DISSERTATION

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGE

OF INVOLVING LATINO PARENTS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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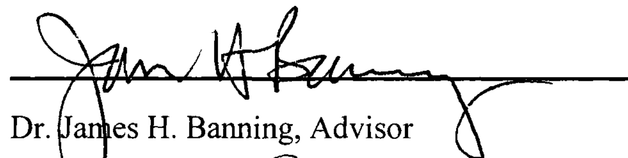

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGE OF INVOLVING LATINO PARENTS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology was to explore the educational experiences of Latino parents and how that may have impacted their views of education and their roles/participation in their offspring's education. By exploring these views, the hope was that ideas would be generated that might increase Latino parents involvement in their children's education. By asking about the educational experiences of Latino parents, their value of education and their view of participation in their children's education were assessed.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the assistance of an interpreter. Several emerging themes were identified and explored with the two most prominent ones being that of language barriers and definition of involvement. During the course of the interview process, the researcher was cast in the role of an outsider whose lack of language skills inhibited involvement. In that experience, the researcher came to more fully understand how language barriers can isolate and remove one's personal power. The discussions also brought out the differences in terms of what involvement in a child's education meant to those who had been schooled in a different culture. In addition, the reality of life's demands came to the forefront in terms of learning a second language so that a broader participation could happen. The resulting understanding forged a number

of recommendations that might help schools with high percentages of English Language Learners (ELL) invite more parental participation and, thereby, increase the chance of greater student achievement in these populations.

First, schools must offer a means for communication with offerings considering the needs of both sides: the parents who do not speak English and the teachers who do not speak Spanish.

Second, setting up dual language opportunities in the classroom will certainly encourage additional Latino parent involvement.

And, third, there must also be a revision of expectations for involvement so that parents more easily feel they are part of the system. This requires a new look at what involvement means.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

With greater demands for accountability in the education system and more focus on student achievement, attention has been drawn more to gaps between Latino and Anglo students in terms of achievement and test results (Colorado Commission for High School Improvement, 2005, Fix, 2003, Ready, Edley & Snow 2002). This study looks at those gaps and how to increase Latino student achievement by exploring the potential impact that parents have on their children's education. Chapter I provides the background for the current situation, looking at legislative changes that have created growing pressures on professionals in education to increase student achievement as well as reduce dropout rates, and achievement gaps. The significance and purpose of the study follows along with delimitations, limitations and the researchers perspective.

In Chapter II, the Review of Literature is broken into two parts. Dropout rates and their causes are in the first section; correlation of parent involvement and academic success follows in the second section. The research approach and methodology follows in Chapter III.

Background of Problem

Greater demand for accountability and higher student achievement erupted in the 1980s, spewing forth a variety of educational reforms, i.e. site-based management and high-stakes testing, that have continued into current day practices. National attention was

drawn to that bottom line of student achievement quite harshly in 1983 when the United States Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk*. The report described schools across the country as ineffective and substandard when compared with other advanced nations. The ensuing outcry from parents and communities sent school systems scrambling to improve and transform their institutions and a number of reports and reform efforts were generated: close to 300 state panels were formed, more than 40 states increased requirements for graduation, and over 700 state statutes were passed dictating the what, when, how, and who of curriculum (Poulin, 1992). The ensuing movement influenced the manner in how institutions across the country would conduct business in the future (Newkirk & Klotz, 2002).

The reform movement gained momentum with Goals 2000, established by President George H. Bush and continued by President Clinton and Secretary of Education William Riley in the 1990s. By 2001, accountability was the hot spot for reformers. All fifty U.S. states instituted statewide assessments although only forty states listed standards in all core subjects (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Pressure to increase school accountability and improve student achievement continued to grow as did concern over the quality of education for all students. Additional legislation and other educational initiatives emphasized the role of high-stakes testing as an immediate method of reform. With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, high stakes tests became widely used, requiring all students, third through eighth grade, to be tested in math and reading every year. Progress would be measured, typically, by the percentage of students who passed the tests. Schools/districts not demonstrating adequate yearly progress could have corrective sanctions imposed.

As the fallout of reform ash has settled over daily practices, and with high-stakes clearly in view, attention has been drawn to underachieving populations that affected overall performance records. Minority issues no longer seem minor and particularly English Language Learners (ELL) and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are being regarded with more than a glancing eye. The numbers speak volumes in any language.

The 2000 Census data registers the rate of growth for Latino[1] populations as increasing by 53 percent between 1980 and 1990 with another 57.9 percent growth from 1990 to 2000. This growth rate is more than five times that of the total U.S. population (9.5 percent) with Latinos currently weighing in at 12.5 percent of the U.S. population (17.1 percent in Colorado). Based on the projections of continued growth, it is obvious that the Latino population will become increasingly important to the economic and social well being of the U.S. (Mayer, 2004). As the fastest growing minority population in the U.S., it is critical that policy makers, educators and researchers pay attention to the dropout rate of the Hispanic population since this can impact not only the individual but society as a whole (Mayer, 2004).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the year 2000, Hispanics or Latinos had the highest dropout rate at 21.1 percent of students16 – 19 years of age. This rate ranks three times greater than the non-Hispanic Anglo population rate of 6.9 percent

[1] Webster's New World College Dictionary from 2000 defines Hispanic as "Spanish or Spanish-and-Portuguese" and Latino as "a Latin American." But a second definition for both Hispanic and Latino in the dictionary is the exact same: "a usually Spanish-speaking person of Latin American birth or descent who lives in the U.S." The U.S. Census lists its counts under Hispanic but under the breakdown for "General Characteristics," the grouping is listed as "Hispanic or Latino (of any race)." A 2000 presidential tracking poll by Hispanic Trends Inc., a national polling firm, asked registered voters which term they preferred: Hispanic or Latino. Of the 1,200 Latino registered voters polled, 65 percent preferred Hispanic, and 30 percent chose to identify themselves as Latino. Regionally, the results were similar. For purposes of this paper, the two terms are used interchangeably and are used in context of the sources quoted.

nationally. (While this number is generally accepted, other studies place the numbers higher. For example, the non-profit Editorial Projects in Education's EPE Research Center puts the 2002-2003 years graduation rates for Hispanics at only 55.6% which could be translated to say that drop-out rates are more likely in the 40% range for Hispanics.) In Colorado, those numbers are just as dismal. The final report of the Colorado Commission for High School Improvement (2005) recorded only 44 percent of Hispanics as graduating in 2004 compared with 80 percent of their Anglo counterparts.

Side by side with that low graduation and high dropout rate lurks the evidence of a widening achievement gap. Based on the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) standardized test score, in 2005, 76 percent of white tenth graders scored at the "proficient" or "advanced" levels on the state reading test compared to 39 percent of Hispanic tenth graders. The Commission reports similar disparities on math tests.

Contributing to the low levels of achievement is that larger issue of language and literacy. The Limited English Proficient (LEP) population grew by 52 percent between 1990 and 2000 from 14.0 million to 21.3 million (Fix, 2003). The share that Mexicans represent in the Hispanic/Latino category hit the mark at 59.3 percent in 2000, putting the greatest numbers into the Spanish-speaking realm. In fact, the number of children from Spanish-Speaking families represented two thirds of all non-English speaking families in 2000. But the surprising part of the statistics is that most of the LEP children have been in the U.S. for five years or more. Two-thirds are members of the 2nd and 3rd generations – they were born in the U.S. and, presumably, began their education in the U.S.

The reasons for the growth in LEP students, the high dropout rate, and broadening achievement gaps are extremely complex, and include issues such as a disconnect

between home and school culture, as well as the risks involved in acculturation. Many educators view the problem as simply a language barrier. In fact, it is not so much a language issue, as a literacy issue. Research indicates that a solid literacy foundation in one's native language predicts academic success in another language (DATA). However, when Latino achievement scores on standardized tests are separated into native Spanish speakers and native English speakers (common in Mexican-Americans), the native English-speaking Latinos also show low achievement and high dropout rates. This data points to the cultural aspect of this complex issue.

Until recently, most of the secondary schools in the nation met the needs of LEP students with ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. These are designed primarily for LEP students that already have literacy skills in their native language. With increasing enrollment of the LEP student population, the number of LEP students lacking literacy skills in their native language has also increased. As a result, the need for programs designed specifically for the LEP student population has increased. But how that will be designed remains a hot topic of discussion. Regardless of the approach, if increased student achievement for all students is really the goal of educational reform, it is imperative to find ways of lowering dropout rates and installing measures for LEP and ELL students to truly be academically successful.

As educators look at the reasons for the dropout rates and widening gaps in achievement, they will need to access indicators that can help determine students at-risk. One indicator would be that of absences. Students who had dropped out had two to three times the number of absences and suspensions of students who graduated (Nesman,

Barbos-Gahr, & Medrano, 2001). Epstein & Sheldon (2002) agree that absenteeism and truancy are indicators of disengagement and can predict dropout potential.

The problem becomes one of finding a means for decreasing the dropout rate and providing the types of resources that will more likely ensure academic success for Latinos.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

There are many contributors to the high dropout rate for Latinos and also to the widening gap in academic achievement between Latinos and non-Latinos. These include language barriers, literacy issues, lack of resources in the home, differing views on the value of education, economic need requiring students to work, and a disconnect between home and school culture. Out of all of these, reducing/eliminating the disconnect between home and school culture may prove to hold a more immediate path to reducing both dropout rates and gaps in academic achievement.

The connection between home and school is paramount in student success since it revolves around parent involvement in the child's education. In the middle of debates about the best way to increase student achievement, Abrams and Gibbs (2002) found that "policy makers and researchers overwhelmingly agree that parent participation is a critical component of academic success." They also reported greater accountability and improved attendance were related to parent involvement. Additionally, Mapp (2003) found that children of involved parents perform at higher rates academically than those whose parents are not engaged. The academic benefit ranges from higher grades and test scores to more positive attitudes about schooling in general. And, where student attendance is a problem, educators may look to involving families since attendance has

been shown to improve when schools use comprehensive approaches to encourage family involvement. (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Improved academic achievement and attendance are positively related to parental involvement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). The academic benefits include higher grades and test scores as well as improved motivation and increased positive attitudes toward school (Mapp, 2003, Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

But while the link between family and academic success cross all ethnic and racial boundaries, a good amount of evidence shows that family involvement in school systems is less prevalent in low-income and minority families (Lopez, 2001, Chavkin & Williams, 1993, as cited in Mapp, 2003, Cotton and Wikelund, 1989).

The promotion of parental involvement as a means to increase academic success has raised issues of equity since rates of parent involvement are significantly higher among middle and upper class parents than in low-income families (Smith, 2005). Parent involvement is less in lower-income communities than in higher income schools (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002) and often focuses on behaviors that are more easily accomplished by middle-and upper-income parents (Mapp, 2003). Current involvement policies often disregard the needs of low-income children (Mapp, 2003).

There are governmental policies in place that direct the effort for parental involvement. The requirements for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) established a number of parent involvements for schools. District Parent Involvement Policy Requirements, Title I, part A, Subpart 1, Section 1118 mandates district support, defines coordination of activities for parent involvement, and stipulates schools' responsibility for building parent capacity for involvement. This includes methods of communicating with parents and evaluating the success of those efforts. Title III, Public Law 107-110, Section 3302,

speaks to methods of parent notification and participation but just having those policies in place doesn't make the end result a given. Many schools that struggle with low academic achievement report minimal parental involvement and struggle to achieve high-quality effective school-parent collaboration (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000, Valdés, 1966).

In looking at the home-school disconnect, it could be helpful to understand the educational experiences of Latino parents and how that may have impacted their views of education and their roles/participation in their offspring's education. By investigating possible obstacles, the means for involving Latino parents in their children's education and keeping them involved through high school may be discovered. This might, in turn, be used to predict and/or alter student success. The body of research using the view of the Latino parent appears to be very small and discoveries could offer alternative approaches to a growing problem.

Understanding the educational experiences of Latino parents may offer an insight into their views of and participation in their offspring's education. Research has shown that minority and low-income parents are often most underrepresented in terms of school involvement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). However, it has also been found that parents of disadvantaged and minority children definitely make a positive contribution to student achievement regardless of their own academic achievement. They must simply receive adequate training and encouragement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

The under-representation has been loosely linked to a number of possible reasons; lack of time or energy because of job requirements, an embarrassment about their own achievements or language skills, lack of understanding or information about the structure of the school, perceived lack of welcome by teachers and administrators. To be

successful in low-income, minority communities and encourage involvement, policies and practices must be designed particularly for low-income, minority communities (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002, Mapp, 2003). Is there a connection between the parents' educational experiences and their view of their offspring's educational needs? What does that look like? What can truly encourage more involvement among Latino parents? The questions can be most readily answered by the parents themselves.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the past educational experiences of the Latino parents and their current view and involvement in their children's education. From that exploration, the researcher will form recommendations that are designed to increase Latino parent involvement in school.

Research Questions

1. What connection do they see between their own past educational experiences and their involvement in their children's education?
2. What are their views of the obstacles to increased involvement?
3. What would encourage them to be more involved?

This study will examine the personal experiences of Latino parents and look at how those experiences relate to their view of the educational system and their involvement in their children's education. The literature review will include a look at the correlation between parental involvement and student success and different forms of involvement.

Delimitations

The study will be limited to the Roaring Forks School District and Latino parents of K-12 students.

Limitations

The researcher is not fluent in Spanish and will have to rely on interpreters in some instances.

Researcher's Perspective

Three perspectives form the basis of this research. First, as a Colorado native, I have witnessed first hand the differences in how Latinos have experienced the public school system and have a personal concern about the growing achievement gaps and dropout rates for this population. Both of my children are Mexican and, so, half of my extended family is also Mexican. Many of them did not finish high school and, of those who did, few went on to college. I witnessed, first hand, the kind of discrimination that occurs because of culture or skin color as my children were treated differently in the school system. Because I had knowledge of the system and knew what demands to make, what paths to follow, both of my daughter was finally placed in a mentally gifted minor program rather than being written off as slow. I found the proper setting for my son as well but, again, that was because I knew how to fight and who to fight.

From the classroom perspective, my daughter has been a bilingual/ELL teacher in the Aspen and Snowmass area for the past seven years and I have spent countless hours volunteering in her classroom. I have watched both ELL and bilingual programs struggle for funding and support internally, at the district level, and in the community and have

talked to elementary students who are already developing negative feelings about school. I find that disturbing.

The reform perspective has been typically aimed at the majority population of Anglo students, pushing for greater achievement and using measurements (tests) designed for those with a grasp of the dominant culture and the English language.

The perspective I was interested in for this study was that of the Latino parents. I wanted to know what they experienced, what they thought, and what they needed.

As Latinos continue to represent larger and larger numbers of our citizens, we need to find the means to serve them more effectively in the school system, help them become more academically successful and, thereby, even more connected and productive members of our communities on par with Anglo counterparts. In understanding the experiences and viewpoints of Latino parents whose children are currently in school, I hope to find ways of developing programs that will encourage Latino parent involvement so that we can begin to "reform" our educational system to be more responsive and more inclusive.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature was directed in several directions. First, the reasons that students drop-out were investigated. After examining those reasons, it became apparent that the disconnect between home and school played a large part in determining student achievement and academic success. So the next section of the literature review looks at the correlation between parent involvement and academic success. That is followed by a review of the literature that looks at minority parent involvement in education as well as the different forms of parent involvement.

Dropout Rates and Causes

A number of factors lead to academic success including regular attendance, positive school attitude, family/peer support, and available services and resources (Nesman, Barobs-Gahr, & Medrano, 2001, Rosenthal, 1994, Hess and D'Amato, 1996). In terms of the Chicano/Latino dropout rate, a qualitative study (Avilés, 1999) using focus group interview with Chicano/Latinos who had dropped out of high school found that Chicano/Latinos spend less time in school overall, "entering later and leaving earlier than their African American or White peers." Suspension rates were also found to be increasing for Chicano/Latino students while, at the same time they were decreasing for whites.

The research has pinpointed a number of reasons for the high dropout rates (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Hess and D'Amato (1996) looked at Mexican-

American elementary-age children with older siblings who were either high school dropouts or "persisters" (students who had already graduated or who were 16 years or older and were making satisfactory progress in school). The variables examined: the younger student's expectation of completing high school, ratings of academic self-competence, school attitude, number of absences, and retention. They found that, for elementary-age Mexican American children, absences and high school completion expectancy may be two of the greatest factors differentiating siblings of persisters from siblings of dropouts. The authors believe that the findings will be useful to educators to help them identify potential dropouts more accurately. They stress the importance of the parents' role in addressing absenteeism. Mayer (2004) compares dropout rates of high school students of Mexican origin who live in cities with a population of 50% or more Hispanic people with those in cities with a population of less than 50% Hispanic. The data collected used the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) to gather information in regard to school staff and student enrollment. The study found a significant relationship between dropout rates of these students and the population of the community: more than 59% Hispanic at the .05 level of significance (the significance level could be an issue). In communities with more than 50% Hispanic populations, the dropout rate was lower (2.1% as compared to 6.5%).

Nesman, Barobs-Gahr, and Medrano (2001) used focus groups and interviews to collect information about why Latino middle and high school students drop out, what services they were receiving and what additional services they needed. It also used the school system database to look at demographic characteristics and school-related factors for this group. A comparison was made between students who remained in school and

those who dropped out, showing differences in absences, discipline referrals, suspensions and GPA. Findings from the database analysis showed that students who dropped out had two to three times the number of absences, referrals and suspensions than those who graduated. The focus groups and interview themes included motivation (both external and internal), language barriers, inflexible policies, negative peer association, responsibilities outside of school, lack of supportive teachers and school staff, and not knowing where to get help.

Rosenthal (1994) analyzed survey research conducted in 1992 in a suburban metropolitan New York City community. The community is predominantly white with an 18% black, 4% Asian and 4% Latino population. The study used self-administered questionnaires to question 305 tenth graders, most born outside the U.S. The theoretical base for the study was established by reviewing research available on social bonding theory and examined family, friends and ethnic group valuing of education. Likert-type scales were used for analyses. The study used a "proxy" variable of "school staying" rather than looking at dropout behavior. Data was analyzed by multiple regression. The study found that the family's valuing of education carried the greatest weight. That value system is often expressed through parent involvement in their children's education.

Correlation of Parent Involvement and Academic Success

As debates rage about how to raise test scores and lower dropout rates among students, one area of overwhelming universal agreement continues to surface: parent involvement is critical for academic success (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002, Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005, Catsambis, 1998, Clark, 1990, Epstein, 2002, Fields-Smith, 2004, Henderson & Berla, 1994, Hess & D'Amato, 1996, Mapp, 2003,). Parent involvement

and a child's success are strongly related (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, Miller-Johnson, 2000, Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000) and, according to the literature, the importance of parent's involvement in their child's education has never been in question and is widely supported by research (Sénéchal & LeFever, 2002, Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). And, conversely, a lack of family support for education has been associated with low academic achievement (Torres, 2004). Parents' attitudes toward education are passed down to their children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Parent involvement in schools is not only a critical ingredient for student academic success, it can also save money and time (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). The partnership between family and school is considered important enough that the U.S. Congress listed it in Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999).

One pervasive finding in the research is that parents' expectations have a strong correlation to student achievement (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). In fact, Henderson and Mapp (2002) synthesized an enormous body of qualitative and quantitative studies as to the positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. They found that, as a whole, the studies supported the idea of a convincing relationship between parent involvement and student benefit, including increased academic achievement. When schools, families and community groups work together in support of learning, grades and test scores are higher throughout a student's career (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002), the dropout rate is decreased and graduation rates are increased (Woods, 1995, Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000), language and literacy skills improve (Sénéchal & LaFevre, 2003), and student attitudes toward school are more positive and

the resulting behaviors are more positive (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In addition, schools benefit long term with higher teacher morale and more successful academic programs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

A summary of research on parent involvement, provided by Henderson and Berla, 1994, showed that when parents are involved, students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance and more completion of homework, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in post-secondary education. They also found that parent involvement provided more confidence in the school, higher teacher expectations of children, improved teacher moral, greater support for the school and better reputation for the school. The more intensely parents are involved, the greater the benefit in terms of increase student achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

Parent Involvement in Minority Groups

The connection between parent involvement and student achievement/success has also been substantiated in terms of Latino families (McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998, Tinajero, 1994, Lunenberg & Irby, 2002, Rolon, 2005, Torres, 2004). Research overwhelmingly demonstrates the connection between parent involvement and the academic achievement of ELLs with schools that have meaningful parent involvement reporting higher levels of student achievement, improved school attendance, higher graduation rates and higher numbers enrolling in higher education (Epstein, 2001, Henderson & Berla, 1994). An examination of 60 academically successful Latino university students found that family support was instrumental in their respective educational process (Duran, 2002, as cited in Torres, 2004).

However, a number of barriers to Latino parents' involvement exist (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Olivös, 2004, Quiroz, 2001, Quezada, Diaz, and Sanchez, 2003). Delgado-Gaitan (2004) found that schools often ignore the needs of second-language learners and their non-native speaking parents and do not always value the minority culture. This has also been substantiated in other studies (Gibson, 2002, Villenas, & Deyhle, 1999). The parents may have little practical knowledge about the school system and because of a language barrier, written communications may not be understood or confusing to the point that available services are not accessed (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield & Quiroz, 2001). Language barriers permeate the concerns (Hyslop, 2000; Gibson, 2002; Perez, & Pinzon, 1997). Because of a low socioeconomic status, work schedules often make it difficult for parents to work with children, review school lessons, or make trips to libraries, and museums (Goldenberg, 2004). Other barriers include limited formal education (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2001; López, 2001), too many responsibilities and lack of time (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Perez, & Pinzon, 1997; Goldenberg, 2004), negative experiences with schools, and a perception of unwelcoming school personnel (Hyslop, 2000; Jasis, P. & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2004/2005; López, 2001). In addition, parents may not have access to reading materials and school supplies (Goldenberg, 2004), may suffer from a lack of transportation and childcare (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2001). Latino parents may even feel intimidated by teachers (Hyslop, 2000).

Another obstacle may be in the cultural differences as to how Latino parents view their roles and the role of the school. They may see the role of the parent as nurturing and one of teaching morals, respect and good behavior while the role of the school is to

provide information and increase knowledge (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). In the Latino culture, teachers are highly respected; involvement by parents may be interpreted as interference and seen as rude and disrespectful. So, although teachers may believe that caring for a child's education is exhibited through asking questions about assignments and grades, the Latino parents may consider this a sign of disrespect (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2001).

Forms of Involvement

Parent participation can take many forms. One type of involvement includes school readiness activities, and ensuring the completion of homework (Goldenberg, 2004). Involvement can also mean attending school obligations or helping children improve schoolwork by providing encouragement and arranging for study time and space, by modeling positive behavior such as reading for pleasure, or by actively tutoring their children (López, 2001). Parents can also serve as advocates for the school or volunteer to help with school or classroom activities or they can take an active role in decision-making processes within the school or district (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Several studies indicate that a high level of formal education of the parent is not necessary for them to provide a "stimulating and enriching environment" for their children (Duran, 2002, as cited in Torres, 2004). It is simply the involvement itself.

The positive correlation between parents helping with homework and achievement is much smaller than the correlation between achievement and parents encouraging homework as well as providing the time and place for the child to do homework (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998). The greater the level of parent involvement in a sustained manner and in every area – advocacy, decision-making, fundraising,

volunteering, and paraprofessionals – the greater the possibilities created for student achievement (Williams & Chavkin, 1989, Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

There may, however, be a different perspective on what that involvement should be. Parents from diverse nationalities may hold different beliefs on what involvement in their child's education means (Hall, 2005). Those beliefs may differ between parent and teacher (Cotton and Wikelund, 1989, Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). For example, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2001) found that cross-cultural value conflicts lead Latino immigrant parents from Mexico and Central America to desire one kind of involvement while school personnel have strong preferences for another.

The perception of what it means to be involved can range from only being involved in social activities and seeing the teacher as the sole authority at one end of the spectrum to the other end where parent-driven school boards make all of the executive decisions.

López (2001) found that although parents of successful migrant students did not regularly attend school functions, they strongly perceived themselves as being highly involved in their children's education. These families saw the transmission of a work ethic as their way of helping their children succeed in school.

Epstein, and Sheldon (2002) stress that parental involvement policies and practices should provide for a number of types of involvement including communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Most school staff view parent involvement in narrow ways, overlooking the variety of ways that parents can and do support their children's education (Mapp, 2003). The type most often requested by teachers is in the area of homework and classroom assistance.

Educators assigning homework must take the family situation into consideration (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield & Quiroz, 2001). For example, suggesting that study space be set aside may be unrealistic for a large family in small quarters.

It is because of these possible differences that it is important to examine the beliefs held by parents (Fields-Smith, 2004) in terms of what they see as the role they believe they should play in their children's education at home and at school.

The bottom line is to make the involvement relevant so that it not only becomes possible but it becomes sustainable. When parents perceive the school as meeting their own needs, they will be more likely to cooperate and embrace values set forth by the school (Hess & D'Amato, 1996).

Parents will also be more likely to be involved when the schools have strong programs that encourage that involvement (Hess & D'Amato, 1996). Some of that encouragement may need to be in training programs for minority parents. Nesman, Barbos-Gahr, and Medrano (2001) recommend increasing Latino families knowledge about the school system and its resources as well as increasing accessibility to programs and services and providing a welcoming and validating environment.

If Latino parents can be encouraged to view their involvement as positive at every level, they will more likely to be open to the possibilities. Parents tend to become more involved when they believe their involvement is capable of influencing their children's success (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999).

Setting the Standard

In encouraging parents, it is also necessary to understand their perceptions of their involvement and of education in general since the family value of education has been

shown as the strongest independent factor for students to stay in school (Rosenthal, 1994, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001).

Parent expectations set the standard for the student. The research shows that again and again. Regardless of income, race, or ethnic background, families with high levels of expectations have the greatest effects on achievement (Catsambis, 1998). Thorkildsen and Stein (1998) found that, of all of the components of parent involvement, parent expectations have the strongest relationship with higher student achievement. "School staying" is positively associated with parents having high expectations for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988, as cited in Rosenthal, 1994). Torres (2004) also found significant need to create connections between students' home, school and community since these systems are the most relevant influences. Parents' aspirations for their children can predict achievement and students with high educational aspirations are not as likely to be dropouts.

Elementary School Involvement versus High School

Involvement must also be encouraged throughout the educational process from elementary through middle school and even through high school. Catsambis (1998) found that maintaining high levels of parent involvement from middle grades to the last year of high school "makes a difference."

But research has shown that family involvement in schooling diminishes as children move through middle and high school (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Parents tend to spend more time in children's classroom in the early grades and less so in middle and high school (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002). Although involvement tends to decrease, study habits, behavior and attitude cans be influenced by

parent interest and involvement up to the senior year. That involvement will only continue if conscious efforts are made to develop partnerships with parents (Epstein, 2002).

Through connecting with Latino parents, the involvement can not only be increased but also prolonged into upper grades (Epstein, 2002). And, if parents are intimidated by the school setting because of their inexperience, it is up to educators to initiate contact to enlist parental participation in the schools (Delgado Gaitan, 2004).

Partnerships for Greater Understanding and Achievement

As schools become more culturally diverse, teachers and administrators will need to focus even more on understanding the cultural views of their stakeholders. "A greater understanding will promote better communication and help create a positive learning relationship between school and home (Hall, 2005)."

Increased communication with parents can foster greater interest in the academic and governing systems of the school. Placing educational decisions at the local level, a consensus based on the demographics, needs and wants of that particular community, a consensus is more likely to be created and the potential for increased student achievement becomes greater. (Delgado Gaitan; 2004; Hall, 2005).

The school maintains the power to exclude parents (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield and Quiroz, (2001) found that parents were more likely to become involved if they are greeted warmly by school staff. Parent involvement is actually a function of how schools reach out to parents and the level of parents' participation is influenced by the degree to which they are invited to participate (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). When schools take the initiative to involve parents in the education

process, parent involvement increases (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). Parents also tend to be more involved when they believe their involvement can influence their child's success (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). They also state that low-income and minority parents need training in how they can be involved in their child's education.

Involvement increases as well when school staff consider parents' educational beliefs and values and provide for diverse cultures in their interactions with parents (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). Staff development must include the means for teachers to gain an understanding of the life circumstances of families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002).

Existing programs often take a "cultural deficit approach" to minority parents involvement and view parents as entities that "need to be fixed" so that the programs attempt to teach the parents interacting skills that are not valued by the home culture (Daniel-White, 2002). A deficit view regards student failure as a result of families that are inherently flawed (Valencia & Black, 2002). A prevalent assumption in that view holds that Mexican immigrant families don't value education and, therefore, that parents don't support their children's education. That is offered as the reasons for high Latino dropout rates and school failure. In contrast to the deficit views, research on parents of ELLs has shown that attitudes and values could be a primary source of support for parent involvement. Many of these parents place a high value on schools and are interested in being involved in their children's schools (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

There are, however, obstacles that may arise from the culture and background of the parents. Any training that takes place must include a respect for that existing culture, for example, looking at how the families survive and the types of knowledge and skills needed to function in these households (Daniel-White, 2002).

Teachers and parents must be partners in education (Gopaul-McNicol & Thomas-Presswood, 1998) because A relationship of trust and mutual respect between teachers and parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students will encourage parents to be involved in building literacy skills in their children (Gopaul-McNicol & Thomas-Presswood, 1998).

Conclusions

Parent involvement has been identified as a critical component of public education in the United States and it is imperative that Latino parents are involved (Delgado Gaitan, 2004) The critical nature of that involvement is beyond question with considerable evidence that parent involvement improves student achievement, increases school attendance and reduces dropout rates, (Delgado Gaitan, 2004, Epstein, 2001). Those positive aspects spell greater achievement and improved performances for schools in general so that all students, in the end, will benefit.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLGY

Research Approach

Given the research questions and the purpose of the study, the first choice in approach was obviously qualitative since it is research that focuses on the experiences and interpretations of individuals, seeking to describe how people view things and why. Where quantitative focuses on measuring and accounting facts and looking at relationships between variables, qualitative looks at the relationship between subjects, experiences, and issues. The answers for this study are more appropriately discovered within beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998) and it is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 1998). The approach, here, was to seek out the attitudes and experiences with Latino parents of school age children and conduct interviews.

Hess and D'Amato (1996) propose the need for additional study, i.e. Mexican-American children's expectations regarding their education, saying, "qualitative data regarding the reasons for their perceived success or failure would be invaluable." Latino parents want to support their children's school success and an understanding of cultural values and the parents' educational experiences can provide clues for how that motivation can be put into practice (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2001).

Characteristics of Research

An exploration into those factors surrounding levels of Latino parent involvement fits many of the characteristics of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). It

is naturalistic since it is be a study of the real world situation -- what did s/he experience as a student and how does s/he view involvement in the child's education. The setting was not be manipulated or controlled and would most likely take place in the home of the parent(s). The researcher was, with the help of an interpreter, the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and this involved fieldwork. The design strategy is emergent and not locked into rigid designs and purposeful sampling would be used as those interviewed were be selected from a participant group of Latino parents with school age children. The research used an inductive method that would build hypotheses and theories rather than testing existing theory and the topic was studied within its context so that a design emerged. The end result is a focus on wholes rather than parts within the final synthesis. The voice/style is informal and the final product is descriptive.

Research Style

Phenomenology best suited the purpose (Moustakas, 1994; Willig, 2001). The study begins with philosophical ideas that emphasize empathy, openness, and life as a mystery rather than a problem to be solved (Creswell, 1998). The study did focus not on the life of the individual but rather on the concept of perception of education as a value. The interviewer explored how the individual's educational experience may or may not have developed an educational value and how that plays into his/her role in the child's education. The study was designed to help increase an understanding as to how the educational experiences and views of the individuals interviewed contribute or form that value and then if there is a correlation to involvement. Since this was an interview process, the data collection involved multiple individuals (a total of nine with five singles and two couples) who are Latino and have experienced both the educational system

themselves and through having children in schools. An interview protocol was used and data was stored through transcription. Data analysis revolved around statements, meanings, meaning themes, and general description of the experience (Willig, 2001). In addition, the narrative form involves the description of the essence of the experience with the educational system. All of that falls under phenomenology quite easily.

This approach not only fits the topic but also fits the personal skills of this researcher. As a journalist, the commitment to qualitative methods is already evident and within each journalistic article, all of the interviews provide a final focus on the whole rather than the parts; in journalism as in phenomenology, experiences and behavior are integrated parts of a single whole. Interview techniques are a major strength and there is an existing belief that personal experiences are the very foundation of true understanding of any social phenomenon. And the personal interests of the researcher surround the increasing dropout rate of Latinos and a commitment to advocate for a more effective public education (Shank, 2002).

Test Area for the Study

The study was conducted in the Roaring Fork School District. This is a good test area because it has seen a growth in Latino populations and, like the state population, has seen an increase in the achievement gaps. In the Roaring Fork School District, Hispanic dropouts are registered 6.4 percent for Hispanics as compared with a 2.1 percent for white, non-Hispanic students.

The Roaring Fork Valley encompasses three separate counties: Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin. Based on 2000 census information, these counties show the following Latino

populations (as compared with 12.5 percent nationally): Eagle County, 23.2%; Garfield, 16.7%; and Pitkin County, 6.5%.

It is difficult to register actual growth in Latino populations in these counties since there is a lack of area statistics in 1990 – the Latino population, at that time, may not have been large enough to be counted separately in area census data. Another interesting aspect of the 2000 Census is that of the percentages of households where a language other than English was spoken in the home. Compared with a 17.9 percent recorded nationally, Eagle County shows 24.7 percent of its residents speaking a language other than English. Garfield County shows 15.5 percent and Pitkin County, 12.1 percent. In the particular school system (an elementary school and a middle school), Spanish speaking students make up 78% of the student body).

Sampling Strategy

The design involved purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) since this procedure is used to draw samples from the groups of Latino parents who are not traditionally involved in their children's education and who would presumably be representative of that specific population (Gliner & Morgan, 2000).

Recruitment

Recruitment of the Latino parents involved discussions with, first, the principals of an elementary school in and its corresponding middle school in the Roaring Fork School District. After they each became comfortable with the research in question and with the approach, they provided the names of and introductions to teachers who work with ELL students and who have regular contact with their parents and some knowledge of their home life.

The plan was to record the personal educational experiences and views of Latino parents, forming an understanding related to their view of the educational system and to examine what they saw as their involvement in their children's education. A list was provided after the ELL teachers (an Hispanic female in the elementary school and an Anglo male in the middle school). The teachers personally made the initial contact. That conversation explained the study and asking if the parents would be willing to participate in an interview session of approximately one hour and provide their opinions on the value of education and what involvement meant to them. For those who were willing, the contact information was provided to the researcher who, with the help of the interpreter, made a second contact to arrange the interview. The third contact was the interview itself. There was an additional interview with one of the couples and one of the singles since a problem arose with one of the questions (Question #12, see below). This question was reworked after three interviews and, for two of the later interviews, that question was rephrased. Of the earlier interviews in which subjects were asked the original question, one was unavailable and one declined a second interview because of work schedule.

The elementary school teacher provided four contacts. But, of those phone numbers provided, one was incorrect. Without realizing it was not the original contact person, the interview was set and the real identity was discovered only at the interview. The woman knew about the project from two of her friends who had already been interviewed and she was very willing to take part in the project. The person who was to be interviewed could not be reached because the correct number could not be located. The school still showed this as her number.

For one of these interviews, the husband opted to take part, giving us a total of five voices from the elementary school.

Three contact names were provided by the middle school teacher and, for one of those interviews, the husband also opted to join in, giving us a total of four voices (rather from the middle school.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with nine Latino parents conducted over a three-month period. Each session ran approximately 1 hour with a follow-up session of about 30 minutes with three of the parents to clarify portions of the previous interview and check for accuracy. A Spanish-fluent interpreter assisted all interviews. None of the subjects spoke English to a degree that a conversation could be held with the interviewer or that questions posed by the interviewer could be understood without translation. The researcher asked the question and the interpreter then posed it in Spanish. The subjects answered in Spanish and the interpreter provided the responses in English. Only four of the interviews were taped. One refused to be taped and, in another session, the tape player malfunctioned. Demographic information was gathered conversationally regarding where they went to school, how many children they had and in what grades they were. They were also asked how long they had been in the U.S.

The research was focused on the following questions:

1. What was school like for you? Did you like it?
2. What is your favorite memory about school?
3. What is your worst memory about school?
4. How far did you go through school?

5. What did you get out of school?
6. Did what you learned in school help you in your life as an adult?
7. How important is a high school diploma for success in life?
8. Are you involved in your children's education? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?
9. Do you see a need for your involvement?
10. Is that different in elementary school as compared to middle or high school?
11. Do you feel welcomed at your child's school? What makes you feel this way?
12. What would encourage you to be more involved in your child's education?
13. What would encourage you to be involved through higher grades?
14. What do you want to see from your child's education?

The same questions were asked of each parent, although #12 was varied as it became clear after the first three interviews that, even though involvement was sometimes registered in non-typical ways, they all felt involved. So that question became: what would encourage more Latino parents to be involved in the school? The interviews were used to gain a greater understanding about the parents' views and accomplished more than a survey alone because questions were posed in a more personal setting. The open-ended interview allowed participants to share their views about their own educational experiences and offered perspectives of parental involvement.

I also used a field log, providing a detailed account of my perceptions of the interviews as well as any observations. The field diary chronicled my thinking, feelings, and experiences that occurred through the research process. Within this process, I was able to have lengthy discussions with the female interpreter, who is also an ELL teacher

and a middle school Spanish teacher, an elementary female teacher who is a Mexican national and native Spanish speaker, and a female native Spanish speaker who previously taught ELL but currently works as a pre-collegiate director/counselor for the Roaring Fork School District. In addition, I spent time talking to a male ELL middle school teacher whose Spanish language is limited.

Data Analysis

The analysis begins with a full description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) and then finds statements in the interviews about the individual's experiences in the educational system. Interviews were analyzed through inductive analysis and main themes were identified. Analyses are both collaborative and interpretive since meaning was drawn from the subjects' personal lives, experiences, shared cultural values and customs.

Themes were identified in the transcriptions, field notes and reflections. Other remarks were included in the column of the notes (Willig, 2001). Relationships between variables, patterns, and distinct differences between subgroups became apparent. Throughout all of the interaction and the interviews, the two main themes of language barriers and the definition/interpretation of involvement surfaced repeatedly. As patterns and processes, commonalities and differences were isolated, initial generalizations were formed, covering the consistencies that evolved. From that, a narrative in story form has been created (Reissman, 1993), explaining the essence of the experiences and, again, forming generalizations that provide a larger picture. From the generalizations that developed, recommendations have been formed.

The experience of the researcher came to play a large part in the analysis because the sense created through that experience punctuated the thoughts and suggestions made by the subjects. Using the basis of qualitative analysis that requires looking at the relationship between subjects, experiences and issues, answers were, at first, hazy and then as the subjects' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors were taken into account, the picture became clearer. It began to show how, indeed, the educational experience of the parents formed their view of their own interaction with their children's schools and what they saw as their role in the educational process. But it also showed how the relationship is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 1998) and that there were other factors that needed to be considered in the analysis.

The first of these factors is the researcher's own limitations. Even though the language barrier was stated in the initial proposal as a limitation, it was unclear how much of a factor this would become for the researcher's ability to fully participate in the interviews and to create a relationship with the subjects. In seeking out the attitudes and experiences of Latino parents of school age children, too much was assumed in terms of being able to translate and analyze the information. Once a question was answered, the researcher could only take down the notes of that answer without being able to respond or to encourage additional discussion. A follow-up question could be posed but it still was not a dialogue so that answers became flat with only basic information being exchanged.

A second factor was the barrier of the researcher's own ethnocentric assumptions. Prime examples are time constraints and the concept of responsibility and of involvement. All of these families are low middle to low income and work long hours. They do not often have time that can be committed to learning English so they can more

fully participate and then have available time on a regular basis to be involved in their child's education.

The concept of whose responsibility it is to teach the child is formed through our own educational experiences. In an educational setting where corporal punishment is allowed, parents may have given up that responsibility to those running the school and trust that the work will be done as it should be without the parent's need to interfere. And, on the tail of that, wags the idea of what involvement truly is, particularly beyond what might be seen as interference. Involvement took a very different approach for these parents several of whom felt providing a work ethic was involvement enough. If any help was needed, several felt, it was to come in if the child got into trouble. That is involvement.

So, as the analysis commenced, those factors began to play a very important role in understanding the value of the experiences not only related by the subjects but the experiences of the researcher as well. It is within the researcher's experience that a true understanding of the problem took shape. The experience underscores the assertion by Villegas and Lucas (2007) that teachers need to know something about their students' family makeup and should be aware of the perceptions of the value of school knowledge and puts it in a different light.

As the interviews begin to unfold and the researcher begins to remove layers within, the story plays out in parallel fashion.

Trustworthiness

The primary strategy used in this project to ensure trustworthiness is the use of rich, thick, and detailed descriptions (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). This provides a solid

framework that can be used for comparison. I have provided a detailed account of the study's focus as well as the basis for selection of those interviewed. All data collection and analysis strategies are reported in detail so that a clear and accurate picture of the methods used becomes apparent. In addition, two other means ensure the trustworthiness of the project:

1. Peer examination – my committee advisor/methodologist, Jim Banning, from the CSU School of Education served as a peer examiner and all phases of this project will be subject to his scrutiny. We met several times to review both my methods and my findings.
2. Clarification of researcher bias – at the outset of the study, the researcher's bias is articulated in writing under the heading, "The Researcher's Role."
3. Member checking – follow-up interviews clarified any unclear areas and, in some cases clarified the information previously received.
4. I also interviewed and had casual conversations with teachers and administrators exploring what they experienced in terms of involvement of the Latino parents: obstacles, concerns, and frustrations. Through these contacts, I was able to see a broader landscape of the educational community and, to a degree, verify responses by the parents.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The analysis of data, specifically qualitative data, occurs in two ways. First, by coding, grouping and looking for themes, generalization becomes possible in terms of both similarities and differences. Standing back from the question, the researcher can then create an analysis that is more detached, less subjective, and valuable for assessing a problem/issue.

The second means is much more subjective, and uses the researchers personal experience, limitations, and prejudices and can create a more in-depth understanding of a complex problem. This form draws the researcher into the problem, not allowing for a detached analysis, and forces a more relative and rich experience that may lead to more relative and pertinent conclusions.

At the point in time where immigration has become such a hot political topic and an emotionally charged one, fears from the majority white have grown as the Hispanic population has continued to grow. Part of that fear is based on a perception (and probably a reality) that there is also a growing number of Hispanics who do not speak English and do not appear to be concerned with enculturation and assimilation. In the interviews I conducted, three of the subjects had been in the United States for over seven years, four between 11 and 15 years and two as long as 21 years. But none spoke English to a degree of being able to converse. Most spoke only a few words (a couple of them

spoke none at all) and two (both male) could speak a few phrases and understood a few phrases in return.

As the interviews progressed, I became more isolated and more frustrated and it is within this experience that the real analysis of the problem began to take form. So the story becomes mine and that's how it will be told. I will first present this analysis in narrative form and, then, end the chapter by presenting a more thematic structure.

Interviews

After several months of tracking down principals, meeting teachers, names for potential subjects finally begin to appear. The difficulty in getting agreement from the Latino parents stemmed from a desire to remain out of any limelight and/or work schedules that simply would not allow time for interviews. From the list I develop, my interpreter begins to make the calls. We were cautioned that a Spanish speaker should make the calls and set the interviews since English comprehension was very low within the group of subjects we were going to approach. An issue of trust might also be a factor I was told. My interpreter has been in the Roaring Fork and Aspen school districts for over 13 years. She is Mexican, fully bilingual, and has established relationships within both white and brown communities. She is very active in the Colorado Association of Bilingual Educators (CABE) and the National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE). She is also my daughter.

As a journalist, I am not used to having anyone intervene in interviews. I have been in biker bars, on construction sites, in laboratories, medical offices, and behind the scenes of musical events and have always operated as a solo act. This is the first difficulty I have to overcome. I am sharing my spot with someone else and it's

uncomfortable. Controlling an interview requires skill and the more variables added to the situation, the more out of control I feel.

Magdelana

On May 24, we head out to interview the first subject at 5:30 p.m. After driving around for 20 minutes, Shawn calls our subject to get more specific directions. We finally find the address and Magdelana and her daughter are standing in the parking lot in front of a large metal warehouse that has been converted into apartments. It is here that Magdelana and her family live. There are large equipment bays with garage doors on either side of the front of the building. It is surrounded by a parking lot. A few small trees have been inserted into the islands in the parking lot, apparently in an effort to make it look like a residential facility. But it is located in a commercial/industrial area surrounded by businesses such as Federal Express, a printing firm, and an equipment rental store.

The inside of Magdelana' apartment is dark, with only one visible window in the small living room and one in the rear of the apartment over a kitchen sink. The rooms we can see are spotlessly clean. Knickknacks cover every flat surface and are a mixture of figurines and homemade crafts. A wonderful aroma of chili drifts in from the kitchen where a large pot is gently boiling on the stove. She is visibly nervous, only glancing at me quickly and not meeting my eyes.

I pull out my recorder and say that we would like to tape the interview. She becomes even more nervous and seems almost at the point of tears. "No, no," she says.

I snap it off, hand it to Shawn and tell her to put it in her purse. "We don't need to tape," I tell her.

She visibly relaxes and motions us to sit on the couch. She sits in the chair across from us.

Magdelana went to school in Mexico up through the 8th grade. She has been in the U.S. for seven years and is currently 35 years old. She has four children: a son in high school, a son in 8th grade, a daughter in 2nd, and a daughter in 1st grade.

She liked school very much and her favorite memories revolve around reading, natural sciences, and playing with her friends. The worst memories are about the corporal punishment the students received from the teachers. The teachers would hit them with branches from the tree or hold them by the ear.

The most valuable thing she got out of school was "just to learn." She says that those lessons in school helped her in her life as an adult because she learned to read and write. "I still read. I read books that the kids bring home from school."

Having a high school diploma is very important for her children in her opinion. It's important so that, "for the future, they can better themselves and they can work and study well."

She is involved in the education of her two youngest children. As a participant in the Even Start program, she is required to go into each girl's class for one hour twice each week. She learned about the program when her daughter brought home a sheet that said offered English classes in exchange for enrollment in the Even Start program. She wants to learn English and feels this is the only way it can happen. She goes in at 10 a.m. to the classroom to work with her children. Since the teacher is bilingual, she feels comfortable in going. She believes her involvement will help her children succeed in the future. She isn't involved in the schools of her older children because, "when they are

older, they don't like it and when they are smaller, it's easier." She reaffirms that her son doesn't want her there and she would feel uncomfortable in upper classes.

Magdelana says she feels welcomed at meetings and parent nights but not in the classroom. She would be more encouraged to be involved if the teacher would have more patience.

The results she would like to see from her children's education is that they learn and that "they feel motivated to better themselves."

There is a side note to this discussion and it came after the formal interview in an exchange between Shawn, my daughter/interpreter, and the subject. Magdelana feels like American students have more of a priority in the schools than Mexican students. She feels that they (teachers/administrators) are more likely to listen to an Anglo than a Mexican. She talks about a note for a prearranged absence but said the principal didn't even read the note. Her 16-year-old boy wasn't enthused about school and didn't want to go anymore until he had the opportunity to go to Yampa. "They were very accusatory at the other school," she says. Her son was absent a lot. "At first, he was there all the time but then had absences so got the chance to go to Yampa. I feel like he got pushed out." He has a baby born February 3rd (2007) and the girlfriend is 15. The girlfriend "sent him to jail for five days and accused him of stealing. They are in court right now trying to get visitation. But the mother-in-law is saying it's not his baby. So he has to go to court to figure out who is the father."

We prepare to leave and they are still talking – small talk, I realize. I'm feeling uneasy because I want to be part of the exchange, to make a connection, and so I comment on a brown-skinned yet blonde Barbie doll that sits on a shelf next to the TV. It

is dressed in a strapless, floor length, crocheted ball gown made of maroon yarn. I ask if she crochets. Shawn translates. She shakes her head and responds, "No, no, mi hermana."

"May I?" I reach to touch the gown. I have crocheted many pieces in my life and am curious about the stitch. "Si," she nods assent.

"Qué bonita," I offer, referring to the work, not the overall piece. She lifts it up, revealing a roll of toilet paper that the doll and dress are designed to cover. It's a toilet paper holder! Uh, oh, I think and I see the look my daughter gives me. I know what's coming because this is a very traditional Hispanic woman who is skilled in social graces. She hands it to me. "Para usted."

"No, I can't, really."

"No, para usted," she insists.

Manners dictate that I accept it. It will assume a position on a bookcase somewhere in my home. It would be rude to dispose of it even though she would never know. My daughter rolls her eyes.

We have time to eat before our next interview so Shawn pulls into a small taco place. The parking lot is filled with work trucks. Inside, tables line the wall and a second row is positioned parallel to those tables. Just beyond that, there is a counter where orders are placed and picked up. The customers are all Hispanic males in varying ages, dressed in the clothing of hard-working, hard-sweating laborers. They are laughing and speaking in Spanish. A young Hispanic female stands behind the counter, pulling orders together. They all stop talking when we enter and stare at us. I am surprisingly unnerved. I've walked into seedy biker bars looking for a story, into run-down black neighborhoods

looking for people to register to vote, into religious gatherings looking for an argument, into druggy settings looking for informants, into a group jail cell looking for characters to write about, into dimly lit fight centers looking for a champ to interview and I've always felt like I belonged there, like I fit. But, here, I'm a chica blanca with no means for talking my way into or out of a situation. Shawn has marched up to the counter and is speaking Spanish to the woman. Shawn can fit. Her brown skin, dark hair, air of authority and, even more importantly, her command of the language, put her in place. They continue to watch me as I join her. She is giving orders -- absolutely no meat in any of hers, fish only, and no avocado anywhere on the plate. It can **not** even touch any part of her food, she emphasizes. She is allergic. I understand most of what she says but I can't join in. "What do you want?" Shawn asks. I order -- that much I can do without help. She asks me a question but I don't understand. "Soft or hard on the tacos," Shawn translates. "Soft," I say quietly. I go to a room off the side of the main room and sit down. It's darker and empty and I'm out of view.

"What are you doing?" Shawn asks? "Come out here." She takes the only empty table, positioned in the middle of the main room, and sits, completely unfazed by the attention we (I) have drawn. She jabbers to me in English as we wait, as we get our meal and as we eat. After, she walks to another room in the back where there are varying groceries with Spanish labels, a meat counter with signs in Spanish, and a display case with pan dulce. She orders some of the bread and picks up a couple of cans of chilis, converses with the checker, laughs, pays and walks back out to the front. They watch us (me) leave. In the car, she says, "You're very quiet."

"I feel stupid but I was really uncomfortable in there. They were all staring and I just felt odd being there. That's just not like me but I just felt so out of place."

"Oh, they always do that. They're so rude! You just have to ignore them."

Easy for her to say.

Rita and Julian

At 7 p.m. that same day, we are scheduled to interview a young couple: Rita and Julian. They live in Carbondale in a townhome in a lower middle income neighborhood. The streets are narrow, and the housing is crammed in, side by side. There are small yards to the front of each place and some are surrounded with fencing. Several cars are parked tightly at each residence. There aren't any garages or car ports. Kids are playing in the front yards, and in the street a group of teens is kicking a ball around. It's a very happy and a noisy setting. In a couple of different areas, two or three adults stand near the curb talking. In each case, they look at us as we drive through, looking for the address, but there is no acknowledgement other than the look.

Julian and Rita's place is very tidy and, for want of a better word, cute. The small 8 ' x 8' lawn is manicured, framed by a perfect white picket fence. Flowers have been planted around a 6-foot and growing Aspen tree and in pots near the house. A metal table with four chairs sits to the back of the small yard, creating a homey patio look. They both greet us at the door and invite us inside. The inside is very bright, very, very clean and cute. There are family photos on the walls. Many of them are of their daughters. A shitsu dog bounds to the door and jumps at us, yipping. The furniture is comfortable and coordinated. The couches and chairs are floral with large ruffles. The pictures on the wall are of their two daughters. Everything is designed around comfort and family.

They welcome us and agree to have the interview taped. Rita takes the tape player and sits it between them. Julian is able to speak some English but it is limited. He tries to insert some English into the answers but, for the most part, the exchange is in Spanish. He is 35 and she is 33 years old. They have been in the U.S. for eight years.

They both went to school in Mexico and both agree that they liked school and it was "good." Julian says this in English.

Julian's favorite memory about school involved the teachers. "They pushed me," he says. "Sometimes I'm lazy."

Rita replies, "The same. The teachers. They were very strict so that you learned and did your work." This is very important to both of them. Children must be pushed to work.

Rita's worst memory was when she had to be vaccinated. She didn't like the shots. For Julian, it was the corporal punishment. "I didn't like when they hit me with a stick. But," he adds, "it was good. I learned."

Rita completed high school and then attended a technical school where she learned computer skills, and what she terms "technical skills." Julian took accounting classes for 3 years. I express some confusion over the timing and ask if that was considered college. He explains that there is a primary school that is attended for six years, a middle school for three years and then a preparatory or high school for three years. He took accounting in preparatory school.

Julian says that those things he learned in school helped him in his adult life. "I learned to be prepared for the world. I studied a little more."

Rita adds that it was the same for her. "To have a different way of looking at other people in the world and, so, someone says if I can do this," she gestures around her, "then my children can do even better than this."

They both agree that a high school diploma is important for success in life. "It is very important because when you finish high school you have more success in getting a job," Rita says. "It helps you simply to relate to other people and have more self confidence."

"It helps you to feel more secure," Julian says.

"And you can get a better job if you finish high school," Rita adds.

Rita and Julian have two children, ages 8 and 10. They feel that they are very involved in their children's education. Rita says she feels very involved by helping her children with homework and "in seeing life in a more positive way."

She is enrolled in Even Start, a program that offers English as a Second Language (ESL) in exchange for spending time in the classroom. She goes for two days from 11 to 1:30 P.M. "I like to go. We are very involved. After school, involved we are also involved in reading with our girls in Spanish and English." They are also involved in their daughters' extracurricular activities. Both daughters dance in Ballet Folklorico and won prizes in Las Vegas, Julian says proudly.

I ask if they see a need for their involvement and Julian pauses for a moment after the translation and then responds: "Yes. To have more education, more knowledge, and to help the children. We like to be closer to them so we can see their behavior and their progress. If they get lazy or they are missing something we can talk to their teacher." (This teacher is bi-lingual.)

Will it be different as they get into junior high and high school? Julian expresses his concerns. "We are fearful of that. There's drinking and drugs. We've seen a lot of things we don't want them to be involved in. Even though they are 15 or 16, we will do it. We will be there to watch. I don't like the system. The kids smoke, they drink and we want the best for our kids. We don't want that."

Rita adds that they want their children to do the best that they can do.

They both feel very welcome at the school and Julian says, "They are very good teachers. We have a lot of friends in the school system."

But, again, they register concerns. "Sometimes I don't like something," Julian says. "It's good but, in Mexico, it's very different. When we were in 5th grade, we learned division and fractions and knew how to write by 5th grade. But here they progress slower and I don't like that."

Rita agrees. "I think it's very slow and I talked to a teacher and she said it's gradual. She says they get a lot of experience and they will finish okay but it seems slower. In Mexico, they know how to read really well by 1st grade and, in 2nd grade, they learn multiplication but here very slow."

Julian feels it's important to have more learning stressed at an earlier age. "When someone is young they don't have a lot of ideas so they are like a sponge when they are little and captivated. Have to learn before 10 years old. They have to learn lots of Spanish before the age of ten."

Second interview was conducted on August 22 because of the reworking of the question on what would encourage them to be involved. They already feel like they are

very involved because they are very concerned about the level of education their children are receiving.

Our second interview with Julian and Rita is very relaxed. They see my daughter's dog, Gonzo, in the car and encourage her to bring it into the yard with their Shitsu. Their dog, a female, is very curious about Gonzo and, after the sniffing rituals, tries to engage him in play. Gonzo, a wheatland terrier mix, isn't happy with the attention and begins to snarl. We have to separate them and Shawn tries to use it as a learning opportunity for Gonzo, forcing him on his side into a submission position while their dog sniffs and walks around him. Then the barking begins. They are very gracious and patient with both dogs.

After a while, the dogs are separated into individual corners of the yard. This starts off as any visit with old friends. And they are welcoming and friendly. Through the initial social amenities, I'm comfortable because the conversation is simple and I can follow most of it and can respond in monosyllables. Julian and Rita are the perfect parents as any family values group would have to agree.

But then we get down to work. The question as to how they could be encouraged to be more involved has been rephrased and they are now asked how other parents could be encouraged to be involved. Julian said that is hard to understand. "We tried to form a group with other parents here. Some of them think you just send your kids to the school and let the teachers do the job. It's as if they were animals."

Rita is more understanding. "I think it's because they come from other countries that they are more focused on working them on the education of their children. Many people have two jobs and don't have the time for their children or to go to school. And it

is easy to buy a Nintendo and television or sometimes just let them run in the street. The children can also be teenagers and get in to drinking and drugs."

Julian says he sees kids around the school at six or seven o'clock in the evening and they should be home. "They are not supervised by parents. The parents are at home but they don't think about the kids." He sees it is hard. He was in a league of parents in the neighborhood. They would invite parents to these meetings but not many would come.

Rita suggests, "It would make a difference if there were a pot luck or party at the school. Maybe more parents would come."

But Julian is still uncertain that would help. "We tried to talk to the parents." He says that he is disillusioned. "I am disappointed in my own race."

They previously lived in Basalt before moving to Carbondale. Rita says, "I noticed a difference between Basalt and Carbondale. In Basalt, they required more. They were very clear about what they needed the parents to provide and they were stricter."

(There is a side note here that needs to be added. I had also volunteered in Basalt Elementary School previously and know exactly why that is her impression. The teacher who had her children in Basalt is a Mexican national whose first language is Spanish. She would often tell the parents that they had to come to the class and had to attend conferences or she could kick their children out of school. Although it was not true and they most likely knew that, because she was part of the Latino community, respected, and spoke the language, her words were heeded. She prides herself on having 100% attendance at conferences and each family shows up for events.)

"There are more bilingual people in Basalt and also a bilingual counselor," Rita says. They can make it clear what is expected of the parents. It's just that you need to be clear what is needed and what is expected. Phone call works better if you want them to come (to conferences or to the classroom). You can send information but also call. Often, they are not at home when the school calls so do both."

Julian believes they need to be constantly reminded. "I think they should send home a calendar monthly that lets them know what will happen that month. Everything should be listed together on there including lunches."

Luisa and Juan

On June 13, at 6:30 p.m. we have another appointment at a house on Highway 82 in Carbondale where we will interview Luisa. We have trouble finding the address. This is another industrial area but there are a few houses and trailers scattered on either side of the road. The intermingling of the industry and residential give it almost a rural look and feel. We pull into the yard of an old house that is in the right area according to numbers on either side. Neighboring it, on one side, sits a trailer park with about a dozen trailers and, on the other side a newer building houses a UPS station.

It is a large yard, isolated from other buildings by a fence and large trees. The yard, itself, is really mowed weeds, with a good-sized gravel area that runs in front and to the side of the house. Back just slightly from the house sits a small barn with a corral and a horse. Used tires are scattered around a junker that doesn't appear to be in operating condition. It sits on a small parcel that is trying to force some grass upward into the light. Old pieces of unidentifiable equipment lie about the yard and the paint on the house is

peeling. The porch is missing a couple of boards and the steps are questionable. The overall look is shabby and unkempt.

"This can't be it," Shawn says. "This is a redneck's house."

"It has to be. It's the only option based on the numbers," I say, consulting the list.

As we get out of the car, a chicken and three of its babies scoot across the yard in front of us and a big lab lops up the drive to meet us, tail wagging. A tall, thin, Mexican woman answers the door. Her long dark hair is braided behind her and I notice her hands. She has long, delicate fingers but the skin looks rough and dry as if they spend many hours in water. She welcomes us hesitantly, acknowledging to Shawn that she is the person with whom we've made the appointment. She motions us to come in to the living room and says something about "mi esposo."

She calls to the other room and a tall, slender Mexican man appears. Juan introduces himself, shaking our hands, and tells Shawn in Spanish that he will join us. He seems comfortable but Luisa appears reluctant.

The living room is a long rectangular room. Its furnishings are sparse with one couch and two chairs and a small TV near the front door. The age of the house is apparent in the flooring but the interior is tidy although not overly clean. A bookcase along one wall holds a collection of Native American figurines and artifacts, a variety of God's eyes and ceramic animals. We admire the collection and Juan proudly takes us on a tour of his pieces, telling us what they represent and the origin. Walls are decorated with religious symbols including a couple of Christ on the cross and pictures of Catholic saints.

A large fish tank, probably 50 or 60 gallons, is placed at an adjacent wall. As I admire the colorful fish, Shawn points to a large birdcage to the side of the tank and hanging from the ceiling. Four birds hop about and twitter lightly.

She motions for us to sit in the chairs and they take their place on the couch across form us. The couch is old and worn and is covered with a serape used as a throw. Next to the couch, I notice a small box. I look inside and see movement. A Chihuahua and her pups are nestling in a colorful blanket. "They were just born today," he says in Spanish.

"He likes animals," his wife says.

Luisa is 36 and Juan is 37 years old. They have four children, a boy, 14, in 9th grade, a boy, 11, in 7th grade, a girl, 7, in 2nd grade, and a girl, 3 years old, who will go to preschool in the fall.

They've been in the U.S. for 13 years. He speaks some English although it is very limited. She doesn't appear to speak or understand any English.

Both went to school in Mexico and while she only says "It was good," Juan volunteers that "It was really good. I did well in middle school and liked it a lot. I liked English but they didn't teach me much. "There were many students that didn't pay attention to English. They didn't think they would come here and didn't think they would ever need it."

"There were very good teachers," Luisa offers.

Juan's favorite memory of school is learning about math. Luisa says, "I liked it from the beginning."

Juan says, "It was far away to go to school and I had to travel to another town." He struggled in earlier grades but, about 4th grade, he says, "The teachers were very interesting and would explain things very well. They explained things better."

Traveling to another town to go to school was commonplace, he says. "This happened a lot. Many of my friends couldn't go to high school because there weren't enough schools."

His family lived near Puerta Vallarto in San Quande Devato. Nuneen is the state. "They've got a school there and a university. It would be like going to Glenwood from Carbondale," he explains. "People from the ranches would have to travel to go there because they didn't have schools past 6th grade." Juan finished 9th grade. "There are 13 in my family," he says. "I wanted to keep studying but we were very poor so we couldn't afford it." He and his brother finished 9th grade. The other children finished elementary school. Juan is the seventh child.

Although he didn't like school from kindergarten to 3rd grade, he began to get good grades in 4th. "I got a 10 which is an A in 4th grade and in 5th and 6th, I got all 10s."

Luisa finished her sixth year because, she says, "There were 12 children in the family so only two younger sisters got to go. They both went to Arizona."

Juan's worst memory about school revolves around the corporal punishment that was dished out. "I never did homework and they would hit you every day. On the hands with a branch or a ruler if you didn't have your homework and I didn't ever have mine."

It got particularly bad at one point, he says, and some students took the matter into their own hands. "If they hit a younger kid, the older kids would show up to hit the

teacher. They would say, 'hit me instead. I'm your size.' So, from that time, they didn't hit us."

Luisa says, "The same thing for me. But I turned in my homework. If one student would get in trouble we would all be punished."

Or, adds Juan, if someone did something against the rules, "if no one would say anything, they would punish them all."

Another memory Juan has is when vaccinations were being given by the school. He went out the window. He didn't' want the mark like the Anglos. He could get through the railing so he always ran out.

About this time, their 14-year-old teenage son, Caesar, joins us. His head is close shaved and he is wearing the requisite baggy jeans and a wife-beater t-shirt. He smiles and says, "hi," in English. He sits on the arm of the couch. Juan looks at him and moves forward, allowing him to slide sideways onto the couch behind his father so that he is laying on his side, resting his head on his hand and his face appears between his parents.

Juan and Luisa were asked, "What did you get out of school?" Juan responded, "There are many benefits. Now that I am married, I see that."

Did what you learned in school help you in your life as an adult? Juan says, "Geography and math help me. I use them in my work. School is very necessary in Mexico." Luisa says, "Math and reading."

Both agree that a high school diploma is important for success in life. "If you don't have a diploma, the level of job you can get is difficult. It makes a difference in the job you can get. It's the first thing people ask for in Mexico," Juan says.

Luisa adds, "For this reason, my sisters will study to get that. For this reason I am taking classes, learning English to get a GED. With out the benefits of school, the job you get will be of a lower status. If you don't have a diploma, you can't even get a job as a secretary or bank teller. Without a diploma, the optimum job would be a housekeeper's job."

"It's necessary for our kids to have a better future so they are not in those jobs. I would like them to not have that hard of a life like construction. I want them to be a teacher, an engineer, a doctor, or an architect. I want them to make money."

They both believe they are involved in their children's education. "Yes, she goes to a class of the girls," Juan says. (Luisa has just signed up for the Even Start program, which requires that she spend some time in the children's classroom.) "And we help them with homework," he says.

"Do you see a need for your involvement?" Shawn translates. "It's very necessary," Juan says.

"When I go to school, my girls pay more attention," Luisa adds.

There is a difference in being involved in elementary school as compared to middle or high school, they both confirm. Juan indicates Caesar behind him. "It's different for him."

"I participate more with the younger kids," Luisa says. Juan says it's equal for him.

"Do you feel welcomed at the school?"

"Yes," she says. "They are very good teachers."

Juan adds, "But, he is a fighter." He pokes Caesar in the stomach and Caesar smiles. "Many times, he got in trouble with the belt. But I don't need to hit them. I will go to the school if he gets in trouble."

Caesar jumps in and says in English, "Sometimes you don't need to be there but sometimes I need them to be there."

Juan says, "They are very welcoming and open at the school. They don't ignore anyone. If Caesar has a problem, they call me and I leave work and deal with it."

Luisa says. "The same thing for me. They treat people well. They invite parents in to see what it is like."

What would encourage other parents to be more involved in their child's education? "It is important that they pay attention to everyone and not brush them aside and they feel equally welcome," Juan says. "Receive them with a smile and be warm."

Luisa feels the effort could be stronger. "They can obligate them and require them to come because many parents don't come."

"The fathers don't come," Juan says. "Some parents that don't even show up for meetings. If you say something like, 'if you don't come to this meeting, your child can't come the next day' they would come."

"They need to put more pressure on the parents," Luisa says.

"Yes, put more pressure on them," Juan agrees.

Luisa was encouraged to go to her classroom by Even Start because the family will receive a scholarship for her child's preschool. "But the requirement is the mother has to come to the child's class so they can get the scholarship. But out of the five parents receiving the scholarship, I am the only one showing up. I just went to the meeting. They

are supposed to cut off the scholarship if the mother doesn't participate but they don't always do that."

They both restate how they agree with putting pressure on the parents. "When they first signed up for the scholarship, they signed up to help in class as well," Luisa said. "They said I could help them learn colors. Many kids don't participate in preschool." In exchange for the scholarship, she is required to spend time on two days in each girl's class. She breaks it up over four days, with visiting one girl's class on two days and the other girl's class on the other two days.

What do you want to see from your child's education? Juan answers, "That they finish a degree and, after that, they get a profession. Something that helps them be professional and they get directly into a profession."

Claudine

On June 14, at 5:30 p.m., we have another appointment. This one is in Catholic Charities Housing. Most of the population in the complex appears to be Hispanic. Neither garages nor carports are provided and vehicles are parked in lots that run on outer sides of the complex. The layout is a standard one for Catholic Charities complexes. One row of five units faces another row of five with lawn and walkway separating them. Lawn runs on the sides of each building and then another building houses an additional five units. The five units are connected and are back to back with another set of apartments. The units all appear to be two story with bedrooms upstairs.

Claudine is standing outside of her apartment with two young girls, apparently her daughters. She welcomes us warmly and the two girls run off to join a group of kids playing on the lawn. Inside, the apartment is very cozy, decorated on every surface with

ceramic knick-knacks. They are everywhere. Some are traditional religious artifacts. There are only two plants visible in the living area. The living room leads into a kitchen/dining area at the rear. To the left as you enter the unit, a staircase leads to the second floor. There are animal print throws on a leather couch and chair. Animal prints decorate the walls. The unit is very clean, meticulously so, and there is no sign of dust anywhere. It has a bright and cheerful feelings accomplished not just by the amount of light in the room but also the color scheme that is used. The smell of green chili permeates the house. It smells wonderful and adds to the very homey atmosphere. Claudine is neatly dressed in a blouse and slacks. Her hair is combed into a bun at the nape of her neck. Her nails are beautifully manicured. Home appears to be very important.

The girls run inside and stop for a moment to converse with their mother. The girls are beautifully dressed in colorful, carefully ironed dresses. Their ears are pierced and they are wearing tiny necklaces and bracelets. Their hair is perfectly combed and curled. One is twelve and in 6th grade and the other one turned 4 in July, 2007.

Can they go to the neighbor's house? the oldest one asks in Spanish. "Is their homework done," Claudine asks. "The girls have a computer and it helps them get their work done quicker.

Claudine is 34 years old and has been in the U.S. for 11 years. She went to school in Mexico. She liked school. "It was good," she says. She attended school for three years after middle school (12 years total) and left because she got married at age 16.

She doesn't have a particular favorite memory about school. "I liked everything but the best thing was my friends."

She doesn't have any bad memories about school. "Everything went well with friends and teachers so there are no bad memories."

Claudine studied to be a secretary. "I wanted to be a bilingual secretary so I took English classes but I don't feel like I can speak well." (She does not use any English in this interview.)

She was born in El Paso, Texas, and feels terrible that her family didn't learn English. She feels badly she didn't learn English. She wanted to keep studying but couldn't when she got married. Her family did return to Mexico (Juarez) before she started school and she only attended school in Juarez.

"I didn't live here until I was an adult but I was born in El Paso. I was going to go back to El Paso because my dad and brothers were working in El Paso but I didn't because I got married."

School was important because, she says, "I learned how to share ideas, communicate with teachers and with other people."

She doesn't have any sense of how else school may have helped her as an adult but she does say that a high school diploma is important for success in life. "It's very valuable. My dad always wanted me to graduate."

Claudine says she is involved in her children's education. "Sí. When they have projects at school or meetings at school, I always go and I see what they are doing. It's hard because I have a younger child but I try to go quite a bit." Before her younger daughter was born, she would go a lot. She would go to watch in the classroom and she would go to the parent conferences.

She does see a need for involvement. "Yes, very much. My daughter really likes it when I am involved."

Involvement is different from elementary school to middle and high school, she says. "Yes, I think it is less. I don't know why. They (the kids) don't want that part when they get older because they want to be by themselves."

She feels very welcome at the school. "Before, at my daughter's conference, they made me feel it is okay to be there and to share/communicate. Right now she has a teacher that only speaks English but in the past, they have been bilingual and that has really helped."

What would encourage her to be more involved in her child's education? "If there were more bilingual teachers and people to help communicate, it would encourage me more. And it would encourage other people, too."

The same is true for encouraging her and other parents to continue to be involved in upper grades. "Bilingual teachers," she says. "If a parent has a question, they could talk to the teacher and they could answer."

She wants to see her children finish school successfully. "I want them to do well in school, to do well with friends and to do well with teachers."

Her daughter likes school, she tells us. "She loves to read, loves school, and immediately does her work first when she comes home after school. She always does her homework first."

Claudine's sister has two boys who do their homework later at night and sometimes they call her daughter for help.

When she needs help communicating with the school, she needs to find someone who speaks English to translate. Her sister-in-law speaks English so she and her husband set that up early on, she says. The school can call the sister-in-law and she can call them.

Her daughter is a very good student and has always been. "She wants to go to college. My husband didn't have a lot of time in school so there are things that are missing."

A second interview was held on August 22, at 5:30 p.m. to revisit the question, "What would encourage other parents to be involved?"

"So many parents think, 'well, if I don't understand English, then I shouldn't go.' Schools could encourage them by translating everything. Always have a translator there," Claudine says.

Should parents be called or is it okay to send home materials? Since she goes to school if she has a question, she says printed material is okay for her (but they need to be in Spanish since she doesn't read English.) "But so many parents don't read them. They should have meetings at school in both English and Spanish."

What kind of meetings would draw parents? "A pot luck to share with everyone. A dinner with information. "

Angelita

On June 14, 7:30 p.m., we went to interview Angelita. She also lives in Catholic Charities Housing and, in fact, knows Claudine.

Angelita had a stroke recently and walks with a cane but is recovering. She had the stroke on Mother's Day, when they were visiting in Mexico. She talks about her stroke.

She was five months pregnant and the baby (a boy) died in the womb. Her daughter is listening and, in Spanish, adds, "All the sadness from the baby dieing went from her heart to her head when we went to Mexico. All the sadness went to her head and that's why she had the stroke. She took all the physical therapy. It was a pure miracle. She had a clot in her heart."

Angelita adds that it's therapy for her to go to school. The doctor said it's good to get out and go to school and not be home alone so she sometimes goes to her daughter's classroom.

She is 37 and has been in the U.S. for fifteen years. Her daughter will turn twelve on October 18th and is in 6th grade. She is a friend with Claudine's daughter. They play together. Her boy will be seven on October 25th and is going into first grade.

Angelita talks about what a beautiful home Claudine has. She lives in the same complex but on the other side. Angelita' home is also very clean. She, unlike Claudine, doesn't have a lot of knickknacks or things on the wall but it is very comfortable and not over done. Again, she praises Claudine for her wonderful home: "Qué bonita."

She also tells us that she knows about the taping incident with Magdelana. She is also her friend and knew that she was upset until we turned off the tape recorder. We may, however, tape her. She does not upset easily now, she says.

Angelita has been in the U.S. since 1992. She went to school in Mexico and liked it "very much."

Her favorite memory about school is that she was very mischievous. "I was a cheater," she says. She liked the teachers. "In social studies, there were very good

teachers. They explained the homework very well. They were very good at explaining, so I got through it."

But how was she a cheater? "It's not a lie," she laughs. "I was a very good student from 1st to 7th grade. In 4th grade, I cheated. Let me explain. I would do homework for her friends that were dumber and I charged money for it. My mom found out and scolded me. They can't get ahead. She said, 'You learn from it and they learn nothing. So go ahead. Let them be dumb.'"

Her younger daughter now does well in school and her friends call her on the phone and as for help. "I said I charged money for that but she doesn't so that is something I remember."

Her worst memory about school is from second grade when a teacher hit her with a belt. "I'll never forget that. In recess, there was a fight with girls and boys and the teacher brought her in and hit her with a belt. He believed it was her fault. Because of this, the teacher was suspended many, many years ago. Her parents went to the school and it was a problem. They talked to his superiors and other parents complained. He wasn't a good teacher and he didn't have a very good disposition and he didn't like kids. I have many memories both beautiful and ugly."

Angelita finished seventh grade. She says, "I learned how to read and write. Those are the benefits when someone goes to school." That is what has helped her as an adult.

Even though she doesn't have one, she says a high school diploma is important for success in life. "It's about money. It's worth the pain. It's worth a lot. If I value my goals and my teacher, what I want to do as an adult when I'm big. Yes, it can help you

reach your goals. It is very important to me to have a school where my daughter can graduate. How far you go depends on what goal you want to reach. It's very valuable to have school but the level depends on the goals that someone has. If you're going to work at City Market or cleaning houses, it's a waste of time. Why would you study a long time if that's all you are going to do. Economically, my daughter is a very good student so I encourage her but with my parents and me, it wasn't economically feasible to follow my illusion but for my daughter it is. If you are going to study well, you should not waste your education and should not be cleaning houses. There are very good teachers here. Good people, good teachers, and they are very patient with children."

Angelita believes that, yes, she is involved in her children's education. "Yes, my children should behave at school, in a store, all the time. I teach them good behavior so that is how I help them in education."

She says there is good reason to be involved but adds, "It depends on the child. Maybe it would be good to help teachers with the children but also just to know what the teacher says about the child if you give them support. The largest responsibility for the children's behavior is the parents."

She says there is a different need for parent involvement from elementary to high school. "When they are older, it's very different. They pick up bad habits like smoking and social issues so little kids will see that parents need to pay more attention as they are entering middle school and high school. My daughter saw two kids kissing so they have to be watched. And the difference between the teachers is that the kids are not going to obey when they are older and you can't demand that they do things. It takes different ways of talking to older children," she says. She knows this from other mothers who

have teenagers who are not obeying their teachers. "I think you should meet with the teachers and have the child at the meeting. For me that works."

Angelita feels very welcome at the school. "I have a lot of confidence in the teachers. They are very loving here and very caring."

She has several suggestions for encouraging Latino parents to be more involved in their child's education. "You could have classes where parents and students attend together. The student is more motivated because the parent is there. A literacy night once a month, that is a good idea to get parents more involved. What I like here is that they have a lot of family activities. They had an art night and taught them weaving but my daughter didn't like the teacher. She thought she was dumb. She was in basketball and she loved it. The teachers were involved in organizing the program through the library every Wednesday so the kids are reading more and not setting in front of the T.V. That should be for parents and kids both. The teachers here have very creative ideas."

What does she want to see as a result of her children's education? "That they achieve their goals. That they arrive at a good future. My daughter wants to be a teacher or a state patrol or the head of a bunch of banks. I said 'I want you to be a dentist' and she said, 'that's gross.' I wanted her to be a pediatrician but that was my illusion, my dream. I wanted to be a flight attendant or a doctor. I try to give her big dreams so here she must be bilingual. To have the skill of being bilingual, there is more they can do because they will have two languages rather than be in Mexico."

Angelita is taking an ESL class. "This is my first time studying English. The English I know is the English I have heard on TV. I worked for 4 years for a beauty salon in Aspen and they were all English speakers and they helped me. I understand a lot

but I don't speak. That is my goal to be able to communicate well with my children when they are big."

I am becoming more hesitant to try and be part of the conversation. The few attempts I have made in Spanish have been graciously tolerated but only prove to show my ignorance and inability with the language. I can pick up some of the answers and understand a portion of the conversation but it's not enough to make me feel any less than isolated. I find that I am withdrawing more and more, acting as a secretary and taking down notes as they are interpreted to me. I don't believe I show it on the outside and may even come across as arrogant or disinterested. I'm trying very hard not to let my insecurities show but I know that I am not in control of the interviews and that I am really not contributing in a meaningful way. A deadly place to be for any journalist.

Celeste

On July 28, at 4 p.m., we interview Celeste in an older house near the outskirts of town. The yard is very small and both house and yard are unremarkable. The interior of the house is very cluttered inside. The furniture is well used, worn, and is covered with blankets of varying patterns and conditions. The blankets are also worn with visible tears. A large Jesus is very prominently displayed on a bookcase. There is a dinginess to the interior but it appears to be fairly clean although it is cluttered with kids toys and videos. A Dora table and two chairs sit in front of a large TV set. Two children, who seem about the same age, are running around, uncontrolled. The boy puts on a video and blasts it. She turns it off and he starts to cry. He begins to calm down and she puts on a video of Sponge Bob Squarepants. It is in English. Shawn asks if the child speaks English, Celeste says, "No, but he speaks only Spanish and he likes the pictures."

She motions us to the couch and there is a faint smell of urine. Celeste's eyes are rimmed with very dark circles and she looks worn out. She doesn't smile throughout the entire interview.

She is not the boy's mother, she says. She is his grandmother and has taken him in. He is six, about the same age as her youngest daughter. He begins to cry and even slaps at her. He doesn't want her to say that he is her grandson. He wants to be her son. Celeste has four children. The oldest is a girl, 21. She is the mother of the six-year-old that Celeste is now raising. She also has a son who is 16 and a sophomore, a girl, 13, in the 8th grade and then her youngest girl is five and in kindergarten.

Celeste is 45 and has been in the U.S. for 11 years. She went to school in Chappos, Mexico, and, she says, she liked it a lot. There isn't a particularly favorite memory because, she says, "I liked history, natural sciences, and math. "I liked almost everything."

Her worst memory is getting hit on the hands with an eraser. "They were very strict," she says.

Although she describes herself as very studious, she was only able to go through the sixth grade. "There was no more school after that. It was a very small country school."

She did learn how to read and how to multiply, she says, and those were the biggest benefits.

What she learned has helped her as an adult, Celeste adds. "For example, if I want to buy something, I know how much do I have to spend and I can add it up. I know

how to figure out the bill. With the little that I know I can also help my children (the younger ones), I can help them learn to write the letters and to read."

She says it is very important to have a high school diploma. "It is very important so you can become what you want and if you want to continue or choose another area, you can keep studying."

Her 16-year-old son is going into his second year of high school (a sophomore). "He's very studious. It's important for him to have a diploma to get a good job."

She is involved in their education, she says, because she goes to meetings at school and participates in the events at night. She was in Headstart before and was a volunteer in the classroom. "I would go in and help with the Headstart preschool with kids from 2 to 4 years old."

But, she adds, that she doesn't see the need for her involvement. "Because I'm taking care of two kids (her five-year-old girl and her daughter's six-year-old boy) but I help them at home in the house with their work."

She thinks that kids learn more when they are young. "They feel more confident and content (happier) as opposed to the changes and less confidence/contentment of older kids. The more advanced grades I can't help them because I didn't study a lot. There's no difference as far as motivating them and supporting them at every level," she says.

She feels welcomed at the schools. "They do a lot because they bring a translator if we don't understand a lot of English. If we can't come to the meetings, they will try to change the time or the day. If a child doesn't arrive, they call the dad (both at elementary and high school level)."

She is not sure anything can be done to encourage more Latino parent involvement. "They have already done a lot. There are parents who work a lot. They don't have time or they don't want to put it as a high priority. It's not a problem of the school but the parents who are not attending to the kids."

She does suggest, however, that a phone call may help. "Talk to the parents more and if they don't come to the meetings (conferences), then call them on the phone."

The main thing she wants for her children in terms of education is that they like school. "Then they will continue studying until they want to end. I want them to study as much as they want."

Edna

After we leave Celeste, we drive to our final interview with Edna. I am relieved that this is the last interview. It seems to have been a long process and it is definitely a trying one – not because of the topic or the subjects but because of my lack of skills. Now my biggest concern is if I truly have anything that will fill a gap in the literature. Do I have something of substance? But that's another day's anxieties.

Edna's house is run down but the inside is very clean. The rooms are sparsely furnished with only the very basics: couch, two chairs, one lamp. The furniture is very worn and there is a slipcover on the couch. A low-income lifestyle is very evident. A Chihuahua is chained to the fireplace. There are a couple of religious artifacts on a bookcase but there are not pictures on the wall. A very warm, enticing smell comes from the kitchen and there is laughing from another room and the sounds of kids playing. . Her son, Benjamin, comes in and greets Shawn. She knows him from Basalt Elementary where she previously taught.

Edna is 37 and has been in the U.S. since 1987. She went to school in Mexico where she completed nine years, total: six years elementary and three years in secondary. She has five children and three live with her. There is a 20-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl living in Mexico. Living with her here are 13-year-old boy (Benjamin) who is entering 8th grade in the fall and a 9-year-old girl who is entering 5th grade. She also has a 15-month-old boy.

Edna liked school very much and her fondest memory is about designing clothing and the class she took in fashion design in her second year of secondary (high school).

Her worst memory is about math. "I didn't like it. My teacher would bring me up to the blackboard to do the problems and I didn't like it."

Edna realized many benefits from school, she says. "They taught me how to read and to write. The majority of my family doesn't know how to write so that was so important." She didn't finish because her family couldn't afford for her to go to school.

What she did learn helped her in her adult life. "It helps me, yes. I can read. I don't know a lot about math but I like to read a lot."

Although she has managed without one, she still believes a high school diploma is important for success in life. "I don't have a reason to study right now but it's important to have your diploma for any job at all. They ask if you have a diploma so you need it to get a good job. In Mexico, you have to finish high school but now they have you finish preparatory school after high school."

Edna says that her involvement is minimal. "I don't help a lot but we try to be there. I help with activities or at home with homework."

She does, however, see a need for her involvement. "Very much. I think that being involved with their homework motivates them and they will continue."

She believes involvement is important regardless of the grade level. "There is no difference. Helping them, that need is the same."

Edna feels welcome in the school, saying that "They are very friendly. They always ask if I need anything and there's always someone to help for those that don't understand English."

As far as the school encouraging more involvement from Latinos, Edna says, "I think it is a fault of missing communication. It's better to contact them by phone. Many times they send a paper and it's not the same as a phone call. A phone call is much better and it's faster."

What do she want to see from her child's education? "We want them to be able to study as long as they can. The university or college is very expensive but we want them to study as long as possible."

Thematic Structure and Context

Our interviews are at an end and my job now is to find some worth in what I have. My sense is that something is lurking under the surface. The themes appear very much the same in each interview and the responses are very similar with the role of language and the definition of involvement becoming the major focus in each discussion. But there is something else that just pure analysis of the interviews does not quite reach.

Language Barriers

There is an isolation that can result when language barriers are not addressed. That isolation can create a cyclical effect whereby the sense of isolation discourages

further involvement and the withdrawal from involvement increases the sense of isolation. A retreat into a familiar community where language and cultural values are shared becomes natural. In every case for this study, the subjects lived within a homogenous community where Spanish is the dominate language and there is a shared sense of culture. All of the parents are able to function well in daily life: working, shopping, accessing transportation, finding entertainment, and creating family lives. They rely on that community and on a small group of people who can communicate in English for them. While this happens easily in stores, at work, in church, this does not always happen in the school system. From both parent and educator reports, those teachers and administrators who have the greatest success with involving Latino parents were, first, fluent in Spanish and, second, were part of the Latino community. I was neither. And it is at this point that a true understanding of what is needed comes into a clearer perspective.

Nature of Involvement

As I soon discovered, all of the parents felt they were "involved" in some form in their children's education. But just what that involvement meant varied within the subjects and greatly deviated from a traditional Anglo view of what that entails. I had assumed that the subjects were not involved in any way and that was actually what I had tried to convey to those teachers and administrators in terms of who I wanted to interview. I had also assumed that, given the income levels of this working class group, they would provide similar reasons why they were not involved: work schedules and not enough time nor a need to be involved. First, a few of the interviewees were in an Even Start program that provides free preschool and an English class in exchange for a couple

of volunteer hours each week in the child's preschool. So these parents did have some involvement even if only for one semester. And even among those who did not go into the classroom, there was a sense that they did participate in their children's education. Not one parent said that s/he was not involved nor did they offer reasons why they couldn't be. So the original research questions on involvement became pointless and, if posed, insulting. The questions had to be reworked and generalized to the rest of the Latino population and I had to seriously rethink my own cultural prejudice toward what involvement truly means and take on a new view from different eyes.

It is here that Chapter Five begins.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

As an aid to the reader, this final chapter restates the research problem and reviews the major methods used in the study. The majority of this chapter summarizes the results and discusses their implications.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the year 2000, Hispanics or Latinos had the highest dropout rate at 21.1 percent of students16 – 19 years of age. This rate ranks three times greater than the non-Hispanic Anglo population rate of 6.9 percent nationally. Based on the projections of continued growth, it is obvious that the Latino population will become increasingly important to the economic and social well-being of the U.S. (Mayer, 2004). As the fastest growing minority population in the U.S., it is critical that policy makers, educators and researchers pay attention to the dropout rate of the Hispanic population since this can impact not only the individual but society as a whole (Mayer, 2004).

Based on research supporting the idea that parent involvement influences student achievement to a high degree, this research project focused on how Latino parents viewed involvement in the school system. The study was designed to elicit responses from Latino parents in terms of their views on education, on parent involvement, and to explore the means for increasing that involvement.

An exploration into those factors surrounding levels of Latino parent involvement fits many of the characteristics of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, Patton, 2002). It

is naturalistic since it is a study of the real world situation -- what did s/he experience as a student and how does s/he view involvement in the child's education. The setting was not manipulated or controlled and would most likely take place in the home of the parent(s). The researcher was, with the help of an interpreter, the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and this involved fieldwork. The design strategy is emergent and not locked into rigid designs. Purposeful sampling was used as those interviewed were be selected from a participant group of Latino parents with school age children. The research used an inductive method that would build hypotheses and theories rather than testing existing theory and the topic was studied within its context so that a design emerged. The end result is a focus on wholes rather than parts within the final synthesis. The voice/style is informal and the final product is descriptive.

As explained in Chapter 3, recruitment of the Latino parents involved discussions with, first, the principals of an elementary school and its corresponding middle school in the Roaring Fork School District. After they became comfortable with the research in question and with the approach, they provided the names of and introductions to teachers who work with ELL students and who have regular contact with their parents and some knowledge of their home life.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with nine Latino parents conducted over a three-month period. Each session ran approximately 1 hour with a follow-up session of about 30 minutes with three of the parents to clarify portions of the previous interview and check for accuracy. All interviews were assisted by a Spanish-fluent interpreter. None of the subjects spoke English to a degree that a conversation could be held with the interviewer or that questions posed by the interviewer could be

understood without translation. The researcher asked the question and the interpreter then posed it in Spanish. The subjects answered in Spanish and the interpreter provided the responses in English.

In transcribing and analyzing the interviews of the nine parents, it became apparent that there were many more similarities than differences both in the personal experiences in their own education, in their view of education as a necessity, and in their view of their own involvement in their children's education.

Those points are fairly simple to analyze and allow parallels to be drawn without regard to the parent's educational level or actual involvement. There are tougher issues that surfaced within myself and, I believe, are really at the heart of the matter. It is those issues that interest me and that I will eventually focus on in this discussion since it is from there that recommendations develop, both for use in schools and for additional research that is needed.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) tell us that analysis is much more than just classifying, categorizing, or collating data. It is more about representing or reconstructing social phenomena. "We do not simply 'collect' data; we fashion them out of our transactions with other men and women." They also maintain that, rather than just reporting what is found through the research, it creates accounts of social life, thereby constructing versions of the social worlds and its actors as the researcher observes it.

Summary of the Findings

Overview

Throughout all of the interviews, several similar threads were woven. First, all of the subjects had gone to school in Mexico. They are all in their 30s and are, judging by

housing and of dress, culturally inclined. Also using housing, belongings, and dress, it appears that they range from low income to low middle income. All of them have been in the U.S. for at least seven years and two have been here for 21 years. Three of them have two children, three have four children, and one has five. Three (one couple) finished high school. Two others (including the other male) finished 9th grade. One finished 8th, one 7th grade, and two finished 6th. The three who finished high school appeared to have higher income levels and showed more interest in home décor and material belongings.

Regardless of grade level, all were literate in Spanish. None were literate in English even though six of them have taken English classes at one point or another during their lives.

All of the subjects enjoyed their own school experiences for a variety of reasons from the subjects taught to the friendships made to the push that they were given. The negative experiences, for the most part, revolved around the corporal punishment that was administered.

All of the subjects valued education and felt it was necessary for their children to have a high school diploma so that they could be successful in later years. And each felt s/he was involved in the children's education. But it is here that there is a difference that appears to be related directly to the parent's own experience and how far s/he went through school. The three who finished high school (one of those also went to a trade school afterward) all provided a place for their kids to do homework as well as resources such as pens, papers, colors, dictionaries, and computers were available in the home. Those three also appeared to be in a bit higher income bracket. The couple, Julian and

Rita, are much more active in guiding their children through school. They go to conferences, attend events, and they help their children with their homework each night. Rita spends time two days a week in the classroom as part of the Even Start program. They have tried to get a Latino parent organization formed in their neighborhood but have met resistance because the other parents don't feel they have the time.

Claudine, too, finished high school and she also goes to the conferences, events, and has, in the past, spent time in her daughter's classroom. Her children do their homework right after school and the older one already wants to go to college (she is currently in 6th grade).

Given the discussion, there appears to be a relationship between level and type of parent education and active involvement at home, in the school, and in parent teacher conferences.

Gaitan (2004) found that studies of schools and Latino home culture often misinterpret parent involvement. While English may be limited in the home and the parents may have low educational attainment, they still value education highly. "They support their children's schooling by providing a strong emotional environment in the home (Gaitan, 2004)."

Given those educational backgrounds, the income levels appear to be higher for those parents with more education, which also adds to the level of resources the family, was willing or able to provide for the support of the child's education. According to Gaitan (2004), life in Latino families is an important factor in the level of parental participation at school and the home environment is affected by the family's

socioeconomic level. Resources available differ from income level to income level for obvious reasons.

All of the parents said they felt welcomed in the school but one added that while she felt welcomed to events, she did not feel welcome in the classroom. This parent also felt there was definite discrimination in favor of Anglos. Although he said he felt welcomed, Juan also admitted that he only went to school if his son got into trouble.

There is an interesting side note that came from the discussions. We often assume that the education offered in the U.S. is better than that of a developing country. Julian and Rita didn't feel that way and thought that the system was holding their children back. They do not, however, feel they can influence this in the school and just need to work with their children at home.

Juan, although he did not like the corporal punishment aspect, said it made him work, kept him from being lazy, and he added that may not be the case in U.S. schools.

The two greatest obstacles to involvement, based on responses, were, first, language issues and, second, time to get involved. The subjects had suggestions on reaching parents and working with language but did not offer ideas as to how to address the time factor. This should have been pursued by the questioning but feeling confined by my inability to speak the language and the constraints passed on by human subjects, I felt I had to stick to questions that had been approved. I also didn't realize this until later when I began to break the interviews down into themes.

A Tilted World: My Perspective of Language and Involvement

The greatest value from the studies came from the realization that my reality was distorted. I was, first, surprised that, even though these were all working class people

who had been in the U.S. for a number of years, there was no English language acquisition. The layers around and above them provide the means for communication with the dominant society. At work, they have supervisors who communicate upward for them and then relay instructions back. There are sufficient restaurants, grocery and retail stores where lower-paid jobs are filled by Latinos who speak Spanish.

Great Grandma Rios, from my first marriage, lived and worked in Los Angeles from the time she came across the border at age 16 until just before her death at around 90. She never learned English but, like those I interviewed, got by because there was a large and supportive Mexican community around her. She always planned to learn and she and I made an attempt at teaching each other our native tongues when she lived with us. But we usually resorted to a few choice words in both languages, a little bit of Spanglish, and a lot of miming. And it worked for us. I also planned to become fluent in Spanish and even took four semesters worth of classes. But there was never time to put it into action.

Based on the interviews, the subjects also would like to be fluent in their second language. It's not that they don't want to learn English. It's a matter of time and life's demands. I truly understand that. While a single mom, I worked a job that required me to put parking lot paving, resurfacing, curb, gutter, and driveway projects together and oversee their completion. None of the workforce that worked for the paving and concrete companies spoke English. The supervisors spoke some and we could get by on that but when I would ask questions of the workers, I would get a shrug and a point that would direct me to someone else. I, again, vowed to learn the language. But raising a family,

working long hours, going to school, and keeping a household together prohibited that. Watching those parents I interviewed, I knew. I had just forgotten.

The next surprise was a bigger one for me. Although I had read the López (2001) study that talked about migrant workers view of "involvement," I still carried the typical Anglo idea of what that involvement meant, thinking that if they saw themselves as involved, that would mean they spent time in the classrooms, attended parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings when necessary. That was a mistake. The context of the concept of involvement is very cultural and, like all concepts, contextual and situational. Sobel and Kugler, (2007) report that at the first session of a parent leadership class in English, parents from eight different countries from all parts of the world were asked to describe school systems of their native countries. According to the parents' description, not one of those systems encouraged parents to become actively involved in the school. In some other cultures, the parents feet the school is responsible for the decisions regarding education and that involvement could be translated as disrespectful.

Adequacy of the Study

The interviews did answered the questions posed to the parents and, in most cases, provided even more information than the questions asked. Two of the three original research questions were answered:

1. What are their views of the obstacles to increased involvement?
2. What would encourage them to be more involved?

The subjects provided specifics on the obstacles and offered suggestions that could encourage additional involvement. The third question was not answered directly because it was not asked directly:

3. What connection do they see between their own past educational experiences and their involvement in their children's education?

Instead, the answer came from an analysis by the researcher and not as the result of the subjects' assessment. It was not so much the actual experience in the educational system since they all appear very similar. It more seems to be the length of time and the amount of education received. This was discussed previously in the Summary Overview above.

Discussion of the Findings

Consideration of the Findings Related to Existing Research

The results of this study are consistent with López (2001) findings of how many Latinos view the term involvement. He found that, although parents of migrant students did not regularly attend school functions, they perceived themselves as being highly involved in their children's education because they transmitted a work ethic to their children. This was, they felt, what would help their children succeed in school.

The results of this study run counter to the assertion made by Rosenthal (1994) in the survey research conducted in 1992 in a suburban metropolitan New York City community. Rosenthal found that the family's valuing of education carried the greatest weight and asserted that the value system is often expressed through direct and traditional parent involvement in their children's education.

Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2001) found that cross-cultural value conflicts lead Latino immigrant parents from Mexico and Central America to offer one kind of involvement while school personnel prefer another and, as I looked at my own prejudicial interpretations and spoke with teachers and principals in the two schools, I found this to be true. In our Anglo culture, we anticipate that involvement will mean attendance at parent teacher conferences, special events, appearance in classrooms, and regular discussions with teachers. And, as we move up the spectrum of what involvement means in our society, it can also include attending school board meetings and even challenging officials over policy.

Telling stories about personal history motivates the kids in school, encouraging them to take advantage of economic opportunities later in life (Gaitan, 2004). Angelita tells her kids stories of her own schooling and feels it helps them understand their own situations.

Teachers often assume that Latino parents who do not speak English are illiterate and that families under economic stress can not be expected to play a role in their children's academic development. But research has shown that is not necessarily true and that although overall education levels may be low, most of the parents are able to read and write (Goldenberg, 2004). That was true of all of the interviewees. Regardless of the level of education, all of them were literate to the degree of being able to read information sent home from school and understand the meaning.

High expectations for children's education was apparent throughout all of the interviews, supporting the findings of Valencia and Black (2002). They list a variety of studies that show how a "multitude of supportive behaviors in Mexican American

homes" counter the longstanding myth about the parents' disregard for education. While their research focused specifically on Mexican American families, the findings can easily be generalized to the Mexican classification and would encompass those interviewed in this study. Citizenship was not questioned and they most likely are all Mexican nationals.

Recommendations for Educators

Gaitan (2004) stressed that, regardless of cultural and linguistic background, parents and schools can work together for students' benefit. The two major keys to making this happen is, first, a rethinking of cultural approaches and, second, a strong focus on language barriers.

The language issue is growing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report, *Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: 2000,* released in October of 2003, nearly 1-in-5 people, or 47 million U.S. residents age 5 and older, spoke a language other than English at home in 2000, an increase of 15 million people since 1990. Among those numbers were almost 11 million additional Spanish speakers. The report says that Spanish speakers increased from 17.3 million in 1990 to 28.1 million in 2000, a 62 percent rise.

With those numbers as the base, it becomes more urgent that schools offer the means for communication with offerings considering the needs of both sides: for parents who do not speak English and for teachers who do not speak Spanish.

Most of the parents expressed a desire to learn English and several are currently attempting to do so through classes tied to the Even Start preschool program. Adult education classes may offer some help but many factors impact participation in adult

education programs including work schedules, family responsibilities, opportunities to learn and use English outside of an instructional setting, marital and family status, and personal motivation. In addition, the availability of classes, times offered and locations available, can impact participation as can the length of courses and frequency of classes, and training and expertise of the teachers (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003).

According to Tucker (2006), although there is widespread agreement that English language proficiency is key to full participation in U.S. society, he says that learning a language is difficult and ESL instruction is in crisis. Tucker cautions that courses are few, overbooked, and often overcrowded, creating a long wait list for spots on the class roster. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Education Fund gathered evidence through interviews with 184 ESL providers from twenty-two cities in sixteen states across the nation. The interviews found that almost three in five ESL providers have a waiting list. Others reported such demand that they have abandoned waiting lists altogether. Some providers have had to discontinue classes because of lack of funding (Tucker, 2006). That has added to the reality that language barriers remain in our society

Setting up dual language opportunities in the classroom will certainly encourage additional involvement. García and Jensen (2007) found that rich language environments that integrate Spanish and English also encourage those important parent-school associations. Spanish-speaking parents are more likely to involve themselves in schools and classrooms in which their language is regularly spoken.

There is another reality as well and that is one of available time. Particularly in areas like the mountain town where this research was conducted, work days are long since affordable housing is most likely located one to two hours away from a job site. That leaves little time for taking English classes and, if they are not readily available, there is little possibility that those parents who are already struggling to make ends meet, will go in search of ways to learn the language. Schools looking to communicate with Latino parents will be pushed more to find a means for verbal exchanges. This will mean either providing bilingual interpreters in every phase of schooling or offer better and more accessible means of learning both Spanish (for teachers and administrators) and English (for parents). Teachers and administrators will be called upon more to broaden their own skills as the changing demographics continue to reach their classrooms. Educators of all racial and cultural groups develop new competencies and pedagogies so that our changing populations will be successfully engaged (Howard, 2007).

Suggestions that came from the parents interviewed included offering a literacy night on a regular basis where both parents and their children can take part in activities designed to bolster language acquisition. Fluency Fast is one such opportunity.

After my frustration with the interviews, I signed up for a weeklong course in Fluency Fast and, at the end of the first 4 hours, I was able to put a few sentences together and understand some of what others said to me as well. After 48 hours, I was able to tell stories in Spanish, make requests of others, have small exchanges, and understand even more. This course, based on Total Physical Response (TPR), uses a base of cognitives that have similar sounds and meanings in both languages and then builds from there, adding verbs, pronouns, and adjectives. Gestures and facial

expressions are used to help convey meaning as the class is conducted only in the language being learned (Fluency Fast also offers Japanese and other languages using the same technique). Every night we read out of very simple books that would use the words we had learned and introduce a few new ones that became apparent in context. This helped pull in those words we had learned earlier and reinforce their meaning and their use in a very simple story line. Denver Public Schools picked up on the technique and began a course in Spanish for its teachers. It is hoped that other districts will follow suit. The same technique can be used for adults wanting to learn English. Whether it is this technique or another, the point is that schools will need to take charge and make sure that the opportunities are there and that both sides are learning. For those ESL parents, the schedules have to work around workdays.

There must also be a revision of expectations of involvement, making it easier for parents to feel as if they are part of the system. But there can't be a one size fits all approach. The interpretation of "involvement" varied in the interviews and ranged from providing a work ethic and behavior expectations to creating a parent organization that could address issues. It's important to value what any parent can offer, given work schedules and home life demands. Several of the parents weren't available during the day because they worked, others had younger children who required their attention during the day. It should be made clear to parents that any level of involvement is welcomed and that there are simple ways of helping their child succeed, for example, just providing a place in the home where the child can study and asking questions about the child's homework.

As parent involvement becomes more essential, schools will need to find a means for creating more formal outreach programs. Ideally, a parent involvement program offers a wide range of activities that fit the parents' schedules, skills, and interest levels from regular communications with parents, homework help, opportunities to participate in school governance or volunteer and work in classrooms and other areas of the school (Goldenberg, 2004).

Through the interviews, two major means of involving Latino parents were recommended. First was making the connection in a language they understand. That helps them feel included. The means for drawing Latino parents to events, parent teacher conferences and into the classroom rests in the language but it's not enough to simply translate flyers into Spanish (Sobel & Kugler, 2007). Flyers must be also be coupled with telephone contact and parents must experience more than one or two interactions with teachers. Other school personnel or other parents can also make those contacts. If the contact person is from within the same culture, it will probably be more effective (Sobel & Kugler, 2007).

Sharing information was also suggested. If the parents are intimidated by the school setting, they are not likely to be involved. If they are informed consistently (Julian suggested using a calendar that shows all activities), they are more likely to feel part of the system and be less intimidated. A third one that comes from the research stresses the need for continual contact with constant assessment, follow up and revision of existing parent involvement programs (Gaitan, 2004).

A well-defined program is necessary for consistency's sake. The program must be continuously assessed so that efforts don't ebb and flow from semester to semester and year to year.

After all of my research and interviews, it appears the only way to really get involvement from those who are not involved is to, first, make sure there is a personal contact with each one of them. From there, a relationship needs to be created. This is essential, the research says. Educators must establish a working partnership with Latino parents living in poverty (Gaitan 2004).

It is only through these partnerships that teachers can begin to understand the cultural differences that may impact parent involvement. Teachers will need to know something about their students' family makeup, immigration history, favorite activities, concerns and strengths. They will also need to become aware of their students' perception of the value of an education (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

By providing a bilingual liaison position at each school (can be part time or volunteer) that is the focal point for contact, parents would feel they have a personal connection. That position should have the responsibility to make phone calls and set appointments for parents to meet with the teachers. Phone calls, my subjects told me, seem much more urgent and make them feel more welcome. This position would also need to be used as an interpreter at those meetings and should come from the Latino community. There should also be a follow-up call after the meeting (by this same person) to see if the parents' questions were answered, to invite them to events, and to encourage them to stop by the school and visit their kid's classrooms during regular sessions. The

position could even be a district one that would help find a community contact for each school. Or it could even be one district position that then works with each of the schools.

> "Although parents from poor communities value education for their children, they often lack knowledge about the educational system and the proper resources to effectively support their children's schooling." (Gaitan 2004, p. ix)

It would also be helpful to offer parents an orientation class where it's explained, in Spanish, how important parent involvement is for their student's achievement. The term involvement would need to be broken down into different levels from establishing a study place at home and making sure homework is done to volunteering for events, in the classroom or, at the farthest end of the spectrum, helping with fundraising or political issues. By setting up different levels of participation, parents should be able to find a comfort zone.

And that is the bottom line. If they are comfortable in the setting, they will most likely return to it and can, over a course of time, be encouraged to become even more involved in increasing ways.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research could be conducted in several of the schools in the mountain areas to analyze the numbers of those Latino parents involved, the type of involvement, the means for getting them into the school system as volunteers and exploring how each program compares with other efforts. The reasons for low involvement numbers are many and must be tackled by the school systems and by researchers who can help provide a better means of understanding for educators.

It is extremely important that, as educators work to increase involvement and, thereby, student achievement, they understand that Latino parents truly share their vision

of education and what that means for their children. Valencia and Black sum this up nicely:

> "In the final analysis, it is important for scholars to be steadfast in debunking the myth that Mexican Americans don't value education. Although such debunking may be deemed reactive, it is necessary. In the production of scholarship dealing with Mexican Americans, we often have to deconstruct inaccurate and unsound writings before we can construct new works. Without acknowledging this reality, it is difficult to continue the ongoing proactive scholarship on the Mexican American family and its rich, varied, and positive expressions regarding the importance of the institution of education." (p. 99)

EPILOGUE

This was an incredibly humbling experience for me. As I took on what I thought was a small and manageable portion of a larger and very complex topic, I felt I had all of the requisite skills needed to venture into new territory. I was wrong.

As a journalist accustomed to controlling interviews and situations surrounding those interviews, I soon found that, without the language, I could only play the role of spectator. It was difficult to draw elaboration from the subjects and I was unable to engage them in a conversational exchange for the most part. Although my interpreter was able to do that quite well, it's just not the same unless I'm the one involved in the interaction. I got the responses I needed for the project but that didn't feel like enough. I wanted to be involved.

I did take the opportunity to speak with educators and administrators in the school district where I was doing this study. From conversations with an assistant superintendent, two principals, four teachers and a Latino advocate working with the district, I could substantiate the pressing need for Latino parent involvement and also heard the frustrations of not being able to secure that involvement. From the Latino advocate and one of the teachers who is a Mexican national teaching in one of the elementary schools, I had many of the ideas that came from the parents reinforced. That at least made me comfortable in validity of the information I gathered.

An interesting parallel presented itself with two lengthy conversations. One was with a male, Anglo middle school teacher who had almost zero involvement from Latino

parents. The other was with the female Mexican National teaching in an elementary school who has 100% participation from her Latino parents. She tells her parents that they will attend conferences, they will help with projects, and they will be involved or she will not allow the child in her class. The message is "you must be involved." While, in reality, they know that she couldn't and wouldn't actually keep the child out of class, she gets the response she wants. The first two reasons are very obvious – she speaks the language and is very much part of the community. But she also understands that concept is often cultural and the idea of "involvement" takes on different meanings depending on the culture. She also understands that time is an issue for these parents and she makes sure that she has some form of project that can be done at home, in evening or weekend hours. All conferences are scheduled via phone call. She also has a parent volunteer call and remind the parents of the time for the conferences. All event notices are also followed up with a phone call. Her efforts make the parents believe that they are a critical part of their child's education. Two of the parents I interviewed referred to her and her tactics without knowing that I had already interviewed her. They confirmed what she had told me and what I also heard from other teachers who knew her.

The male teacher has his notices translated into Spanish but there are no phone calls and there is not only a language barrier but a cultural one as well. It is a cultural one that, I am ashamed to admit, I shared as I started this process.

The idea of concept as cultural, as situational, is so simple and, yet, I found I was very ethnocentric in my idea of what involvement should be. For me, involvement in my child's education included making sure they had nutritional breakfasts to start the day, to setting down with them every evening to do homework, regularly visiting classes and

talking to teachers, volunteering to tutor other kids, tackling teachers who labeled them, fighting the district to allow me to choose which schools they would attend (this was before Poudre School District (PSD) school of choice), and attending the PSD Board of Education meetings to voice my opinion on policy. And that experience colored my view of what I thought involvement meant. Although there was some variance in how they regarded that concept, none took it to the extreme where they would actually interfere in district or board choices.

I was faced with two harsh realities. I was, first, without the language, put in the role of the parents who must feel the same frustration and isolation when they are placed in a situation where they can only understand when interpretation is available. But they can never truly participate unless exchanges are consistent and they are helped to understand how the system works and where resources exist. I didn't like being in that situation and vowed now to ever be there again. I have the time and financial resources to do language immersions. They do not. But teachers would be more likely to have opportunities and it falls to the district and the schools to make sure that either teachers learn the language or that there are options for non-Spanish speakers in every part of the school system. The parents all said that having a dual language situation would encourage more traditional involvement and help them to feel more comfortable in taking part. They would also begin to feel more comfortable sharing ideas with teachers and administrators.

As to the cultural piece, training is also required to provide cultural competencies for those teachers and school personnel. But it can't be a one-shot training and has to be ongoing and consistent. There are models available that immerse the participants into a

setting that replicates a given situation and makes them experience what others in a different culture experience in a given situation. For example, in a two-hour session, Pathways Out of Poverty puts participants through a week of life in a low-income family and brings all of the frustrations and barriers into play. That type of training goes beyond theory and drives the experience home.

For me, the bottom line was clear. If educators want to improve student achievement and accept the influence that parents can have in that process, then they will have to accept the reality that Latinos tend to be in a lower socioeconomic classification and may not have the flexibility of time or finances to learn a second language. So it falls to the schools to make sure that happens and the burden will have to be put on teachers and staff to make the effort.

As for me, I fully plan to become fluent and will continue to put myself into situations where I am reminded that there are other cultural understandings and where my thinking will be tested and stretched. It is the only way that I can truly be an advocate for Latinos and for the educational system.

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