and recognition
  school environment
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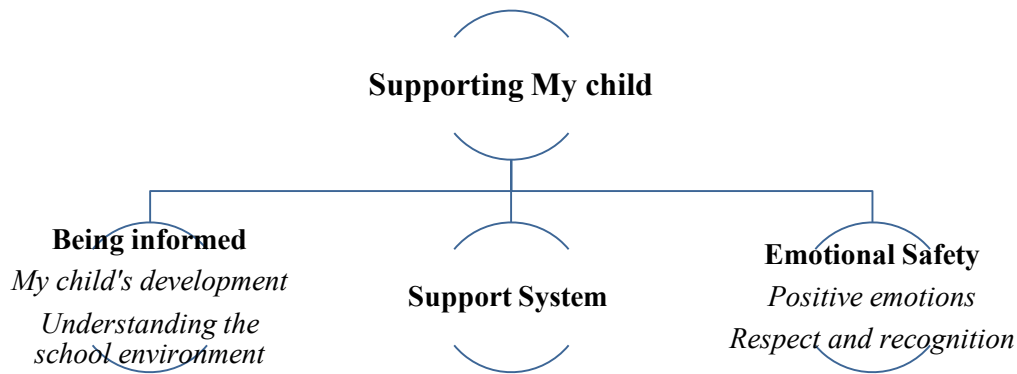
Figure 1. Thematic Map of Families' Perception of Sense of Belonging

Theme 1. Being informed. Immigrant families talked about being informed as an important

component of being part of a community. Immigrant families discussed "being informed" as it

pertained to the extent that they were aware of factors relating to their children's growth and

functioning in school. More specifically, they discussed that by being informed they can learn about

their *child's development* and gain a better *understanding of the school environment.*

Being informed had important implications for the families and did not simply imply access

to information. Some families indicated that the teachers "have the knowledge" for how to best

enhance children's behavior and academics. By being informed about their child's development and

the school environment, the families believed that they will have the knowledge and the basis to

support their child and make the right decisions in the best way possible.

Subtheme 1.1: My child's development. Immigrant families emphasized that they feel greater

belonging to the school when they can learn about various factors that are related to their child's

education. For example, they discussed how their children do not talk about their interests, their

school days, their accomplishments, or their needs to them. However, through the school community

and the teachers, the families are able to learn what their children like, what they engage in, and if

they have any educational or social-emotional difficulty. One family emphasized the importance of learning about her child through the school community, indicating that,

> I want to know my son. It's so weird that he is my son but when it comes to interactions between him and other kids, I have no idea, I have no idea. I am just so curious about what's going in school, what he likes. That's why I am like hey teacher what's going on. And she is like he likes that part. So I understand my son better and better.

Through the school community and communication with the teachers, the immigrant families discussed how they learn about the social emotional development of their children and "emotions that did not show up before". As a part of this process, the families also revealed that they learn about how others deal with problems and challenge their own point of view. Their child's development in the school was important because "school is a micro representation of the larger society". Their children have the opportunity to interact with different children and navigate this micro society on their own.

Subtheme 1.2: Understanding the school environment. Immigrant families discussed that by being informed, they can learn about the school environment, which helps them make better decisions for their lives. Further, understanding the school environments facilitate continuity and consistency of expectations between school and home, which enhance the child's development.

Immigrant families discussed that school community helps them understand the school environment and expectation better. In turn, this understanding can clear misunderstandings and allow the families to make better decisions for their children. For example, this family discussed how the teacher helped her understand why the physical education was important. She stated that,

> When you are member of the community of school it helps you decide quickly and correctly for your son. In grade 7, he had a bad cold on a same day that he had a math exam. And I asked his doctor to give him a letter that my son does not need to attend this exercise. The

first thing after that I talked with my son's teacher and she told me and explained what is the aim of running, and that running is here is as important as science and math. And if your son is as good as attending math class then he is good enough to attend the running class. She explained to me why this happens. And when my son grew up in high school, I saw the meaning. Because in high school PE was a major part and it was important for me and my son. And I really thank the teacher that told me about it.

Some families also recognized that education happens at home and at school. They indicated that the school community has "the theoretical knowledge about children's education". However, teachers do not have enough time to spend a lot of time with each individual student. Therefore, when families are part of the community, they can learn about what is happening at the classroom and try to emphasize it at home. One family stated,

Education comes from both the school and the family. The point would be, at the school there are several students with maybe one teacher. And the teacher just has if you divide by 8 hours per day it would be half an hour per children. But at home, you only have our kid, only your son. You can spend much more time to your son. Under the advice the leadership of the teacher that has the knowledge of education. If you could have that relationship with the community, you have this responsibility to bring any kind of education any kind of services that they are offering in the school, improve it and fix it at home for your child. If somebody ignores it, it would be just at school and they will forget about it.

Theme 2. Support system. Two immigrant families discussed how having a support system in the school community contributes to their sense of belonging in the school community. These two immigrant families defined having a support system as being able to communicate their concerns and worries, and receiving support. One family stated that,

Belonging is when you can have communication…go and back communication. So you can

be you feeling, easily contact them and receive responses from them. It was not like that

sometime you have to book an appointment, and wait for some time. It would be possible for

you that anytime that you want, you could contact them, could phone them, could talk to

them, understand the situation, and have your concerns and worries.

At the same time, the family expressed that the support system is based on involvement and

the networking of the families, and also the ability of the community to facilitate the involvement and

the information seeking. Therefore, she described the support system and being part of the

community as a "two-way connection".

Hmm I think being part of a community it comes some part from your part and some parts

from facilities that you receive from the community. If you like to be a person in the

community and be involved, you need to start making connections and try to find information

and make connection and networking in your community. On the other hand, there should be

some facilities and services that give you some opportunities to facilitate your involvement in

communities So I think it's a two side connection to be part of the community.

Another family also discussed the importance of having a support system in the

community. She said that "community, I think kind it's supporting team kind of…being with people,

it can be from your country or your new country I mean your background country or your new

country. It's supporting. I support them (other people). We join together and support each other."

For these two families, support system was about being able to freely communicate with the

school community members and receive support and help. It was also about establishing a reciprocal

relationship between the community members and the community services.

Theme 3. Emotional safety. Immigrant families explained emotional safety as experiencing

respect, recognition, and positive emotions in the school community. They discussed that feeling

emotionally safe is important because when they move to a new country or community, everything is "confusing" for them.

Subtheme 3.1: Positive emotions. Immigrant families expressed that they feel safe, self-confident, and relaxed when they feel part of a community. One family described these positive emotions as,

> I feel part of the community when my child feels relaxed and happy and I feel safe and a place where they can find some friends. [I would feel] self- confidence and safe feeling. The place that my son is happy and receives good experience. The place that they don't make him worry about something that are not real. And it is very important to know that there are no signs of racism in the school.

Another family discussed that her son felt safe in the school and classroom because he did not feel judged or not loved. The family stated that,

> When I drop him off, I know he is going to have fun, learn something, and at the end of the day I pick him up. We should fix, but not judge. If you know they are going to you know humiliate him, make him embarrassed, I will be worried. Just give himself confident that "you can do it." Because they have it in their mind that they can do it.

Interestingly, families' sense of belonging appeared to be related to their children's experience of positive emotions in the school. This highlights the immigrant families' focus on their children's well-being as the overarching theme contributing to their sense of belonging.

Subtheme 3.2: Respect and recognition. Immigrant families explained that their sense of belonging is enhanced when they are seen as respected and contributing members of the community. The families expressed that they feel respected when the school community shows interest in their culture and background.

Immigrant families indicated that they do not want to feel "bad because [they are] an immigrant" or feel undermined as "a lesser Canadian". They also expressed that they feel respected when the school community shows interest in them by inquiring about the meaning of their names or their cultures. For example, one family recalled how surprised she was when the teachers in her son's school could remember his son's Iranian name.

They also report that they felt recognized when their help and involvement was needed and effective in the school. One family recalled how grateful she felt when she received an email from her son's classroom teacher thanking her for contribution to the potluck event in the school. The family expressed that the email "gave [her] the feeling that [she] did something for the community of the school and that [she] was effective".

For immigrant families, receiving respect from the school meant that they were *important* in the school community. Receiving recognition meant that they were *valued* in the school community and that their contribution *mattered*.

How Do Immigrant Families Experience Sense of Belonging in Their Children's School Communities?

Immigrant families reflected on their experiences with feeling a sense of belonging in their children's schools. While most of them chose to discuss their positive experiences, some discussed situations where they did not feel part of the school community. They discussed how their early experiences shaped their beliefs and expectation for later years. Therefore, in many instances, they chose to compare their experiences and emotional processes in each year and discussed how that has changed their views. This provided the researcher with rich, complex, and often multi layered recount of experiences and their consequences on families' views.

Two themes were identified that captured immigrant families' experiences of sense of belonging in the school community. The first theme, *Inclusion*, identified ways that immigrant

families felt emotionally and physically included in the school community. The second theme, *Communication*, was a very prevalent theme across all participants. Being able to understand the information and the procedures, and receive feedback about their child's academic growth was an important factor in building the sense of belonging.

Theme 4. Inclusion. For immigrant families, their experience of inclusivity in the school community was important for their experiences of sense of belonging. While some families recounted positive experiences of inclusivity, others talked about lack of inclusivity in the school community. Overall, they felt included in the school when there was accessibility to participate in school events, educators displayed cultural sensitivity, and the families were treated as valued members, and felt safe to discuss their challenges with someone.

Two families indicated they often felt like an outside member of the community when they were not able to volunteer with the family advisory committee due to lack of time and resources. However, one family's experience changed when the advisory committee offered her smaller jobs such as decorating a room or contributing to potluck. She started to feel more confident and felt "seen and that [she was] active and can do something for the society". By being included in the school, the family felt valuable and was able to experience success, which contributed to her sense of belonging. The experiences recounted by these families highlight the importance of accessibility of opportunities to become involved. When opportunities to become involved were more accessible to families, they experienced more positive emotions and contributed to the school community.

Some families expressed that although the school personnel were always respectful and cordial, they never felt welcomed in the school community. One family described that she sensed the school personnel did not take her problems seriously. She stated that,

They [school personnel] are too relaxed about my problems. Even if talking with other immigrant families, they say it too. I talked with my neighbors from China and Russia. I feel

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that they are cold towards us. I thought that since we got approved to move here and they said they support us, this would be ideal for us. But the community is not ideal. But…it's not the outcome I thought it was. It's not true in actions.

When asked further to explain her experiences, she explained that the school community never approached her to see if she needed help. She explained that she often felt "embarrassed, and not good" when she had to repeatedly ask them questions. She felt that her connection to the school community was weak and that it was a "one-way street". This family's experience suggested that lack of a healthy reciprocal relationship, where community members show concerns for each other, can make some community members feel unwelcomed and not included.

The immigrant families expressed mixed emotions regarding experiencing cultural sensitivity in schools. Some families found the actions and the procedures of the school personnel to be respectful and culturally appropriate, while others had experiences of cultural insensitivity, which hindered their sense of belonging. For example, one of the families recalled an emotional experience where her son was told during remembrance day that the Canadian army might invade his home country soon. The family expressed how after this incident she felt that "school is not a safe place for [my] son". Alternatively, another family expressed how the school did not make her feel embarrassed or ashamed when her son had an inappropriate interaction with another child. Instead, she appreciated the teacher's respectful, calm, but appropriate course of actions with her son. This family also recounted positive experiences of school personnel demonstrating interest in her culture. She explained that she appreciated when school personnel "asked for the meaning of my son's name" or when they recounted positive stories of their interaction with people from her culture. These families' experiences demonstrate that cultural understanding, and interest in one's culture, indicate respect and acceptability in the school community.

Theme 5. Communication. One of the most important and prevalent themes in the interviews centered around communication. The immigrant families indicated that positive and substantial communication with the school made them informed, which in turn enhanced their sense of belonging. Lack of communication or information from the school, however, made them confused and scared, which hindered their sense of belonging.

The importance of communication was highlighted because most families reported that they were often confused or scared of the new education system in Canada. Having clear communication provided them with the necessary tools to support their child and learn about different resources available to them. The families reported different experiences of communication and its impact on their sense of belonging. Communication was discussed in terms of the different modes of communication, implications of effective and ineffective communication, and the importance of feedback to the families.

Subtheme 5.1: Multi modal communication. Most families found the schools' communication approach via different methods such as emails, newsletters, word of mouth, or even report cards to be extremely useful. One family reported that she found email communication to be very useful. Another family found report cards and face-to face conversations to be useful. Another family found updates via the school's mobile applications to be very useful. She also appreciated receiving minutes from PAC meetings because it allowed her to be informed although she could not make the meetings. The same family also discussed the importance of using other methods than children to rely the messages home. She explained that,

> Children are not good source of transferring the knowledge. Inside in the class they have
>
> planners that teacher ask them to write any specific things that families need to know. They
>
> ask them to write them in their planners. So it was another way of communication. But
>
> generally regarding the school it was a bit weak at the beginning but then they started to

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create this app and through this app it was very good. They started sending information

anything about the lunch, program, about activity programs, any kinds of activities in the

school.

Some families reported that lack of multi modal communication significantly hindered their

sense of belonging to the school. One family expressed that "information was only found on paper,

and nowhere else". She described the information as "cold", indicating that the school personnel did

not provide her with detailed information or other resources to have her questions answered.

These families' experiences demonstrate that for them, different means of communication has

proven to be an effective method of relying information. More significantly, each family preferred a

different way of communication, based on their availability, resources, and personality. For these

families, an improved communication system made them more informed of the school system and

played a part in their sense of belonging. Lack of multi modal communication resulted in "a weak

connection" and an ineffective (i.e. cold) information.

Subtheme 5.2: Communication as a demystifying tool. Immigrant families often described

the initial months enrolling their child in the school as "mysterious", "confusing", and "scary". They

described that the process in Canada was very different from their own country. Some families

reported enhanced sense of belonging when the school personnel gave them step- by-step

instructions, or pointed them to someone that could provide more specific help, rather than generic or

vague instruction. Families reported that detailed description demystified the process for them, and

helped them understand the school system better.

For example, one family recounted her positive interactions with the school secretary and

praised the secretary's patience and detailed instructions. She stated that,

Because I am from different culture and different system. And she [the secretary] realized

that. and I did not even know what I don't even. And I had so many questions from her. And

she gave me full step by step by instruction on how to register for summer school.

Another family contrasted her experience with one teacher who gave her generic or vague

instruction, and another teacher who gave her more detailed support. She recounted that,

It was something related to small journal that students can buy scholastics. I did not know at

all about it. I emailed the teacher and asked what is this one. And she sent me an email back

"please read it careful, you can find it". It was not enough information for me. In grade 7, the

teacher told me "maybe this pattern of books is better for your son" and I am not sure it helps

me to choose some books but it gave me more confidence to go to scholastics.

For this family, a detailed instruction was important, but not necessarily because of the content.

Rather, the detailed instruction was helpful because it gave her confidence to support her son.

Another family recounted how vague instruction was frustrating for her. Specifically, for

her, being redirected to search the internet was not useful. She stated that,

They sent me some sites. They told me to search on the internet. I know there is internet,

that's not good support. You want more detailed…every day talking, maybe they can connect

us with elderly people who were born in Canada. Maybe they can give us more information

than the government.

This family's experience indicates that face-to-face, personalized interaction is important for her and

her connection to the community. Vague communication and impersonalized support resulted in what

she called an "unwelcomed and cold" environment.

Subtheme 5.3: Communication with other families. Immigrant families reported that their

sense of belonging to the school community increased when they made connection with other

families, especially other immigrant families. The families explained that receiving help from other

families was easier because they were in the same situation as them, and can understand each other better. The families hoped that schools would facilitate communication and connection with other immigrant families better. Some families expressed that they understand that the school staff is very busy and cannot always provide the most individualized help. Therefore, they rely on other families to share their resources. Families expressed that they feel "less stressed" when their questions and problems are resolved. For example, this one family explained how communicating and resolving the issues with the help of families, especially the newcomers, can result in a reciprocal relationship:

> So good. Less stressed. I like to share my information too when I receive them. I like to give that to others. I have some families who are newcomers I like to share the information with them too.

Subtheme 5.4: Feedback about child's academic growth. The families reported that they do not receive enough feedback or information about how their child is doing academically. They reported unclear evaluation criteria and unclear academic expectations for their child. Some families reported that they were often confused about how their child is academically doing in school. They often expressed how the teaching system differs from their home country. One family expressed that she used to check in with his son's teacher every day back in their home country. However, they did not get the same opportunity here. Some families described that they do not understand the purpose of some of the activities their children are asked to do. Most families reported that lack of a syllabus or textbook in elementary school confused them, as they often had them in their home country. For example, in their home country children learn "through theoretical approach, and not through games". The families expressed that lack of feedback and information hindered their ability to help their child at home. Some families reported that their confusion discourages them from getting involved with the school community. One family expressed her frustration and disappointment with lack of feedback, stating that,

I feel lonely. That very bad feeling. And I don't know what to do sometimes. It keeps me back. Do nothing. I like to do something, but I feel nothing. I don't feel encouraged [to be involved]. [I want to know] what is each year's schedule or each year's education titles for example. What are they going to do in elementary in 7 years in elementary. What are the titles of education. There is no books for the beginners, and I am kind of in a space. I am like what is going to happen. Because I like to be involved with my kids at home if they have problems. I know for first years it's not very important, kind of just fun. But it's better to know what's going to happen in their education.

Some families reported their ambivalence and confusion was reduced when the school personnel gave them the academic goal and the reason behind some of the activities students do in the classroom. For example, one family compared her experience one year with another positive experience the year after, stating that,

In grade 6, I did not receive any feedback from his teacher, I sent a lot of emails for the first couple of months. And most of the time I did not receive any replies, or she replied with things that I did not need to know. Very short answers. But in grade 7, they ask my son to clean the classroom. It was very weird for me. But when I sent an email to please explain to me what is the aim of this action. And when they gave me an email with detailed explanation what is the aim of this thing, it helps me to know that I am very close them.

Another family recalled how talking with the teacher and seeing her child's sample work helped her understand the educational approach better. She stated that,

My son's teacher showed me this poem and said have you seen this poem that your son has written. And I asked her how did my son do this, was there any template for these kinds of things. And she explained to me that there was a template that showed the first word and they continued. I saw the template and I saw how my son's thinking went through making this

poem. And it was very interesting for me. Never in my 20 years of education never I did try to

do poem. So then I thought maybe they try to make learning possible through activities not

through theoretical approach. So it is my understanding of how the system is in Canada.

The immigrant families' experiences indicate that lack of feedback and unclear academic

expectations can be very frustrating for them. However, when they had clear communication

with the teacher, their concerns and worries were mostly resolved.

Bringing Immigrant Families' Perceptions and Experiences of Sense of Belonging Together

Immigrant families were asked about their perception of sense of belonging, and their actual

experiences of feeling part of their child's school community. In summary, immigrant families

perceived sense of belonging as being informed and emotionally safe, and having a support system in

the school community. They perceived that these components will allow them to learn about their

children, be dependable on their community members, and feel secure to support their children's

needs. When inquired about their experiences of sense of belonging, immigrant families recounted

positive and negative experiences. Feeling included in the school community allowed them to feel

valued, confident, and appreciated, which were similar to feeling emotionally safe. Having the ability

to communicate and learn about the resources and their children, allowed them to be informed and

depend on their community members for support. Therefore, the families' perceptions and

experiences of sense of belonging was interconnected. Generally, both the perceptions and

experiences of sense of belonging allowed them to support their children. Refer to Figure 2 for a

visual representation of how the perception and experiences were interconnected.
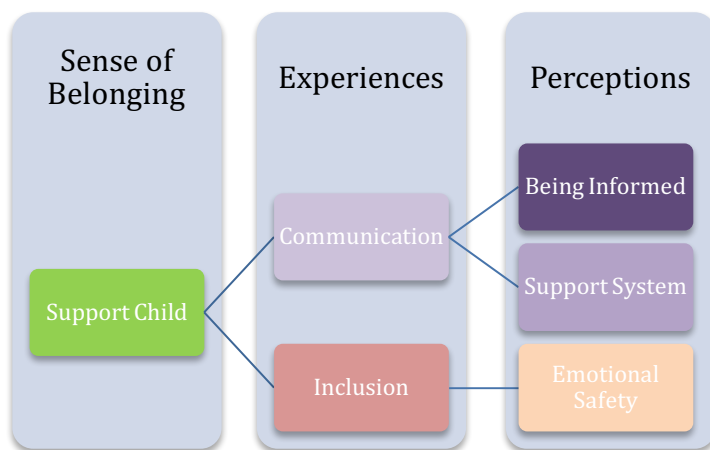
Figure 2. Thematic Representation of Perception and Experiences of Sense of Belonging by Immigrant Families

Perspectives of Teachers

Teachers discussed their perceptions of what sense of belonging means in the school community for different community members. Specifically, they were asked what sense of belonging means for non-immigrant students and families, immigrant students and families, and educators. Further, they were asked about the strategies that they used to enhance sense of belonging for all families and the specific strategies they have used for immigrant families. The themes are grouped together to represent the teachers' perception of what sense of belonging means for school community members, and how the teachers have tried to improve sense of belonging for non-immigrant and immigrant families.

How Do Teachers of Immigrant Students Perceive What Sense of Belonging Means for The Members of the School Community, Including Immigrant Families?

Teachers were asked what it means for each of the following school community members to feel part of the community: families, immigrant families, students, and teachers. Their responses were accumulated under one theme due to the shared commonalities in their perception of sense of belonging for all the community members. All teachers identified that for all the school community members, sense of belonging means a *Welcoming Environment*. Teachers further defined a

Welcoming Environment in different components. Refer to Figure 3 for a visual organization of the themes.

Figure 3. Thematic Organization of Teachers' Perceptions of Sense of Belonging for School Community Members

Theme 1. Welcoming Environment. Teachers expressed that sense of belonging means having a welcoming environment. An environment is welcoming when the members feel connected and experienced positive emotions.

Subtheme 1.1: Feeling connected. Teachers expressed that in a welcoming environment, community members feel connected. As one teacher stated,

I think it can be place of connection where people come together, where child or teacher or any adult can have a purpose, meaning, they can support each other and academically, socially, and emotionally. So a place where there is a connection and sense of belonging.

This teacher further explained that teachers are the first person that families and students, especially immigrant families and students, interact with when they enrol in their schools. Establishing that connection between teachers and families is an integral part of that sense of belonging. She explained that,

Some families can be completely comfortable with school settings, but for families that are not, they have a huge role in being the first person that is involved in their kids life that makes

them feel part of things or not. But this is the first adult that is quiet involved with their

children, I think building trust between the two is very important.

This view was also expressed by another teacher. This teacher expressed that school community is the place where individuals can make connections, and this can be even more important for immigrant families. According to her,

The school should function as a safe place for families to be in contact with other

professionals or make those connections through the professionals of the school. I believe that

teachers have a job although it might not be in the description to be able to connect families

especially those families who perhaps are new to the area, who perhaps don't have the same

existing connections and don't also have the generations of family around them.

Teachers also explained that feeling connected also meant having a bidirectional relationship where people contribute and help each other. In return, they know that they are cared for by the community members. For example, one teacher said that "It's a two-way street and they need to have a sense of appreciating everybody else in their community as well. So we celebrate commonalities and differences, we look for ways that make sure everybody experiences success." A reciprocal relationship contributes to feeling connected because it allows for sharing of resources, recognizing differences and commonalities, and ultimate success of everybody.

Subtheme 1.2. Positive emotions. Teachers also discussed that when individuals feel they belong to the school community, they experience positive emotions. Specifically, teachers highlighted feeling valued, accepted, and emotionally safe as the positive emotions.
Some teachers explained that in a welcoming community, individuals feel "valued, appreciated, important, and not another nameless person in the crowd". They emphasized that the individuals, from students to teachers, would feel noticed and productive in their school community and that they are "supporting, contributing, and their work is valued".

For one of the teachers, feeling valued and appreciated was even more important for immigrant families, because they are new in the school community. Other non-immigrant community members had time to feel part of the community, and have "roots". However, it is even more essential for newcomers to feel valued and appreciated. Feeling valued and appreciated can lead to feeling empowered for immigrant families and students. She stated that,

> That feeling of belonging. That people notice them, that they are important, a welcoming place. I think it's important for all students, but I can definitely see for immigrant families…if you are coming in, and if you are not part of any other community, to be part of the school community it could be very necessary. It could create roots, a sense of belonging. Kids that are not immigrants generally have that already built in.

For another teacher, feeling valued in the school community meant that immigrant students in the school community know that everyone matters regardless of their backgrounds. She said that "no matter what type of idiosyncrasies or backgrounds or challenges that they might face I want them to know that when they are in school that they matter that they are important." This sentiment was also reflected in another teacher's interview. They stated that immigrant families feel that they belonged to the school community when the schools are "accepting place that can make [immigrant] families feel that they are not different [from other families]." Therefore, for some of the teachers, feeling valued and accepted transcended beyond appreciation to unconditional acceptance.

Another teacher also emphasized that community members must feel emotionally safe to feel sense of belonging. She further explained that emotional safety means that students, families, immigrant families, and teachers "feel comfortable to take risks". Feeling safe "allows individuals to share their differences". That is "how we move forward because we all have different ideas to share and that is how we evolve." Furthermore, some teachers expressed that when immigrant students and

immigrant families feel safe, they are "less stressed and are more likely to get involved and learn". Therefore, emotional safety enhances inclusivity and emotional well-being.

How Do Teachers Engage in Practices that Foster a Sense of Belonging for all Families? How Do Teachers Engage in Practices that Foster a Sense of Belonging for Immigrant Families?

Teachers were asked what strategies they use for all families and what strategies they use for immigrant families to enhance their sense of belonging. Teachers indicated that in general, communicating face to face with all families enhances the families' sense of belonging in the school community. However, they said that there are certain challenges in communicating face to face when working with immigrant families. Teachers identified different ways that they overcome these challenges. Furthermore, teachers explained that they focus on relationship building with immigrant families. Overall, teachers explained that they engage in relatively different practices when working with immigrant families.

Theme 2. Communication. Communication was a very prevalent theme in the teachers' interviews. Communication was one of the strategies that they used to strengthen the sense of belonging for all families in the school community. In general, the teachers talked about the importance of face to face meetings to communicate with all families. However, they identified that this method does not always work with immigrant families and explained different ways that they overcame the challenges.

Subtheme 2.1: Face- to- Face meetings and events. Teachers explained that in general, they invite families to meetings and organize different events for families to participate. When families engaged in face to face meetings, it increased their involvement and their sense of belonging in the school. Teachers explained different types of face to face meetings and events. One teacher explained that,

Well the number one thing is coming in for the family meetings. Each term there is a family

teacher opportunity to discuss reports. And we often have…the only families that come in my

experience were the ones that we already have a relationship with.

Some teachers explained that they organize culturally relevant activities for immigrant

families. For example, one teacher recounted that,

There was an after school carnival that brought families together. We have done some potluck

days and people have brought in national dishes. And families that have come in for reading

have usually generally good feedback.

Another teacher shared this sentiment. She stated that,

I think that, also, practical ways that they can become involved. Helping with things in the

classroom. Coming to show things from their customs and traditions. We have had families

come in and do dances and lead kids in their artwork or cook for the staff. Some way that

there is an open door for them that they are contributing to the community.

Apart from face-to-face interactions and meetings, teachers considered different cultural events and

classroom activities as important ways to involve the families in the classrooms.

Subtheme 2.2: Challenges with face to face meetings and events. However, teachers talked

about how they realize that organizing face-to-face meetings and events can be more difficult for

immigrant families than non-immigrant families. They identified the busy lifestyles and the English

language fluency as possible challenges for immigrant families. One teacher explained that in her

school's neighborhood, immigrant families are working more than one job and therefore do not have

much availability. She said that "in my experience families who have just arrived in Canada are

working awful hours and long hours and so being able to bridge the gap it could be very

challenging."

Another challenge noted by the teachers was the language barrier. One of the teachers

noted that,

> I think when we have done with "meet the teacher" with me just talking…that has not been
> very successful because most people don't know exactly what I am saying. I try not to use as
> much teacher language, a lot of the English is difficult for families, so they just tune out.

This teacher also explained that the physical structures of most schools are intimidating and
scary for many families. She stated that,

> It's physically intimidating you have to walk in the office, you have to present yourself in the
> office, and you have to feel comfortable presenting yourself to the secretary. I think there is a
> lot of physical barriers and emotional barriers.

Therefore, for teachers there are number of challenges that make face-to-face interactions with
immigrant families difficult. These challenges often lead to a sense of frustration and fear for
teachers. One teacher explained that she is at loss as to how create the face-to-face meetings. She
stated that,

> I think we want to, but we are at a loss at how to…and I don't see us as teacher coming
> together. I have tried family reading at my classroom and I did it once a month. And I would
> get two or three families. And I felt like it was a struggle. And I don't know if they feel
> comfortable so I guess I kind of got tired and frustrated with trying. I said what's the point if I
> keep trying.

Some teachers also highlighted what they referred as to fear of not knowing what to expect
when faced with these challenges. For example, one of the teachers explained that sometimes in the
meetings she senses that "there is a lot of assumptions, a lot of fear, and things that are unknown".
These challenges can make face-to-face interactions difficult for teachers.

Subtheme 2.3: Overcoming the challenges. Some teachers noted methods that helped to
communicate with immigrant families. One teacher explained how she organized student led

conferences, where the student shows their classwork to their families. Another teacher explained that the use of translators and cultural workers have really facilitated productive family meetings when language was a challenge.

Another effective tool was the use of multi modal communication tools. For example, teachers reported variety of methods to reach out to families. One teacher reported the use of mobile applications to communicate the students' progress with families. Another teacher discussed the use of visuals to communicate in order to overcome the language barrier. The teacher said that "I set up emails. I try to email family in regular basis. I take photographs and send them, I communicate visually. Because I want families to know what's going on."

However, some teachers revealed mixed experiences regarding their access to resources and their schools' capacity to provide resources. One teacher believed that the lack of transparency in the school system contributed to their challenges. In her opinion, "there is sense of autonomy for some teachers and if things are imposed, can make them have less buy ins."

Some teachers believed that the resources are not always available to them to overcome the challenges. Specifically, they discussed that the multicultural workers have a huge workload, preventing them to offer support for every immigrant family. Therefore, "some families are not being reached out as well as they could be". One of the teachers, who also held an administrator role, discussed that as a teacher she did not know about the resources. She believed that it is the administrators' responsibility to inform the teachers about the available resources and build capacity within the school to utilize these resources.

Theme 3. Relationship. Building relationships was another prevalent theme in the teachers' interviews. They emphasized that spending time on positive interactions and interest in the cultures and customs of immigrant families can contribute to establishing a positive and healthy relationships

with the families. A positive and healthy relationship was important for the teachers, because it could reduce the stress for the families.

Subtheme 3.1: Positive interactions. Similar to sense of belonging, teachers emphasized that having positive interactions with immigrant families as an important part of enhancing the sense of belonging in the school. Many teachers expressed that positive interactions involve simple but sincere connection and show of support for students and families. As one teacher noted, it starts with "hello, and connecting, smiling, and the continuous feeling of a friendly atmosphere." Another teacher stated that positive interactions are important because it allows her to " know something about them beyond and be able to have conversations about life outside of school, knowing who's got how many kids and what's going on in them [and] being able to have those conversations." Therefore, positive interactions led to familiarity with the families.

Some teachers expressed that this relationship building is initially "more necessary than curriculum support" because it can reduce some of the stress that families experience at the beginning. They further explained that part of the relationship building is establishing a trust between the families and the school community. Teachers stated that it is important to let families know that there is someone available if they need to talk. One teacher explained that by building the relationship, families are more "encouraged and empowered" to be involved in the school. She stated that,

> I think it starts with friendly faces. Time to listen. Welcoming atmosphere, ' nice to see you" how you are doing". At the crosswalks in the morning. I think that it also is time, when you say it's okay, "Do you want to talk? We have some time now". Or "I can't talk but we can talk later". So that they always know there is an ear and someone to listen. I think it's encouragement and uhm and it is standing up for them.

Teachers also discussed that part of building trust and relationship with families involved communicating to them that they are all working with the best interest of the child in mind. Teachers recognized that the school community needs to demonstrate understanding of the immigrant families' challenges when they are settling in a new country. For example, if one family has financial difficulty and cannot provide warm clothes for their children, administrators need to find ways to support the family through donations, etc. According to one teacher, "it is not only about the school, it is about home as well". One teacher explained this in the following way,

> Especially in those beginning first times were families start interaction with Canadian schools
> …. letting them know that adults working with their children are safe and are caring and ado
> what they can do best for the children.

> According to the teachers' experiences, positive interactions was defined more broadly than simple greetings. It is an active style of interaction that builds rapport, trust, and communicates understanding and support for the families' challenges.

Subtheme 3.2. Cultural understanding. For the teachers, demonstrating understanding of the different cultures was important. One teacher recounted the importance of teaching the other students about different cultures and respect. She stated that,

> It's taking a moment with the rest of the class with the current members of the class and
> taking a moment to have a conversation about where our new student is coming from. This
> type of experience so you have to think about your behavior and how it could change so it's
> not only about teachers doing, it's about empowering the children. And when done properly,
> those conversations can happen without creating an us and them conversation. And I think
> that matters. Sometimes kids need to know what it's like to be in somebody else's shoes
> because they can't always think like that.

Teachers also highlighted the different mindsets about educations that exist in different cultures. Some teachers noted that we need "meet the families where they are" in order to understand them. Teachers emphasized the need for multiculturalism and highlighted that every person is "bringing a different piece that is important from their rich culture". They reiterated that expecting the families to change will hinder their sense of belonging. One teacher noted that "when people come together you have to find a way to get along. It needs everyone to change." Additionally, one teacher also emphasized her desire to learn about different cultures and the reasons behind the cultural practices. She explained that when there is an openness about cultures, it is easier for her to understand them and follow them. She explained that,

> I would love to understand more of the whys behind practices. If you could tell me why I can appreciate but if you just tell me no, that does not work for me. Because my brain wants to know…give me a good reason. If there is a good reason behind it, I will completely appreciate it and understand. That's my learning brain. I wish there were more openness about different cultures and why things happen in different cultures so that people can reach common background. Some cultures are more open than others.

Teachers recognized that even with cultural understanding, there might still be difference of opinions between the educators and the families. However, they noted that it is important to explore options with the "child's best interest in mind". One teacher noted that,

> Knowing when it's okay to ask questions and uhm I am trying to think of a better word…challenge things with a critical eye with a child's best interest. I think that's really important. So for immigrant families, finding ways to show that we are trying to communicate. And it's not just about immigrant families changing to meet what the school standards are. What the school is doing to find ways to meet the families in a place that is comfortable and finding ways to support the means.

Therefore, cultural sensitivity and understanding is more than knowing and understanding cultures. It is about compromise and requires both the families and the school to find ways to support the child.

Bringing Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Sense of Belonging Together

Teachers recognized that a welcoming environment where all community members feel connected and experience positive emotions creates sense of belonging within the community members. However, practically, teachers explained that enhancing the sense of belonging may be different for immigrant families. While face-to-face meetings was the usual method identified to reach out to non-immigrant families, it was not always suitable for immigrant families. Teachers noted factors such as that immigrant families' work schedule and the language competency may create a challenge to connect. However, teachers identified some methods to overcome the challenges. For example, multimodal communication, student led conferences, and use of interpreters and cultural workers has been shown to be effective. Therefore, through using different means of communication, teachers were able to create a sense of connection and line of communication with families and create a welcoming environment.

Teachers also emphasized that establishing a good relationship with the immigrant families was more important than concerns regarding the curriculum. For teachers, relationship building consisted of an active positive interaction that built trust and a line of communication. It also consisted of developing cultural sensitivity which could contribute to immigrant families experiencing positive emotions and feeling connected. Therefore, through relationship building, teachers were able to contribute to building a welcoming environment. Refer to Figure 4 for a visual representation of how teachers' perceptions and experiences of enhancing sense of belonging for immigrant families were interconnected.
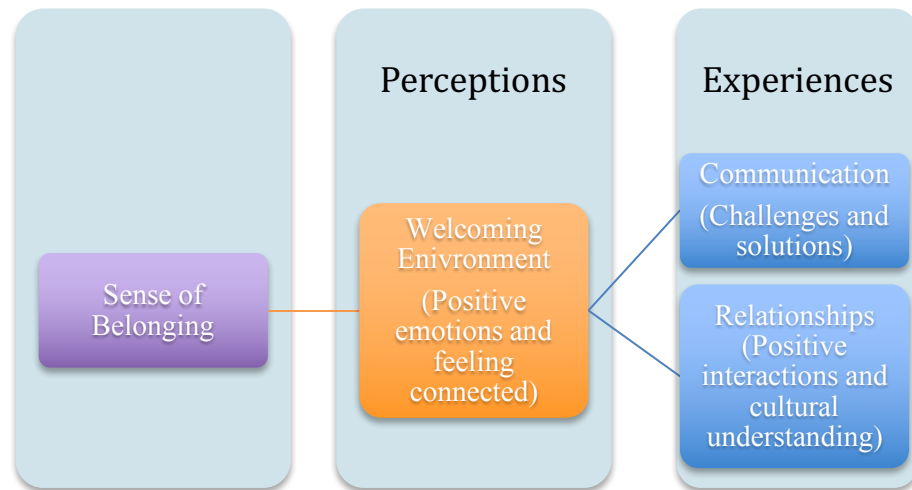
Figure 4. Teachers' Perceptions of Sense Belonging and Experiences of Enhancing Sense of Belonging for Immigrant Families.

Cross-Group Perspectives and Experiences

Given the reciprocal communication between the families and teachers in school setting, the researcher looked across consistencies and discrepancies of perceptions of sense of belonging and experiences of it across the immigrant families and the teachers. Through the data analysis, it became evident that some perspectives and experiences were common across both groups, while some were not.

Perspectives of sense of belonging. Overall, the immigrant families had a very child centered perspectives in their perspectives and experiences. They were focused on their children's experiences and growth. As mentioned previously, their sense of belonging was interconnected with their ability to support their child. However, teachers were more focused on the overall school environment. They perceived sense of belonging in terms of emotions. Their perceptions matched closely with the immigrant families' perceptions of *Support System* and *Emotional Safety*. Both groups attributed sense of belonging to being valued, respected, recognized, and appreciated. They also both emphasized that individuals, and children in particular, must feel safe, confident, and respected

regardless of their backgrounds in school. Families emphasized that it was important for them that their children are not bullied or shamed in the school.

However, families also emphasized their desire to be informed about their child and the school environment. This was a very prevalent theme in for the families. They continuously emphasized the need for "information" and "two-way communication" as an important aspect of their sense of belonging. They expressed that the school community is a means for them to get to know their children better. Interestingly, teachers did not identify this as an aspect of sense of belonging. This could be due to the challenges that are associated with communication, which was indicated in the teachers' experiences.

Experiences of sense of belonging. Similar to the perceptions, both immigrant families and teachers focused on the importance of inclusivity, relationships, and experiences of positive emotions that can enhance their sense of belonging in the school community. For families, it was important that the events in the schools are accessible for them so that they could contribute and feel effective in the community. Similarly, teachers recognized that events where families could contribute (such as potlucks) were effective in enhancing the sense of belonging for immigrant families. Cultural understanding and respect for each other was also identified as an important factor that enhanced sense of belonging for both groups.

Experiencing effective communication was an important factor that was highlighted across both groups. Both teachers and immigrant families recognized that there are some challenges in having effective communication with each other. Both groups noted lack of availability as one of the factors. However, immigrant families also noted their confusion and lack of understanding of the school system in Canada as one their challenges in establishing communication with the school community. Many of the families reported that they do not feel part of the school community because they do not feel their concerns or questions are addressed. Similarly, teachers noted that that factors

such as fear of the unknown, unwelcoming physical structure of the schools, and language barrier can make communication very difficult. Both groups listed multi modal communication methods as an effective way to distribute information and connect. One method that was thoroughly discussed by the families was the use of clear, step by step, instruction as a demystifying tool. Families often reaffirmed that the school environment in Canada is very new to them and accessing information and support is very "confusing and scary". Step by step communication, clear expectations, and feedback about their child's functioning in school can make them less stressed and build trust. Teachers also recognized that immigrant families need time to adjust to their new environment and sometimes there are different mindsets about the education. They expressed their desire to learn about the families' culture and understand their points of views. While teachers and families may have presented different methods on reaching out to each other, they both recognized that experiencing good communication usually enhanced sense of belonging in the school.

Summary

The findings revealed a number of important themes across participants. For the families, they perceived sense of belonging as being informed, having a support system, and being emotionally safe. They experienced sense of belonging when they had effective communication with the school, and felt included. Additionally, teachers perceived sense of belonging to be a welcoming environment for community members. They discussed their experiences with communication and relationship building as strategies they have used to enhance sense of belonging for immigrant parents. They explained that while face to face meeting is a common method they use for all parents, there some challenges with organizing meetings with immigrant families. Cross group perspectives indicated that communication was a common theme in the experiences of both immigrant and teachers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The primary purpose of the present study was to understand the meaning and experiences of sense of belonging for immigrant parents. The secondary purpose of the present study was to understand how teachers think the school community members perceive sense of belonging, and what approaches they have taken to enhance sense of belonging in schools. Four immigrant parents and four teachers participated in semi structured interviews. The interviews were coded consistent with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Findings revealed a number of themes in the perceptions and experiences of teachers and immigrant families. This chapter integrates and discusses relevant research that pertain to the themes identified. Implications of the findings for teachers and school psychologists working with immigrant families are also discussed. Finally, the limitations, strengths, and future direction are presented.

Findings of the Present Study in Previous Literature

One of the common themes for both immigrant parents and teachers was a better communication system between them. Immigrant parents expressed their desire to be informed about their children's development and the school environment. Communication for immigrant families was a demystifying tool in learning about the Canadian education. Lack of communication resulted in ambivalence, confusion, and frustration for the parents. Further, they discussed the importance of receiving feedback about their children's academic growth, as it could help them to support their child.

These themes are consistent in previous research which suggest that being informed, communication, and feedback is very important for immigrant parents. For example, in a study of Iranian immigrant families by Zadeh, Geva, and Rogers (2008), 49 Iranian families and 29 Iranian-Canadian families were interviewed about their experiences. Similar to the views expressed in the present study, the immigrant Iranian-Canadians signified the importance of communication by

discussing its role in informing them about the Canadian education system and increasing their ability to support their child (Zadeh et al., 2008). In the study by Francis et al. (2015) described in the Chapter 2, families also underscored the value of communication as a multi-modal, reciprocal link in bridging home and school environments. This underlies that the importance of communication and being informed transcend beyond knowledge, and it is a tool to make the transition between home and school continuous and enhance the child's development.

This home-school continuity is an important concept in understanding the importance of immigrant families' partnership with the school. Currently, the North American system propagates the dominant North American culture in school, which can be different than the home culture of immigrant students and families who potentially have different belief systems and socialization practices (Pigott & Cowen, 2000). Scholars argue that this causes a *cultural discontinuity* between home and school cultures. Immigrant and minority students may often cope with the discontinuity between their values and school values by assimilating to the dominant culture (Murray & Mandara, 2003). However, assimilation can place a stressful burden on the students' development of cultural identity and feeling of belonging in their new environments, and can also create potential conflicts between school systems promoting certain values, practices and parents' own cultural values (Downer & Myers, 2010). Delgado-Gaiton (1991) explained that "sociocultural congruency" between home and school leads to better development of the child. She further argued that "less knowledgeable parents face problems in relating with schools relative to children's development and school success" (p. 21). In his bio-ecological model, Bronfenbrenner also noted this. The developmental potential of the child is dependent on the strength of links between the settings and the extent that the individuals in the setting can allocate resources in response to the needs of the child (Bronfenbrenner,1978).

In addition to the home-school continuity, communication and an improved sense of belonging contribute to the relationship between the parents and teachers by decreasing the ambivalence and confusion that some immigrant families experience in schools. Zadeh et al. (2008) stated that,

> Indeed, these [Iranian-Canadian] mothers discussed the difficulty they had experienced in judging children's success in Canada. They indicated that shortly after having immigrated to Canada, it was hard for them to gauge and monitor their children's success because they were puzzled and confused by the divergence in approaches to academic evaluation. (p. 59).

This view resembles the current study's immigrant families' ambivalence, confusion, and challenges with approaches to academic evaluation and curriculum in the Canadian education system. In their review of cross cultural parent involvement literature, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) concluded that the degree that parents gave weight to the school's feedback was related to their relationship with the teacher. The trust between parents and teachers was impacted if the parents view the evaluation as biased (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). This implicates the importance of communication as a tool to build that trust.

Another prevalent theme in the immigrant families' perceptions and experiences of sense of belonging was inclusion and emotional safety. Inclusion and emotional safety described feelings of respect, recognition, confidence, and safety. Additionally, participating in cultural activities enhanced immigrant parents' sense of belonging when they felt that their contribution was important. One parent described that she felt effective in the school community when the teacher thanked her for participation in an international potluck event at school. Similarly, in the study by Kuperminc et al., (2008) described earlier, the authors concluded that the positive impacts of parent involvement in immigrant parents may not actualize if the parents' efforts are not recognized by the school officials. Other studies also noted that parents may feel frustration if their efforts are not acknowledged

(Crozier, 1999). These results echoed the current study's immigrant families' experiences of recognition and appreciation in their child's schools. Parents' sense of inclusion was connected to their emotional safety, as they reported feeling a sense of confidence when they felt appreciated. Parents also experienced emotional safety and security when their children experienced positive emotions in school. Similarly, Francis et al. (2015) reported that families described teachers' respect for their children through the teachers' empathy, sensitivity, compassion, and kindness. Respect for families was manifested by listening to them, valuing their knowledge, and treating them as equal partners (Francis et al. 2015).

However, a unique perspective in this current study's findings was the accessibility of opportunities to participate for immigrant parents. Delgado-Gaiton (1991) shares this perspective, by explaining that schools (consciously or unconsciously) exclude minority parents by establishing activities that require an extensive knowledge of the majority culture. The absence of the cultural knowledge prohibits school participation from minority parents, resulting in isolation. This view was reflected in one of the parents' recount of her experience in the current study. She explained how she was afraid to participate when she was given large organizational tasks but her confidence grew when she was able to participate in smaller tasks. Lack of accessibility of opportunities for immigrant parents can have important consequences for their partnership with school.

The teachers interviewed in the current study expressed that a welcoming environment would enhance sense of belonging for immigrant parents. Teachers expressed that they provide this welcoming environment by establishing positive relationship with immigrant parents. One way that teachers established the relationship was through positive interactions. This was similar to findings in the study by Puig et al. (2015). The authors report that one family "acknowledged how daily routines like morning greetings contributed to feelings of warmth and welcome" (P. 193). However, as the

teacher participants in this study and previous research suggested, there are some challenges in establishing this relationship and communicating effectively.

Vygostky (1994) explained that connection is made possible through shared language as well as shared cultural knowledge. When immigrant parents and teachers interact, there must be understanding of the English language and a cultural awareness of the experiences of children, families, and teachers (Strickland, Keat, & Marinak, 2010; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Green eld, & Quiroz, 2001). As teachers in this study indicated, language proficiency, fear of the unknown, and their cultural misunderstandings at times hindered their ability to effectively communicate or build the relationship. However, they emphasized developing cultural understanding in the school community. Similarly, the practice of developing cultural understanding in the school community and incorporating that in the classroom, referred to as culturally responsive teaching, has been shown to bring awareness and improve the relationship between teachers and parents (Copple & Bredekamp,2009). In a case study of a school by Strickland et al. (2010), fourteen immigrant children took photos of their daily lives and narrated them to their teachers in focus groups. The authors report that the opportunity to learn about the children's daily lives allowed teachers to understand their own false assumptions that they had constructed. Both parents and teachers also commented on their "perception of strengthened connection between their world" (p. 94). Similar to these results, the teachers in the current study expressed that positive interactions, and developing a cultural understanding builds trust and confidence with the parents. Further, the immigrant parents in the Strickland et al. (2010)'s study also expressed that they felt assured that the teachers had their child's interest in mind. The teachers in this study reflected this as well; indicating that cultural understanding leads to finding ways to support the child.

Similar to the families, communication was an important theme in the teachers' strategies in enhancing sense of belonging. While teachers recognized the importance of communication, they

discussed the challenges they face in communicating with immigrant parents. Some of these challenges were the English language proficiency, lack of availability, and lack of resources. The teachers explained that they overcome these challenges by using translators, multi modal communication, and organizing student led conferences. These challenges have also been found in other research. Kuperminc et al. (2008) reported that the low parent involvement among Latino families reflect challenges with the English language proficiency, lack of knowledge about the expectations, and the parents' work schedule. In their literature review article, Larocque, Lkeiman, & Darling (2011), noted the same challenges. Further, they also recommended using translators and multi modal communication methods (videos, applications, photos) to communicate with immigrant parents. One recommendation that contrasted with the views expressed by the teachers in this study, was the caution in using students as translators. According to the authors, the use of students "upsets the balance and authority in the parent-child relationship" (p. 119). Teachers in the current study organized student led conferences in order to overcome the shortage of translators and facilitate a relationship with parents. It appears that the use of students is a result of shortcomings in resources. Districts need to consider these shortages and their consequences in order to provide the teachers and families with the best services.

Sense of Belonging Revisited

In Chapter 1 of this document, McMillan and Chavis's definition of "membership" in a community was used to define the phenomena of sense of belonging. This definition included emotional safety, sense of belonging and identification, and personal investment. However, researchers have inquired how sense of belonging can manifest differently for individuals such as immigrants who are new in their community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The findings in this study indicated that sense of belonging for the immigrant parents interviewed did include some aspects of emotional safety, and identification (inclusivity) in their child's school. However, communication

and being informed was also an important part of their perceptions and experiences of sense of belonging. Communication was especially important for immigrant parents because of their unfamiliarity with the education system in Canada. It allowed them to learn and support their child better. Effective communication was also a very prevalent theme that was evident in the teachers' strategies to improve sense of belonging for parents. As Delgado-Gaiton (1991) stated, familiarity with the school system through communication *empowers* immigrant families. While communication resulted in familiarity with the school system for immigrant parents, it also resulted in familiarity and understanding of the home culture for the teachers. This role of communication, as a tool to increase familiarity between teachers and immigrant parents, may not be as important for the relationship between parents and teachers who have been in the community longer and have established the sociocultural knowledge (Delgado-Gaiton, 1991). As previously explained, communication leads to knowledgeable parents and culturally aware teachers, resulting in home-school contingency that can strengthen the proximal processes and development of the child (Bronfenbrenner,1978; Delgado-Gaiton, 1991). Communication is also related to other themes of sense of belonging identified by the participants. Through familiarity with the school system, effective communication made participating and involvement more accessible, resulting in inclusion, and emotional safety, and a welcoming environment.

However, examining how to enhance immigrant parents' sense of belonging is not complete unless it is situated within the broader current sociocultural environment. Ali (2008) argued that the Western establishment and practices of current school system in Canada can lead to isolation, loss of parental efficacy, and disempowerment of immigrant parents who have different expectations and visions of the education system. This isolation can also impact the students' experiences of discrimination in schools. Feeling isolated and disempowered, immigrant parents engage less in schools and home-school discontinuity occurs. However, this lack of engagement is not necessarily

due to the parents' characteristics, but rather due to the practices of the school system that does not recognize the unique experiences and natures of immigrant families (Ali, 2008; Delgado-Gaiton, 1991). Focusing on the parents' characteristics are misguided because the efforts to enhance involvement are based on the assumption that parents are deficient and require change (Ali, 2008; Delgado-Gaiton, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, immigrant families value education and are involved in their children's education, albeit in different ways (Lopez, 2001). Focusing on the deficits of the families diverts attention from policies, service (e.g. English language classes), or attitudes that may need to adjust or change in schools or larger communities that they are involved (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, & Ryalls, 2010). LaRosque et al. (2011), agrees with this view and further explains that,

> There is a clear need to move from the idea that parents are the same, with the same needs and that children should be treated the same. This may be a result assuming *fairness* and *sameness* are synonyms. Such an approach misses the complexity of needs and roles that students and parents who are from diverse backgrounds play in the education process. It also makes it very easy to miss the barriers to participation that may exist for these families. There is no one best way for parental involvement. School systems should strive to reflect the full spectrum of the plurality of the United States to accommodate ethnically and racially diverse families and children. (p. 121).

This view was reflected in the teachers' experiences to some extent. While they acknowledged their efforts to overcome the challenges in creating a sense of belonging, lack of resources, and information were some factors that hastened the process. Improving immigrant parent involvement and the home-school connection through enhancement of sense of belonging requires the school system to recognize the unique experiences of immigrant parents and teachers in working together, and provide adequate resources to enhance the relationship.

Implications for School Psychologists

The present findings suggest that school agencies and professional need to consider culturally appropriate ways of enhancing immigrant parents' sense of belonging. It also recognizes the school establishment's need for adjustment and change. School psychologists have a unique relationship with parents and teachers, knowledge of the school system and culturally relevant practices, and the leadership to implement system wide change (NASP, 2010).

School psychologists in North America have the important responsibility in conducting psychoeducational assessments and recommending students for special education, a process that may not be common in different educational system around the world. In fact, culturally and linguistically diverse students have been shown to be disproportionally represented in the special education category than majority students (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). School psychologists must engage in practices that recognize the unique experiences and perceptions of different families and use psychometric tools that yield culturally valid results (Rhodes et a., 2005). School psychologists also play a pivotal part in establishing the role between families and schools. They also have knowledge of diversity in families and schools (NASP, 2010). They can utilize their unique relationship with the families and the teachers to initiate effective communication (NASP, 2010). School psychologists have knowledge of the resources, such as interpreters and cultural workers, and also the understanding of culturally relevant school system. Therefore, they have the ability to share their knowledge about these elements and build capacity in their schools (Rogers et al., 1999). Further, psychologists are knowledgeable about how "institutional racism, cultural misinformation and other systematic issues affect education of students from culturally and linguistically diverse populations" (p. 249) (Rogers et al., 1999). Therefore, they have a duty to assess whether problems experienced by the student may be a manifestation of systematic biases in the school (Rogers et al., 1999).

Limitations and Strengths of the Current Study

The findings of the current study contribute to a better understanding of immigrant parents' sense of belonging and teachers' strategies in enhancing sense of belonging in schools. However, there are limitations in the study that need to be acknowledged for future research on this topic. An overall limitation relates to the question of generalizability of the findings. As previously explained, generalizability is not a goal of IPA. Rather, the current study presented an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of immigrant families and teachers.

However, due to the nature of purposive and snowball sampling, the participants were all females and the immigrant families were all from one home country. In addition, most participants had at least a Bachelor's or a higher degree of education. Lastly, the teachers mostly worked in low-income neighborhoods while the families mostly lived in higher income neighborhoods. Although education and socioeconomic status were not topics of interests to this current study, it is essential to note that the possible heterogeneity of the experiences may have impacted the comparison of findings between teacher and families. In addition, although all the families spoke adequate English, they may have been able to better express their feelings in their mother language. Future research may consider using a translator on studies with immigrant families. It should also be noted that all the interviewed immigrant families came to Canada as skilled immigrants, and their experiences may drastically differ from refugees, international students, and immigrants on work visa. The limitations of generalizability and the demographics of the sample should be considered in relation to the findings.

Despite the limitations, the study has a number of strengths that highlight the importance of understanding and recognizing immigrant families' experiences. Further, it employed teachers' perspectives and experiences as well in order to highlight a need for a collaborative approach to family and school partnership. While the majority of research on sense of belonging in a community rely on theoretical views that may only be applicable to individuals who have been in a community

for a period of time, there is scarcity of research on how to enhance sense of belonging for individuals that are new to the community. The findings of this study suggest that sense of belonging for immigrant parents has a unique component pertaining to effective communication and being informed that is related to other components, such as inclusion and emotional safety. It also highlights the importance of reframing immigrant parents' apparent lack of involvement to an understanding of how the school system may not be recognizing their unique experiences and viewpoints. Therefore, it calls for a review of the relevancy of our current education system to the current population.

Future Directions

Given Canada's focus on welcoming immigrants and refugee families, it is important to continue to research this topic. As previously stated, immigrant children's success in education is very related to their parents' involvement and the home-school continuity. Since our current education systems may not extensively represent their unique experiences, further studies need to be conducted to understand how the education system can serve its student population. Further, studies in the Canadian context should focus on demographics of immigrant population that are relevant to a specific city, since there is a large variability in the immigrants' experiences depending on their immigration status, home country, and their new community.

Further research should be conducted to evaluate the teachers' education proficiency in promoting culturally relevant teaching instructions. While it is imperative that immigrant families are being informed about the education system in Canada, it is equally important for the teachers' education and the education system to systematically consider different approaches that recognizes immigrant families and their viewpoints.

Given the limitation of generalizability and the language demand with IPA, further research may consider using different methodologies to explore immigrant parents' and teachers' partnership.

Other qualitative methods such as photo-voice, ethnography, or case studies may provide additional insights. Further, researchers may consider using quantitative methods such as survey results to gauge the experiences of a broader sample size. Ultimately, research including different members of the immigrant family, such as the students, and research with focus groups including teachers and the family can initiate collaborative discussion and sharing of viewpoints.

Summary

Generally, the previous literature was consistent with the findings in this study. Further, the findings in this study provided a baseline understanding how sense of belonging is developed differently for immigrant parents. When considered in a broader sociocultural context, the findings also demonstrate the need for the school structure and the current education system to understand the different needs of immigrant parents. School psychologists have a unique role in identifying the unique needs of diverse families, and can facilitate communication between families and educators.

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Appendix A: Parent Background Questionnaire

You may skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your nationality?

Where did you migrate to Canada from?

When did you migrate to Canada?

What is your highest degree of education?

How old is/are your child(ren) living at home?

- What grade(s) are they in?

Do you have any extended family living in your household?

- If yes, what are their relations to you?

Appendix B: Teacher Background Questionnaire

You may skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

What is your highest level of education?

How many years have you been teaching?

What grades have you taught in your teaching career?

What grade/subject are currently teaching?

To your knowledge, approximately how many immigrant students have you taught over the years in the elementary school?

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, Ph.D.,
                              Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
                              & Special Education
                              Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
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Student Co-Investigators: Dorna Rahimi
                              Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
                              & Special Education
                              Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
                              Email:XXXXX

Dear Parent/Guardian/Caretaker,

Please read the following information carefully. This is a request for you to take part in the study that we are doing. If after reading this letter, you would like to take part in this research study, please sign one copy and return in the envelope provided (or in person at the time of the interview). Keep the other copy for your records.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of immigrant parents and their perception and experiences with their child's school community. We are talking with immigrant parents and teachers to better understand : 1) What school community means to them 2) what are the experiences of parents with the school community 3) what approaches teachers can take to foster a positive school community.

Research Study Participation:
1. Taking part in the study means that you will take part in a one-on-one interview about your perception of the school community, what it means to you, and your experiences with your child(ren)'s school community.

2. The interview will take place at your home or another location mutually agreed upon that is quiet and works well for you. The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. If needed and agreed upon by both the researcher and the parent, a second interview may be conducted by phone or in person. This interview will last no more than one hour.

3. The interview will be audio-recorded and notes will also be taken. When possible, two researchers will attend the session. In the case of two researchers, one will be the lead interviewer and the other will take notes. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the audio recording.

4. If you agree to take part in the study, we will ask you to answer a background questionnaire following the interview.

5. After the interview is transcribed the researchers will contact you to give you an opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy, clarification, and need for any changes.

This may take up to 15 minutes and will be done I person or by phone, your choice, with the interview transcript sent to you in advance via password protected file.

6. We are not aware of any risks if you take part in our study. However, if you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to stop at any time. If any of the questions in the interview make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose not to respond to those questions. You are welcome to contact us with any questions.

7. Taking part in the study means that you agree to the information being used for the purpose of reporting the results of the research in presentations or publications. This information will help us develop materials such as booklets, websites, and videos to help support students with IBD in schools. However information identifying you directly will not be included.

8. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. Further, anything you share with the researchers will be kept confidential. As you aware, we will also be talking to teachers about ways to best serve immigrant families. Anything you say about your experiences with your child's school or teachers will not be shared with anyone, including the teachers or people working at the school. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and with electronic files password protected and encrypted at the university office of the researchers. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this study.

9. As a thank-you for your time and any transportation expenses, each person who takes part in the study will receive a $10 gift card to a local business. The researchers will also provide child-care on site if it is needed.

10. If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of at XXXX or if long distance at XXXX or call toll free at XXXX.

11. If you are interested in taking part or would like to learn more about the study and what is involved, you may contact us by phoning the research project office at XXXX or by sending us an email at XXXX.

Consent to Participate in this Research Project

By signing below, it means you consent to take part in this research study. When you sign below it also means that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

_____
Your Name (Please Print)

_____
Your Signature   Date

Additional Questions

If you would like a summary of our results upon completion of the study, please indicate below and provide your email and mailing address so we can send you a copy.

We will be doing additional related studies about how to support immigrant students and their families in the schools. If you would like to be contacted with information about future studies and materials we develop, please indicate below.

Check all that apply:

_____ Yes I would like a summary of the research when your work is completed.

_____ Yes I am interested in learning more about future studies.

If you check any box above please complete the following:

Full Mailing Address (include city and postal code): _____

_____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

Appendix D: Teacher Consent

Principal Investigator:	Laurie Ford, Ph.D.,
	Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
	& Special Education
	Phone: XXXX
	Email: XXXX
Student Co-Investigators:	Dorna Rahimi
	Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
	& Special Education
	Phone: XXXXX
	Email:XXXXXX

Dear Educator,

You are receiving this because you have had experience teaching immigrant students and communicating with immigrant parents in elementary schools. Please read the following information carefully. This is a request for you to take part in a study that we are doing. If after reading this letter, you would like to take part in this research study, please sign one copy and return in the envelope provided. Keep the other copy for your records. If however you would like to learn more about the study before you decide if you want to take part, please contact us at the email address listed at the end of this letter.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of immigrant parents and their perception and experiences with their child's school community. We are talking with immigrant parents and teachers to better understand : 1) What school community means to them 2) what approaches teachers can take to foster a positive school community.

Research Study Participation:
1. Taking part in the study means that you will take part in a one-on-one interview about your thoughts on school community, your experiences in fostering a positive environment for immigrant parents to get involved, and

The interview will take place at a location mutually agreed upon that is quiet and works well for you. The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. If needed and agreed upon by both the researcher and the teacher, a second interview may be conducted by phone or in person. This interview will last no more than one hour.

2. The interview will be audio-recorded and notes will also be taken. When possible, two researchers will attend the session. In the case of two researchers, one will be the lead interviewer and the other will take notes. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the audio recording.

3. If you agree to take part in the study, we will ask you to answer a background questionnaire following the interview.

4. After the interview is transcribed the researchers will contact you to give you an opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy, clarification, and need for any changes. This may take up to 15 minutes and will be done in person or by phone, your choice, with the interview transcript sent to you in advance via password protected file.

5. We are not aware of any risks if you take part in our study. However, if you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to stop at any time. If any of the questions in the interview make you feel uncomfortable, you may chose not to respond to those questions. You are welcome to contact us with any questions.

6. Taking part in the study means that you agree to the information being used for the purpose of reporting the results of the research in presentations or publications. This information will help us develop materials such as booklets, websites, and videos to help support students with IBD in schools. However information identifying you directly will not be included.

7. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and with electronic files password protected and encrypted at the university office of the researchers. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this study.

8. As a thank-you for your time and any transportation expenses, each person who takes part in the study will receive a $10 gift card to a local business. The researchers will also provide child-care on site if it is needed.

9. If you have any concerns or complaints about your-rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of at XXXX or if long distance at XXXX or call toll free at XXXX.

10. If you are interested in taking part or would like to learn more about the study and what is involved, you may contact us by phoning the research project office at XXXX or by sending us an email at XXXX.

Consent to Participate in this Research Project

By signing below, it means you consent to take part in this research study. When you sign below it also means that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your Name (Please Print): _____

Your Signature: _____ Date: _____

Additional Questions

If you would like a summary of our results upon completion of the study, please indicate below and provide your email and mailing address so we can send you a copy.

We will be doing additional related studies about how to support immigrant students and their families in the schools. If you would like to be contacted with information about future studies and materials we develop, please indicate below.

Check all that apply:

_____ Yes I would like a summary of the research when your work is completed.

_____ Yes I am interested in learning more about future studies.

If you check any box above please complete the following:

Full Mailing Address (include city and postal code): _____

_____

OR Email: _____ OR Phone: _____

These questions will be discussed with the parents during the first interview session.

Introduction and Orientation:
- Introduction of researcher(s) and research study
- Review and sign consent forms.
- Give the parents Background Information Questionnaire to complete.

Interview Questions:

(About sense of belonging)
- What does it mean for your to be part of a community.
  - Possible follow up: What emotions or feelings do you have when you are part of a community that you associate with?
- How do you see the school as a community?
  - What are some ways that the school can be a community?
  - What does it feel like?
  - What does it sound like?
- What does it the mean for you to belong to your child's school community.
  Possible follow-ups:
  - What does it feel like?
  - What does it look like?
  - How would other community members treat you?
  - How would you trust the community members?
  - How safe would you feel part of the community?
- How important do you think it is for your child's school to feel like a community for you?
  - How do you think it can benefit/not benefit your child?

(About experiences of sense of belonging in the school)
- Tell me about how you feel about being part of your child's school.
- How does your child's school feel/or not feel like a community for you.
  - Tell me about some times that you felt included in the school community.
    - How did it feel like?
  - Tell me about some times that you did not feel included in the school community.
    - How did it feel like?
- What do you think the schools/educators can do to make schools more inclusive for immigrant parents?

Appendix F: Teacher Interview Guide

Introduction and Orientation:
- ✓ Consent and review
- ▪ Introduction of self and research study
    - o

(About sense of belonging)
- ▪ How do you see the school as a community? (do you get a sense of community from your school?)
    - o What are some ways that the school can be a community?
    - o What does it feel like?
    - o What does it sound like?
- ▪ How do you think the parents become (can be) part of that school community?
- ▪ As a teacher, What do you think "feeling of belongingness in school" means ?
- ▪ What do you think it would feel like for the following individuals to feel belonging/part of a school community?
    - o Parents
    - o Immigrant parents
    - o Students
    - o Immigrant students

(About experiences of creating a sense of belonging)
- ✓ What were some of the experiences in fostering a sense of belonging in schools.
- ▪ What were some ways that the schools you have welcomed immigrant parents in the school community and fostered a sense of belonging?
- ▪ What were some ways that were not as successful in creating a sense of belonging/community for immigrant parents?
- ▪ What do you think is the best way that educators/teachers can create a strong sense of belonging in school community for all parents, especially immigrant parents?
    - o Possible follow ups: What strengths do you think immigrant parents can bring to the school community?
    - o What strengths do you think teachers can bring in creating that inclusive community sense for immigrant parents?