

“SOMETHING THAT NOT EVERYBODY HAS”: PARENTS’ REASONS FOR  
ENROLLING IN SPANISH IMMERSION PROGRAM

By

Danya Schimmack, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Applied Linguistics

University of Alaska Fairbanks

August 2018

APPROVED:

Dr. Sabine Siekmann, Committee Chair  
Dr. Patrick Marlow, Committee Member  
Dr. Wendy Martelle, Committee Member  
Dr. Patrick Marlow, Chair  
*Linguistics Program*  
Todd Sherman, Dean  
*College of Liberal Arts*  
Dr. Michael Castellini,  
*Dean of the Graduate School*

## **Abstract**

Immersion programs are a form of bilingual education where content classes are taught in a second language. Immersion programs are generally optional choices which means that parents must make the conscious decision to enroll their children in the specific program. Thus, my research question: why do parents decide to enroll their children in the Spanish Immersion Program of Chugiak, Alaska? This research question and site were selected based on my own experience as a learner in the program and my personal curiosity towards my own parents' enrollment decisions.

This study involved semi-structured interviews with twelve parents, including my own parents, focusing on their reasons for enrolling their children in the Spanish Immersion Program in Chugiak. Findings reflected the general benefits of bilingualism including: academic, cognitive, and social. Participants also noted that the program helped expose their children to other cultures and to have a better understanding of diversity. Several parents also stated that the immersion program would provide their children with a unique and valuable experience that would lead to future opportunities. These findings can help inform other parents that are in the process of deciding where to enroll their children. The findings can also inform schools about what prospective parents value when they are considering different school options.



## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	vii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Rationale and Research Question .....	1
Summary .....	3
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	5
What is Immersion? .....	5
What are the Benefits of Immersion? .....	9
Linguistic .....	9
Cognitive .....	15
Academic .....	17
Social .....	20
Economic .....	21
What is School Choice? .....	22
Why do Parents Enroll their children in (Dual) Immersion Programs? .....	24
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	27
Statement of Study Design .....	27
Goals of Research .....	29
Setting .....	30
Selection of Participants .....	31
Profile Descriptions of Participants .....	32
Procedures of Study .....	35
Analysis of Data .....	38
Chapter Four: Analysis by Participant .....	41
Barry .....	41
Barry summary .....	43
Terri .....	44
Terri summary .....	46
Hannah .....	46
Hannah summary .....	49
Gabriella .....	49
Gabriella summary .....	53

Sarah.....	53
Sarah summary.....	55
Brenda.....	56
Brenda summary.....	57
Lisa.....	57
Lisa summary.....	60
Margaret.....	60
Margaret summary.....	63
Rebecca.....	63
Rebecca summary.....	67
Ida.....	67
Ida summary.....	70
Brandon.....	70
Brandon summary.....	72
Lacey.....	73
Lacey summary.....	76
Chapter Five: Analysis by Theme.....	77
Linguistic Factors.....	77
Language choice.....	79
Cognitive Factors.....	80
Academic Factors.....	81
Concern: Lag.....	82
Social Factors.....	83
Peer.....	83
Travel.....	84
Diversity.....	85
Economic Factors.....	86
Being Special.....	86
Parental Involvement Factors.....	87
Investment.....	87
Community.....	89
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	91

Summary of Findings .....	91
Cultural, Social and Linguistic Capital of Immersion Education .....	93
Implications .....	95
Future Research.....	98
Reflections .....	98
Conclusion .....	99
References .....	101

#### List of Tables

2.1 Benefits of Immersion.....	9
2.2 Enrollment Decision Factors.....	25
3.1 Rigor of Qualitative Research.....	28
3.2 Class Periods by Language.....	31
3.3 Participant Description.....	33
3.4 Interview Information.....	37

#### List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	108
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form.....	110
Appendix C: Transcription Guidelines.....	111
Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Exemption.....	114



## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my entire committee, Dr. Siekmann, Dr. Marlow, and Dr. Martelle for their guidance through my studies and research. Their support and patience has been invaluable throughout this process. They are examples of the type of educator I strive to be someday.

I would also like to thank my friends and family that have supported me over the years. Your support and love has allowed me to reach my goals. A special thanks to my father who made the decision to enroll me in an immersion program which is where my entire journey began.



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

“Well, I don’t know, dad! She doesn’t even speak English!” I responded to my father’s question about the name of my teacher after my first day of school. According to my father, the first weeks of school were very frustrating for me, many times resulting in tears, because I would spend half of my day not understanding my teacher. I grew up as a student in a Spanish immersion program in a small Alaskan community. In this program the first half of our first day of Kindergarten was spent in a classroom with a teacher speaking solely in Spanish. For almost all of the class this was our first time being exposed to Spanish. I do not have many memories of the first years in the program, but my father has numerous stories he enjoys telling. Many of these stories from the first years in the program involve me being upset and frustrated. Listening to these stories made me wonder why my parents would have decided to place me in the program.

### **Rationale and Research Question**

I spent all thirteen years of my schooling in the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak, Alaska. It was not until years after graduating, that I realized how unique my learning experience was because of this program. Knowing a second language has become such an integrated part of who I am that I often find myself perplexed when other people are not able to understand something in Spanish. Over the years, I have become more and more grateful for my time in the immersion program. While in the program, I struggled with understanding the purpose of learning Spanish and finding a real world connection because the language only existed in the classroom, not even throughout the school. In hindsight, however, I am grateful to my own parents for not only placing me in the program, but also for not letting me ever quit.

As I embarked on my undergraduate and graduate studies, I remained fascinated with the immersion model, and also wondered why my father had made the decision to enroll me in the program. It was difficult for me to imagine myself as a parent making the decision to place my children in a language immersion program. It seemed a strange concept to have my children spend half of their day learning a language that is not spoken in the community, and a language that I myself did not speak; which would leave me unable to understand or help with half of their education. This then led me to my research question:

Why do parents make the decision to enroll their children in the Spanish Immersion program?

I wanted to understand what motivated parents to make the decision to enroll their children in the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak. Beyond my own curiosity, this question is important for schools to consider when they are attempting to appeal to perspective parents. Investigating this question helps reveal what the parents value in their children's education, and how they see the Spanish immersion program benefitting their children. What I am learning from my participants' stories may also help other parents when considering educational options for their children.

Programs like my research site are optional programs requiring a conscious decision and additional steps by the parents to enroll their children. My research site is the program that I graduated from in Chugiak, Alaska. In 1992, the Anchorage School district began a K-12 Spanish immersion program through Chugiak Elementary, Mirror Lake Middle School and Chugiak High School. In the elementary years, there are two teachers that split time with the students; one teaches in Spanish, and the other teaches in English. In elementary school, the time spent in each language is split fifty-fifty. During middle school, there are two classes students attend in Spanish: social studies and language arts. For the last four years of the program in high

school, students attend one class in Spanish, a social studies content course. The program is not a stand-alone school, but rather offers an optional track housed within the existing schools. The program prides itself on being the oldest Spanish immersion program in Alaska. In order for a child to be enrolled in the program, parents have to enter a lottery system for available spaces.

I wanted to approach my question about enrollment decisions qualitatively through interviews to allow participants to share their own words and stories. I was interested in the parents' experiences and hearing what they valued.

Given the qualitative nature of my study the findings will be limited to the experiences of my participants. These may not be representative of all parents in the community, nor to the general population. However, I hope to provide rich insight into the decision making of participating parents, which might be transferable to similar programs.

## **Summary**

In this thesis, I investigate why parents make the decision to enroll their children in the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak, Alaska. In Chapter Two, I will discuss the literature related to the benefits and challenges of bilingual education, and factors influencing parents' enrollment decisions. In Chapter Three, I will present my research methodology, further define my site, introduce my participants, and discuss the process of data collection and analysis. In Chapter Four, I present each individual participant's story through their quotes. In Chapter Five, I discuss the data thematically and make connections to the literature. Lastly, Chapter Six will include a brief summary of my findings, the implications of these findings, and my own reflections.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

In the literature review I will first define immersion and then discuss the benefits of immersion, along with the challenges associated with immersion. These benefits are divided into linguistic, cognitive, academic, social, and economic. Next, I will define choice and power. Lastly, I will discuss parental choice in regard to education and motivational factors behind school choice in bilingual programs.

### **What is Immersion?**

In general terms immersion is used “to refer to situations in which second language learners immerse themselves in the target language and culture, usually temporarily and often as they work or study” (Lyster, 2007, p. 8). However, in the field of linguistics and when discussing educational models there are more specific definitions. I will start with broader definitions and narrow the discussion to the specific immersion definition that fits my research site.

This first broad definition incorporates numerous bilingual education programs under the umbrella term of immersion. Lightbown and Spada (2013) define immersion as follows:

An educational programme in which a second language is taught via content-based instruction. That is, students study subjects such as mathematics and social studies in their second language. Typically, students in immersion programmes share the same first language and teachers adjust their instructional language and materials to meet needs of second language learners. (219)

Here in this definition we see that immersion is a type of content-based instruction (CBI). Lyster (2007) defines CBI as the use of subject matter to provide “second language learners with enriched opportunities for processing and negotiating the target language through content” (p. 1). Thus, the focus of the class is a specific subject and not the second language. The language is used as a tool in the instruction of the content. A syllabus for a CBI class would focus on content

goals involving the specific topics of the class. The syllabus is organized around themes and topics, and not by grammar or linguistic features (Richards, 2001). Secondary goals may involve language learning, but the end goal of the class is the subject matter. Immersion involves CBI because the main goal is to teach specific content, and through the content, learners are exposed to the language.

Now that I have discussed general definitions of immersion, I will present other specific factors of immersion programs. Swain and Johnson (1997) focus on eight core features which are:

1. the second language is the medium of instruction
2. the curriculum matches the regular monolingual curriculum
3. continued support for the first language
4. aim of additive bilingualism
5. the second language is mostly confined to the classroom
6. students start with similar limited levels of the second language
7. bilingual teachers
8. classroom culture matches the community of the first language (p. 6-8)

These core features are central to their identification of an immersion program. The content being taught is the monolingual curriculum but in a second language. There is support for their learners first language with an overall goal of additive bilingualism. The L2 does not widely exist in the community. The learners in the program are all starting at the same low levels of proficiency in the second language. The teachers are bilingual and the organization of the classroom culture matches that of the broader community. Learning the second language is an

additional skill that will not detract from the students' first language. Lyster (2007) further provides a definition of immersion, which includes some of these core features:

a form of bilingual education that aims for additive bilingualism by providing students with a sheltered classroom environment in which they receive at least half of their subject-matter instruction through the medium of a language that they are learning as a second, foreign, heritage, or indigenous language. (p. 8)

This definition highlights the additive approach and language learning content courses. It also identifies four different categories within immersion, including heritage language immersion. In a heritage language immersion program the second language being taught is the traditional cultural language of the students' families.

Baker (2011) narrows the definition for immersion programs based on the following factors: learners are from the language majority, language use in the classroom is bilingual with an emphasis on the L2, the aims are of enrichment, bilingualism, and biliteracy (Baker, 2011, p. 210). Language majority refers to the language that is used by the largest part of the local population, and is considered the language of power (discussed later in this chapter). Enrichment is connected to the notion of an additive approach. Notably, this definition includes literacy skills in both languages, thus the aim is for students to be able to read and write in both languages.

While Baker's basic definition is narrower than Swain and Johnson (1997), both include the aim of additive bilingualism. While Swain and Johnson define the students as coming in with a similar level of limited knowledge of the second language, Baker says that they belong to the language majority. Baker's definition of immersion includes further categorization based on the following factors: the age at which students enter the program, the amount of time spent in the

second language, and at what age the students exit the program (p. 239). Swain and Johnson discuss these same topics as part of variable features within different immersion programs.

Baker would define my research site as an early start, late exit, and partial immersion program. The program begins in Kindergarten where half of the school day is spent completely in the foreign language, Spanish in this case. The 50/50 model continues through elementary school, but in middle and high school the learners are only in Spanish for a third of the school day. Thus, it is an early start program because they begin their first year in school, and it is a partial immersion program because only part of their day is spent in the second language. Since the program continues through all thirteen years of school it is also considered a late exit program.

Now that I have provided definitions for immersion programs I will introduce an immersion program that will be used throughout the literature review as an example. The program is a well-known modern example of language immersion and has been the site for numerous research studies, some of which will be discussed below. Baker (2011) introduces the program as the beginning of the “modern immersion movement” (p. 239). The program is known as the St. Lambert experiment which began in the sixties in Quebec, Canada with a French Immersion program. The program started because a group of parents wanted their children to be bilingual in French to ensure their economic future in Quebec. During this time there was a shift beginning in the language majority from English to French. (See my discussion of school choice for an explanation of how the program began.) The first two years in the program were exclusively in French, while the following grade levels had a daily hour of language arts in English. The overall purpose of the program and the studies surrounding it were to compare the students’ achievements to peers, including both English speaking peers in English classrooms,

and French speaking peers in French classrooms (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). I will continue to refer back to this program throughout the literature review while discussing different topics.

Next, I will present benefits associated with both immersion specifically and bilingual education in general. When applicable, challenges and concerns are discussed.

**What are the Benefits of Immersion?**

Benefits stated in the literature are generally grouped by linguistic, cognitive, academic, social, and economic. The benefits are summarized briefly in Table 2.1 for each category and includes related sources.

Table 2.1: Benefits of Immersion

<b>Linguistic</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Academic</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Economic</b>
-higher proficiency	-metalinguistic skills	-achievements in other subjects	-cultural sensitivity	-extra skill on resume
-early start most beneficial	- problem solving	-standardized test scores	-learn to communicate with more people	-job opportunities
-fluency vs. accuracy	- executive processing			
Lyster (2007) Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, and Swain (1998)	Bialystok (2007) Hakuta and Diaz (1985) Lambert and Tucker(1972) Peal and Lambert (1962)	Turnbull et al. (1998) Johnson, Flores, and Ellison (1963) Cooper (1987)	Blake, Lambert, Sidoti, and Wolfe (1981)  Lambert and Tucker (1972)	Lambert and Tucker (1972)  Lazaruk (2007)

**Linguistic.**

For linguistic benefits, I will be specifically discussing immersion programs, while the other benefits (cognitive, academic, and social) will focus more widely on bilingualism in

general. Overall the most beneficial educational model for linguistic proficiency is an early-start immersion program.

First, I will discuss the concept of linguistic proficiency. Over the years there have been numerous approaches to measuring a learner's achievements linguistically. It is important to note that the concept of proficiency is not necessarily defined by reaching a specific score on a test, but instead can be described with varying levels. A learner may be considered highly orally proficient in a second language, but may have low proficiency in reading.

One of the first holistic approaches to proficiency is communicative competence. (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). It separates competence into four main areas: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to the ability to accurately produce grammatical aspects of a language. Sociolinguistic competence means using the language in a socially appropriate way in context. Discourse competence is the knowledge of language in order to use it coherently and cohesively. Lastly, strategic competence refers to the ability to strategize and use language in a different way when there is a breakdown of communication or understanding.

Another example of a more holistic approach involves the concepts of complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF). Housen and Kuiken (2009) discuss the development of these concepts and their use in assessing learners' proficiency and measuring progress. Fluency involves "spontaneous oral L2 production" (p. 461) while accuracy involves the "controlled production of grammatically correct linguistic structure in the L2" (p. 461). Thus, it is possible for a learner to be considerably fluent while not being accurate. Complexity refers to language use being "elaborate and varied" (Ellis, 2003, p. 340) meaning the learner is able to use varied sentence structure and a wide array of vocabulary. While these three constructs allow for a more

holistic view of learners' linguistic proficiency, it is unclear how best to measure and analyze these constructs. It is important to note that not all three constructs will develop equally or be performed at the same level.

More recently different tests have been developed to measure linguistic proficiency. For example, one of the commonly used proficiency tests is given by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2012), known as ACTFL. Their proficiency guidelines range from Novice Low to Distinguished, with nine other levels in between. They also separate proficiency into: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. For example, a Distinguished in speaking would require the use of the language accurately and efficiently, along with the ability to discuss a wide range of topics, all done in an organized manner. A Novice Low in speaking would produce little more than a basic greeting.

Another aspect of language learning and proficiency, tied to speaking skills specifically, is accent. The traditional belief was that accent was best learned while language learners are younger, during the critical period. However, recent studies have shown there are other factors to consider. Munoz (2014) found that "age of onset of FL learning...and exposure...were not conclusive determinants for perceiving and producing English sounds in a native-like manner in a formal language learning context" (p. 59). Thus, the issue of accent is more complicated than just looking at learners age and time spent exposed to the language. Immersion programs allow for young learners to gain early exposure to the second language, but does not always lead to learners producing native-like accents. Other factors to consider include: motivation, attitude, willingness to communicate, structure of exposure, and learning styles (Moyer, 2014).

I have presented these concepts of linguistic proficiency in order to highlight that immersion language programs lead to higher levels of linguistic proficiency. Lyster (2007)

summarizes research which shows that immersion students “develop much higher levels of second language proficiency than do non-immersion students studying the second language as a regular subject” (p. 14). In other words, learning a language through content courses has been more successful for learners than a traditional language learning class. Lyster also notes that learners in early immersion programs develop higher levels of proficiency than students in middle or late immersion. One study that specifically shows the benefits of early immersion was conducted by Turnbull, et al. (1998) who tested students in early (EI), middle (MI), and late (LI) immersion programs. The findings “revealed that EI students outperformed students from MI and LI programs on selected measures of listening and speaking ability” (p. 51).

***Linguistic challenges.***

The first common challenge associated with immersion programs is limited exposure to the language, and limited opportunities to use the language (Swain & Johnson, 1997; Thomas & Roberts, 2011). This challenge exists for immersion programs because the learners come from the majority language so the surrounding community typically uses the child’s first language. In some situations, the target language may only be found inside the classroom, thus limiting the learners’ exposure and opportunity for further learning outside of school. It also means that students are exposed mostly to the academic use of the language, and not necessarily the social use. In discussing this issue Hammerly (1987) notes that the natural environment of the second language would involve multiple native speakers including peers. However, in a classroom “there is one native speaker, if that, and each learner is surrounded by, and interacts with, thirty other learners who misuse the target language just as badly as he or she does” (p. 398). In this environment it is difficult for each student to receive corrective feedback and learners will pass on their incorrect use as they interact with other students.

It is important to consider language use outside of the classroom because it entails more of a social communicative use of the language, while in the classroom more academic language is used. “Since interacting with peers dominates the day, and children often opt to do this in their stronger L1, it may be the case that some children have little or no experience of using the minority language in a natural communicative context, even at school” (Thomas & Roberts, 2011, p. 92). A study conducted in a Welsh-English bilingual primary school found that while students had an overall positive attitude towards bilingualism, the large majority of their language outside of the classroom was in their first language of English (Thomas & Roberts, 2011). This limited exposure to the language can thus lower learners’ motivations as they struggle to see real world application and use of the new language they are studying. Day and Shapson (1996) make the argument that learners have “no strong social incentive to develop further toward native-speaker norms” (p. 95) because, again, their linguistic interactions are limited to the classroom (Hammerly, 1987; Krashen 1982). This is also the situation of my research site, where Spanish is limited to the classroom and the learners are not exposed to Spanish in the community.

This leads to a challenge in immersion: learners tend to perform well fluently, but not necessarily accurately. Lyster (2007) summarizes what research over the years has found that “immersion students are second language speakers who are relatively fluent and effective communicators, but non-targetlike in terms of grammatical structure and non-idiomatic in their lexical choices and pragmatic expression- in comparison to native speakers of the same age” (p. 16). Students can express themselves with the language, but will most likely do so with grammatical errors. Lambert and Tucker (1972) in discussing the St. Lambert experiment noted, even after only two years in the program, the students “have mastered the distinctive phonemes

of French, and demonstrate nativelike command of the language when reading” however “their rhythm, intonation, and overall expression in French was clearly not equivalent to that of the French Controls” (p. 204). Similar to many other studies, they also noted numerous grammatical errors.

In many immersion programs, as noted previously, access to the second language outside of the classroom is limited. Often children are studying a language that parents are not familiar with. This can lead to challenges for both children and parents, especially when it creates a barrier to helping with homework (Combs, Evans, Fletcher, Parra, & Jimenez, 2005; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Worthy, 2006; Yamauchi, Lau-Smith, & Luning, 2008). While these studies involve other forms of bilingual education, the language difference between home and school is the same as in an immersion program. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) used a powerful quote from their data collection as the title of their article: “You’re looking at this different language and it freezes you out straight away” (p. 432). Combs et al. (2005) found frustration from parents who wished to help their children with homework. In their research they found that numerous parents

described the deep and daily frustration of sitting with their child as he or she tried in vain to do homework he or she did not understand. Parents would try to help, asking the child to explain what he or she understood of the assignment.

Eventually, children would cry or become furious at their own inability to answer their parents’ questions in Spanish about something they had been taught in English. (p. 711)

Not only is this situation stressful and frustrating for the parents, but also for the children. Again, while this context is not that of an immersion program the situation is similar because the children are studying in a language that their parents do not know.

Overall the linguistic benefits of immersion are that it leads to higher levels of proficiency in the second language, especially with early start programs. While learners gain high levels of proficiency they may be lacking in grammatical accuracy. The challenge with immersion programs is that the students' exposure to the second language is limited to the classroom. This also means that parents generally do not have experience with the language either, which can create a barrier at home when parents are unable to assist with homework.

### **Cognitive.**

Cognitive benefits pertain to the ways the brain processes information. This discussion of cognitive benefits involves bilingualism in general and not immersion specifically. Lyster (2007) notes: "content-based programs have considerable potential, not only for developing high levels of bilingual proficiency among a wide range of learners, but also for creating ideal conditions for both language and cognitive development" (p. 3). The cognitive benefits of bilingualism can be seen through students' metalinguistic skills, and problem solving.

As students learn two languages they begin to understand the system of languages and how the languages work. This leads to metalinguistic awareness which "refers to the ability to analyze linguistic output objectively...looking at language as an objective set of rules, as an objective tool for communication" (Hakuta & Diaz, 1985, p. 325). Students' ability to look at the different parts of language as they are learning multiple languages leads them to compare different languages. This comparison was called contrastive linguistics by Lambert and Tucker (1972) who noted that beginning in Kindergarten: "the children who switch languages for schooling get caught up in a process of comparing and contrasting two linguistic codes, one learned from infancy, and a new one that surrounds them from the very first day of school" (p.

207). Thus, immersion students begin to perform comparative and contrastive tasks early on as they work with two different languages.

Bilinguals are more flexible in their problem solving. Deák and Narasimham (2014) define cognitive flexibility as “the capacity to update attention, representation, and inference, in response to changing task-relevant information” (p. 2). For example, having higher levels of cognitive flexibility means being able to discern an unfamiliar word’s meaning based on the context. In general, mental flexibility contributes to problem solving skills. Bilinguals have been found to be more flexible than monolinguals. Peal and Lambert (1962) attribute this higher level of flexibility to code-switching, changing between different languages. The concept of mental flexibility also relates to what others term divergent and creative thinking. Baker (2011) says this divergent and creative thinking involves the learner being able to produce numerous responses, and responses that go beyond the obvious answers. The cognitive benefits of flexibility can be found at a young age in immersion students. Nicolay and Poncelet (2013) found these cognitive advances were already measurable after only three years in an early start immersion program. Even though these students were not yet highly proficient in the second language, the study found these cognitive benefits began early on in the process of immersion.

This study is similar to that of Lambert and Tucker (1972) in that the learners were young and had only been in an immersion program for a few years.

Bilingualism has also been shown to create different pathways in the brain which can then lead to continued higher cognitive function as a person ages (Bialystok, 2007). Bialystok, Klein, Craik, and Viswanathan (2004) found that “controlled processing is carried out more effectively by bilinguals and that bilingualism helps to offset age-related losses in certain executive processes” (p. 290). Learning a language causes physical changes to the brain, which

then benefits cognitive function throughout a bilingual's life. A recent study found that bilinguals had more grey matter which is associated with memory functions (Duncan et al., 2017). They also noted that these changes in the brain delay brain atrophy which occurs with age and diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Physical changes to the brain, and greater metalinguistic awareness may also lead to the academic benefits discussed in the research which I will present next.

### **Academic.**

The benefits of learning a language can extend to other areas of academic study including other content classes and standardized testing. Despite learning content in the second language, students develop academically equal to their monolingual peers. In comparison to monolingual learners Lyster (2007) states:

The academic achievement of immersion students in subjects they study through the second language is equivalent to that of non-immersion students studying the same subjects in their first language, and their first language development ranges from equivalent to superior to that of non-immersion students. (p. 12)

Despite learning some content in the second language, students will remain academically on par or surpass their monolingual peers. Turnbull et al. (1998) also found immersion students performed better academically than their peers. For example, they found that: "a cross-sectional analysis of our Grade 6 results shows that immersion students in all types of programs outperformed regular program students" (p. 21). Regardless of the type of immersion program, students performed higher on mathematics exams.

Johnson, et al. (1963) compared classes of fourth graders. The experimental group received twenty minutes daily instruction in Spanish and the control groups did not receive any language instruction. The authors noted that "the experimental group showed greater

achievement in reading vocabulary and reading comprehension and that in language skills, arithmetic and work-study skills the two groups varied little” (p. 11). While this situation was not immersion, it shows that even a short time in a second language can increase academic success across different topics.

Academic benefits can also be seen in standardized test scores. Building upon other studies, Cooper (1987) compared SAT-Verbal test scores of students that had taken a foreign language in high schools to students that had not taken foreign language. The difference in score was statistically significant, with students that had studied a foreign language scoring highest. Again, while this is not immersion specific, Cooper found that after at least 1 full year of a foreign language, students performed higher on the SAT-Verbal. The benefit of language learning on higher standardized test scores can help lead to further academic benefits. These higher SAT scores can help students continue their education into college. While not in an immersion context, even students taking a couple years of traditional language classes are shown to have academic benefits from these classes.

Based on previous research that establishes the academic benefits of learning a language, Stewart (2005) suggests schools should introduce foreign language into the schools, specifically at the elementary level, in order to raise achievement levels in math and reading. She bases her argument on three main points that foreign language study: (1) increases cognitive skills, (2) leads to higher academic achievement, and (3) leads to higher achievement test scores (p. 13).

#### ***Academic challenges.***

A challenge for many language programs is the erroneous belief that learning a new language will detract from the first language, and/or other academic subjects. This deficit belief mainly stems from the idea that in taking time to instruct in a new language, time is taken away from the first language and/or other subjects. Turnbull et al. (1998), Johnson, et al. (1963), and

others show that while students may lag some in early years, over time they catch up to and eventually surpass their peers. For example, Turnbull et al. (1998) found that Grade 3 immersion students' reading and writing tests "demonstrated a certain lag in English literacy skills" (p. 23), however when comparing Grade 6 exams they found "immersion students' literacy test scores were notably better than their peers' in English programs" (p. 23). So while there may be a lag in early literacy, it is important to remember that immersion students will overcome this lag and most likely surpass their monolingual peers in later grades.

Johnson, et al. (1963) also highlighted "that the inclusion of foreign language instruction in elementary school curricula will not reduce the extent of average gain in pupil achievement in basic learning as measured by standardized achievement tests" (p. 11). A student's achievement in all academic subjects, based on standardized testing, will not decrease if they are learning some content in a second language. Similarly, Lambert and Tucker (1972) also argue against this deficit belief:

There are no signs at the end of grade IV of any intellectual deficit or retardation attributable to the bilingual experience, judging from yearly retestings with standard measures of intelligence, nor is there any symptom of their being handicapped on measures of creative thinking. (p. 205)

This quote underscores the earlier link between bilingualism and lower levels of achievement. Lambert and Tucker (1972) specifically state that students going through the French immersion program in St. Lambert did not show any decrease on yearly tests. While this deficit concept has been shown to be false, it is still a common misconception regarding bilingual education.

Learning a language through immersion can lead to academic benefits in other content areas and learners often score higher than monolingual peers. Benefits are also noted even when

students spend a small amount of time studying another language. These students have been found to score higher on standardized tests and perform well in other academic areas.

**Social.**

Through learning another language, especially in an immersion context, learners are exposed to the culture and beliefs of other people. As they learn about these other cultures and ways of life they gain a sense of respect and understanding towards the other culture. Learning another language also allows the learner to communicate with more people around the world and create new relationships.

Since immersion programs involve teaching content through the language it allows for content focusing on the history and culture of the second language. Studying this content in the second language fosters understanding of other ways of living. Learners have shown a shift in attitudes and beliefs that occurs with language learning. Blake et al. (1981) conducted a survey in Canada regarding attitudes and perceptions of French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. The participants were students in grades six through eleven, and included students from both language groups. The authors report that bilingual students at grade six "...see French and English Canadians as being more alike- both groups are human beings and similar ways of thinking, feeling and so on" (p. 155).

Learning another language also allows students to interact with more people and enter new social groups. Lambert and Tucker (1972) noted that students "developed sufficient competence with French to permit them to enter French-Canadian social spheres and establish satisfying friendships on their own" (p. 211). In this community the second language was widely available in the surrounding environment, which then allowed for learners to interact further with other groups in the community. Socially, it allowed learners to enter into new social groups because of a shared language. Blake et al. (1981) also found this in their survey with bilingual

students who “...reported significantly more other-group friends than the monolinguals, suggesting that, at this age level, high degrees of proficiency in the other language apparently help bilingual children make friends in the other ethnolinguistic group” (p. 155). Lambert and Tucker (1972) similarly found that students in the French immersion reported having made “‘very good friends’ with French youngsters” (p. 197). So not only does learning another language allow students to communicate with other people, it allows them to create relationships with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **Economic**

Being bilingual can lead to students having more opportunities in the future when they enter the work force. Lazaruk (2007) stated that:

students who become bilingual enjoy access, on graduation, to a far wider range of national and international jobs than is available to monolingual graduates, including positions with airlines, import–export companies, and other international businesses in addition to domestic opportunities (pg. 622).

Learners with multiple languages are able to look for jobs beyond their home country which greatly expands their employment options. Having the second language on their resume is also a vital skill that makes them a more competitive job seeker in the market. The social benefits discussed previously also attribute to economic benefits for bilingual students since they are able to network with people from other cultures which can lead to possible job opportunities. The economic benefits from bilingual education are factors that attract parents to enroll their children in bilingual programs.

The overall benefits of immersion and bilingualism are important because they may contribute to a parent’s decision to enrolling their child in an immersion program. In the

following sections I will discuss school choice, and research that has investigated parents' reasons for enrolling their children in bilingual education programs.

### **What is School Choice?**

When considering immersion programs, it is important to consider the aspect of parental choice. Because immersion itself is an optional school program, it requires a conscious choice to be made, and enacted, for a student to be enrolled. In the following section I will discuss school choice and decision-making factors in school choice.

Historically, children attended the school within their neighborhood. However, today in the United States many districts offer parents a variety of different school options. While there are different options in existence, not all of the options are truly available for all families to choose. Tollefson (1991) describes this limitation on choice: "Choice is never totally free, but rather is always between predefined alternatives" (p. 14). For families depending on school buses for transportation the predefined alternatives are the schools for which they are zoned. In some contexts there may only be one school that is in their zone, thus limiting their options for schools. Limitations on choice involve the concept of power. Tollefson (1991) discusses power in relation to social theory in language planning; "...individuals exercise power as a result of their social relationship within institutional structures that provide meaning to their actions and also constrain them" (p. 9). In other words, people with more power are more equipped to maneuver through the system. In relation to school choice, power is an issue because not every family will have the same school options available to them because of varying power. If a family is able to provide their own transportation for their children to school then they will have more options in their predefined alternatives than a family limited to their zone. With even higher levels of power, a parent is able to expand the options available to them, sometimes even working to

create a new school. This is the situation that led to the creation of the St. Lambert French Immersion Program in Quebec.

The St. Lambert program is an example of community members exerting their power to create a new option in their choice set. The immersion program began because parents wanted it for their children. They were motivated out of concern that

political movements were under way to make French the ‘working language’ of the province, meaning that their children would likely encounter strong pressures to learn the language when they finished schooling. In this sense, these representatives of Canada’s majority group were looking a generation ahead with the hope that they could provide their children with thorough mastery of the present minority group’s language. (Lambert & Tucker, 1972, p. 3)

At that time the parents were part of the majority group, the Anglophones, but were anticipating the language shift of the French minority becoming the more widely spoken language in Quebec. Swain and Johnson describe the generation of these parents as having studied French themselves but that “focus on grammar, memorization, and drill had not provided them with sufficient skills to work in French, or to socialize with French speakers” (Swain & Johnson, 1997, p. 2). The parents themselves had experienced their own failures with language learning and wanted their children to have a different option in language education. This desire led them to seek out the immersion approach. The program sought to allow students “(1) to become competent to speak, read and write in French; (2) to reach normal achievement levels throughout the curriculum including the English language; (3) to appreciate the traditions and culture of French-speaking Canadians as well as English-speaking Canadians” (Baker, 2011, p. 239).

When considering the case of the Lambert Experiment it is important to note the power the parents had; they were able to control their resources and create the program they desired. The parents understood the system and were able to work with resources available to them. Parents creating a new option for themselves is an extreme example of how their choices as consumers can affect that school market.

### **Why do Parents Enroll their children in (Dual) Immersion Programs?**

The studies reviewed in this section were conducted either in immersion programs (Hindman, 2015; Hoffman, 2010; Lambert & Tucker, 1972, Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012) or dual language programs (Bomotti, 1996; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Shannon & Milian, 2002). Both of these program types are strong forms of bilingual education (Baker 2011), supporting additive bilingualism. The findings provide insights into the factors that parents value when making an enrollment decision. Specific factors that were noted by parents in the studies can be categorized as:

- a) academic (Bomotti, 1996; Hindman, 2015; Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012),
- b) diversity (Bomotti, 1996; Shannon & Milian, 2002), and
- c) future opportunities (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Hoffman, 2010; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Shannon & Milian, 2002).

These factors are summarized in Table 2.2 with related literature.

Table 2.2 Enrollment Decision Factors

<b>Academic Factors</b>	-strong curriculum -high standards -educational philosophies	Bomotti, 1996; Hindman, 2015; Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012
<b>Diversity</b>	-exposure to diversity -understanding other cultures	Bomotti, 1996; Shannon & Milian, 2002
<b>Future Opportunities</b>	-future job prospects -higher education -social connections	Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Hoffman, 2010; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Shannon & Milian, 2002

Academic factors included the curriculum, academic standards, and educational philosophies. Hindman (2015), at my research site, found that parents highly valued the factors of curriculum and school environment. Diversity factors involved exposing children to other cultures. Lastly, the factor of future opportunities was discussed in relation to economic benefits. For example, Giacchino-Baker and Piller (2006) found that parents believed enrolling their children in a bilingual program would help them in the future with the “ability to get a good job as a bilingual person” (p. 17). Similarly, parents in the St. Lambert experiment hoped “for children to become bilingual and bicultural without loss of achievement. Subconsciously or consciously, the economic and employment advantages to be gained from bilingualism, biliteracy and biculturalism may also have been motivations” (Baker, 2011, p. 239).

Another aspect of parental choice that is important for schools to consider, is where the parents are gaining information about the school and which sources they trust. Olson-Beal and Hendry (2012) found that parents were not making decisions based on test scores and hard data,

but instead based their enrollment decisions on the parents' perceptions of high standards of the program and the rigorous curriculum. Similar motivations were found in Giacchino-Baker and Piller (2006) where parents noted the influence on their decision of other parents, the teachers in the program, and the overall reputation of the program.

In this chapter, I have briefly presented the overall benefits and challenges with bilingual education, and related research to parental enrollment decisions. In the following chapter, I will introduce my methodology, research site, participants, and the data analysis process.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

In this chapter, I describe my research methodology, my research question and my research procedures. I introduce my participants, discuss the steps of data collection, and the process of data analysis.

### **Statement of Study Design**

This qualitative study explores parents' decisions about enrolling their children in the Spanish immersion program (SIP) in Chugiak, Alaska. Qualitative research is well suited to research that seeks to gather a deeper understand of things, such as perspectives and experiences of people involved in a specific event or organization. This is a good fit for my research question because I am trying to understand the perspective and experience of parents that have made the decision to enroll their children in the SIP. The following are characteristics of qualitative research as defined by Mackey and Gass (2005): "rich description, natural and holistic representation, few participants, emic perspectives, and cyclical processes" (pp. 162-163). The rigor of qualitative research is described in terms of: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p.179). Credibility refers to the research being trustworthy and believable, specifically to those in the community of the research site. In my study this rigor is upheld because I am a member of the community, and my analysis focuses on the words used by the participants. Transferability means that the context is deeply described which allows for similarities to be drawn with other research contexts. I have done this by providing thorough descriptions of my research context. Confirmability means that the findings and analysis can be confirmed or replicated. My data analysis included having my faculty mentor code a subset of the data separately for inter-rater reliability. Dependability means that the

research process is reliable; for this I have provided full descriptions of my research procedures.

A summary of the rigor of qualitative data and my research can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Rigor of Qualitative Research

<b>Criteria for rigor in QR</b>	<b>My study</b>
Credibility: can be trusted and believed, especially by those in the community	Analysis focused on participants’ own words. Analysis maintains participants words through interviews and excerpts
Transferability: extensive description of context in order to allow others to find similarities in other contexts	Findings can be transferred to similar contexts of bilingual education. Provided deep description of context and participant details.
Confirmability: others would be able to find similar conclusions based on available data, relates to replicability	Analysis corroborated with research supervisor. Data shared through participants’ quotes.
Dependability: process of data collection and analysis are reliable	Procedures outlined in detail, including data collection and analysis.

The form of data collection I chose was interviews because they “can allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learners’ self-reported perceptions or attitudes” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173) which fit best with my research topic. My data collection specifically involved semi-structured interviews which are commonly used in similar studies investigating parents’ perspectives of language education (Combs et al., 2005; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Worthy, 2006; Yamauchi et al., 2008). A semi-structured interview involves having some guiding questions prepared, but these questions do not act as a strict script. This allows for the researcher to react to the interview discussion and add additional probing questions. The overall goal is to gain a deeper understanding; Richards (2003) notes “this is not best achieved by dragging an unwilling victim

through every nook and cranny of an interrogatory masterplan but by listening to what they say and how they say it” (p. 65). A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a more natural conversation with participants as they listen and react to the responses given.

My research topic was inspired by my own personal experience as a student in the Spanish immersion program. Thus, I have an emic perspective, meaning the perspective of an insider and member of the community. Following a constructivist paradigm I gathered the stories and experiences of parents. The emic perspective is congruent with constructivist theory because “we start with the assumption that the social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed, then we must take the researcher’s position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality. It, too, is a construction” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). I made the conscious decision to approach the research as an insider. Overall, a qualitative approach allowed me to collect the stories and experiences of the participants in hopes of better understanding their decision-making process.

### **Goals of Research**

The primary goal of this research is to better understand why the participating parents decided to place their children in the Spanish immersion program. This question was inspired by my personal curiosity, both about why different families choose to enroll their children in the program, and about my own parents’ reasoning. It can also provide insight into why a Spanish immersion program exists in such an isolated homogenous community.

Through my findings, I hope to inform immersion programs about what parents value in a program which could aid the school when approaching their marketing strategies and the information shared with prospective parents. It can also help inform prospective parents when

they are faced with the enrollment decision. This study can provide them with examples of the thoughts and advice given by experienced parents.

The findings will contribute to the overall literature about bilingual education and parents' choices, especially in relation to the specific setting of immersion since the majority of the current literature focuses on other types of bilingual programs.

### **Setting**

The focus of this study is the Spanish Immersion Program in Chugiak, Alaska (SIP). Chugiak is a community 20 miles north of Anchorage, which is the largest city in Alaska with 291, 826 residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census. Chugiak is closely tied to the larger community of Eagle River. The 2010 U.S. Census reports Chugiak with a total population of 9,211. According to the 2010 Census, 85% of the population are White, with only 3.7% being Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The SIP spans kindergarten through twelfth grade and thus encompasses three different schools: Chugiak Elementary, Mirror Lake Middle School, and Chugiak High School. It is important to note that the program exists within these schools and not as a stand-alone school. Thus, not every student attending these schools is enrolled in the SIP. According to the Anchorage School District (2014a), for the 2013-2014 school year, Chugiak Elementary had 445 students, which included 292 that were enrolled in the SIP. The program as a whole, kindergarten through senior year of high school, in 2013-2014 reported 479 students enrolled in the SIP. There is a lottery system in order to enroll in the program, and then younger siblings can be grandfathered in to the program.

The SIP can be defined as an early-start, late-exit, partial immersion program (Baker 2011). It is early-start because it begins in students' first year of school (kindergarten), and is late-exit as the program continues through their senior year of high school. It is a partial

immersion program because the program follows the 50/50 method in elementary school where half the day is spent in English and half in Spanish. (See Table 3.2 for the break down of class time spent in each language.) According to the Anchorage School District (2014b), the content areas taught in Spanish in elementary school are Science, Social Studies, and Spanish Language Arts. In middle school, the students have two classes in Spanish. For example, in seventh grade students take a Spanish Language class and a World Geography class in Spanish. In high school students are in one Spanish class; for example, in tenth grade the class is *Perspectivas Literarias* [Literary Perspectives]. The breakdown of time spent in Spanish is shown in the following table.

Table 3.2: Class Periods by Language

<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle School</b>	<b>High School</b>
Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
Spanish	Spanish	English
Spanish	English	English
English	English	English
English	English	English
English	English	English
		English

The specific location where data collection occurred was in the Chugiak/Eagle River Public Library in study rooms. This location was chosen because it provided a quiet environment, and is centrally located making it easily reached by participants. The study rooms are along the back wall of the library, thus they are secluded and private. The rooms are big enough to seat up to five people around a table in the center of the room.

### **Selection of Participants**

Participation was invited by parents who had children in the program at the time of data collection or who had had children in the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak. Even if the children had already graduated from the program or were removed from the program, the parents

were still invited to participate. The first recruiting occurred through a social media post to a page for my own graduating class in the program where I said:

I'll be back in town over break doing my data collection for my thesis and was wondering if you would be willing to ask your parents if they would be interested in participating. It would only require an hour of their time at the library sometime in the first two weeks of January. If they are interested they can contact me at (my email address). Thanks!

This garnered the interest of one participant, so the next step in recruitment was a post on my father's social media which stated:

Hey, Spanish Immersion family friends, we need a favor! Our oldest daughter Danya Schimmack is finishing a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics at U.A.F. As part of her research thesis she needs to interview parents who have had, or currently have kids in the immersion program. She is scheduling interviews for next Tuesday thru Saturday, Jan. 3rd thru 7th at the Chugiak/Eagle River Library. (Both parents can participate, but they must be interviewed separately) Would you be willing to give up an hour of your time to help her out?

If people showed interest I reached out and scheduled an interview. This recruitment resulted in ten potential participants.

### **Profile Descriptions of Participants**

Including both my parents, 12 participants total agreed to participate (see Table 3.3 below). Data collection was focused on gathering participants' thoughts and experiences, thus background information is limited to gender, age of children, and whether they were zoned for

the SIP or not. The participant names are pseudonyms, other than Barry and Terri, my parents, who consented to having their real names used.

Table 3.3: Participant Description

Name	Gender	Grade level of children attending SIP	Zoning at time of enrollment	Other information
Barry	M	7, 10, G2011, G2012	Yes	Married to Terri, my father
Terri	F	7, 10, G2011, G2012	Yes	Married to Barry, my mother
Hannah	F	10, G2016	No	
Gabriella	F	10, 12	No	English teacher in SIP
Sarah	F	7, 8, 10, G2015	No	Teacher in district
Brenda	F	R k-8	Yes	Had older child not in SIP
Lisa	F	11, R k-11, G2014, G2015	No	
Margaret	F	10, 12	No	Moved abroad for three years
Rebecca	F	10, R k-11	Yes	Language learning experience
Ida	F	G2011, G2015	Yes	Works with audiology
Brandon	M	8, 9	Yes	Married to Lacey
Lacey	F	8, 9	Yes	Married to Brandon

(G denotes year of graduation, R denotes grades in SIP before removal)

*Barry* had four children total; two that had graduated from the SIP and two that were still in the program as seventh and tenth graders. Barry is my father and when I was reaching school age he was a single parent and made the enrollment decision on his own for his two oldest children. He then married *Terri*, and together they made enrollment decisions for the two younger children.

As mentioned above, *Terri* married Barry after the two oldest children had already begun elementary school in the SIP. She was involved with the enrollment decision with the two younger children.

*Hannah* had a child that graduated in 2016 from the SIP, and one that was in tenth grade.

*Gabriella* had children in twelfth and eleventh grade. She had been an English teacher in the SIP before her children began school which gave her an insider perspective to the program. Her education as a certified teacher also gave her insight to language acquisition.

*Sarah* had four children; one graduated in 2015, and the others were in grades seven, eight, and ten. Sarah was also a teacher in Anchorage, but did not work with the SIP in Chugiak.

*Brenda* had two children, but only one that had been enrolled in the SIP. The oldest was too old to enter the program when they moved to the area. The youngest was in eighth grade and at the time of data collection in January she had just made the decision to remove the youngest from the program.

*Lisa* had two children that had graduated from the program in 2014 and 2015. She had one child in eleventh grade, and one that had been removed from the program after their eleventh year.

*Margaret* had two children in the program who were in tenth and twelfth grade. When the children were in middle school, the family moved abroad where the children continued studying Spanish in order to re-enter the program when they returned.

*Rebecca* had two children, the eldest completed eleventh grade before being removed, and the youngest was currently in tenth. Rebecca herself has learned multiple languages through her own education and career. She studied abroad in high school, and attended the Defense Language Institute. Thus, she had her own experience learning languages in different ways.

*Ida* had two children that had graduated from the SIP, in 2011 and 2015. Her work with audiology has given her insight into language acquisition and communication.

*Brandon* had children in eighth and ninth grade. Brandon, and his wife Lacey, moved to the area when his oldest was in first grade, but in order to join the SIP they had her repeat kindergarten year.

*Lacey*, Brandon's wife, had children in eighth and ninth grade.

Overall, there were two married couples that participated; Barry and Terri, and Brandon and Lacey. There were ten female participants, and two male participants; this ratio of more mothers being participants in research is a general trend that can commonly be found in other research studies (Hindman, 2015; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013). At the time of enrollment, there were five participants who were not zoned for Chugiak Elementary and had to apply for a zone exemption in addition to the lottery. All participants have English as their first language. Two of the participants had studied Spanish themselves enough that they commonly used some Spanish at home once the children had begun school. Only one participant had a child that was not in the program, Brenda, because when they moved to the area her older son was unable to join the program. Otherwise all children in the participating families have been in the SIP. At the time of the interview there were three students that had been pulled out of the program for various reasons. Overall there are twenty three students represented by the parent participants.

### **Procedures of Study**

The first step in my research procedures was to create the semi-structured interview. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) explain that a semi-structured interview is based on a set of questions, but that the interviewer is also "able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when he or she feels this is appropriate" (p. 1). Thus, the process begins with creating an interview guide of questions (Appendix A). I began with the bigger

questions, followed by more specific questions and possible follow up questions. The general topics in my guiding questions were:

- background information on the children
- zoning
- first thoughts
- enrollment decision thought process
- language choice
- advice for other parents

For example, my interview guide had the broad question and then possible follow-up questions:

How did you first learn about the program?

What were your initial thoughts?

Did you know any parents, or teachers in the program?

Did you look at the school's website or other informational materials?

Again, this was simply a guide so not every participant was asked all of the same questions.

Prompting questions varied depending on the participant's response, and time spent on different topics varied as well.

The main procedure was to conduct the semi-structured interviews in person with participants. I scheduled my own parents to be the first interviewees as an opportunity to pilot the interview. This decision turned out to be beneficial because there was a technical difficulty with the recording equipment during my first interview, and the audio was not recorded. Since the interviewee was my mom, I was able to do the interview a second time. After the first day of interviews, I reviewed the audio and began transcriptions.

The rest of the week was spent doing the rest of the interviews; the second day I conducted four interviews, and the third and fourth day both had three interviews. Each interview began by reviewing the consent form (see Appendix B) and then asking for consent to begin the recording device. Each interview started with me asking the participants to tell me about their children. From there, the question order varied depending on the direction of the conversation. The interviews ended when all the main questions had been answered and I asked if they had anything else they wished to share. The recording was then stopped. Finally, I asked participants if they would be interested to see a summary of their interview and have a chance to provide further information.

Table 3.4: Interview Information

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Length of Interview</b>
Terri	1/3/17	16:36
Barry	1/3/17	27:20
Hannah	1/4/17	12:55
Gabriella	1/4/17	36:34
Sarah	1/4/17	17:11
Brenda	1/4/17	12:42
Lisa	1/5/17	14:11
Margaret	1/5/17	20:58
Rebecca	1/5/17	47:00
Ida	1/6/17	29:49
Brandon	1/6/17	17:11
Lacey	1/6/17	30:15

See Table 3.4 for the interview dates and individual length of interviews with each individual participant. My total recorded data was 282 minutes and 42 seconds, with the average interview length being 23 minutes and 34 seconds long. The interviews ranged from 12 minutes and 42 seconds to 47 minutes even.

## Analysis of Data

The first step in data analysis involved transcribing the audio recorded interviews. During this step I did not focus on the linguistic forms, but instead simply on the content. However, I included pauses, repeats or fillers if it indicated hesitation, change of thought, or pausing to think further (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012). The transcription conventions I followed are attached in Appendix C. I began the transcribing in between some of the interviews in order to evaluate the process and discover possible areas of improvement for the following interviews. This approach is supported by constructivist theory because “with grounded theory methods, you shape and reshape your data collection and, therefore, refine your data and increase your knowledge” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 26). Here is a short example of my transcriptions where D is myself, and R was the participant Rebecca:

D: ok how important was it that the program was Spanish so imagine it had been like the Japanese immersion would that have affected your decision

R: oh it wouldn't have mattered to me I happen to be a Spanish speaker so it was nice because I was always gonna be able to help them with their homework but I would have picked any language cause my experience in learning languages so just a little background I was an exchange student to Honduras in high school I learned Spanish and then I joined the military and I went to the defense institute twice

D: oh interesting

R: once for Russian and once for Korean so and then ultimately got my Spanish my bachelors is in Spanish and Korean so when you study multiple language like that you realize really any portal that gets you into a language activates that part

of the brain and then learning those future languages as you get older it's easier every time you add one in

This example illustrates how I focused on allowing the participant to share their stories while I would provide brief responses and guiding questions.

Once the transcripts had been completed I began data analysis. The next step was to look at the data set as a whole to find emerging themes among all of the participants. This first step was open coding, which is “the process of breaking down the data for the purpose of categorizing, conceptualizing and comparing” (Richards, 2003, p. 276). The structure of the interviews lead to certain questions eliciting the discussion of specific topics, which were the initial open codes. With these initial codes in mind, separate profiles were created for each participant focusing on their quotes from the transcripts that highlighted the main topics. In the profiles, these quotes have added punctuation to make them more natural to read. Once the individual profiles had been created, I began another cycle of coding to organize the different codes and relate them to each other across all participant profiles. This stage of coding is called axial coding, which Richards (2003) defines as “organizing the data, based on the ‘axis’ of a category. It involves relating categories to subcategories and making connections between categories” (p. 276). All of the codes from the data are compiled and discussed in the second part of Chapter Five. Also, at this stage of coding, my faculty mentor coded the participant profiles individually. We then sat down to compare codes to ensure inter-rater reliability through 85% of the data.

In this chapter I have presented my methodology, introduced participants, and discussed the process of data analysis. In the following chapter you will find the presentation of the individual profiles of participants focusing on quotes from their interviews.



## **Chapter Four: Analysis by Participant**

In this chapter I will present and discuss the data collected from interviews with twelve participants. I present each participant through a profile focusing on their own quotes from the interviews in order to share their story and thoughts in relation to the enrollment decision in the Spanish immersion program. At the end of each profile there is a short summary for each participant.

### **Barry**

Barry is married to Terri, so more information can be found in her participant analysis. Barry had two older children that graduated from the program in 2011 and 2012, and two daughters still in the program. When his older children were nearing school age Barry was a single father and was invested in finding the best school option. “When it was time to start looking at elementary school choices I heard that there was an immersion program at Chugiak” [Barry 1] so he then went to a couple different schools to pick up some information and then returned to talk to office staff with further questions. From the office he learned about an upcoming open house which he then attended.

“I remember vividly there was a kindergarten teacher who from the minute we walked in the door spoke no English to us. And there was probably about fifteen parents in there and she went through birthdays colors, putting her jacket on and off, moving her chair in and out, and the whole time she was talking in Spanish to us and over the course of those ten to fifteen minutes she was able to get everybody’s birthday and get it up onto the board” [Barry 2].

He was impressed with the concept of immersion and being able to experience a small part of what would happen in the classroom. He went on to say that the language specifically was not as important: “I don’t think it was important that it was Spanish it was a language immersion that was intriguing to me” [Barry 3]. Barry was also attracted to the early start believing that “it

comes more natural for somebody that age then it would be for instance if I as an adult went into a full immersion program” [Barry 4].

When asked about any concerns he had about the program he shared general concerns with having kids start school, but not specifically about the immersion program. “I think mostly just those natural fears that come first with having your first born starting school as a kindergartner and those changes... and so there was just those kind of nerves and jitters” [Barry 5]. These concerns he expressed were general concerns of having a child begin school and were not related to immersion specifically. On the other hand, Barry shared what he saw as benefits of this “enhanced type learning situation” [Barry 6].

“What I was hoping is that it would broaden their horizons so that travel, especially Spanish is such a widely spoken language and in the lower forty eights there’s so many parts of the country that are Spanish speaking and second language Spanish. So I really thought it would just open their eyes and minds to other cultures and other language” [Barry 7].

While Barry would have still chosen the immersion program if it had been in another language he was attracted to Spanish and hoped it would benefit his children. He also shared some thoughts where he has noticed the benefits of having his children in the program. The first was a trip the school organized to Spain which his third child attended where “her favorite part of that entire trip of all the great things they did was spending a half of a day with middle school students in the Spanish community” [Barry 8]. He was glad she enjoyed being able to interact with kids her age in another language. His second story was about a family trip to Mexico when the two older children were in elementary school and his son helped him rent a car using his Spanish. In other interactions on the trip he remembers people saying that his children “have such beautiful intonation and natural speaking of the language. And one guy in particular said you can tell they’re being taught by first language Spanish speakers” [Barry 9]. These stories shared by Barry highlight the noted benefits he has observed having his children in the program.

When asked about what he wished he had known before making his decision, Barry reflected on a presentation given by a specialist that he attended when his kids were already in the program.

“She talked language immersion and what it does for the kids brains; their development, their growth in education, how their brains actually work when they learn a language through immersion...I remember she said in kindergarten the kids stay about even with kids that are in kindergarten and first and second grade they actually start to take a little dive down below the standard for learning and then in third grade they come even and then they start growing and then the growth is exponential above students that are in the mainstream” [Barry 10].

While this was not information known before making the decision it is something that helped him feel like he had made a good decision. It is also knowledge he passes on to other parents in the community who may be considering the program. He noted seeing these benefits in his own children:

“It really opens up a lot of the way their minds work. I don’t know if it has the language immersion and the way that they learn and the way our human brain works, if that’s helped all four of them but all four of them have been excellent students, nearly straight A’s through their entire school” [Barry 11].

All of these noted benefits also connect with the advice that Barry would give to parents that are looking at enrolling in the program. “I would tell them what it has done for us and for our kids...but then I would also throw that caveat that just like any kind of a job or any kind of a school it’s not for everyone” [Barry 12].

**Barry summary.**

Barry saw the program as an enhanced learning opportunity for his children to learn a second language. If the program has not been Spanish he still would have chosen it, but he did see Spanish being more useful since it is more widely spoken. He also hoped the program would help his children learn about other cultures. He focused on the social and cognitive benefits of immersion.

## Terri

Terri has a daughter and son who have graduated from the program, and two daughters currently in the program in 7th grade and 10th grade. Her initial exposure to the program is unique in that she married Barry after his oldest daughter had begun the program. Thus she was not involved in the decision making process initially (see participant data from Barry). Her initial thoughts about the program were that:

“it was very interesting and intriguing and it seemed kind of fun. I remember being kind of surprised that the Anchorage School District offered so many options, several different language immersion programs and even surprised there was one way out in Chugiak, which is the farthest away from Anchorage” [Terri 1].

In order to learn more about the program she volunteered in the kindergarten classroom and shared an overall feeling of being impressed and intrigued.

“I thought it was definitely interesting and would be interesting for my kids. And just impressed that it, I don’t remember at that point how many years it had been going on, it’d been going I think for several years at that point three or four years I’m not sure. So I mean it was still a fairly new program but I don’t remember having the feeling at all that it was going away at any point” [Terri 2].

This comment also shares a sense of the importance of stability and that this program was not a just a short-term experiment.

As mentioned previously Terri was not involved in the decision for the two older children so her decision making time came when the two younger girls got closer to school age. It was not an immediate decision that they would also join the program. “It wasn’t really a done deal that they would follow suit through Spanish immersion for several reasons” [Terri 3], the main reason she discussed was that because of the age gap between the kids that they would not be at the same school anyways. She does remember looking at another school and liked that they let kids learn more individually so if they were advanced in math, for example, they would get to take that class with older grades. However:

“In the end we kept them at Chugiak because we thought it would be disruptive to our family to have two kids go through it and then two kids not. Like two kids speak Spanish and then the other two not be able to. And also it was hard to give up the zoned school option of buses and things like that” [Terri 4].

Then when prompted about zoning she said that it would have affected their decision if the Spanish immersion program had been out of their zone. She continued saying “I do believe in a zoned school personally to be with kids that your kids are sort of living around” [Terri 5].

In regards to the language of the immersion, Terri replied:

“I think it was important to me anyway that it was Spanish. I didn’t think there was any way I’d send my kid to a Russian immersion, to me that just didn’t seem like such an up and coming language and one that they would use very much as adults. I thought that Spanish because it was so on the rise of being used by millions and millions of people that that would probably be a benefit to them as they became adults, that they could converse and use for jobs and things like that” [Terri 6].

In this response she began to include benefits she believed her children would have because of their experience in the immersion program. When talking about future careers she noted that “it would be sort of a nice thing they could put on their resume that they could converse in Spanish and understand it” [Terri 7]. Later in the interview we were discussing the year in the program where students take an Advanced Placement exam that can give them college credits which led to further discussion on benefits:

“I would say definitely just gave them more options when they’re looking for jobs that they would have the extra asset on their resume that they could speak Spanish. And I think just problem solving, and there was a speaker that came and spoke to us years and years ago about don’t panic if you don’t feel like your kids are caught up with everyone at a young age because at some point they learn so much problem solving in trying to figure out this language that it really sort of teaches them such critical thinking to figure things out. That it’s a real boost for them across the spectrum of different areas not just in speaking Spanish and understanding Spanish” [Terri 8].

On the other hand she also expressed some concerns:

“they were learning math in Spanish which I did not ever agree with. I didn’t think that was allowing them to learn math to their fullest potential and I do think

looking back on it now that my kids did not feel super confident with their math skills ever, and I do blame that partly on learning a lot of the very basic concepts in Spanish” [Terri 9].

Since she expressed concern in one academic area I asked if she was concerned about their English learning:

“I really wasn’t they were all very verbal and they all wrote and read easily and at a very young age...I didn’t feel that they were ever behind other kids in those things” [Terri 10].

Looking back she felt like she made the correct decision, and would make the same decision again. Her advice to future parents thinking about the program is

“to visit the school and kind of see how it works...and I would tell them it’s a commitment, it’s definitely a commitment, especially if you’re driving your kids every day” [Terri 11].

She encourages future parents to visit the school and to approach the decision carefully because it is a commitment, especially for those that live out of the zone.

### **Terri summary.**

Terri made the choice to have the younger two children continue in the program that the older two children were already in. Part of this reasoning was that it would make things easier for the family to have all the kids go to the same schools. She also saw the possible future economic benefits of knowing Spanish specifically since it is a popular language and that it would be something that would look good on their future job resumes.

### **Hannah**

Hannah has two children, the oldest graduated in two thousand sixteen, and the youngest was a sophomore at the time of data collection. She first heard of the program from a mother at their preschool who had an older child that she had placed in the program:

“we were clueless. We hadn’t heard about it in the community or anything but they were at preschool and the conversation came up one day and so all the sudden we started looking into that” [Hannah 1].

At that time they were not zoned for Chugiak Elementary and their search for other options was pushed by them not wanting their children to attend the zoned school. In order to learn more about the program they called the coordinator who helped them enter the lottery system. Hannah noted that at that time “it wasn’t like you could just look up Spanish immersion information easily it was back in the day of phone calls” [Hannah 2]. This meant Hannah relied on information provided by other families in the community aside from what she learned from the district coordinator at the time. During this stage of gathering information they also learned about some things that concerned them initially;

“The only thing they told us and it kinda did come to pass for both of them...was they said they’ll lag behind a little bit in their English skills and I think also both of their math...so the concern about the English, yes it happened but yes we survived it. So I think long term for anybody who is new, who is thinking about it, you just have to look at the big picture and get beyond that” [Hannah 3].

Even though this initial concern did become a true situation for her children she does not believe it is a big enough concern to deter others from joining the program.

The discussion then moved on to the decision making process now that they had learned more about the program and she shared:

“we put a lot of thought into it. Just because we heard about it randomly didn’t mean we made the decision randomly, because there was a Spanish immersion information program that we went to... and they had an expert who was talking about the different ways your brain develops when you’re younger and that was kind of the convincing factor for me, that when their brains are more malleable and can take in the information that’s when they should be learning it, not in middle school when all those receptors start to close down. So to me once I had the science I felt like it was a no brainer and it would be foolish not too” [Hannah 4].

In this she highlights that just because the program existed did not mean they were automatically going to be choosing to enroll their children. Once she learned about the positive ways it can change the way the brain works she was convinced it would be a good choice. She was especially drawn to the early start aspect of the program as she believed the cognitive benefits

would be more at a younger age. In making the decision she also said “if we did it we wanted to commit to the thirteen years” [Hannah 5], so when the oldest did a year abroad in Norway he had to find a Spanish class in order to be able to complete the entire immersion program.

When prompted further about her motivations she responded:

“I just wanted them to have something that was going to help them in their private and professional life long-term, something that not everybody has. I mean to have dual language is just invaluable in this society” [Hannah 6].

Here she shares valuing bilingualism in general but when asked about the language specifically Hannah said that the program being Spanish was important “because Spanish is such a large portion of the language that’s spoken in the United States and close to us I felt like it was going to be more useful” [Hannah 7]. She did note that the cultural aspect is important too. When discussing teachers, she shared how she appreciates having native speakers from different countries because

“it’s not just about the language it’s also about the cultural differences of these different places and learning that it’s not good it’s not bad it’s just different... and just having a better world view and I don’t think you can teach that in a book” [Hannah 8].

So while she found Spanish to be more useful than other languages, she also highly values learning about other cultures and world views.

The final comments revolved around her observations of the social bond the students form:

“you are like family, and you get along like family and you fight like family, and you go through tough times together, but at the end of the day these kids always come back to each other. And it’s like they understand, and they’ve all been through something that’s unique to them. And some people might think it’s cliquish or whatever but I don’t think it’s ever meant to be that way, it’s just these kids form a bond that I think is above and beyond what you would get quote unquote normal classroom” [Hannah 9].

This social aspect she expressed as a benefit of the program that she has observed over the years.

Lastly, her advice to new parents in the program is simply to “learn alongside them” [Hannah 10]. Her advice lends itself to suggesting parents learn the language with the children in order to remain high involved.

**Hannah summary.**

Hannah remembers attending an information session and learning about the positive cognitive benefits with learning a language while young; this was the main deciding factor for her. She saw being bilingual as something that would benefit her children in their private and professional lives, through social and economic benefits. She was particularly interested in the language being Spanish because she considered it more useful since it is popularly spoken, but also values learning about different world views in general.

**Gabriella**

Gabriella has two children currently in the program; a daughter who is a senior and a son who is a sophomore. Her exposure to the program is unique in that she is a teacher in the district and has been an English teacher in the immersion program at Chugiak Elementary. When her children got to be school age she said they “were looking at the options what can public education offer our kids that we couldn’t” [Gabriella 1]. When asked about her initial thoughts about the program she shared the following:

“I have an early childhood background. My Master’s degree is in childhood education which is through second grade and my first job was kindergarten English. And back then the Spanish teachers didn’t speak any English to the kindergarteners at all, and they would often have tummy aches before they went to Spanish. And so we’d talk about how just watch what she’s, the teachers, doing she’ll show you what she needs, nobody else understands, just do what the other kids are doing. And the Spanish teachers didn’t even want the kids to know they understood English, which was the model that’s the model the traditional

immersion model. And it was hard for me because I believed little kids need a nest so it was hard for me to have them have two teachers; that I didn't have them all day and there was no playtime. So back then every kindergarten had play kitchens and playtime every day and so there wasn't time for that in immersion. And I just had to reconcile my teacher brain with the parents make choose the tradeoffs, the bonus is they get Spanish...the hard part the kids, they had more than one teacher which I didn't think was good for little kids and I know now they are fine" [Gabriella 2].

Her own experience with the program is unique because she has been teaching in the program and watching how the program works. Working with kids in the program she noted the challenges the students experienced being immersed in a new language which she noted took time away from play time in the classroom. Despite these noted challenges she came to see the benefit of learning Spanish outweighs them.

Even though she had experience teaching in the program it was not decided until when her oldest was heading to school that they thought more about school options. She shared feeling that their daughter "needed a good challenge and the gift of a second language I just thought was something we couldn't give her" [Gabriella 3]. Here she notes that knowing a second language is a gift. She also shared how our language education system differs from other countries:

"I know that most a lot of other countries kids grow up bilingual and trilingual and I wish that was the norm in our country. I think that would break down a lot of barriers in our country" [Gabriella 4].

In this she expresses a benefit of knowing another language in breaking down barriers, and wishes that more people were able to learn other languages. I then specifically prompted for her own motivations in the decision and she shared that this gift of knowing another language could help her children

"to broaden their horizons and give them opportunities and open doors to people that they otherwise might not be able to talk to and connections" [Gabriella 5].

She believed that another language would help her children create connections with other people. At this point I prompted further about what opportunities she imagined it could provide her children and she responded:

“I knew that it would open a lot of doors for them whatever career they chose” [Gabriella 6].

While above she talks about bilingualism in general she did express specific interest in Spanish specifically as the language being learned:

“Spanish was my number one choice because of its relevancy to our country and to proximity of people who speak Spanish; opportunities that would come to them by speaking Spanish as far as career wise down the road, all the doors that Spanish would open to them...I just felt like Spanish was probably the most logical choice that they would get the most use for it in their lifetime” [Gabriella 7].

Later in the interview she went on to share that:

“Spanish is the reason we still live here Spanish immersion it’s hard to find in other places... as soon as [youngest child] graduates we’re out of here but Spanish immersion program and that it’s K twelve program is the reason that we are still here” [Gabriella 8].

The program itself was the main factor dictating where they lived. They valued the program so highly they were willing to continue living in the area so both children could graduate from the program.

Gabriella also had a lot of advice for parents, both from her perspective as a teacher and as a parent. First from her experience as a teacher in the program she had the following to say:

“I think the demands, the curriculum moves very fast and I think parents need to understand that there are times where as a parent you have to step it up and do a little more at home, and be a little bit more stringent with kids about getting homework done and closing academic gaps” [Gabriella 9].

She emphasized that the parents may need to work more with the children at home if they start to fall behind in English. She reiterated the same thought again in regards to language learning:

“I think Spanish is for everybody but I do think it comes with some, you need to know as a parent that it might require extra work as far as making sure that they

are where they need to be academically in English because it's hard" [Gabriella 10].

These pieces of advice came from her own experience as the English teacher in the program that noted students not meeting the expectations of the English curriculum. Gabriella also noted that many students who do struggle will go to their parents asking to leave the program and she gave some great advice to parents:

"Something else that parents need to know is that there will be times where your kids are like we don't want to do Spanish. Well why did you put them in Spanish in the first place...as a parent you have to think about what do you value in your child's education...most of the kids end up being successful in whatever endeavors they chose. I mean I think the kids that I know they do well but I think it's cause a lot of the parents they make an active decision about what program they want for their kids" [Gabriella 11].

She encourages parents to reflect on their initial decision to enroll their child and evaluate what they value in their child's education. She then had one final piece of advice from more of a parental viewpoint:

"it's okay if they don't speak Spanish themselves cause there are a lot of resources in the community especially cause we've got older kids who now tutor younger kids and just to network with other parents" [Gabriella 12].

This advice also shows the importance of the community, not only of other parents, but of older students in the program as well.

Lastly, she discussed the social aspect of the program which she has noted both as a teacher and as a parent:

"by middle school and high school they're very over cliquish. I mean when my son was in fifth grade he called the neighborhood kids 'the English' and this mom came to the front desk and said I heard there were Spanish gangs here and we're like no" [Gabriella 13].

From this perspective it can be seen as an issue for the school overall dealing with the split between the immersion program and the neighborhood English program. However, by high

school there is not as much of a divide and instead the social aspect can be seen as more of a benefit for the students:

“In high school the kids tell me that when they go to Spanish class it’s like your family...so I think that’s one of the benefits maybe of having the split neighborhood Spanish program is that they do have this cohort of kids” [Gabriella 14].

Over the years she has come to see it as a benefit for the students, to have created close friendships with each other that becomes like a family.

### **Gabriella summary.**

Gabriella has a unique perspective on the immersion program because she has been an English teacher in the program for years. It was not automatically decided that when her children reached school age that they would join the program. Her main motivations for deciding to enroll her children was for the benefit of being bilingual and making connections with other people. She also noted that it would likely help them in their future careers with economic benefits. While she did focus on bilingualism in general she did say that Spanish is her first choice because it is a logical choice that would be more relevant in their future careers.

### **Sarah**

Sarah has four children, one that has graduated from the program, one is a sophomore, one is in eighth grade, and one in seventh. Sarah and her husband both grew up in the Chugiak area, but the program had not started when they were going through school themselves. They heard about the program from “word of mouth and knowing what was going on at the school” [Sarah 1]. Even though they lived out of zone when the first child began school she said:

“We knew that we wanted to live out in Chugiak and that would be our neighborhood school anyway, and if there was an opportunity for some sort of enrichment or the dual language that was something that was valuable. As well as knowing that students who are learning a second language, or children are learning a second language, they develop more there’s more there’s more brain capacity. Research shows they’re making connections and able to learn that language earlier, and so I wanted to give our kids that opportunity. And then when

they became an adult having that second language and being a dual speaker they would be able to have more opportunities in their careers whatever it would be” [Sarah 2].

She knew that they would eventually be living in the zone for the school and saw it as a source of enrichment in her children’s education. Sarah is a teacher in the district, so this background gave her the exposure to the research about the changes that can happen in the brain. At this point I prompted about her preference on schools being public or private and she responded:

“Definitely with public school, I teach public school. I believe that you know owe it to our kids for free public education and we pay for it so we might as well use it” [Sarah 3].

Therefore, the school being a public school was another positive aspect in her opinion. To really understand her choice I directly asked to narrow down her motivation in making the enrollment choice, and she responded:

“Just the total immersion in the second language, and in Spanish in particular. My husband and I very much enjoy the culture and studying and things like that about Hispanic culture, and just having your children be able to be fluent in one of the most highly spoke languages in the world, it just that benefit alone for them when they’re adults and making their own lives” [Sarah 4].

Her own experience with Spanish and related cultures was something that she wanted to share with her children. She also noted that Spanish is widely spoken which would benefit her children as they became adults. While she noted many benefits, she did also express some concerns with the language barrier when trying to help with homework. Both Sarah and her husband had taken Spanish classes in high school and college but noted that:

“We knew a little bit but not quite as much as our children were learning, so then there was just the little bit of contextual difference” [Sarah 5].

So while her own language learning did allow her to help, she was concerned from the start with being able to keep up and did end up experiencing challenges.

When we talked about how she would respond if one her children asked to leave the program she shared that they had and her response is: “It’s not their choice and they’re our

children and we get to make their choices until they're eighteen and yea this is for their benefit in the end" [Sarah 6]. Sarah also noted that her oldest daughter in sharing her experiences growing up in the program has helped the younger siblings:

"Now that the oldest one is in college and she's seeing and reaping the benefits of having that language and that knowledge and credits and things like that, that it adds up to in college that now she's telling the younger ones: well no you really do need to stick with it there is a bonus there is a benefit in the end" [Sarah 7].

As a family unit it helped the younger children to be able to see their older sibling using their language skills in the real world.

Finally, we discussed what advice she would give to parents that are thinking about the program and she said:

"I've recommended it to parents before I think it's an amazing program, and just so they follow it up with, oh you just need to be aware that you will see some things that don't develop quite as quickly as it does if you're just learning one language because they're learning two languages, and that takes a little more time to get a grasp on it, so try to be don't like overwhelm them with information" [Sarah 8].

Overall she would recommend the program to others, but also suggests sharing with them some of the challenges that can occur such as delayed development as the students struggle with two languages.

**Sarah summary.**

As a teacher Sarah was familiar with the research that supports the cognitive benefits effects and this contributed to her decision. Her main motivation was focused on the specific language of Spanish because of her own passion for the language and culture which leads to social benefits. She also believed that knowing Spanish would help her children in their futures as adults in their careers. Her main concern was not being able to help with homework because of the language barrier.

## **Brenda**

Brenda has two children, one who graduated mainstream in 2012 and one that is currently in eighth grade. The oldest child was not in the Spanish immersion program because they moved to the area when he was already in school. When they moved to the area they were zoned for Chugiak Elementary and her main reason for enrolling her daughter in the immersion program was that she “wanted her bilingual” [Brenda 1]. I then asked what her decision would have been if the program had been a different language such as Japanese and she responded:

“If it was Japanese at Chugiak Elementary I don’t think I would have done it. Spanish, I think in my field of work which is healthcare, that Spanish is just nationwide really and we’ve traveled to Mexico before so I wanted her in Spanish. If it weren’t Spanish I wouldn’t have done it...and with such a diverse population in Anchorage area that was important to me at that time” [Brenda 2].

Brenda highly valued that the language used in the program was Spanish and would not have considered the program as an option if it had been in another language. She saw Spanish as being more useful. She shared being able to help some with homework so I prompted her about her level of Spanish where she said:

“In a medical appointment I can get through and I had taken Spanish a little bit in high school, not used it at all until I got up here in Anchorage, I could get through but after fifth or sixth grade I was beginning to not do well” [Brenda 3].

During the first couple years in the program Brenda was able to spend time volunteering in the classroom and she shared this memory:

“A week or two weeks after she first started that kindergarten class that she could tell the teacher that she wanted lunch con leche, whether it be chocolate or white blanco. And I remember asking her what did you just say ‘I don’t know what I just said I just know that it gets me what I want’ and I went hm okay so do you know other things you get what you want when you say the things that you’re supposed to say, she said yea and I was like okay. So I think for us as adults trying to learn a different language you want to say that brown cow or the cow is brown and you can’t translate that” [Brenda 4].

Brenda's situation is unique because just during the winter break during which the interview took place, she had decided to have her daughter leave the program. It is important to note that when asked if she regretted her initial decision to enroll she said:

“No not at all, however I have struggled to know whether it was the right thing or not it back then and even now as I look back” [Brenda 5].

While she has struggled over the years with the situation she does not regret the time spent in the program and still recommends it to other parents. Her advice to parents is:

“Don't question yourself, don't question yourself whether you are doing the right thing or not. I think that was my big thing and now am I doing the right thing by pulling her and I think I am, but don't question yourself and have fun with it lots of fun be involved” [Brenda 6].

She further suggests that parents be involved with the program, and to be confident in their enrollment decision.

#### **Brenda summary.**

Brenda highly values bilingualism and chose the program for her daughter. While she values bilingualism she was mostly interested in Spanish specifically because it is nationwide. She also made note of how it is easier to learn languages when you are younger. In her own work in healthcare she has noticed how much the language is used, even in Anchorage. She focused on social and economic benefits. Even though her daughter has just left the program she does not regret the decision of having chosen to enroll her years ago.

#### **Lisa**

Lisa has four children, the oldest was in the program until senior year, the two middle children have graduated from the program, and the youngest is currently a junior.

“I had a little play group, we all had our first kids and the other moms were far more investigative than was I. So I benefited from them; a lot of them did a ton of research on the program. And so I applied for it and did a little bit of research but I had four other kids under the age of five at one point. So I definitely benefited from other people doing research and took advantage of it” [Lisa 1].

Thus, her first exposure to the program was through other parents in the community who had children that had started the program. She trusted the other parents and what they knew about the program. She did not have any initial concerns of her own but shared that her husband at the time was concerned:

“I mean he cited the common ones: how can they possibly learn another language? what do you mean they’re teaching core courses in foreign language?”  
[Lisa 2]

The concerns her husband expressed revolved around adding in a new language when the children are just starting out in school with new classes. I further prompted her to share what arguments she used to sway her husband’s thinking:

“A lot of research done on how if you start at this age, actually if you start earlier, and you start learning the way the immersion program is taught, that you retain more, that you have a you can converse more. I think it helped too that both he and I had had a second language and neither of us could speak a word of it. So this was kinda my point, we didn’t learn it the right way, we spent hours and hours and hours and hours going over verbs and tense and yea can’t speak a word of Spanish or Polish, both of which I was fluent in at one point” [Lisa 3].

Lisa was aware of the research supporting early start language learning. She also talked about both of their language learning experience which she considered a failure. Her own failure led her to want her children to have a different experience and she believed immersion could provide that. When we discussed the language specifically of the program she expressed being open to other possibilities:

“I honestly don’t know because I had a familiarity with Spanish already so I felt confident that I could probably perceive my children in their learning until about third fourth grade. Japanese probably would have scared me, I still think I probably would have made the decision and I do have Alaska relatives whose kids have gone through the Japanese program” [Lisa 4].

Even if the program had been another language immersion she still would have been interested in enrolling her children. She did feel more comfortable with Spanish because of her own

familiarity of the language. Lisa also felt like it would not have affected her decision if the school had instead been a private school.

Later on she shared some of the benefits she has seen come true for her children because they went through the immersion program. She noted:

“My oldest...still takes a lot of pride, I guess is the right word, in being able to have gone through the program, being able to communicate. He lives down in California so he can do translations for people when they need...my second son is going into ER med and would like to go do doctors against borders or something like that, so he thinks it will help him tremendously” [Lisa 5].

Their experience in the immersion program has allowed her children to communicate with other people, and perhaps may help with future careers.

Lastly, we discussed what advice she would give to parents in the community. She began by saying that:

“The program speaks for itself. I think the results speak for themselves...there are people that will say, oh my gosh these kids lag behind in math or in reading...I think that what you give your children in your home can certainly supplement if they’re lagging behind in a core subject in any way” [Lisa 6].

The results that she has noted from someone going through the immersion have been positive enough that she believes that alone is reason for others to join the program. In the same quote she also mentions one of the challenges with students maybe lagging behind, but she notes that a little help at home can help them catch up. Finally, Lisa highlighted the benefit of the community of parents in the program who are very involved:

“What I really loved about the program and why I would highly recommend going into it is that it is a very dedicated group of parents. Forty percent of us, I think had to drive our kids, we were out of district, we had to drive our children. I don’t know if the number is correct but I know it’s high and so you don’t do that lightly, you make we all made a commitment to our children’s education and I think it showed in the school with parental involvement” [Lisa 7].

Keep in mind that Lisa originally learned about the program from other parents in the community, and she came to find a strong group of parents who made the commitment to their

children's education in the immersion program. As she mentions, for parents that live out of the zoning area for the school they must provide transportation to school for their own children which is a huge time commitment.

**Lisa summary.**

Lisa first heard about the program from parents in her neighborhood playgroup, and based on their recommendations decided to enroll her children. However, her husband at the time was not so easily convinced and she had to convince him using two main arguments: the research supporting early development with language, and both of their own failed traditional language learning experiences. Thus she was interested in the linguistic benefits of immersion, and the cognitive benefits. Even if the program had been a different language she thinks she would have made the same decision but she was more comfortable with Spanish because of her own familiarity with the language.

**Margaret**

Margaret has two children in the program, one is a senior and one is a junior currently. They were zoned for a different school but knew that it was not where they wanted their children to attend-

“so then it just opened up what are the possibilities and we considered both the open optional at Eagle River, and Spanish immersion and I think it was a pretty easy decision that we wanted to do the language immersion just because maybe I have an ethnic background that's pretty strong and they didn't offer Chinese so we said okay Spanish is just fine” [Margaret 1].

Knowing that they were not interested in their zoned school left them open to look at other schools in the community. They decided on Chugiak Elementary because of the immersion program because they were interested in language learning. In regards to specific language, she would have actually preferred a different language but was interested in language learning in

general as well. When asked to narrow down a specific motivation for her enrollment choice she responded:

“I think because we were hoping for a little more cultural awareness and felt like in where we live and school in general there wasn’t a whole lot of cultural diversity. So I think we felt like this was the best way to try to have some of that at an early age for the kids without having to drive into town” [Margaret 2].

Overall they were interested in exposing their children to other cultures and saw the immersion program as a way to do this. While they did not have to drive into Anchorage, they were not zoned for the immersion program so they did still have to commit to driving to school so I asked if she felt that the extra effort was worth it:

“Yea yea and that’s actually an interesting question because I’m not sure how much that maybe changed how we did our work life balance. I wound up working part time because there was the burden of having to do the drop offs and pick-ups and stuff like that. And I’m not sure if the kids had been going to a neighborhood school where they had a bus if I would have done things differently and maybe gone back to work fulltime or something but no it seemed worthwhile” [Margaret 3].

Margaret shares in this quote that having her kids go to the immersion program out of their zone actually changed her own working situation. The commitment to drive her kids to school meant that she was only able to work part time. They were also committed to the full thirteen years of the program which got complicated for a couple years. While the kids were in middle school the family moved to Scotland for three years so they had to decide whether to find Spanish classes while abroad or they would not be able to re-enter the program upon returning. Both kids ended up taking Spanish classes with high schoolers but-

“it wasn’t ideal and what we were really worried about was that they would lose their speaking skills because it’s not an immersion class. That they were in so we actually had a Spanish speaking tutor that just met with them and chatted and had conversation with them once or twice a week” [Margaret 4].

Not only did the kids have to spend time in classes with much older students, but they also spent time at home with a private tutor in order to maintain their level of Spanish to be allowed back in the program when they moved back.

The only concern she expressed about the program in general was about when the curriculum involved math being taught in Spanish:

“I don’t remember it being a big deal for them. I remember being a little concerned just because math was a little bit of a struggle for both of them at one point in time. So yea I remember questioning the wisdom of teaching math in Spanish” [Margaret 5].

She expressed some of her own concern, but also noted that it did not seem like a big deal to the children themselves. Despite this challenge, and the difficulties while they lived abroad for a couple years, when I asked if she would have made a different decision she responded:

“No no no definitely not, no we really like the program and the kids got a lot of self-confidence I think from having a second language” [Margaret 6].

She believes she would make the same choice again, and noted the benefit of her children having more confidence which they gained from learning another language.

The final topic was about what advice she would give to new parents, she started by saying:

“I’d say go for it and embrace it. And I think there’s a lot of a pretty strong component of the parental involvement, making it more than just what you would get if you didn’t. It makes the whole program better you know the parents are more involved and the kids get more out of it. I’d say it’s a good community and really the best thing that came out of it that was a peer group that stuck together the whole time, just they stayed really tight” [Margaret 7].

In her advice she shares some of the benefits she has seen from the program, mainly the strong community with other parents, and the friendships the students make. She continued with the topic saying:

“It may not be for everyone but I think it’s an opportunity it gives them a foundation to go on” [Margaret 8].

I prompted further what she meant by opportunity and she responded:

“I think to maybe have an interest in travel, to have an interest in other cultures, to maybe even pick up another language. Both my kids wanted to, at points in time, wanted to pick up another language and so that was fun. And I think an understanding of others and when you’re not foreign or an understandable when they can actually kind of related more than other cultures are less scary maybe” [Margaret 9].

These things noted above are the benefits she believes should help attract other parents to enrolling their children in the program. She also believes that the program will inspire children to travel, learn more languages, and allow them to relate more to other cultures.

### **Margaret summary.**

Margaret was zoned for an elementary school that they were not interested in attending so in their search for other options they learned about the Spanish immersion program. She has a strong Chinese ethnic background and wanted her children to experience learning about other cultures. Thus, she would have actually preferred a Chinese program, but was overall interested in language learning in general and cultural awareness that would bring social benefits to her children. They were so committed to the program that she had to cut back on her work hours to provide transportation to school. They also lived abroad for a couple years and the kids had to take Spanish classes with older students and had a private tutor. This was in order to maintain their levels of Spanish so they would be allowed back into the program when they moved back.

### **Rebecca**

Rebecca has two children; the oldest left the program last year after sophomore year and the youngest is currently a sophomore. She first heard about the program-

“before the kids were born I think we always knew it was there...so I think the first time I started thinking about it was probably when he was little. And I always thought well I’ll be sure to take him to the immersion program because I was a foreign language major myself” [Rebecca 1].

In this she shares that it was not a difficult choice to make, it was one that was just assumed because of her own language learning experiences she wanted her children to share. She was

overall more interested in the language learning aspect and not that the specific language be Spanish. In her own words:

“It wouldn’t have mattered to me. I happen to be a Spanish speaker so it was nice because I was always gonna be able to help them with their homework but I would have picked any language cause my experience in learning languages. So just a little background I was an exchange student to Honduras in high school I learned Spanish and then I joined the military and I went to the defense language institute twice” [Rebecca 2].

While she would have still been interested in the program if it was another language immersion, she did like that it was Spanish because she was able to help her children through school. Not only did she value bilingualism, but also values learning multiple languages and through her own experience learned of the benefits-

“So when you study multiple languages like that you realize really any portal that gets you into a language activates, that part of the brain and then learning those future languages as you get older it’s easier every time you add one in” [Rebecca 3].

Rebecca reflected further on her own language learning and how it has helped her:

“This is something I love, it’s something that I discovered at sixteen years old I was really good at and I thought well chances are my kids are good at it too. And it just changes the way that you think about things and it changes the way your brain works; I know that from personal experience and I just wanted my kids to have it. And I would I mean it could have been Swahili I would have been happy right but and that’s not the only thing, now I also see that the skills of learning, having to figure things out by yourself in a safe academic environment brought at five or six when all the sudden you’re doing things your parents don’t understand, that that has an I think that has that’d be a fascinating sociological study like what does that do in terms of kids resourcefulness, ingenuity, stick to itedness, all those things” [Rebecca 4].

An aspect that she notes about language learning in this immersion context is that it creates a situation where the children are learning something that their parents do not know, and thus the children have to rely on their own resources to figure out homework and such.

When we started talking about concerns she had about the program the conversation steered towards her observations of the social aspect of the program. This was not an initial

concern that was part of the decision making process but is one that arose as her children went through the program-

“I didn’t have any notion, I didn’t know that I was surreptitiously putting my kid in a gang. Like I didn’t know at the time, you know what I’m talking about right, they’re a clique that’s so intense and they’ve been in class together since they were five and for good or for bad...what I really didn’t appreciate at the time is what a challenge they are to teach because they’re a gang, and they act like a gang in class and the older they got the worse” [Rebecca 5].

Over the years the students create a strong bond, and she notes how this can complicate the behavior in the classroom. While she initially spoke of this social aspect as a concern she later spoke about it more positively:

“They also have had an experience unlike most American kids ever have. And it is a bonding thing that if they ever meet each other in the world even though they may not have been friends in high school, if they were in the same cohort they’re going to be friends for the rest of their life. Like this was such a forming experience I think for them and you’ve survived something” [Rebecca 6].

So while the social aspect can create a challenging behavioral classroom environment, the students create a strong friendship going through such a unique experience together.

Another concern she shared was about the curriculum as the program continues on into high school-

“it’s not advancing academically in any meaningful way there’s a lot of regurgitation of the same things. They’re conjugating very basic verbs, they don’t do fairly high end verb conjugations, they’re not really talking about moods, they’re not talking about the more complicated sentence structures. They still and I want to be really clear that if you ask me to pick accuracy or fluency I would pick fluency every time and that it fluency is what Spanish immersion gives you can fluently say things wrong” [Rebecca 7].

This initial expression of a concern with the curriculum not progressing then led into highlighting the benefits associated with the immersion approach. She highlights one of the main benefits of immersion which is a focus on fluency. She went on:

“you’re not afraid and that is the thing that most people who learn a second language, they’re so terrified of making a mistake that they don’t say a flipping

word. And so I saw this all the time in learning other languages...I don't care that they make mistakes I just want them to not be fearful talking" [Rebecca 8].

In her own language learning experiences she was frustrated with other students not being willing to speak because they were scared of making a mistake. So she shows appreciation for the immersion context, which promotes fluency and confidence, but again notes that in high school:

"all of the momentum has stopped on either front fluency and accuracy"  
[Rebecca 9].

While the majority of the program seemed to work well in her opinion, she became frustrated with the classes in high school where she believed the students were not advancing properly.

Moving on to her advice for other parents, it highlights the beginning years of the program especially:

"It is such an awesome environment in elementary school, it's so friendly and loving, and exposes them to so many different ideas that I think it's totally worth it. I know the school district wants you to stay in K through twelve; I get that you want them to make a commitment and investment, and of course that's how I came in. But even if you are only going to get your kid through elementary school I would say it's worth it" [Rebecca 10].

So she suggests that kids would benefit even from just a couple years in the program. This sentiment was also true for her own experience with her oldest leaving the program after his sophomore year. When I asked if she regretted having put him in the program to start with, she responded:

"Oh no not at all. I mean last night I heard him so his best friend is dating an exchange student from Spain and he's in his room and they're skypeing each other and he's teaching him Spanish" [Rebecca 11].

So even though her oldest child did not complete the program she still would have chosen to enroll him because he has benefitted from the many years he was in the program. He also continues to use the language and share it with other people even though he is no longer taking Spanish classes.

At the end of the interview I asked if there was anything else she would like to share-

“I think we’re so lucky in the school district to have these choices and I think that it makes, not only people, not only do I believe it gives you a academic advantage; I believe that it changes the way you learn everything for the rest of your life for the better. And I also think it makes you a citizen of the world to have spent part of your life thinking about the way other people speaking in languages that aren’t your own, like they get it’s an anti-bigotry technique” [Rebecca 12].

She shares a huge sense of appreciation that the program even exists as an option. She also discusses benefits she believes go along with learning another language. Finally, she finds that learning another language allows people to better understand other ways of life and to become more accepting.

**Rebecca summary.**

Rebecca does not remember specifically first hearing about the program but just seemed to know it was there as an option. She was interested in the program because of her own background studying abroad, being a foreign language major, and attending the defense language institute. The language itself was not important to her, but she was interested in the immersion aspect because there is more focus on fluency. She highlighted the linguistic, cognitive, and social benefits. Even though her oldest has left the program, she believes any amount of time spent in the program is a good opportunity.

**Ida**

Ida has two children that have graduated from the program, one in 2011 and the other in 2015. They did live in the zone of the school and learned about the program from a patient of hers who was the head of the district languages department who told her: “you’ve got to get them in the Spanish immersion program, and she was just a huge advocate for languages” [Ida 1]. So Ida’s work with audiology led her to first hear about the program and also provided her with an

informed background when considering the immersion program as an option. When I asked her if she had any initial concerns about the program she responded:

“You know for me being my background is speech and hearing and communication. And to me it was a no brainer. I think it was selling my husband on it is that what an opportunity, I mean how lucky are we have an immersion program at Chugiak Alaska and our kids you know we just have to lottery to get into it, but to me it was a no brainer” [Ida 2].

Thus, it seemed like the decision was easily made, however her husband did express his own concerns:

“My husband is like well how probably more of the typical questions: how can they learn Spanish when we don’t know Spanish? I said because their brains will do it, they’ve just got these little plastic brains so I think maybe he had more questions he’s a little more analytical, I’m sort of a jump and just do it so that was probably only mild barrier” [Ida 3].

These concerns her husband shared would have also lent to a more difficult decision if the school had not been a public school-

“I think if it were a fee then I’m sure that I think then that would have been very different. That would have been a much harder sell to my husband, that if it was not part of our public school system for someone that maybe not have that background in language and learning, and it could have been prohibitive at that point so I think that would have been different” [Ida 4].

When asked if she would have made the same decision if the language had been different she responded:

“I might not have been as interested. Spanish was interesting to me but and maybe that would have changed it cause I felt like Spanish might have been more universal” [Ida 5].

She notes that Spanish was more interesting because it is more universal, but is not really sure what the decision would have been if it had been a different language immersion program. She also shared that she was not concerned with the language learning detracting from other learning areas and continued on saying:

“I also knew there’s just no way and that’s probably my background too. Is that they had such little exposure to Spanish that there was no way; they didn’t have any other exposure. If anything, it was the other way around, I wish they could have had more immersion in Spanish. There’s just the smattering of Spanish that they had was all they had. So that was never a concern” [Ida 6].

This response led to me inquire what her thoughts would be if the program was a full immersion since this program is only partial-

“I would probably have been even more interested. It would be perhaps at that point, you know hindsight is clearer, it would have been maybe more of a concern of learning other, like math, learning those things. But I have some good friends whose kids are in the German total immersion and I just see they’re just exceling. And so perhaps way back then it was probably would have more concerned, but I think it might have been better for their Spanish” [Ida 7].

While she would have been interested in a full immersion, she does think it would have led to concerns with other academic areas. However, she has seen children of her friends be successful in a full immersion program.

In the end I prompted her to reflect on her many years with the program after having two children graduate successfully. In her reflection she shared:

“No regrets, I think it was they’ll never not know Spanish; I think it’s all really imbedded there. I think it’s helped them in a lot of different ways that perhaps they can’t see right now but it’s very important...no regrets would have done it again, would do it again, even with the fractured it’s good for them. Everybody should know another language here in America and then especially in Alaska; we’re so isolated, the only country that just thinks English is the only language it’s ridiculous” [Ida 8].

While noting some fracturing in the program she would make the same choice again and has no regrets about the decision. She also believes that language learning is something valuable that everyone should experience. On this same line of thought I prompted what she would say to parents in the community that are thinking about the program and she, “without a doubt” [Ida 9], would recommend the program to other parents and would advise them “not to worry...just do it the younger the better” [Ida 10].

### **Ida summary.**

Ida remembers first hearing about the program from one of her patients who happened to be the head of the language department for the school district. With her background as an audiologist she considered the decision a no brainer, but her husband needed some convincing which she was able to do by explaining the cognitive benefits. She is not sure what the decision would have been if it was a different language but she was interested in Spanish because it is more universal. She also shared that she would have been even more attracted to the program if it had been a full immersion and not just partial.

### **Brandon**

Brandon has two children that are currently in the program, one is a freshman and the other is in eighth grade. His wife, Lacey, was also a participant so further information can be found in her data in the following section. They moved to the area because of Brandon's job and:

“lucked into having Chugiak, we didn't really pick the area on purpose. We knew they had Spanish immersion available but we hadn't really talked about it. But we lucked into the area and found out that it was a great program; went and talked to the principal about it at school and decided we really wanted to try and get our kids in the program” [Brandon 1].

At this point the oldest child had already completed kindergarten before, but they were unable to get them a spot in the first grade class so they had her repeat kindergarten in order for her to be in the immersion program. If the program had been a private school-

“I don't think the decision would have been different I think it would be easier to run the school that way but I don't it wouldn't have changed our decision” [Brandon 2].

This comment refers to the fact that the immersion program is not in a stand-alone school, there also is a regular English track.

In regards to his initial concerns about the program he said:

“how does it work? what level do they start enforcing all Spanish? what kind of methods were they using to teach it? what level of training do the teachers have? You know some basic stuff to get into it” [Brandon 3].

His concerns revolved around the immersion model and curriculum. When prompted about his main motivation for choosing the program he shared:

“Well I travel all over the world for my job and it's fairly embarrassing that Americans are the only country that don't speak other languages and everybody out there speaks some level of English; you can communicate on some form of English in most countries... I just felt it was really important to get language, some kind of language with the kids and something fairly mainstream” [Brandon 4].

His work involves traveling around the world where he has seen how most other places have people learning numerous languages, and he wanted that for his children. Since he expressed a general interest in languages, I prompted further about other possible languages Brandon responded:

“I would've been fine with German or Japanese immersion or one of the others...I wasn't as picky about the language, it just the fact that they were exposed to speaking some other languages and that you tend to learn other languages once you learn something other than your mother tongue” [Brandon 5].

The actual language was not that important, he was more interested in the process of learning a language. In regards to his own experience learning another language he “took three years of college of Spanish but without repetition or use it goes pretty fast, and by about the kids' third or fourth year they were eclipsing my college level Spanish” [Brandon 6].

Brandon also shared a concern that developed as his children went through the program, which revolved around having some of the core subjects being taught in Spanish:

“It's a little concerning...because they learn especially science some of the science stuff they were learning, they didn't know the English equivalent because you don't use those words in English a lot so that was a little challenging. Sometimes when I was helping them and I realized oh they don't even know what a beaker is; they don't know so that is a limitation of the program. I think you can't do everything when you're using that kind of flip flop method of teaching

them and unless the teacher's willing to go in and out of English and Spanish, which they don't then I think you're just gonna have to deal with those situations and you may have some small things drop through the cracks in those cases" [Brandon 7].

While it did concern him that his children were missing out on some linguistic development in English, he eventually came to accept it and found that he could help them at home too. Over the years he also had some benefits he noticed-

"Anybody I have ever had that knows Spanish fluently that's talked to my kids say they speak very properly and which is a good thing. But it's also good to be able to fit in and speak colloquially and understand different accents" [Brandon 8].

This fluency benefit he attributed to the immersion specifically and the fact that every year the students would have teachers from a different country.

Lastly, we discussed what advice he would give to other parents in the community. He responded:

"I think it's important to support the teachers and the way they're doing things because if you don't have the support at home your kid knows he can do whatever in class and nothing's gonna happen. I think you gotta have buy in from the kids and they gotta understand how important, what a great thing it is to be able to speak multiple languages, and understand different cultures, and be able to go back and forth. And see the other advantages what other languages gives you in your other tasks and activities and classes, so I think that's important" [Brandon 9].

In this Brandon shares his belief that parents must remain involved and be highly supportive of the teachers and students. He also notes that learning another language can benefit students in other classes and activities.

### **Brandon summary.**

Brandon had lucked into moving into the zoned area for the school. He remembers being concerned about content classes being taught in Spanish. His job involves traveling and he has seen how in other countries people learn multiple languages

and felt it would be a benefit for his children to also study another language. He wanted his children to learn a mainstream language and was open to options other than Spanish. He also values having a better understanding of other cultures and the social benefits of being bilingual.

### **Lacey**

Lacey is married to Brandon. Just to reiterate, they have two children: one is an eighth grader and one is a freshman. Lacey began by sharing the story of how they first learned about the program:

“We were house hunting and we were looking at the house that we ultimately bought and our crazy neighbor next door came out and said the lottery’s tomorrow are you gonna buy this house, you better make a decision, I would just go to the school and get your kids signed up. And I was like, whoa I don’t know what you are talking about and so then I said what is it and I asked a little bit more. And I was like I don’t want to live there, like there’s a crazy lady next door and I can’t handle that. And then by the time we actually bought the house then the kids and I were like let’s go check out that school that you’re gonna be going to. And it was like May and it was like one of the last days of school and the whole front office staff like stopped everything they were doing and sat on the counter and talked to us about where we were coming from and what we were, you know, why we moved here. And so yea it was really cool; we got a really good feel for it, so I wasn’t pulled or drawn to the immersion programs I kind of just fell in the right place at the right time” [Lacey 1].

She shares this interesting story of how she learned about the program which shows how passionate her neighbor was about the program. She notes that they were not actively seeking out different education choices but that they wound up in a spot by chance that had this opportunity that they were interested in. When asked about her main motivation for enrolling in the program she responded:

“Probably, well two: I think it teaches diversity, more than anything it teaches a world outside of what they knew and what they’re involved in and their surroundings and their neighborhood because if you don’t have that second language they probably wouldn’t have given it much thought until probably middle school or high school. So at a very very early age I think it instills a lot of diversity or maybe sensitivity to diversity” [Lacey 2].

In this she shows valuing early exposure to new cultures. I followed up noting it was difficult for her to narrow it down to one reason so asked if there were other ones she wanted to share. She shared:

“I was going back and forth I feel like well there was a chance that [oldest child] wasn’t going to get in and she had to repeat kindergarten. So she had done half day kindergarten where we lived before but she was really young for her age and we kind of pushed that maybe too quick. And so we ended up getting her a kindergarten slot but I think when I realized that they couldn’t get her in I didn’t think about a kindergarten slot they kind of just figured that out as we went. But I was told to go make a stink cause they didn’t have a spot for her. Like we just felt like you live so close to this opportunity to for these kids to learn beyond themselves so early on. That I sort of panicked and I went, I mean I made a name for myself...I was like I live right there I was like and we’re gonna be here we’re not military and I plan to, I was making my case, like I plan to volunteer and if you don’t take me you’re gonna be sorry kind of thing. And I was like oh my gosh what did I just do and she was like well let’s put her in a K one two classroom and they felt like that way it would challenge her cause she might be first or second grade level English but she’ll definitely be K of Spanish and so being able to there are three different levels in that one classroom, so that was kind of a compromise” [Lacey 3].

This whole story is about how there originally was not room for her daughter in the program but they had set their mind to making it work. So even though they came across the program by luck, in the end they were invested in getting their children into the program. Since they learned about the program because they moved into the zoned area, in fact just down the road from the school, I asked her what she thinks they would have done if they had been living outside of the zone area: “I don’t know I think we’re ones to make the most of what your situation is and the fact that I stumbled upon it was a miracle” [Lacey 4].

Taking a step back we talked about what concerns she might have had about the immersion program before making her decision to enroll:

“My initial concern was that I wouldn’t be able to keep up with my kids and then therefore I couldn’t enforce it. And I wasn’t afraid that they knew more than I did, I just knew that as a mom you need to help your kids with whatever they’re struggling with and I knew that at some point I wasn’t going to be able to do that and I sort of panicked” [Lacey 5].

This concern revolves around the language barrier that occurred with what her children were learning in school with her low level of Spanish. She worried that her children would struggle and she would not be able to provide help. She also shared an aspect of the program that caused concern once they were already in the program:

“these Spanish immersion kids have become a wolf pack and that they have a confidence and an air about them that is disrespectful and they’re horrible when they’re together now” [Lacey 6].

This observation came from talking with one of the Spanish teachers that was struggling with classroom management. This issue of group mentality was not one that she predicted would occur but started to happen in the later grades in the program. She found this challenge frustrating because the behavior issues was detracting from the learning process in the classroom.

Looking back she would make the same decision to enroll her children in the immersion program but she also recognizes-

“that in the next couple years there might be reasons to get out of it and I’ll probably learn a lot in the next years just but I just know some really good kids have gotten out it because they wanted to do other things and it limits on what you can do in high school cause you don’t have the electives” [Lacey 7].

This comment is in regards to having her children possibly not complete the program entirely. If there was a good reason, she thinks she would allow her children to pursue other things.

However, when specifically asked then if her kids came to her and asked to leave the program she responded:

“I don’t know I think I would really struggle with that because my initial thought is no you’ve come this far you need to so I’d probably end up picking your brain and everyone else that I know about pros and cons” [Lacey 8].

She values the program as a whole and would like to see her children graduate from it, but she also understands that they may want to pursue other things as well.

**Lacey summary.**

Lacey learned about the program by chance through a neighbor when they were looking at houses in the area. However, once they learned about it they were committed to having their children enrolled. So when there was not an open spot for their oldest child she went to the school and argued their case until a compromise was found. The main benefits she wanted her children to have involved learning about new cultures and having a better understanding of diversity. Her overall focus was on the social benefits.

In this chapter I have provided analysis of individual participants through their quotes. In the following chapter I will organize themes that emerged from the data.

## **Chapter Five: Analysis by Theme**

In the previous chapter, I presented individual profiles of participants. In this chapter I discuss themes that emerged from the data. I will present these themes with quotes from numerous participants in order to maintain a focus on the words of the participants. I will also discuss related literature. The main factors that I will be discussing are: linguistic, cognitive, academic, social, economic, being special, and parental involvement. Within some of these factors there are other topics addressed, including some related concerns.

### **Linguistic Factors**

The theme of linguistic benefits includes the benefits of bilingualism in general and benefits of immersion specifically.

Several participants were drawn to the potential of developing high levels of language proficiency through the immersion program (Terri, Barry, Sarah, Lisa, Rebecca). Barry shared “I don’t think it was important that it was Spanish it was a language immersion that was intriguing to me” (Barry 3). Specific language choice is discussed in a separate section below. Lisa discussed linguistic benefits of learning through immersion; “you retain more, that you have a, you can converse more” (Lisa 3). She also mentioned being interested in an immersion approach because of her own language learning experience in traditional settings, because she felt that approach had failed her as a student. Both Lisa and her husband “had a second language and neither of us could speak a word of it...we didn’t learn it the right way” (Lisa 3). These findings reflect what has been discussed in previous literature; the parents’ own failed traditional learning experience is what inspired the parents in Quebec to start the French immersion program (Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

Another linguistic benefit that was discussed was the fluency developed by the learners. Rebecca discussed the benefit that immersion provides with a focus on fluency; she shared "...if you ask me to pick accuracy or fluency I would pick fluency every time and that it fluency is what Spanish immersion gives, you can fluently say things wrong" (Rebecca 7). While Rebecca was focused on the fluency benefits, she also brings up a lack of accuracy also seen in the literature when discussing immersion programs. Other research has found that learners in immersion will develop fluency but will show grammatical errors (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Lyster, 2007).

Barry and Brandon shared observations that were shared with them when their children were talking with native speakers. Barry shared that while on vacation in Mexico he had people tell him that his children "have such beautiful intonation and natural speaking of the language. And one guy in particular said you can tell they're being taught by first language Spanish speakers" (Barry 9). Brandon has had native speakers tell him that his children "speak very properly" (Brandon 8). These observations of the fluency and accents are to be expected because of the early start immersion model. Immersion models generally involve a teacher that is a native speaker of the students' second language (Swain & Johnson, 1997) so learners are being exposed to a native accent. Moyer (2014) noted that younger learners have the advantage of pronunciation abilities because of "real neurological and/or cognitive changes that reduce the capacity for, or adeptness of, phonological processing" with age (p. 444).

Some participants noted the benefit of being bilingual in general (Hannah, Gabriella, and Brenda). Hannah believes "to have dual language is just invaluable in this society" (Hannah 6). Gabriella even called having a second language a "gift" that they wanted to give their children (Gabriella 3). One participants' entire motivation for enrolling her daughter in the program was

that she simply “wanted her bilingual” (Brenda 1). This hope for their children to become bilingual through the immersion program is to be expected, since the goals of an immersion program are additive. In immersion, both the students’ first language is developed, and the second language is additionally taught (Baker, 2011; Swain & Johnson, 1997).

In relation to linguistic challenges of immersion, Ida noted that the exposure to the language is limited because it is only in the classroom, and she wished they had more immersion in the language (Ida 6). This is a known challenge commonly discussed in the literature related to immersion where the second language is generally only used in the classroom and does not widely exist in the community (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Swain & Johnson, 1997; Thomas & Roberts, 2011).

#### **Language choice.**

Participants were asked if they would have made the same enrollment decision if the immersion program had been another language. Five participants immediately stated that Spanish was their first choice (Terri, Hannah, Gabriella, Sarah, Brenda). These participants perceived Spanish to be a useful language. Some examples of the words used by participants to describe the language choice include Spanish being: “on the rise” (Terri 6), “highly spoken” (Sarah 4), and “more useful” (Hannah 7). Five other participants answered that they would have been open to other languages in the program (Barry, Lisa, Rebecca, Ida, Brandon). These participants showed more interest in language learning in general. However, some did express that they appreciated that it was a Spanish program. For example, Barry was drawn to immersion in general but later noted that Spanish is “widely spoken” (Barry 7) and thus a good option for his children. There was only one participant, Margaret, who stated that she would have preferred another language; Margaret would have been more interested in a Chinese immersion program because of her own heritage (Margaret 1).

These results that many participants would have still chosen the immersion program if it had been a language other than Spanish was somewhat surprising. Contrary to my findings, Hindman (2015) found at my research site that parents were highly motivated by the Spanish language factor of the program. Specific interest in a single language is also seen in the St. Lambert experiment where parents were solely interested in creating a French immersion program (Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

### **Cognitive Factors**

Cognitive benefits are the changes to the brain and ways of thinking that are attributed to language learning.

My participants' knowledge of the cognitive benefits came from different experiences. The program has hosted informational sessions that highlighted cognitive benefits of immersion language learning and some parents remember attending these and learning about these benefits (Terri, Barry, Hannah). Other participants were familiar with the cognitive benefits because of their own education and professions (Hannah, Sarah, Rebecca, Ida). This second group of participants read the research supporting cognitive benefits of language learning in their time as teachers, audiologists and language majors.

The first point of cognitive benefits relates to the early start aspect of the program, where participants discussed the benefit of learning a language while young. While not directly mentioning cognitive benefits, some parents did note the factor of starting at a young age being a benefit. For example, two participants noted that learning a language comes more naturally for kids than for adults (Barry, Brenda). This aspect of age connects to the benefits of immersion programs that are early-start which leads to higher levels of proficiency than with programs that start in later years, which is reflected in the literature (Turnbull et al., 1998).

The issue of age is also connected with the literature on cognitive benefits, where young learners with bilingual skills have changes that occur in their brain with executive processing (Bialystok, 2007; Bialystok et al., 2004). Other participants expanded on the benefit of early start and how it affects cognition by noting that children at young ages have “more brain capacity” (Sarah 2), “their brains are more malleable” (Hannah 4), and “they’ve just got these little plastic brains” (Ida 3).

The second point mentioned by the participants that relates to cognitive benefits is how language learning leads to problem solving skills. The words used to describe this concept include: “problem solving”, “critical thinking” (Terri 8), “making connections” (Sarah 2), “resourcefulness, ingenuity, stick-to-it-ness” (Rebecca 4). These observations by the participants relate to the concept of flexibility in the literature, where bilingual students have been found to show high levels of linguistic problem-solving skills (Baker, 2011; Deák & Narasimham, 2014; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Nicolay & Poncelot, 2013; Peal & Lambert, 1962). Participants also noted that learning one language makes it easier to keep learning other languages (Rebecca, Brandon). These cognitive benefits are not specifically limited to language learning.

### **Academic Factors**

Academic factors noted by parents were closely connected to the cognitive benefits; they saw how these cognitive benefits can then be seen in students’ academic performance. An academic concern was also expressed with comments about a lag.

Terri connected the cognitive and academic benefits: “it really sort of teaches them such critical thinking to figure things out. That it’s a real boost for them across the spectrum of different areas not just in speaking Spanish” (Terri 8). Likewise, Rebecca simply stated “I

believe it gives you a academic advantage” (Rebecca 12). Brandon also highlighted the importance of “the other advantages, what other languages gives you in your other tasks and activities and classes” (Brandon 9). The academic benefits of bilingual programs have been shown in other studies with students outperforming their monolingual peers (Johnson, et al., 1963; Turnbull et al., 1998). Parents in other studies have also been shown to value the high academic standards of a bilingual program (Bomotti, 1996; Hindman, 2015; Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012).

**Concern: Lag.**

One of the concerns noted by participants was of an academic lag occurring, whether in English or other class subjects. Terri shared concerns with mathematics specifically: “I do think looking back on it now that my kids did not feel super confident with their math skills ever, and I do blame that partly on learning a lot of the very basic concepts in Spanish” (Terri 9). Similarly, Margaret remembers “questioning the wisdom of teaching math in Spanish” (Margaret 5). Brandon also shared a general concern with content classes being taught in Spanish and believes that “you may have some small things drop through the cracks” (Brandon 7). The fear of learners lagging is evident in the literature since the start of modern immersion programs. Hoffman (2010) found that parents were concerned about this idea of lag that could occur in an immersion program. Lambert and Tucker (1972) explicitly stated that the immersion program did not result in any “intellectual deficit or retardation attributable to the bilingual experience” (p. 205). Several comparison studies with bilingual students and monolingual students did not find a continued lag. Instead these studies found that bilingual students would generally outperform their monolingual peers (Johnson, Flores, & Ellison, 1963; Turnbull et al., 1998).

Some parents shared being aware that this sort of lag would occur and understood that it was not something they needed to be concerned about as their children went through the program. Barry remembers learning that in the early years students “take a little dive down below the standard for learning and then in third grade they come even and then they start growing and then the growth is exponential above the students that are in the mainstream” (Barry 10). Similarly, Hannah noted that “you just have to look at the big picture and get beyond that” (Hannah 3).

### **Social Factors**

The discussion of social benefits mentioned by the participants has been organized into three main areas: peer, travel, and diversity.

#### **Peer.**

The discussion of peer relationships is based on what the participants observed in their experience with the program, and was not a factor in their enrollment decision; it is included here because it might influence enrollment decisions of other parents in the future. Different words and phrases were used to describe the relationships that the students develop with each other in the program. Some comments came from a positive perspective: “you are like family, and you get along like family and you fight like family, and you through tough times together but at the end of the day these kids always come to each other” (Hannah 9), “when they go to Spanish class it’s like your family...they do have this cohort of kids” (Gabriella 14), “the best thing that came out of it that was a peer group that stuck together the whole time, just they stayed really tight” (Margaret 7). In these quotes the parents shared the sense of family that the students create with each other.

Other comments came from a negative perspective such as: “they’re very over cliquish” (Gabriella 13), “they’re a gang, and they act like a gang in class and the older they get they got the worse” (Rebecca 5), “have become like a wolfpack and that they have a confidence and air about them that is disrespectful and they’re horrible when they’re together now” (Lacey 6). The negative views expressed by participants was brought up with discipline issues that arise in the classroom which detracts from learning.

As a teacher in the school Gabriella has also noted how the immersion students socially separate themselves from the mainstream students in the elementary school. She shared an experience from when her youngest child was in fifth grade and “he called the neighborhood kids ‘the English’ and this mom came to the front desk and said I heard there were Spanish gangs here and we’re like no” (Gabriella 13). The pack mentality that develops among the immersion students has been observed in the school with the interactions that occur with mainstream students.

This topic of the social environment with learners creating close bonds with their peers in an immersion program is not discussed in the literature. The literature instead focuses on the learners that are then able to interact with peers that are native speakers of the language they are learning as a second language (Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

### **Travel.**

Some participants also noted the benefits of knowing another language when traveling. Barry: shared “...that it would broaden their horizons so that travel, especially Spanish is such a widely spoken language” (Barry 7). Margaret also noted that she hoped the program would help her children “have an interest in travel” (Margaret 9). These comments allude to the belief that their children will have the opportunities and means to travel. Participants also shared stories of

their childrens' past travels (Brenda, Barry), and some that had experienced living abroad (Hannah, Margaret).

### **Diversity.**

The last section under social benefits is the view that learning another language would help their children be more open and understanding of other cultures. This view was worded in the following ways: "open their eyes and minds to other cultures" (Barry 7), "broaden their horizons" (Gabriella 5), and "an understanding of others" (Margaret 9). Rebecca shared her strong belief in learning another language and what that does to your worldview: "I also think it makes you a citizen of the world to have spent part of your life thinking about the way other people [live], speaking in languages that aren't your own, like they get it's an anti-bigotry technique" (Rebecca 12). A similar viewpoint was expressed by Lacey: "it teaches diversity, more than anything it teaches a world outside of what they knew and what they're involved in and their surroundings...it instills a lot of diversity or maybe sensitivity to diversity" (Lacey 2).

Having a better understanding of another culture and group of people has also been seen in research that looked at how the learners' attitudes and perceptions changed with learning another language through immersion (Blake et al., 1981; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Other studies also revealed that parents valued the exposure to diversity that their children receive in a bilingual education program (Bomotti, 1996; Shannon & Milian, 2002).

Margaret and Ida made comments in relation to how isolated the site is. Margaret said "we were hoping for a little more cultural awareness and felt like where we live, and school in general there wasn't a whole lot of cultural diversity" (Margaret 2). Ida believes that "everybody should know another language here in America and then especially in Alaska; we're so isolated, the only country that just thinks English is the only language. It's ridiculous" (Ida 8). Similarly,

Brandon shared he finds it to be “fairly embarrassing that Americans are the only country that don’t speak other languages” (Brandon 4).

### **Economic Factors**

Multiple parents noted that going through the immersion program would help their children in their future careers. Some examples include: “[It gives] them more options when they’re looking for jobs. That they would have the extra asset on their resume” (Terri 7), “... something that was going to help them in their private and professional life long-term” (Hannah 6), “I knew that it would open a lot of doors for them whatever career they choose” (Gabriella 5), and “... being a dual speaker they would be able to have more opportunities in their careers whatever it would be” (Sarah 2). The benefits the participants anticipated revolved around their children having more options for jobs, and having an additional asset on their resumes. These economic motivations were also noted in other studies where parents hoped enrolling their children in bilingual programs would lead to future economic benefits (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Shannon & Milian, 2002).

### **Being Special**

As noted above, parents felt that this Spanish immersion program allowed their children to have a unique social experience with their peers as they learned together in the program. Hannah noted this unique development of friendships was “above and beyond what you would get quote unquote normal classroom” (Hannah 9). Multiple participants also noted that the immersion program is a unique experience and something that would help their child be special in a unique way. This concept of the program itself being a special experience was expressed in the following ways: “enhanced type learning situation” (Barry 6), and “opportunity for some sort of enrichment” (Sarah 2). Gabriella also noted that in enrolling her children in the program she

wanted to give them “the gift of a second language” (Gabriella 3). It can be inferred from these expressions that the children going through this unique and special program would then receive the benefit of being unique in themselves. This was explicitly stated by one participant by saying that her children gaining a second language through this program is “something that not everybody has” (Hannah 6).

Another quote that highlights this being a special experience was shared by Barry who said that the program is “just like any kind of a job or any kind of a school it’s not for everyone” (Barry 12). The same idea was shared by Margaret: “It may not be for everyone but I think it’s an opportunity it gives them a foundation to go on” (Margaret 8). Participants noted the uniqueness of the program which would then make their children unique. They also noted that the program itself was not for everyone which may suggest they believe their children already have something special about them before starting school.

### **Parental Involvement Factors**

Investment and community factors will be discussed under the topic of parental involvement. The overall investment of parents in the program leads to a strong sense of community.

#### **Investment.**

The immersion program in total involves thirteen years, kindergarten through senior year of high school. Hannah and Barry noted that when they made the enrollment decision they were committed to the full thirteen years. For example, Hannah stated “if we did it, we wanted to commit to the thirteen years” (Hannah 5). On the other hand, Rebecca shared that she recommends the program even if parents do not plan to commit to all thirteen years: “I get that you want them to make a commitment and investment, and of course that’s how I came in. But even if you are only going to get your kid through elementary school I would say it’s worth it”

(Rebecca 10). It is important to note that Rebecca was committed to the entirety of the program, but she does see the benefits of even a couple years in the program. The literature has also shown the academic benefits of studying another language, even if only for a small amount of time (Cooper, 1987; Johnson, et al., 1963).

One form of investment for the parents is the issue of providing transportation to school, especially for those that lived out of the zoned area. In her advice to parents Terri also noted that the program is a commitment, especially if they have to drive everyday (Terri 11). Lisa also discussed the high number of parents who drive their children and that it is a commitment to their child's education that they do not take lightly (Lisa 4). This commitment to drive every day even led Margaret to work fewer hours which meant the family made economic sacrifices to commit to the program (Margaret 3). In a previous study conducted at this site, Hindman (2015) found that parents did not emphasize location as being an important factor in their decision. She interpreted this to mean that parents had their own means to provide transportation and thus were not concerned about remaining within their zone.

In relation to the academic concern of lag, participants also noted extra effort that might be needed at home if this lag does occur with their children. Gabriella noted that "there are times where as a parent you have to step it up and do a little more at home" (Gabriella 9). Similarly, Lisa noted that "what you give your children in your home can certainly supplement if they're lagging behind" (Lisa 6).

Parents expressed frustration with a language barrier that would occur when they would try to help with homework. Even parents that had experience learning Spanish noted that their children surpassed them linguistically. For example, Sarah said "We knew a little bit but not quite as much as our children were learning, so then there was just the little bit of contextual

difference” (Sarah 5). Lacey shared having this concern before even starting in the program: “My initial concern was that I wouldn’t be able to keep up with my kids and then therefore I couldn’t enforce it” (Lacey 5). This frustration is also reflected in the literature on parents with children in bilingual programs (Combs, et al., 2005; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Worthy, 2006; Yamauchi, Lau-Smith, & Luning, 2008).

Participants also shared some other points that show their own investment in the program and their children’s education. Gabriella even noted that the only reason they still live in the state is because of this program; Gabriella noted how rare it is to find an immersion program that is Kindergarten through high school (Gabriella 8). Thus, this family is basing their location around this program until their youngest child graduates. Margaret shared the extra efforts the family took while living abroad for three years so that upon returning the children would be allowed back into the immersion program. Both kids were in middle school at the time and they joined high school classes in Spanish while abroad but “it wasn’t ideal and what we were really worried about was that they would lose their speaking skills because it’s not an immersion class” (Margaret 4). This concern also led to her finding a private tutor to practice speaking with her children. So not only did they seek out academic alternatives during the school day, but also had a private tutor help the children maintain their oral skills in Spanish.

### **Community.**

Multiple parents heard about the program initially from other parents in the community (Hannah, Lisa, Lacey). Lisa even based her enrollment decision mostly on the trusted recommendation from other parents: “...the other moms were far more investigative than I. So I benefitted from them; a lot of them did a ton of research on the program” (Lisa 1). With other programs it is also common for parents to learn about the program through the grapevine of other parents. Studies have also shown how highly parents value the opinions and

recommendation of other parents when they are making enrollment decisions (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Hoffman, 2010; Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012).

There also was a sense of community among the parents in the program. For example, Lisa said “we all made a commitment to our children’s education and I think it showed in the school with parental involvement” (Lisa 7). Margaret observed “It makes the whole program better you know the parents are more involved and the kids get more out of it. I’d say it’s a good community” (Margaret 7). In advice to future parents Brenda said to “have fun with it, lots of fun. Be involved” (Brenda 6).

This sense of community is passed on as participants continue to recommend the program to new parents in the community. All participants expressed an overall satisfaction with the program that leads them to recommend the program to new parents.

Overall participants focused on: the social benefits of cultural sensitivity; being able to communicate with more people and create new relationships; and wanting their child to be unique. These motivations can be connected to wanting their children to have more opportunities in the future, whether social or economic. Taking a look at many of the themes and specific quotes shared by participants I was led to the concept of social capital which I believe can summarize the participants’ overall goals and hopes in enrolling their children in the immersion program.

In this chapter I have presented different themes that were discussed in the interviews by the participants. I have highlighted specific quotes from the interviews that relate to the different themes. The next chapter is the final discussion of this research. I will briefly summarize my findings, discuss implications of the study, and provide an overall reflection.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

In order to better understand parental reasons for enrollment decisions in the immersion program I sat down with twelve participants to interview them. The focus of these interviews was on my research question:

Why do parents choose to enroll their children in the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak, Alaska?

In this chapter I will provide a brief summary of my findings, discuss the implications of these findings, and provide my own reflections.

### **Summary of Findings**

Overall, parents made the decision to enroll their children in the Spanish immersion program because they were interested in their children becoming bilingual. As discussed in Chapter Five, the reasons and related concepts discussed can be organized into the following categories: linguistic, cognitive, academic, social, and being special.

In relation to the linguistic theme, participants discussed various topics including the immersion model, early start, accuracy versus fluency, limited exposure, and a linguistic barrier. Participants expressed interest in the immersion approach, some based on their own failed experience learning language in traditional language classes. Some participants discussed the importance of the program being early start, with students entering their first year with half the day immersed in Spanish. Beyond this, participants also noted some of the difficulties and challenges of immersion such as the second language being limited to the classroom. Participants also discussed the challenge of the language barriers at home when they wanted to help with homework.

The cognitive and academic benefits were discussed by the participants in broad terms, such as understanding that learning another language at a young age can change the way the

brain works. Some participants were aware of these cognitive benefits because of their own backgrounds in education and linguistics, while others remembered it from orientation presentations the immersion program gave.

The social benefits noted by the parents are divided into the following categories: peer, travel, and cultural sensitivity. Parents' discussion around peer social benefits was based on the close relationships their children form with other students in their class, as they go through the program together. However, this benefit is not one that the parents had anticipated before starting the program, but instead a benefit they have noted over the years. My participants also noted social benefits in relation to cultural sensitivity and having a better understanding of the way other people live.

Another important factor to consider was the participants' thoughts towards the specific language of the program. Interestingly, the majority of the participants did not share a specific interest solely in Spanish as the second language. However, many noted the utility of Spanish because it is so widely spoken, and is used in geographic areas that are near. I found it surprising that almost half of the participants stated that they would have still had their children join the program if the language being used was something other than Spanish.

Many participants shared first hearing about the program from other parents who were already involved with the program. The participants all also shared that they highly recommend the program to other parents as well. This points to a successful experience with the program, which then continues the circle of experienced parents recommending the program and guiding new parents through.

## **Cultural, Social and Linguistic Capital of Immersion Education**

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between cultural, social, and linguistic capital; where social capital focuses on the relationships a person has, and linguistic capital looks at the specific language use and dialects. For Portes (1998), social and cultural capital are directly relatable to economic benefit:

through social capital, actors can gain direct access to economic resources (subsidized loans, investment tips, protected markets); they can increase their cultural capital through contacts with experts or individuals of refinement (i.e. embodied cultural capital); or, alternatively, they can affiliate with institutions that confer valued credentials (i.e. institutionalized cultural capital). (p. 4)

Thus, cultural capital relates to an individual's social status and their relationships with others.

For this paper I will focus on the concept of capital in relation to education and specifically school choice. The concept of cultural capital connects to school choice because parents “search for distinction and uniqueness, aspirations for social mobility and the global contest for jobs” (Smala, Paz, & Lingard, 2013, p. 373). This was noted in my findings, especially in the theme of Being Special.

In school enrollment decision parents are investing in their children's cultural capital. In a discussion of the work of Bourdieu, MacLeod (1987) explains the role of schools as: “the trading post where socially valued cultural capital is parlayed into superior academic performance. Academic performance is then turned back into economic capital by the acquisition of superior jobs” (p. 12). In other words, in choosing a school a parent is attempting to provide their children with education that will lead to future social capital for their children. Jaeger (2009) notes “that for cultural capital to promote educational success three conditions must hold: parents

must possess cultural capital, they must transfer their cultural capital to children, and children must absorb cultural capital and convert it into educational success” (p. 1943). As Jaeger suggests, for the children to accrue different forms of capital, their parents must first have their own cultural capital. My participants’ cultural capital can be seen in their social economic status, ability to consider schools outside of their zone, and in their levels of education and careers. Previous research at my site supports that the parents having high levels of cultural capital; Hindman (2015) found that 37.9% of the sample base of parents had an average household income between \$75,000 and \$124,999 (p. 47). Hindman also found that 25.6% had graduated from college, and 29.5% had graduated from graduate school (p. 47). The data from Hindman reinforces the observations I made with my participants, both in the interviews and from knowing them in the community in regards to their levels of cultural capital.

Cultural capital relates closely to the discussion of power by Tollefson (1991). For Tollefson, power is related to the ability to choose from predetermined set of alternatives. The greater one’s power, the broader the range of alternatives available. For example, with relatively less power and cultural capital a parent may be limited to the school that they are zoned for, thus their predefined alternatives are limited which limits their choices. On the other side, parents with more power and cultural capital are able to define their own social world. For example, the parents in the St. Lambert experiment were able to expand their educational options for their children by approaching the university to help set up an immersion program. This example highlights the parents’ social capital because they were able to create relationships with university staff and the school district in order to begin a new program.

My participants did not discuss the concept of capital but I believe it is a useful framework to understand their overall goals when they selected an immersion program. It can

especially be connected to the theme of the parents wanting their children to “be special” and their hopes for bright economic futures. Participants believed that this program, with the goal of additive bilingualism, would help their children pursue further higher education and gain employment in the future. By deciding to enroll their children in an immersion program the parents were hoping to increase their childrens’ levels of capital.

### **Implications**

I believe the stories and thoughts of the participants would be beneficial to parents that are in the process of considering different school options. The information would help these parents to have a better understanding of the benefits of an immersion program from the perspective of parents that have years of experience. These insights may also inspire parents to reflect on their own school choices, especially if they are currently struggling with whether to keep their child in an immersion program or to have them pulled out.

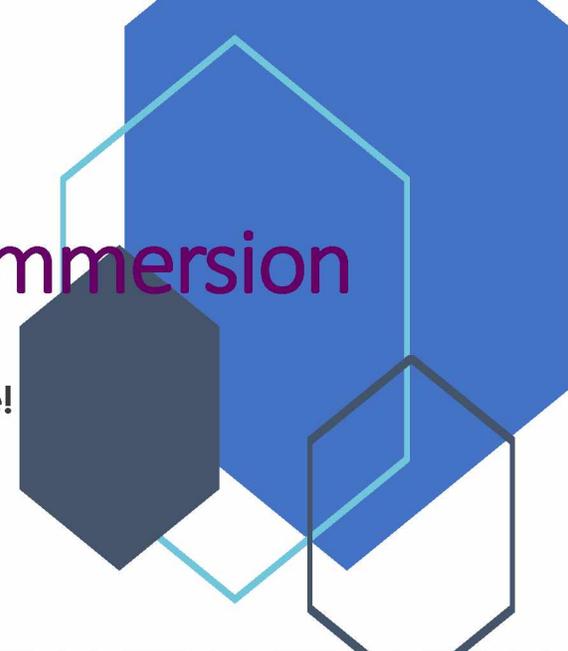
If a parent were to ask for my advice in making an enrollment decision I would absolutely recommend the immersion program in Chugiak. I would highlight that the program is not just about having their child learn another language; but that it has so many other benefits including cognitive, academic, and social. I would also remind them that they are not required to commit to all thirteen years in the program, and that any amount of time spent in the program would be beneficial to their children.

The findings can also inform immersion programs about what motivates a parent to enroll their children in immersion. Based on this information, schools can adapt their marketing strategies and information they share with perspective parents. On the following page you will find a pamphlet that I have created that I believe would be a useful tool for schools to share with

perspective parents. The pamphlet highlights the key benefits of an immersion program that were noted by my participants.

# What parents say about immersion

Immersion is not just about learning another language!  
It provides cognitive, academic, and social benefits!



*Learning a second language will provide your children with skills that will benefit them throughout their lifetime.*

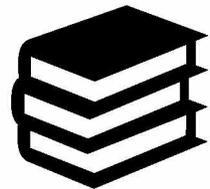
## Cognitive Benefits:

- “their brains are more malleable and can take in the information”
- “resourcefulness, ingenuity, stick to itedness”
- “problem solving”, “critical thinking”

**“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.”** –Frank Smith, psycholinguist

## Academic Benefits:

- “a real boost for them across the spectrum of different areas”
- “growth is exponential above the students that are in the mainstream”



## Social Benefits:

- “open their eyes and minds to other cultures”
- “it makes you a citizen of the world”
- “open doors to people that they might otherwise not be able to talk to”

## **Future Research**

Future research in this specific school district could be conducted to compare the motivations of parents in the one-way immersion in Chugiak with those of parents in the two-way program in Anchorage. The city of Anchorage is one of the most diverse cities in the United States and there are a variety of language programs in the public schools. There is a need for both qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in the region to better understand the various languages and cultures represented and what the school district can do to help support them.

Another research area of interest would be the aspect of removing children from an immersion program before completion. Wesely and Baig (2012) also looked at parental decisions about whether to have their children continue in an immersion program through middle school and high school. In my own participant pool, there were three students that had been removed from the program, and future research at the site could provide further insight into these decisions that parents make as their children grow older in the immersion program. Even though these parents had made the decision to have their children leave the immersion program, they all stated that they would still make the original decision to enroll them. Despite their children not graduating from the program, the parents still found their time in the program to be beneficial.

## **Reflections**

Ideally, I would have liked to have more participants, especially ones who had made the enrollment decision more recently. My participants had children that were already in middle school, high school, or had already graduated, which meant it was difficult for many to recall their specific train of thought while making the enrollment decision. It is also possible that their reasons for choosing the program might actually be benefits they have seen occur with their

children in the program and not necessarily benefits they were aware of before making the choice.

Since this was my first time as an interviewer I have also noted areas upon which I could improve including: further prompting, clearer wording, and slowing pace. Reading through the transcripts there are many times that I should have dug deeper and asked for clarification. In the transcripts I also noted that my questions were not always expressed fully or concisely. Lastly, I also noticed a sense of rushing, which I attribute to my nerves and inexperience. With additional resources and time, I would have also liked to have been able to complete a second round of interviews with these participants with further questions.

## **Conclusion**

This research topic was inspired by my own curiosity as a student who went through this Spanish immersion program. I had always wondered why my own parents had decided to have me learn Spanish when they themselves do not speak it, and there is almost no Spanish that exists in the community. In this thesis, I interviewed my own parents to have a deeper understanding of their decision, and also to talk with other parents to gather their stories and reasonings. This entire process has led me to consider what decision I would make if I had children of my own and continued to live in the community.

Three years ago, I do not believe that I would have made the decision to enroll my own children in the immersion program. My own thoughts on the program as a graduate were so focused on what I considered to be my own linguistic failure. I believed that thirteen years of studying a language should have led to higher levels of proficiency in Spanish. I was so embarrassed by my own perceived low proficiency level that I would tell people I had only

studied Spanish in high school. However, through my studies and this research I have gained a new perspective.

I believe that I would make the decision to enter in the lottery in an effort to enroll my children in the Spanish immersion program. Despite some of the linguistic challenges that I have seen with the program, I think that overall the program has been a beneficial experience for students. As my participants noted, it is a unique experience to have been immersed in another language and culture for thirteen years. It also creates such a strong bond with your peers that I do not think occurs in traditional classrooms. As classmates, we struggled through learning a new language, and share the unique experience that other people are not able to understand. While I am not able to present data that this immersion program increased our cognitive capabilities, I have observed over the years how my immersion peers have been successful in areas other than language. Many immersion students would be in the honors classes, have the higher grade point averages, and would be lead chairs for their instrument in band.

Someday, when I have children of my own, I hope to be able to enroll them in a language immersion program. When they come home from school most likely frustrated and confused, as I was, I will share with them my own stories. I hope to be able to inspire them through example. If one day they came to me and asked why they are in an immersion program, I will be able to give them numerous reasons and as they got older perhaps even share this research with them.

## References

- ACTFL. (2012). *ACTFL proficiency guidelines*. Retrieved from <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>
- Anchorage School District. (2014a). *Anchorage school district immersion program student enrollment 2013-2014* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.asdk12.org/cms/lib/AK02207157/Centricity/Domain/1252/TotalStudents.pdf>
- Anchorage School District. (2014b). *Chugiak area k-12 Spanish partial immersion program* [PDF file]. Retrieved from [https://www.asdk12.org/cms/lib/AK02207157/Centricity/Domain/1843/WOR-1851\\_Chugiak-FINAL.pdf](https://www.asdk12.org/cms/lib/AK02207157/Centricity/Domain/1843/WOR-1851_Chugiak-FINAL.pdf)
- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (5th ed.). Clevedon; Multilingual Matters.
- Bialystok, E. (2007). Cognitive effects of bilingualism: How linguistic experience leads to cognitive change. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(3), 210–223.
- Bialystok, E., Klein, R., Craik, F., & Viswanathan, M. (2004). Bilingualism, aging, and cognitive control: Evidence from the Simon task. *Psychology and Aging*, 19(2), 290–303.
- Blake, L., Lambert, W. E., Sidoti, N., & Wolfe, D. (1981). Students' views of intergroup tensions in Quebec: The effects of language immersion experience. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement*, 13(2), 144–160.

- Bomotti, S. (1996). Why do parents choose alternative schools? *Educational Leadership*, 54, 30–32.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York: Greenwood.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. *Language and Communication*, 4(9), 2–27.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Retrieved from [https://www.sswm.info/sites/default/files/reference\\_attachments/COHEN%202006%20Semistructured%20Interview.pdf](https://www.sswm.info/sites/default/files/reference_attachments/COHEN%202006%20Semistructured%20Interview.pdf)
- Combs, M. C., Evans, C., Fletcher, T., Parra, E., & Jiménez, A. (2005). Bilingualism for the children: Implementing a dual-language program in an English-only state. *Educational Policy*, 19(5), 701-728.
- Cooper, T. C. (1987). Foreign language study and SAT-verbal scores. *The Modern Language Journal*, 71(4), 381–387.

- Day, E. M., & Shapson, S. (1996). *Studies in immersion education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Deák, G. O., & Narasimham, G. (2014). Young children's flexible use of semantic cues to word meanings: Converging evidence of individual and age differences. *Journal of Child Language*, *41*(3), 1–32.
- Duncan, H., Nikelski, J., Pilon, R., Steffener, J., Chertkow, H., & Philips, N. (2017). Structural brain differences between monolingual and multilingual patients with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer disease: Evidence for cognitive reserve. *Neuropsychologia*, *109*, 270–282.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giacchino-Baker, R., & Piller, B. (2006). Parental motivation, attitudes, support, and commitment in a southern Californian two-way immersion program. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *5*(1), 5–28.
- Hakuta, K., & Diaz, R. M. (1985). The relationship between degree of bilingualism and cognitive ability: A critical discussion and some new longitudinal data. *Children's Language*, *5*, 319–344.
- Hammerly, H. (1987). The immersion approach: Litmus test of second language acquisition through classroom communication. *The Modern Language Journal*, *71*(4), 395–401.

- Hepburn, A., & Bolden, G. B. (2012). The conversation analytic approach to transcription. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 57-76). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hindman, S. (2015). *Critical factors parents consider when selecting a public Spanish immersion elementary school* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Argosy University: Atlanta, GA.
- Hoffman, J. (2010). *A parent's choice* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from UMI Dissertation Publishing. (1486003)
- Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 461–473.
- Jaeger, M. M. (2009). Equal access but unequal outcomes: Cultural capital and educational choice in a meritocratic society. *Social Forces*, 87(4), 1943–1971.
- Johnson, C., Flores, J., & Ellison, F. (1963). The effect of foreign language instruction on basic learning in elementary schools: A second report. *The Modern Language Journal*, 47(1), 8–11.
- Kavanagh, L., & Hickey, T. (2013). “You’re looking at this different language and it freezes you out straight away”: Identifying challenges to parental involvement among immersion parents. *Language and Education*, 27(5), 432–450.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.

- Lambert, W., & Tucker, R. (1972). *Bilingual education of children: The St Lambert experiment*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Lazaruk, W. (2007). Linguistic, academic, and cognitive benefits of French immersion. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63, 605-628.
- Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. (2001). *Dual language education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lyster, R. (2007). *Learning and teaching languages through content: A counterbalanced approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- MacLeod, J. (1987). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Moyer, A. (2014) What's age got to do with it? Accounting for individual factors in second language accent. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 4(3), 443-464.
- Munoz, C. (2014). Contrasting effects of starting age and input on the oral performance of foreign language learners. *Applied Linguistics*, 35, 463-482.

- Nicolay, A., & Poncelet, M. (2013). Cognitive advantage in children enrolled in a second-language immersion elementary school program for three years. *Bilingualism, 16*(3), 597–607.
- Olson-Beal, H., & Hendry, P. (2012). The ironies of school choice: Empowering parents and reconceptualizing public education. *American Journal of Education, 118*(4), 521–550.
- Peal, E., & Lambert, W. (1962). The relation of bilingualism to intelligence. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 76*(27), 1–23.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*(1), 1–24.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shannon, S. M., & Milian, M. (2002). Parents choose dual language programs in Colorado: A survey. *Bilingual Research Journal, 26*(3), 681–696.
- Smala, S., Paz, J., & Lingard, B. (2013). Languages, cultural capital and school choice: Distinction and second-language immersion programmes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 34*(3), 373–391.
- Stewart, J. H. (2005). Foreign language study in elementary schools: Benefits and implications for achievement in reading and math. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(1), 11–16.

- Swain, M., & Johnson, R. (1997). Immersion education: A category within bilingual education. In M. Swain & R. Johnson (Eds.), *Immersion education: International perspectives* (pp. 1–16). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, E. M., & Roberts, D. B. (2011). Exploring bilinguals' social use of language inside and out of the minority language classroom. *Language and Education*, 25(2), 89–108.
- Tollefson, J. W. (1991). The ideology of language planning theory. In J.W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Planning language, planning inequality: Language policy in the community* (pp. 22–42). New York: Longman.
- Turnbull, M., Lapkin, S., Hart, D., & Swain, M. (1998). Time on task and immersion graduates' French proficiency. In S. Lapkin (Ed.), *French second language education in Canada: Empirical studies* (pp. 31–55). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2010). *US Census Bureau 2010 Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/2010census/>
- Wesely, P. M., & Baig, F. (2012). The “extra boost”: Parental involvement and decision making in immersion programs. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 35(3), 314–330.
- Worthy, J. (2006). Como si le falta un brazo: Latino immigrant parents and the costs of not knowing English. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5(2), 139–154.
- Yamauchi, Lau-Smith, and Luning. (2008). Family involvement in a Hawaiian language immersion program. *School Community Journal*, 18(1), 39–60.

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

Introductory Protocol:

Hello, my name is Danya Schimmack. I am a 2011 graduate of the Chugiak Spanish Immersion program. I am currently studying at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and working on completing a Masters Degree in Applied Linguistics.

I would like to talk to you today about your enrollment choices in this program. Thank you for taking the time today to talk with me.

I would like to audio record our conversation today. I have planned for this interview to last no more than an hour. During this time I have several questions that I would like to cover. There is no right or wrong answer, I am interested in your experiences and stories. If there is a question you would not like to answer you are welcome to not respond, and you are able to end the interview if need be.

Standard follow-up questions are:

Why/Why not?

Can you tell me more about that?

How did that make you feel?

When you say \_\_\_\_\_ can you tell me more about what that means?

Can you give me an example of \_\_\_\_\_?

Sample interview questions: semi-structured, organized by bigger question and followed by potential follow up questions based on responses received

Tell me about your kids.

What grade are they in?

What are they doing now?

How long have you lived in the area?

What brought you here?

Think back to when you first heard about the Spanish immersion program. What did you think at first?

How did you learn more about the program?

Did you know any parents, or teachers in the program?

Did you look at the school's website or other informational materials?

What information do you remember being able to find?

Can you walk me through how you made your decision?

Are you zoned for Chugiak Elementary?

Was Chugiak Elementary your first choice?

Was the Spanish Immersion program your first choice?

Were you thinking about the program as a short term option, or fully committing to thirteen years?

Why did you choose the Spanish immersion program?

What did you think about your child learning Spanish?

What did you know about the benefits of bilingualism?

What did you know about the program's reputation?

Other

If parents state multiple reasons:

Were any of these reasons more important to you than others?

What concerns (if any) did you have about enrolling your child there?

Looking back now do you feel like you made the correct decision?

Have you ever regretted enrolling your child in the program?

Would you make that choice again?

What do you wish you had known when you were making this choice for your child/children?

What would be your advice to parents who are thinking about enrolling their child/children in the Spanish Immersion program?

If you have more than one child in the program

Did you consider other options for your older or younger children?

Was the decision making process different for each child?

Closing Script:

Do you have any final comments or questions?

If you think of any questions, or think of anything else you would like to share with me feel free to email me at any time.

Once I have analyzed the data would you be interested in taking a look and possibly providing me with feedback? If so what would be the best way to contact you?

Thank you again for your time today, I truly appreciate it.

**Appendix B**  
**Informed Consent Form**

IRB #100015

Date Approved 12/14/2016

**Description of the Study:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about your experience with the Spanish immersion program in Chugiak. The goal of this study is to learn about why parents choose to enroll their children. You are being asked to take part in this study because you have/had children in the program. Please read this form carefully. We encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the study before making a decision on whether or not to participate.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview with Danya Schimmack in the library and be audio recorded.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The risks to you if you take part in this study are possibly feeling uncomfortable being interviewed or with specific questions, but at any point you are welcome to simply skip over a question or to end the interview.

The benefit(s) to you for taking part in this study is/are to reflect on your experiences, and add to a growing knowledge base within the local community.

**Confidentiality:**

- Any information obtained about you from the research will be kept confidential.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in the study you can stop at any time or change your mind and ask to be removed from the study.

## Appendix C

### Audio and Audio-visual File Transcription Guidelines

We will use the following standards, which are based on transcription conventions within conversation analysis (CA) research (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012):

- 1) Every time a speaker begins a turn, even a very short turn or backchannel (e.g. uh huh), you should designate the speaker with a capital initial. It should always be clear who is speaking on every line, so if overlap causes there to be a line gap within a speaker's turn, you will need to retype the speaker initial on the first line after the overlap line.
- 2) Please number the lines of transcription starting with 001, this will allow you to refer to specific lines in your analysis
- 3) Please include page numbers on your transcription
- 4) If your data is in a language other than English, please provide a translation of any relevant data. (This counts as one line in the transcript)

*Gib \*mich bitte \*der Ball.*

*Give me (Acc should be Dat) please the (Nom should be Acc) ball.*

*Please give me the ball.*

#### Transcription features:

- 1) **Transcribe the actual language and sounds used** – do not change grammar or finish incomplete words or utterances.

Do not transcribe phonetically. Instead, write words with standard spelling unless there is reason not to do so (e.g. sound cut offs, mispronunciations that are noticed and/or corrected by speakers.)

- 2) **Punctuation** – do not use punctuation as you normally would when writing. Instead use it to mark the intonation contours of discrete phrases and clauses.

We will use all four of the following punctuation marks to mark intonation:

- A period (.) indicates a falling intonation contour, not necessarily an assertion
- A question mark (?) indicates strongly rising intonation, but not necessarily an interrogative
- A comma (,) indicates slightly rising intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary and not necessarily marking that the speaker is continuing
- [use] the inverted question mark (¿) to indicate a pitch rise that is stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark.

(Hepburn & Bolden, 2012, p. 61)

- 3) **Capitalization** – capitalize proper names and the pronoun “I” when it is clearly identifiable. Do not capitalize other words even if they appear at the start of sentences.
- 4) **(ONLY IF RELEVANT TO YOUR DATA) Transcription of important non-verbal sounds** – use two sets of parentheses to capture sounds such as coughs, sneezes, laughs, and throat clearings that are audible. These sounds can overlap speech just like spoken language.

Examples of non-verbal sound transcriptions: ((cough)), ((laughter))

- 5) **(ONLY IF RELEVANT TO YOUR DATA) Overlapping talk** – use squared brackets to indicate exactly where a speaker’s talk or non-verbal sounds overlap part of a speaker’s turn. As closely as possible mark where the overlap begins and ends in the ongoing speaker’s turn.

The squared brackets for both speakers involved in an overlap should align perfectly. Use the tab key to ensure this.

Example of overlap in transcription:

```

001 D:    so as I [was   ] saying we
002 E:                                [yeah  ]
003 D:    need to start [thin                ] king about
004 F:                                [((cough))  ]

```

- 6) **Transcription doubt** – if you are unsure of a word in a recording, but you have a good idea of what the word is, put your guess inside of a single set of parentheses. If there is a choice of two possible hearings, include both options in the parentheses with a slash mark between them.

Examples: (dog) (dog / doc)

If you simply cannot understand a word or part of a word, insert a pair of parentheses in your transcript with two full tab spaces between them – ( )

- 7) **Pauses within and between turns** – Please try to indicate when you hear noticeable pauses in a recording. Although it is sometimes difficult to establish whether a pause happens within or between speakers’ turns, do your best to place pauses where they occur. You may even place micro-pauses within words if they are noticeable in a recording.

Micro-pauses of approximately 0.2 seconds or less should be indicated by a full stop within a set of parentheses – (.). Pauses longer than 0.2 seconds should be indicated with two full stops within a set of parentheses – (..). You do not need to time pauses – a simple estimate is acceptable.

Pauses between turns receive their own transcript line. These lines are not attributed to any speaker.

Example:

001 D: I think we agree.  
002 (.)  
003 D: okay, (..) what do you want to talk  
004 about next.  
004 E: can we talk (.) about equipment?

- 8) ***Sound cut-offs*** – if a speaker cuts off a word while speaking, please indicate this with a single hyphen attached to the sounds that were spoken.

Example:

001 D: this is wh- what I was talking about,

#### Reference

Hepburn, A., & Bolden, G. B. (2012). The conversation analytic approach to transcription. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 57-76). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

## Appendix D

(907) 474-5444 fax  
uaf-irb@alaska.edu  
[www.uaf.edu/irb](http://www.uaf.edu/irb)

### **Institutional Review Board**

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270  
December 14, 2016  
To: Sabine Siekmann  
Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB  
Re: [1000151-2] Parental Enrollment Choice in Spanish Immersion

Thank you for submitting the Response/Follow-Up referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title: Parental Enrollment Choice in Spanish Immersion  
Received: December 12, 2016  
Exemption Category: 2  
Effective Date: December 14, 2016  
This action is included on the January 25, 2017 IRB Agenda.

*Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.*