

FACTORS THAT INHIBIT SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT  
OF HISPANIC PARENTS

By

JAY E. SMITH

Bachelor of Music Education  
University of Central Oklahoma  
1978

Master of Music Education  
University of Central Oklahoma  
1983

Master of Education  
University of Central Oklahoma  
2000

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement of  
the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
December, 2005

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Kenneth Stern

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Robert Davis

Dr. Ed Harris

Dr. Judith Mathers

Dr. Timothy Pettibone

Dean of the Graduate College

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The focus of this study has been to identify those obstacles that inhibit non-English speaking Hispanic parents from being involved with the schools their children attend.

I would first like to thank my mother, Mary Louise Smith, for her example of being a life-long learner and for instilling in me the value of education. Her support and encouragement during this project always came at the times I most needed it.

My loving fiancé Gina Moore was there for me during countless hours of editing and inspiring me to move forward during yet another “final draft”. Her love and support as my cheerleader made an enormous difference in encouraging me to keep moving forward.

I would like to thank my exceptionally skilled translator Hortencia Velasquez for the many hours spent in interviews and for her assistance in interpretation.

The guidance and support of my adviser, Dr. Ken Stern, made the dissertation process manageable (and even enjoyable at times) and I extend my deepest thanks to him. Dr. Stern’s investment of time in my dissertation, along with committee members Dr. Ed Harris, Dr. Robert Davis, and Dr. Judith Mathers, is most sincerely appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank the participants themselves that were gracious enough to take the time to participate in this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

During the past three decades, a large and ever increasing number of foreign-born individuals of Hispanic origin with little or no English proficiency who live in the United States has challenged the American public school educational system (Ortiz, 2002). The number of students of Hispanic descent in American public schools has tripled in the last 30 years with predictions promising that by 2030, over one fourth of all K-12 students will be Hispanic (Gibson, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reported that the “Hispanic population has increased more rapidly than any other racial or ethnic group, growing from nine percent of the child population in the United States in 1980 to 14 percent in 1996” (p.1). From 1990 to 2000, the total number of Hispanics in the United States increased by over 50 percent, reaching 35.3 million or 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population (Guzmán, 2001). The Current Population Survey conducted in October 1999 by the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 20 percent of school-age children in the U.S. had at least one foreign-born parent, while 5 percent of elementary and high school students were themselves foreign born (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 1999). Hispanics have become the largest ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The stereotypical view of Hispanics, held by many in the not so distant past, was of migrant workers moving with the harvest or other seasonal work. According to research conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (2002), many

Hispanics who initially entered the U.S. as migrant or seasonal workers have selected communities in which to put down roots as they seek a more permanent way of making a living than following agricultural harvests. By the time of the 2000 Census, increasing numbers of Hispanics were beginning a migration to non-metropolitan and rural areas, in contrast to the predominant pattern shown in the 1990 Census in which the majority of Hispanics in the U.S. were more concentrated in urban and/or metropolitan areas (USDA, 2002). A significant proportion of Hispanics settling in these previously overlooked areas “lacks a high school degree, proficient English language skills, and naturalized immigration status” (p.1). This new wave of Hispanic settlers who has chosen to settle away from metropolitan areas is the population segment that is the focus of this study, as increasing numbers of Hispanics are enrolling in many U. S. non-metropolitan schools at a daily rate.

The prospects for the academic success of Hispanic students, wherever they are located, are not good if current statistical trends continue. Hispanic youth in general are the “most under-educated major segment of the U.S. population” (Inger, 1992) and have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group (Gibson, 2002). There are numerous major reports documenting that Hispanic students in U.S. schools are much more likely to drop out of high school than the general population (Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Gibson, 2002; National Council of La Raza, 1992; Valverde, 1987).

According to a report released by the Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, October 12, 2001:

The present crisis not only threatens to leave behind yet another generation of Hispanic children, it will limit their mobility in the labor force and could

jeopardize our country's ability to compete economically. The crisis requires us to ensure educational excellence for Hispanic Americans now (p.1).

In this report, the Commission identified the need to help Hispanic parents navigate the educational system and to create partnerships that would provide expanded options for Hispanic children, as well as implementing a nationwide public awareness and motivation campaign aimed at increasing educational attainment as a primary objective.

Since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty," increasing interest at the highest governmental levels has been focused on educating American school children. Following behind ESEA was the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, enacted during President Bill Clinton's tenure in office, strongly promoting curricular standards as part of a major reform effort to improve America's schools. With the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), particular effort is directed toward increasing the accountability of schools to improve the academic performance of various student subgroups. These subgroups include racial minorities, students with high mobility, English language learners (ELL), high poverty students, and students on an individual education plan (IEP) for learning impaired or otherwise disabled students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, NCLB "is a landmark education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools" (2001). President George W. Bush has expressed that "too many of our neediest children are being left behind" and described this law as "the cornerstone of my administration" (2001). Through NCLB, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which is the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. NCLB is a sweeping overhaul of federal efforts to support elementary and secondary education in the United States. It is built on four pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility.

This legislation makes educators responsible for taking the necessary steps to identify weaknesses in the educational process as well as to find ways of improving the opportunities for those students most at risk. Hispanic children remain highly under-educated and at risk for academic failure (Inger, 1992; Gibson, 2002). American-born Hispanics have the largest dropout rate of any ethnic or racial group with dropout rates in the South and the West tending to be even higher than those in the Midwest and Northeast (NCES, 2000).

Some of the causes of this under-education and subsequent dropout may be attributed to language barriers, low expectations of teachers, poverty, racism, and isolation with poor communication and cooperation between the school, parents, and community also being an important factor (Scribner, 1999). Low levels of parent involvement have been shown to be linked with low academic achievement (Floyd, et al., 1998). Jones and Velez (1997) found a definite relationship between higher performing Hispanic students and higher levels of parental involvement. Though research shows parental involvement to be very important in increasing student achievement, and while several studies have shown that Hispanic parents care very much about their children's education (Chavin & Gonzalez, 1995; Greenfield & Quiroz, 2001), minority parent participation in the schooling process of their offspring is decreasing (Floyd, 1998).

Hispanic parents consistently demonstrate low levels of parental involvement in schools their children attend (Costas, 1991; Bauch, 1992). This paradox may be at least partly explained by an examination of the obstacles that Hispanic parents might encounter as they try to be involved with their school since the obstacles may be too daunting to overcome. These obstacles may include the language barrier, a lack of trust, a lack of understanding of how the system works, logistical issues, and lack of education of the parents themselves (Bauch, 1992).

Perceptions of what it means for parents to “be involved” vary from culture to culture. Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) found in a Texas study that teachers tended to define parental involvement as participation in formal activities such as meetings and school events while Hispanic parents tended to define involvement as working in informal activities at home such as checking homework or reading to children and listening to them read. There are also differences between the expected roles of teachers and parents. Latino parents highly respect teachers (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995) and feel that the job of the school is to instill knowledge while they view their own role as parents is to provide nurturance and teach morals, respect and good behavior (Carger, 1997). When Hispanic parents are asked to take on responsibilities that they view as being those of the school, they may be reluctant in part because they feel they are overstepping their own boundaries (Sosa, 1997). Though teachers may view parents asking questions about assignments and grades as indicative of the level of caring by those parents, Latino parents may view this as being disrespectful (Trumbull, et al., 2001). Hyslop (2000) found that Hispanic parents often feel intimidated by teachers, especially if teachers appear condescending.

A major barrier for many Hispanic parents is language (Shannon, 1996) because most American educators do not speak Spanish (Gibson, 2002). Not only is it impossible for communication to occur in meeting under these circumstances, non-English speaking parents also have obvious difficulty in understanding even simple school policies or helping their children with homework that is in English (Aspiazu et al., 1998). Many Hispanic immigrants have very limited formal education and may not be able to help their children with schoolwork (Sosa, 1997). This leads to further difficulty in assisting their children with schoolwork and may cause the parents to feel intimidated (Floyd, 1998).

Hispanic parents consistently demonstrate low levels of parental involvement in schools their children attend (Costas, 1991; Bauch, 1992), and are frequently unaware of practices essential to helping their children develop academic skills (Ortiz, 2002). Inger's statement (1992) that there is a critical need to increase the involvement of Hispanic parents in their children's schooling process served as an impetus for this current study. Though prior research identifies some of the obstacles toward greater school involvement faced by Hispanic parents in metropolitan areas, little study has been done in the non-metropolitan areas that are increasingly being settled by Hispanics (USDA, 2002). Research is needed to determine what the most substantial obstacles in these rural and non-metropolitan areas are and to determine if they are primarily the same obstacles as those previously identified or if there are new obstacles or different dimensions to some of those already known. The purpose of this study is to identify the major impediments to greater involvement of Hispanic parents with their children's schools through interviews and focus group research.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Hispanic parents consistently demonstrate low levels of parental involvement in schools their children attend (Costas, 1991; Bauch, 1992). Though many efforts have occurred in an effort to increase the levels of Hispanic parent involvement, results have been disappointing with Hispanic children remaining highly under-educated and at risk for academic failure (Inger, 1992; Gibson, 2002; Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980). Studies positively linking parent involvement with a variety of student cognitive and affective outcomes are extensive (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Desimone, 1999; Rutherford, Anderson, Billig, & RMC Research Corporation, 1997). In these studies, parent involvement has been linked with student outcomes including higher achievement test scores, a decrease in dropout rate, improved attendance, improved student behavior, higher grades, higher grade point average, greater commitment to schoolwork, and improved attitude toward school. Inger (1992) stated “There is considerable evidence that parent involvement leads to improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates, and that these improvements occur regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family” (p. 1). There are many indications that Hispanic parents and even the extended families deeply care about the schooling process. Trumbull, et al., (2001) stated that “studies of immigrant Latino families have repeatedly shown that parents are highly interested in being involved in their children’s education” (p. 32) while Oritz (2002) stated that Hispanic parents care deeply about their children’s academic progress.

Not only do Hispanic parents care greatly about their children’s education, they have high goals for their children (Shannon, 1996), and want to be involved (Lopez, 2001). Several studies (Espinosa, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza,

1999) indicate Hispanic parents and families are very involved in their children's educational lives, though they may not participate in traditional ways. Since there are substantial indications that the Hispanic population is interested in the education of their children and generally wish to be involved, enabling them to identify the specific factors that are the major barriers that cause a lack of involvement should give insight into the phenomenon of inadequate involvement. Educators should also gain insight into ways of removing the barriers identified so that the lagging academic performance of Hispanic children can be improved.

Informal preliminary research that could be considered as an experiential pilot study occurred from efforts at one non-urban school (where the author served as principal) to involve and empower Hispanic parents, and the information obtained helped inform the direction of the current research. Hispanic parents at this school were encouraged to attend meetings to express their opinions and concerns about their children's educational progress. Information obtained from the parents themselves at these meetings served as a major source of preliminary information about problems and concerns and also resulted in the establishment of English language instruction for adults and students as well.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to allow Hispanic parents in non-metro areas to identify and explain the major obstacles that hinder their participation in their children's schools. Insight gained through this research can be used by educators to address the most formidable barriers, thereby increasing involvement levels of Hispanic parent and correspondingly increasing the achievement of Hispanic students.

### *Research Questions*

Ortiz (2002) established that parent involvement is an important element in a student's formal education and that additional research should focus on ways to promote Hispanic parental involvement. Five research questions guided this study:

1. Why are Hispanic parents who are currently settling in one non-metropolitan area generally not involved with the schools of their children?
2. What factors do the parents identify as being the most significant obstacles preventing increased involvement with their children's schools?
3. Why are these factors similar or different from those identified in previous research of the large number of Hispanics who settled in more metropolitan and urban areas?
4. What, if any, are the factors not yet identified in the literature influencing the lack of involvement by Hispanic parents?
5. What insight can be gained from the parents' own descriptions of the barriers to greater involvement that might be used to address the problems identified?

### *Assumptions*

1. The researcher exercised fairness in collecting and analyzing the data received from interviews and other sources.
2. The respondents interviewed answered honestly the questions posed to them.
3. The interpretation of the data collected effectively reflected the context and the relationships being explored.

### *Methodological Framework*

A qualitative approach was determined to be the most appropriate for this project because of the need to study the experiences of the individuals involved in both depth and detail. The qualitative approach is a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest”; rather, research should produce findings from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Qualitative research has been defined as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Rather than seeking causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings as in quantitative research, the qualitative approach undertaken herein seeks illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

This research employs an interpretive methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Interpretive research is a form of inquiry that emphasizes the interpretation of texts and text-analogs, including human action which can be considered as a text-analog (Packer, 1995). It calls for the study of the interaction of individuals in a specific context with attention on power and ideology.

Two areas are central in this investigation. First, the context, or common experiences of Hispanic parents in a particular school community that influence the levels of school involvement must be described and understood. Second, the actions, attitudes, and desires of these parents must be considered within that context.

While examining and interpreting data received in pursuit of answers to the main research questions, the focus was upon elements of the Hispanic parent’s environment

that are at least partially within the control of the public school administrator. These include but are not limited to:

1. The receptiveness and cordiality perceived by the parents from the school.
2. The effectiveness of communications channels open between parents and the school.
3. The amount of support, training, and encouragement given by the school to enlist greater participation by the parents.

There are additional elements that may affect the level of parental involvement that are beyond the direct control of the school. Even if largely uncontrollable, these elements are equally important to understanding the whole experience of Hispanic parents and have been included in this study. These include:

1. The parents' previous educational levels and experiences.
2. English language proficiency and usage.
3. Economic issues.
4. Transportation issues.
5. Parental aspirations for their children's success.
6. Immigration status.

### *Importance of the Study*

With the mandates of NCLB intensifying the need to improve the academic achievement of all at-risk groups in American schools, and with the relatively new phenomenon of large numbers of Hispanics settling in non-metropolitan areas, the findings of this study should be highly useful to educators in the field trying to improve academic achievement of Hispanic youth.

Though this study claims no generalizability, the findings may help in the

development of theory that pertains to Hispanic parental involvement in rural and non-metropolitan areas that may be “analogous to the way a scientist generalizes from experimental results to theory” (Yin, 2003, pg. 38). Edwin T. Hall’s theory of low-context and high-context cultures indicates that Hispanic parents place a much higher value on interpersonal relationships, cooperation, conformity, and social status than mainstream Americans and that a consequence of these cultural differences and the failure to recognize them as such causes much misinterpretation of the actions that occur between Hispanics and non-Hispanic educators. One important aspect of the current study is to create insight into how this misinterpretation may be minimized or avoided entirely to achieve the mutually desirable goal held by Hispanic parents as well as educators: to improve the academic achievement of Hispanic students.

#### *Scope of the Study*

The study will identify the perceptions of a small number of Hispanic parents in one rural community in Oklahoma through a series of in-depth interviews and a subsequent follow-up interview of the respondents. The results will not be generalizable.

#### *Definition of Terms*

Dropout - Any student who does not complete high school.

ELL- English language learner

Hispanic - Persons with origins from Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. In this study, the term “Hispanic” is used interchangeably with the term “Latino”.

Hermeneutics- the art of interpretation (Inwood, 1998). Translated from the classical Greek, it means “to understand, to interpret, to decipher” (Hoel, 1992).

IEP- Individual education plan

Parental Involvement - a combination of the frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-teacher interactions, participation in educational activities at home, participation in school activities, parental aspirations for children's education and parent-child communication.

Limited English proficient - a student or parent who has a limited usage and understanding of the English language.

Metropolitan Area - an area consisting of a large population center and adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social interaction with that center.

Non-metropolitan Area - an area of residence that lies outside of metropolitan areas.

School Culture - the constructed reality of the school environment that shapes how those who work and learn in the school think, feel, and behave.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There are inherent limitations in any research study. Limitations of this study include the research design, translation and interpretation of the interviews, sample size and individuals selected, and assumptions about causality between the acts and actors involved.

### *Research Bias*

My previous experience as a Caucasian male school administrator involved in the creation of programs to involve Hispanic parents to a greater degree introduces an element of bias on my part. This previous experience includes witnessing an influx of non-English speaking Hispanic parents into the school where I was employed as an administrator and the difficulties involved in communication and a lack of meaningful

involvement by these parents with the school. Though my interest was heightened by these experiences and my desire to find solutions to the problems encountered, every effort was made to remain as objective as possible.

The community where the research occurred is a community in which I had worked as a high school band director some years prior to conducting this research. Though this gave me some familiarity with the community, my employment there was before the time of the substantial influx of Hispanics into the area.

The findings are specific to the context of the study and cannot be generalized, though they may have implications for other schools and communities similar to the one used in the study.

#### *Motivation to Conduct This Study*

In part, the motivation for the current research grew from my desire to improve the academic achievement of the steadily increasing number of limited English proficient students enrolling in public schools. In my experience interacting with Hispanic parents as the principal of a school of about 600 students, it seemed clear to me that, as a group, these parents and extended family are highly interested, supportive, and protective of their children but are minimally involved or uninvolved with the school in the education of their children. What is the cause of this? Are they uninvolved because of barriers and obstacles that exist in our school? Are there community and cultural issues that are primarily to blame? Can a better understanding of what lies behind the phenomenon give educators a better idea of how to increase the involvement level of Hispanic parents so their children have a better chance of succeeding? It is my hope that this research will begin the process of answering these questions.

#### *Overview of Chapters*

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter I includes an introduction to the study and an overview of the problem. Chapter II is a review of the literature pertaining to the Hispanic population, parental involvement, and student achievement, and previously identified obstacles that inhibit involvement. Chapter III identifies and details the methods and procedures used to conduct the research. The data is presented in Chapter IV and analyzed in Chapter V. Chapter VI summarizes the findings of the study and suggests recommendations for future study.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### *Introduction*

The Presidential Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2001) identified the present situation of large Hispanic population growth coupled with lagging academic performance as a “crisis that not only threatens to leave behind yet another generation of Hispanic children, it will limit their mobility in the labor force and could jeopardize our country’s ability to compete economically” and states that this crisis “requires us to ensure educational excellence for Hispanic Americans now.” The report found that “the nation is losing Hispanic American students all along the education continuum” and also noted:

One of every three Hispanic American students fails to complete high school. Only 10 percent of Hispanic Americans graduate from four-year colleges and universities, with fewer than 100,000 graduating each year. Too many Hispanic American families lack the knowledge to fulfill the high expectations they have for their children, and too many Americans set low expectations for them. The federal government does not adequately monitor, measure and coordinate programs and research to the benefit of Hispanic American children and their families, despite the rapidly growing Hispanic American population in the United States (p.2).

This literature review, pertaining to the issues of Hispanic parent's identification and perceptions of obstacles that impede greater involvement between themselves and the schools of their children, is separated into five more or less distinct areas, though the important cultural differences between the dominant non-Hispanic White school culture and Hispanics is woven throughout each of the other areas and is not presented separately. The first of these areas is demographic and statistical data that detail the Hispanic population growth in the U.S. (and the projections for even greater growth in the future) and define many important characteristics of Hispanics in the U.S. public school systems. The next part consists of the literature that explores the lagging academic achievement of Hispanic students when compared with other ethnic groups. Following that is a broad body of literature that establishes the positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, while also looking at the different ways this involvement has been measured and the differing degrees of effectiveness. Literature that identifies important cultural aspects of Hispanic students, parents, and families that could be factors in the low involvement levels of Hispanic parents with public schools which should be considered in the study design follows, while the final section is a review of the recommendations made by previous research of strategies that are effective in increasing Hispanic parental involvement. As stated earlier, important cultural differences between Hispanics and the predominant non-Hispanic White school culture that many of them find themselves in is discussed in each area where relevant and appropriate.

#### *Use of the Term "Hispanic"*

The 2000 Census defines a Hispanic or Latino as "a person of Cuban, Mexican,

Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Though some draw a distinction between the terms Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano, for the purposes of this study, the Census Bureau definition will be used as an encompassing term.

### *Demographic and Statistical Data*

Though united by a common language, Hispanics in the U.S. are very diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, race, age, country of origin, the nature and timing of their immigration, and the degree of acculturation (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). Differences among Hispanic subgroups in communication styles and socialization practices may be greater than the overall differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics (Haycock & Duany, 1991). This diversity within the Hispanic population can add greatly to the difficulties of strategy development to increase meaningful, effective parental involvement with the schools of their children; however, since all of the Hispanics interviewed in this present research were of Mexican origin, diversity issues within the Hispanic population were not considered. Other than Cuban-Americans, Hispanics can be characterized as having high rates of poverty and low levels of educational achievement when compared to non-Hispanic Caucasians (Valdivieso & Nicolau, 1992).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in the March 2000 *Current Population Survey* (CPS), Hispanics reported their origin as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Latino origin and consisted of 32.8 million people making up 12 percent of the total U.S. population. Of these, 66.1 percent were of Mexican origin, 14.5 percent were Central or South American, 9.0 percent were Puerto Rican, 4.0 percent were Cuban, while the remaining 6.4 percent were of other Hispanic origin. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that between 1999 and 2050, the total number

of foreign-born Americans will increase from 26 million to 53.8 million, changing the cultural makeup of the America that is known today by its inhabitants. From 1990 to 2000, the total number of Hispanics in the United States increased by over 50 percent, totaling 35.3 million or 12.5 percent of the overall U.S. population (Guzmán, 2001; Census, 2000).

The U.S. government considers race and Hispanic origin to be separate and distinct matters, and collects census data accordingly. Table 1 shows the most current breakdown of population by race and Hispanic origin:

Table 1. Population by Race and Hispanic Origin For the United States:2000

Race and Hispanic or Latino	Number	Percent of Total Population
<b>RACE</b>		
Total Population.....	281,421,906	100.0
One race.....	274,595,678	97.6
White .....	211,460, 626	75.1
Black or African-American .....	34,658,190	12.3
American Indian and Alaska Native.....	2,475,956	0.9
Asian.....	10,242,998	3.6
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander .....	398,835	0.1
Some other race.....	15,359,073	5.5
Two or more races.....	6,826,228	2.4
<b>HISPANIC OR LATINO</b>		
Total Population.....	281,421,906	100.0
Hispanic or Latino.....	35,305,818	12.5
Not Hispanic or Latino.....	246,116,088	87.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting (Public Law

94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1 and PL2.

The number of students of Hispanic descent in American public schools has tripled in the last 30 years with predictions occurring that promise by 2030, over one fourth of all K-12 students will be Hispanic (Gibson, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 1998) reported that the “Hispanic population has increased

more rapidly than any other racial or ethnic group, growing from nine percent of the child population in the United States in 1980 to 14 percent in 1996” (p.1). Using the results of a *Current Population Survey* conducted in October 1999 by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is estimated that 20 percent of school-age children in the U.S. had at least one foreign-born parent, while 5 percent of elementary and high school students were themselves foreign born (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 1999).

Hispanics are not as equally dispersed geographically as non-Hispanic Caucasians. In 2000, Hispanics made up 44.7 percent of the population in the West and only 7.9 percent in the Midwest; Hispanics of Mexican origin made up 56.8 percent of the total Hispanic population in the West and 32.6 percent in the South while individuals of Puerto Rican origin made up 63.9 percent of Hispanics in the Northeast U.S. Hispanics of Cuban origin tend to concentrate mainly in Florida (80.1 percent) while Central and South Americans made up 32.3 percent of the Hispanic population in the Northeast, 34.6 percent in the South, and 28.2 percent in the Western United States (Census, 2000).

Since 1980, the Hispanic population not living in metropolitan areas (non-metropolitan) in the United States has doubled and is the fastest growing demographic group in rural America. By 2000, half of all Hispanics in the Southwest lived outside the traditional metropolitan settlement of earlier immigrants. In many of these rural areas, Hispanics are recent arrivals to the U.S. with low levels of education, poor English proficiency, and undocumented status as to the legality of their arrival. This recent trend has increased the visibility of Hispanics in many regions of rural America whose population had previously been dominated by non-Hispanic Caucasians (Census, 2000).

In 2000, Hispanics of less than 18 years of age comprised 35.7 percent of the Hispanic population, compared with 23.5 percent of Non-Hispanic Caucasians. A slightly smaller proportion of Hispanics were age 18 to 64 (59.0 percent) compared to Non-Hispanic Caucasians (62.4 percent). Hispanics that were age 25 to 44 comprised 32.4 percent of the Hispanic population compared to 29.5 percent of Non-Hispanic Caucasians. Only 5.3 percent of Hispanics were age 65 or older compared with 14.0 percent of Non-Hispanic Caucasians. Hispanics of Mexican origin (38.4 percent) made up the largest proportion of the total Hispanic population while Cubans (19.2 percent) made up the smallest (Census, 2000).

Only 25 percent of the 12.8 million foreign born Hispanics were naturalized U. S. citizens in 2000. The numbers entering the U.S. by decade have increased: 43.0 percent entered in the 1990s, 29.7 percent entered in the 1980s, while 27.3 percent entered before 1980 (Census, 2000).

More Hispanics than non-Hispanic Caucasians work in service occupations (19.4 and 11.8 percent respectively) and are almost twice as likely to be employed as laborers as non-Hispanic Caucasians (22.0 and 11.6 percent respectively). Managerial or professional occupations employ only 14.0 percent Hispanics compared with 33.2 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasians. Mexicans (11.9 percent) were the least likely of all Hispanic groups to work in managerial or professional occupations (Census, 2000).

In 1999, 23.3 percent of Hispanics and 49.3 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasians earned \$35,000 or more per year. Among all Hispanic groups, Mexicans had the lowest rate of earnings with 20.6 percent earning \$35,000 or more. In higher income ranges, the percentage of workers earning \$50,000 or more per year was 9.6 percent of Hispanics

compared with 27.4 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasians. Again, Mexicans (7.7 percent) made up the lowest proportion of workers earning \$50,000 or more (Census, 2000).

Hispanics are more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic Caucasians. In 1999, 7.7 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasians lived in poverty, compared with 22.8 percent of Hispanics. Though Hispanics made up 12 percent of the population in 2000, they made up 23.1 percent of those living in poverty. Hispanic children (under age 18) represented 16.2 percent of all children in the U.S. but made up 29.0 percent of those living in poverty; they also were much more likely than non-Hispanic Caucasian children (30.3 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively) to be living in poverty (Census, 2000).

#### *Adaptation to American Society*

In a review of the research on factors that affect the academic achievement of Latino versus Asian immigrants, Schmid (2001) identifies three primary types of adaptation to American society:

1. Acculturation to middle class. This is the classic model of parallel acculturation of all ethnic and racial groups into the white middle class.
2. Assimilation into underclass. Rather than join the middle class, this form of adaptation places the immigrants into a permanent underclass.
3. Economic advancement with a distinct cultural identity. Immigrants preserve their community's values and solidarity, but find ways to achieve economic success.

According to Schmid, the adaptation of an immigrant group will depend on several complex and interacting factors. Family socioeconomic status is a significant factor across most immigrant groups, although the degree to which it matters depends on

the group. Immigrant culture interacts with the dominant U.S. cultures in complex ways, sometimes to depress academic achievement and at other times to enhance academic achievement. Schmid identifies several factors that interact to influence immigrant academic achievement: socioeconomic class, cultural characteristics, social reception, language proficiency, and gender. The problem, according to Schmid, is that these factors do not interact in the same way for all immigrant groups. While some immigrant groups such as Asians tend to do well in academic and economic arenas, other immigrant groups such as Hispanics generally do not. Socio-economic status (SES) and family background do the most to explain the relatively low academic achievement of second generation Mexican-American students. Schmid says that “the stark reality is that the economic conditions of Latino children are much more likely than those of other children to be dire” (2001).

Other factors may also play an important but complex role in the academic achievement of Hispanic students. U.S.-born Mexican-Americans from U.S.-born parents were less likely to finish high school than U.S.-born Mexican-Americans of Mexican-born parents. Second-generation Mexican-Americans were also more likely to drop out of school than third-generation Mexican-Americans, even though third-generation SES was lower (Schmid, 2001).

Low English proficiency of Hispanics is associated with poverty and segregation. In the 1991-92 school year, about half of low English proficiency Hispanic first graders attended high-poverty schools, while low English proficient students are also more likely to attend schools with an overwhelmingly minority student population than students fluent in English (Schmid, 2001).

Four key factors emerge to explain the difference in achievement among immigrant groups:

1. Cultural history and traits of the immigrant group.
2. The degree to which the immigrant group's culture is compatible with and able to assimilate to white middle-class culture (as opposed to underclass culture).
3. U.S. society reception of the immigrant group—involving such things as the reaction to ethnic “markers” such as culture and skin color.
4. Political and economic capital of the immigrant group developed in the context of U.S. society (Schmid, 2001).

#### *Academic Achievement of Hispanic Students*

Hispanic youth in general have been called the “most under-educated major segment of the U.S. population” (Inger, 1992) and have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group (Gibson, 2002). Numerous major reports document that Hispanic students in U.S. schools are much more likely to drop out of high school than the general population (Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Gibson, 2002; National Council of La Raza, 1992; Valverde, 1987). The Presidential Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2001) found that “the nation is losing Hispanic American students all along the education continuum.” This report also noted that one of every three Hispanic American students fails to complete high school and that only 10 percent (fewer than 100,000) of Hispanic Americans graduate from four-year colleges and universities each year:

Too many Hispanic American families lack the knowledge to fulfill the high expectations they have for their children, and too many Americans set low

expectations for them. The federal government does not adequately monitor, measure, and coordinate programs and research to the benefit of Hispanic American children and their families, despite the rapidly growing Hispanic American population in the United States. They are also one of the most educationally vulnerable minority groups in the U.S. (Presidential Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2001).

Hispanic children start kindergarten somewhat behind their peers; 44 percent, by age 13, are at least one year below expected grade level; and more than 40 percent drop out before completing high school (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). The Latino dropout rate (30 percent, compared to 8.6 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasians and 12.1 percent of non-Hispanic blacks), when coupled with estimates that as many as one-third of Hispanic children may never even enroll in school at all (Schmid, 2001) indicates that the number of poorly educated Hispanic youth are even larger than reported. Economic reasons for Hispanic dropout are also likely to be much higher than for non-Hispanic Caucasians: 4 percent of Hispanic males (compared to 8 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasian males) give their reason for dropping out as “poor school performance” while economic reasons for drop out were cited by 38 percent of Latino students compared with 22 percent of non-Hispanic Caucasian students.

Because many Hispanics are economically challenged as well as relegated to jobs requiring relatively unskilled labor, developing social and human capital are difficult. Hispanics are often seen by many American natives as being associated with the economic and social underclass of the United States (Schmid, 2001). This lack of human and social capital outside the confines of the Hispanic community clearly puts this ethnic

group at an educational disadvantage. It is hoped that the findings of this current study will give educators direction in advocating for Hispanic children in order to insure that their academic achievement improves.

#### *Parental Involvement and Student Achievement*

Trumball, et al. (2001), stated “studies of immigrant Latino families have repeatedly shown that parents are highly interested in being involved in their children’s education” (p. 32). Not only do Latino parents care greatly about their children’s education, they have high goals for their children (Shannon, 1996), and want to be involved (Lopez, 2001). Several studies (Espinosa, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999) indicate Hispanic parents/families are very involved in their children’s educational lives, though they may not participate in traditional ways. Despite having limited educational backgrounds when compared to non-Hispanic whites, Hispanic parents provide emotional support and a strong work ethic and are instrumental in the education of their children (Duran, 1998).

Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 were used to determine the relationship between 12 types of parent involvement and mathematics and reading scores of eighth grade students. Results of this study indicated that there were statistically significant and substantively meaningful differences in the relationship between student achievement and parent involvement according to the student’s race-ethnicity and family income. The findings also indicated that there were potentially important differences in the relationship of parent involvement to student achievement according to the type of involvement, whether the student or parent reported the involvement level, and how achievement was measured. This study concludes that the effectiveness of particular parent involvement practices differs according to race/ethnicity

and family income, and these differences must be considered by educators and policy makers if parent involvement is to be utilized as a resource to help schools respond more effectively to the nation's growing income and educational disparities (Desimone, 1999).

A substantial body of research shows that parental involvement positively affects student achievement, although what it means to be involved is defined in various ways. Different individuals and groups have different views of exactly what parent involvement is (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999) and these views are culturally variable (Trumbull et al., 2001). Though attending parent-teacher and school activities are the most used factors at arriving at a definition of what it means to be an involved parent, other factors such as participating in volunteer activities and the parents' perception of schools' efforts to communicate with parents and to encourage parent participation in school activities have been used (Griffith, 1996) along with parent aspirations for children's education, parent-child communication about school, and home structure (Trivette & Anderson, 1995).

As stated by Inger (1992), "There is considerable evidence that parent involvement leads to improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates, and that these improvements occur regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family" (p. 1). Two studies with large samples (13,031 students from 41 schools) and diverse student populations document that the positive effect of parental involvement on student's academic achievement is still present when school characteristics, socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic composition, diversity of family backgrounds and values, students' previous achievements, and other factors are controlled (Griffith, 1996). The positive effect that parent and family involvement has on

student achievement occurs throughout the elementary, middle school, and secondary years (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993). Duran (1998) attributes lower parental involvement levels of Hispanic parents during the high school years to difficulty understanding the subject matter and language barriers.

In a comprehensive review of home and environmental influences on student achievement, Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom (1993) identified the following three characteristics of parental support and guidance significantly correlated to student achievement:

1. Frequent encouragement of children for their schoolwork.
2. Parental knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in children's school learning and supportive help when needed (e.g., knowledge so supervision of homework is smoother or supplemental tutoring is provided).
3. Availability of a quiet place for study with appropriate books, references materials, and other learning materials.

Early childhood programs which include parent/family involvement generally show significant positive effects in improving the academic achievement and adjustment of children, with the greatest effect among at-risk and disadvantaged students (Starkey & Klein, 2000).

A study of Title I students found that mathematics and reading achievement was higher for students regardless of socioeconomic levels when parent/family involvement levels were significant, although students from lower socioeconomic families experienced less benefit (Shaver & Walls, 1998). Simply having parents that are knowledgeable about the child's schooling is positively correlated with improved

academic performance (Baker & Stevenson, 1986).

Hispanic parents and families are often involved in the education of their children in different ways from those of traditional American families, while the effectiveness of specific parent-involvement practices often differs according to race/ethnicity and family income (Desimone, 1999). Perceptions of teachers and Hispanic parents of what it means to be involved as well as what the appropriate roles for parents and teachers are in the schooling process vary substantially. Scribner, Young & Pedroza (1999) found that teachers and parents in high-performing Hispanic schools in Texas defined parent involvement as participation in school events and meetings or working as a teacher assistant or tutor, while parents in this study defined parent involvement as being involved in informal activities at home, such as “checking homework assignments, reading and listening to children read, obtaining tutorial assistance, providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with children, and sending them to school well fed, clean, and rested” (p. 37). Teachers viewed parent involvement as a means to improving academic achievement while parents viewed involvement as “a means of supporting the total well-being of children” (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999, p. 37). According to McClain (1997), in her educational ethnography of a Mexican American family, “educational professionals rarely see families as educators. Schools more often focus on certain expectations about how parents should support the educative work of the school” (p.36).

What it means to be involved may vary even more when Hispanic migrant workers are compared to urban dwelling Hispanic parents. Gerardo Lopez (2001) studied the migrant Padillas family in Texas whose children consistently maintained a high level

of academic success. The academic achievement of the children suggested parental involvement, but the parents were not involved in their children's education in any traditionally defined ways. A primary goal of the Padillas was to teach "their children to appreciate the value of their education through the medium of hard work" (p. 420). To help accomplish this goal, the Padillas took their children to work with them in the fields and regularly reinforced the importance of hard work while emphasizing the limited employment opportunities created by a lack of education. The Padillas children were literally given the choice "to either work hard at school or work hard in the fields" (p. 420). Lopez argues that the transmission of socio-cultural values should be included in the many definitions of parent involvement.

A study conducted by Izzo, et al. (1999) of teacher perceptions of parent involvement in children's education and school performance showed four variables which correlated moderately with increased student achievement in reading and mathematics, even when the effects of student gender and socioeconomic status were considered. These variables were frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-teacher interactions, participation in educational activities at home, and participation in school activities. This longitudinal study of the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (which claims to be one of the few studies that controlled for previous student achievement) found that younger children and those from higher socioeconomic households made the greatest improvement while a decline occurred from the first to the third years of the study in the frequency of parent-teacher contacts, quality of parent-teacher interactions, and parent participation at school (Izzo, et al., 1999). Declines in overall parental involvement as students grow older were

noted in a study by Roehlkepartain & Benson (1994) who stated that relatively few parents stay involved with their children's education through high school. The study showed that 42 percent of 167,000 6th through 12th grade students surveyed reported that their parents seldom or never helped with homework. A similar percentage (39 percent) said their parents seldom or never attended school meetings.

Hispanic parents generally believe that the role of the school is to instill knowledge while they view their role as parents is to provide nurturance and to teach morals, respect and good behavior (Carger, 1997; Chavkin, 1991; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). Teachers are highly respected by most Hispanic adults which may cause reluctance to ask questions that could appear rude or disrespectful (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). While teachers view parents asking questions about assignments and grades as being indicative of the parents' level of caring for their child's education, Hispanic parents may be reluctant to ask these same types of questions because of concern that it might be viewed as a sign of disrespect (Trumbull et al., 2001).

#### *Language Barriers and Cultural Issues*

A major issue that many Hispanic parents deal with while seeking to become involved in their child's education is the language barrier (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Hyslop, 2000). In the majority of schools, teachers speak little or no Spanish (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Gibson, 2002) which makes communication about grades, behavior, or homework difficult. Many schools do not provide interpreters at parent meetings so Spanish-speaking parents cannot understand what is being said (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). Vasquez (2003) stated that even when attempts are made by schools to

translate documents into Spanish for parents, assumptions are often incorrectly made about the level of acculturation of Hispanic parents and that intended meanings are often lost. In addition to the difficulty of communicating with the school, Hispanic parents with little or no English comprehension are also unable to help their children with homework since the homework is usually in English (Aspiazu et al., 1998).

Gibson (2002) states that a “disconnect” exists between the school culture and the Hispanic home culture, and that schools sometimes may not value or even understand the home culture. Latino families value social responsibility, the well-being of the group, and interdependent relationships above individual fulfillment and choice (Trumbull, et al., 2001), but since American schools often stress competition within schools and individual achievement over cooperative behaviors, Hispanic children often get mixed messages from their home and school.

In a study investigating whether parental authority was associated with Hispanic academic achievement, Dyer (2003) states that Latino culture has “patterns of legitimate parental authority that are different from those in the United States” (p.6). Differences between the highly individualistic American culture and the more collectivistic Hispanic culture may be related to varying parental expectations of student achievement, with collectivists showing more concern for the welfare of their groups while individualists were more concerned with having the freedom to “do their own thing” (p.7). Individualistic cultures, according to Dyer (2003), value achievement more than collectivistic cultures.

Other obstacles in increasing parental involvement levels can be the parent’s level of education (Floyd, 1998) and previous negative experiences with schools (Chavkin &

Gonzalez, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). Hyslop (2000) reported that many Hispanic parents feel intimidated by teachers. Migrant families often have had limited exposure to schooling and are lacking many essential skills needed in order to help their children (Lopez, 2001). Parents with lower levels of education often feel intimidated when communicating with teachers and school administrators (Floyd, 1998) and may avoid being involved with the school because of this. In families with older siblings, the older children are often expected to help their younger siblings with homework which could infringe upon into the older child's study time (Sosa, 1997). Parents who were unsuccessful or who had other negative experiences in their own education may have feelings of low self-esteem and anxiety when entering a school setting while even those parents who had positive experiences with education may feel uncomfortable entering the school if they are recent immigrants to the U.S. (Hyslop, 2000).

There are also various logistical issues that hinder Hispanic parents from becoming more involved. Lack of time is an issue for many Hispanic parents (Sosa, 1997), especially for new immigrants and migrant workers who work long hours (Fuentes, Cantu, & Stechuk, 1996). Other issues relate to childcare, transportation, and scheduling of events. The lack of affordable and available childcare for stay-at-home mothers who would like to volunteer at their children's school is an obstacle not only to volunteering during the day, but is also an obstacle to participating in events outside the school day such as parent conferences (Floyd, 1998; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Sosa, 1997). Transportation difficulties are often issues as well for Hispanic parents which makes trips to school difficult unless there is easily accessible public transportation

(Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

### *Factors that Increase Hispanic Parent Involvement*

Several factors have been identified as important to increasing the parental involvement of Hispanic parents. Promoting a school environment that is warm, caring, inviting, and receptive to parents has been particularly beneficial in increasing Hispanic parental involvement (Scribner et. al., 1999). A key piece in the development of this kind of environment is communication which should be the major focus of efforts to improve parent involvement (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995).

Greeting parents when they enter the school and engaging in small talk is helpful according to Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999). Latino parents respond positively to communication that is personalized (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Scribner, et al., 1999) through one-on-one contact or over the telephone. Inviting parents to come to a meeting through a personal contact, though simple, is highly effective in getting them to be more involved (Scribner, 1999; Sosa, 1997). Another way for schools to improve communication with Hispanic parents is to send out regular newsletters which keep parents informed about what is going on at the school so that they can reinforce learning at home and to contact parents immediately when problems come up that relate to their child or if their child is absent (Scribner et al., 1999).

It is essential to reduce the language barrier. For schools containing populations of Spanish speaking parents, all communication should be bilingual. Written materials sent out to parents should be in English and Spanish (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Inger, 1992; Scribner et al., 1999; Sosa, 1997), and bilingual staff should be available to talk with parents when they come into the school (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa,

1995). Providing interpreters at meetings and events is also helpful (Inger, 1992), though it should be noted that “street Spanish” spoken by many uneducated Hispanics may differ substantially from the formal Spanish learned in American school and that interpreters who are unfamiliar with local idioms may be only marginally effective (J. Putnam, personal communication, May 10, 2005). In one study of six high schools that were successful with Hispanic students, parents listed the availability of Spanish-speaking staff as one reason for their increased involvement (Lucas et al., 1990). Providing training in English for adults and other educational opportunities such as GED classes will help increase Hispanic parental involvement (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Scribner et al., 1999).

Home visits by teachers can also be effective in increasing parental involvement levels (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Sosa, 1997). In a study of high performing Hispanic schools in Texas (Scribner et al., 1999), parents generally responded positively to home visits. Parents felt that teachers who took the time to conduct home visits truly cared about their students, especially those parents with limited transportation. Visits allow for parental input (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995), and when parents’ input is valued, communication is enhanced (Scribner et al., 1999; Sosa, 1997).

The use of a home-school coordinator or parent liaison can also be an effective strategy in getting Hispanic parents to be more involved (Bright, 1996; Floyd, 1998; Ramirez-Smith & Lofland, 1995). A parent coordinator may be especially beneficial at the secondary level where parents sometimes have difficulty in determining whom to contact (Scribner et al., 1999). A parent coordinator who is Hispanic can be an asset in dealing with cultural and language barriers and can help create a communication path

between the school and parents (Scribner et al., 1999).

Besides improving communication, there are other strategies to assist in creating a welcoming school environment. Regular activities and events create opportunities for positive interactions and shared experiences (Scribner et al., 1999). For the school to make parent involvement interesting, scheduled activities and events should be based on the interests of parents (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). In a study of high schools that had more success in working with Latino students, it was found that the higher performing high schools held monthly parent meetings in order to get parents involved (Lucas et al., 1990). Sanders (1996) points out that if schools are seeking to obtain greater involvement from fathers, events should be targeted especially for them, such as father and son breakfasts.

One way to lower cultural barriers is to acknowledge the parents' cultural values (Scribner et al., 1999) and to view them as strengths (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). A cultural strength of the Latino community is the nurturance and support of the extended family (Carger, 1997). By inviting members of the extended family to participate at the school, the cultural values are not only acknowledged but are seen to be valued (Sosa, 1997). Sanders (1996) described one school that promoted involvement of the extended family in which grandparents assisted teachers in monitoring the halls at school. Other cultural strengths that can be acknowledged and emphasized are resiliency and resourcefulness, especially of migrant worker's families (Chavkin, 1991). This helps students develop pride in their identity and makes parents feel they can provide valuable contributions (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). It is important that teachers receive training on Hispanic culture (Espinosa, 1995; Scribner et al., 1999) since the attitudes and practices

of teachers and administrators can have a substantial effect on parent involvement (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995).

Providing parents with training to become involved in their child's education at home may be the most economical use of their time (Scribner et al., 1999). Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1998) found that monthly parent workshops provided by the school increased the parental involvement level. Knowledge and skills to assist their children with their homework as well as providing supportive parenting skills were presented at these workshops. In a case study of high performing Hispanic schools in Texas, successful schools emphasized parent involvement with more informal activities at home (Scribner et al., 1999). Other studies have also confirmed that training parents in ways to help with homework can help get parents involved and improve academic achievement (Ascher, 1998; Bright, 1996; Ramirez-Smith & Lofland, 1995).

The school should provide childcare for meetings and events because of the number of young children that Hispanic families often have (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Scribner, 1999; Sosa, 1997) and should also try to provide transportation when possible (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Inger, 1992; Sosa, 1997). Schools should consult parents about opportune times to schedule events and should try to schedule events at more than one time to accommodate families with different work schedules (Sosa, 1997).

## CHAPTER III

### Methods and Procedures

The naturalistic inquiry undertaken in this research attempted to reveal the experiences of the subjects (Hispanic parents) within their context (the schooling process) pertaining to their involvement levels in schools. With the arrival of large numbers of Hispanics to non-metropolitan and rural areas being a recent phenomenon and a lack of formal research conducted in this area, it is hoped that the current study will be helpful in identifying and exploring areas for further research and aiding hypothesis generation as well as giving direction to educators in the field who are attempting to improve Hispanic academic achievement.

To discover what Hispanic parents perceive as the obstacles preventing greater parental involvement with the schools their children attend, a qualitative inquiry was determined to be the most appropriate research approach because of the need to study the experiences of the individuals involved in both depth and detail. The study was devised with predetermined categories of analysis as identified in related previous research literature although the possibility that new or previously unidentified categories might emerge was considered and provision was made for these new categories. With some categories not being predetermined, the researcher is allowed to approach fieldwork without constraint as described by Patton (2002). This approach contributes to the “depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, p. 14).

### *Why This Study is Suited to a Qualitative Design*

A qualitative approach is a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in a context-specific setting, such as a “real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest;” rather, research should produce findings from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Qualitative research has been defined as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Rather than seeking causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings as in quantitative research, the qualitative approach undertaken in the current research sought illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

### *Theoretical Perspective of the Research Methodology*

The theoretical perspective that underlies the methodology of this research is interpretive. This approach looks for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (p.67) and is linked to the thought of Max Weber (1864-1920) who contrasted the need in the social sciences for understanding with the need for explaining causality as found in the natural sciences (Crotty, 1998).

Interpretivism seeks to understand individual phenomena to trace their unique development and is distinctly different from the approach used in the natural sciences of seeking to establish general laws.

### *Unit of Analysis*

The selection of the unit of analysis was a critical factor in the current study. The experiences that hinder school involvement of Hispanic parents were selected as the preliminary unit of analysis.

### *Population*

The population in this study included seven Hispanic parents with little or no English language comprehension. These parents were selected out of the larger Hispanic community in the rural midwestern community where their children attended school.

### *Procedure*

The aid of a local ELL teacher was enlisted to notify members of the local Hispanic community of the purpose of the research and to invite them to participate as volunteers. Individuals selected for both individual interviews and the follow-up focus group interviews were screened to determine their English language proficiency and then randomly selected. The selected parents were interviewed regarding their perception of the primary factors that cause low levels of parental involvement with their children's schools. Each interview session was conducted with the assistance of a fluent translator, was tape-recorded, and was limited to approximately one hour.

### *Sampling Procedures*

Sampling strategies were not of major concern given the choice of methodology for this research. However, the subjects and site selection met the requirement of Benbassat et al. (1981) in being carefully thought out rather than opportunistic. That the sample selected was not a true, representative sample of the population under investigation was not a large issue since generalization was not a goal of the research.

A typical case sampling procedure was followed in the current research. Typical case sampling is appropriate in describing a culture or phenomenon to people not familiar with the setting studied (Patton, 2002). Seven participants were selected by a key informant who could identify who and what are typical; in this case, a Hispanic woman

who is fluent in English and who serves as an ELL teacher in the school district where the interview subjects live. This individual is well respected within the Hispanic adult community and serves as an important resource for Hispanic parents in their efforts to communicate with the schools and other local agencies. The subjects selected for the interview were Hispanic parents who settled in a non-metropolitan area about 30 miles from a large metropolitan area. All of their children attended the same school district.

Since sampling logic is not being used, typical criteria for sample size was not applicable (Yin, 2003). The number of subjects selected was a practical number which would allow sufficient depth of inquiry and allow for rich detail in reporting the findings. Each subject consisted of a whole study in itself, in which data were gathered from various sources and conclusions were drawn from the data before comparisons were made between the different subjects.

The purpose of a typical case sampling approach is to describe and illustrate what is typical to those who are unfamiliar with the setting and not to make generalized statements about the experiences of all participants (Patton, 2002). The sample is therefore illustrative rather than definitive.

The interpreter used during the interview process was an English fluent Hispanic female parent who acted as a liaison and advocate for other parents because of her English fluency and her interest in helping Hispanic children to do better in school. An important consideration in using this person was her previously established rapport with the subjects to be interviewed. The actual subjects interviewed were selected by the interpreter from the pool identified by the ELL teacher as being good typical case samples.

### *Data Collection and Field Procedures*

Stake (1995), and Yin (2003) identified several important sources of evidence that include interviews, documents, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Though all of these evidence sources were used, most of the data were collected through focused interviews, a survey questionnaire, and a focus group interview of seven selected Hispanic parents from a non-metropolitan community. Both individual interviews and the focus group were tape-recorded and translated by a skilled bilingual adult so that literal transcription could occur.

Recommendations from Denzin & Lincoln (2000) were instrumental for this researcher in developing the approach for the actual and individual and focus group interviews:

This interview context calls for the interviewer to play a neutral role, never interjecting his or her opinion of a respondent's answer. The interviewer must establish what has been called "balanced rapport;" he or she must be casual and friendly on the one hand but directive and impersonal on the other. The interviewer must perfect a style of "interested listening" that rewards the respondent's participation but does not evaluate the responses. (p. 650).

Several questions as suggested by Yin (2003) guided data collection during the interview procedure. These were:

1. What overt information is being revealed by the respondent?
2. Is the information being revealed what the respondent thinks they are revealing?
3. What ideas or concepts are repeated in their answers?

4. Which answers should be given the most weight based upon the words chosen and the number of repetitions?

The initial interviews occurred in February 2005 at the homes of each of the respondents and were tape-recorded so that data analysis could occur afterward. The findings from the initial interviews of individuals informed the development of structured questions that were relatively open ended for use with the follow-up focus group interviews which occurred at a local Mexican restaurant.

Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix G) was obtained and consent forms translated into Spanish were provided to interviewees. A written survey questionnaire consisting of 20 items translated into Spanish (Appendix D) along with an interview protocol of 15 open-ended questions (Appendix E) were used. These items were designed to elicit responses that would be relevant to the research questions of this study. The interviewer followed additional lines of information as they appeared in an attempt to identify previously unidentified factors that hinder involvement.

Data were collected, analyzed, and categorized as appropriate while the research was in progress and not at the end of data collection. This approach allowed the newly collected data to inform the direction of the focus group interview as well as allowing the researcher to cycle back and forth between thinking about existing data and generating strategies for collecting new and better data, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984).

#### *Rationale for Data Collection Methods*

The current study focused upon the practices and circumstances present in a non-metropolitan Oklahoma community that were interpreted as being either positive or

negative factors in the involvement level of Hispanic parents. The range of information used for this study included data from interviews and surveys of Hispanic parents with children in school, documents, comments and observations from knowledgeable individuals in the community about the phenomenon under study, and a follow-up focus group interview with the parents. In this research, the interview protocol, questionnaire, and the focus group questions were designed to pursue answers to five primary research questions:

1. Why are Hispanic parents who are currently settling in one non-metropolitan area generally not involved with the schools of their children?
2. What factors do the parents themselves identify as being the most significant obstacles preventing increased involvement with their children's schools?
3. Why are these factors similar or different from those identified in previous research of the large number of Hispanic who settled in more metropolitan and urban areas?
4. What, if any, are the yet undiscovered factors influencing the lack of involvement by Hispanic parents?
5. What insight can be gained from the parents' own descriptions of the barriers to greater involvement that might be used to address the problems identified?

Since little previous research exists that studied the recent phenomenon of the Hispanic migration to non-metropolitan or rural areas, the interview and focus group

approach in this context was used to create a deep and personal look into the school involvement barriers seen by the participants living in these historically new surroundings. This approach allowed the investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context while permitting uses of multiple sources of evidence by the researcher and also providing a means for working with information obtained from various individuals who were members of the group being studied without undue interference with the process being studied. This current procedure was structured after a review of current published literature about Hispanic parental involvement with schools. Additionally, sociological, economic, and population studies were used to offer a better understanding of the demographic, societal, cultural and economic context that influences the current conditions of the low academic success of Hispanic students with low corresponding levels of parental involvement.

A pre-ethnography helped inform the direction of the current research and influenced the questions used in the written survey as well as those used in the individual and focus group interviews. A preliminary focus group of 22 non-English speaking Hispanic parents were asked to identify the main obstacles that inhibited or prevented greater involvement with schools. Three additional informal interviews with Hispanic parents were conducted to confirm the data obtained from the pre-ethnography. The information obtained from these preliminary efforts informed the selection of the questions and the process that was used to collect the data for this study. For example, it was learned in these interviews that many written materials sent home to parents from the Oklahoma State Department of Education are translated by computer programs and are unintelligible by Hispanic readers, and that the children themselves served as translators

for most school-to-home written communications.

Data received from interviewing in its various forms is a basic method used by quantitative and qualitative researchers alike (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To obtain data about the perceptions of Hispanic parents living in non-metropolitan or rural areas in Oklahoma regarding the obstacles keeping them from greater involvement with the educational process of their children, the methodology utilized individual interviews of approximately one hour each of three Hispanic husband- wife couples and one single mother identified as typical cases by a key informant as described earlier, a written questionnaire completed by each participant, and a subsequent follow-up focus group interview of the subjects.

The use of a focus group interview after the initial individual interviews as a means of triangulation as well as a source of additional or new information was deemed appropriate as focus group interviews “often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative, they can be stimulating for respondents, aiding recall, and the format is flexible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Since the initial interviews with individual couples yielded data consistent with that obtained in the pre-ethnography, the approach used in the focus group follow-up interview was to determine if there were any yet undiscovered obstacles to parental involvement.

The written questions on the survey questionnaire were general yes-no questions or short answer questions that provided additional relevant data. See Appendix C for the survey questionnaire, Appendix E for the individual interview questions, and Appendix F for the group interview questions.

### *Data Analysis*

According to Yin (2003), data analysis consists of “examining, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study.” Identifying repeated patterns, the “repeatable regularities” as described by Miles and Huberman (1984), was the foundation upon which all analysis began. The analytic strategy used relied on the theoretical propositions below:

1. Previously identified factors that hinder involvement of Hispanic parents in urban areas will be factors in the non-metropolitan area of Oklahoma.
2. Undiscovered factors that hinder involvement may emerge as well.

Since qualitative data analysis consists primarily of data reduction and interpretation, a pattern matching approach was used toward both these ends in this study because of its effectiveness and desirability (Yin, 2003). Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes that identify a pattern, emergent theme, or explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This “start list” approach allowed the researcher to create an empirical pattern based on factors identified in previous research and factors predicted from the pre-ethnography and personal experience. These factors were then compared to the data obtained in the study. That the results show pattern coincidence helps strengthen the internal validity of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The pattern matching procedure involves no precise comparisons and may involve no statistical or quantitative criteria and is rather interpretive and analytic (Yin, 2003). The factors predicted to inhibit Hispanic parental involvement that were pattern matched to the data obtained in the interviews are detailed in Table 2.

To allow this researcher to be open-minded and context sensitive, the development of emerging and new codes was essential (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The

procedure for coding, therefore, allowed the identification of newly emerged factors as well as the categories based upon findings from previous research, presumptions informed by the pre-ethnography and personal experience. Miles & Huberman (1984) noted that codes may be static or dynamic and should allow changes over time as the procedures progress.

To deal with the issue of convergence and divergence as described by Guba (1978), categories were first judged by the criteria of internal homogeneity (the extent to which the data in a category fit together) and external heterogeneity (the extent to which differences between categories is bold and clear). After this, a careful examination of data that did not seem to fit, or what Guba calls “divergence” occurred by building on information already known and making connections where possible between different items. This process was not followed mechanically, linearly, or rigidly but rather was allowed to unfold inductively, as Guba (1978) stated that no infallible procedure exists for performing this process.

The data obtained from each respondent were coded into the factors on the left side of Table 2 (Chapter V) and then pattern matched as to the level of hindrance as determined by the number of recurrences in the interview as well as the strength of language used so that the focus would not be solely on arithmetic but on substance (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Researchers disagree as to whether a qualitative study should be concerned with issues of reliability (replicability) and validity as these terms defined quantitatively may not apply to the qualitative research paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). Some researchers argue that precision (Winter, 2000) along with credibility and transferability (Hoepf,

1997) provides the means to evaluate the findings of qualitative research. The results from this research are not intended to produce any direct findings that could be generalized as such. It was instead anticipated that the outcomes of this study should stimulate further research and to help build and provide hypotheses for later studies as well as being applicable to a limited degree to similar situations. Every effort was made by the researcher to collect, analyze, and interpret the data in a truthful, credible, and plausible manner.

### *Triangulation*

This study will use triangulation to ensure accuracy and to generate alternative explanations (Stake, 1995). Snow and Anderson (cited in Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) note that data, investigators, theories, and even methodologies can be used for triangulation. In the current research, this was done by using multiple sources of data including documents, archival records, individual and focus group interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, member checks, and outside authority checks.

To triangulate the interview findings shown in Table 2 (Chapter V), member checks from knowledgeable individuals from within and without the community were performed by presenting the main categories and findings of the study and asking for their reflection and contribution. These individuals from the community included a Hispanic ELL teacher who serves as an informal liaison between Hispanics and the local schools, and a bilingual Hispanic mother that is somewhat of an advocate for Hispanics in the community. To extend the triangulation to an individual experienced with the population being studied who was not involved in the research, a school principal from a rural community with a growing Hispanic population was asked to reflect upon the main

findings as well. This individual expressed that the findings in light of his own experiences in the field were not surprising and noted that the high cooperativeness level typically encountered by school administrators interacting with Hispanics could be successfully used to improve school and home communication if schools offered English language instruction to adults (G. Morris, personal communication, April 22, 2005).

#### *Criteria for Judging the Findings*

According to Yin (2003), an exploratory study such as the current study should have a stated purpose or criteria on which the success of the findings will be judged. The findings of this study should illuminate those obstacles that hinder Hispanic parental involvement as being similar to those previously identified obstacles faced by urban-dwelling Hispanics but may additionally bring to light new obstacles encountered by those Hispanics settling in rural and non-metropolitan areas.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

The data obtained from individual and focus group interviews of non-English speaking Hispanic parents as well as data obtained from written questionnaires, school records, and key informants are presented in two parts. The first part consists of a narrative description of each interview conducted, while the second part compares the results found from these interviews with the various other information sources used in the study. All names are pseudonyms.

The research questions used in establishing the questions for each interview were:

1. Why are Hispanic parents who are currently settling in one non-metropolitan area generally not involved with the schools of their children?
2. What factors do the parents identify as being the most significant obstacles preventing increased involvement with their children's schools?
3. Why are these factors similar or different from those identified in previous research of the large number of Hispanic who settled in more metropolitan and urban areas?
4. What, if any, are the yet undiscovered factors influencing the lack of involvement by Hispanic parents?

5. What insight can be gained from the parents' own descriptions of the barriers to greater involvement that might be used to address the problems identified?

*Mr. and Mrs. Torres*

The Torres' mobile home lies in a rural area spotted with other mobile homes often surrounded with old cars and appliances in the yards, stacks of lumber, and other things such as children's toys. Even before the interpreter and I arrived at the door of the home for the interview at 6 PM, Mrs. Torres was standing at the door, ready to welcome us inside. "Buenos Dias" and "Hola!" enthusiastically exchanged along with smiles seemed to indicate Mrs. Torres willingness to participate in the study. We learned that Mr. Torres worked as a house painter while his wife did babysitting when possible to earn extra money.

After being directed to sit on a sofa in the modest but scrupulously clean home, Mr. Torres, an obviously Hispanic man of about 40 years old came into the room, wearing clothes that indicated his occupation as a painter as he was sporting a variety of colors of paint on various parts of his clothes. He was very courteous, and shook my hand while nodding.

A female child of grade school age stood shyly in the doorway looking into the room, while another younger kindergarten aged child freely came into the room to observe what was about to happen. While Mrs. Torres sat on another sofa directly across from the one on which the interpreter and I sat, Mr. Torres sat in a chair along another wall, placing himself in between his wife and the interpreter and myself rather than beside her.

After introducing myself and describing the research and explaining the consent

forms which Mr. and Mrs. Torres signed, we began the interview. As would be the case in each interview, Mr. Torres answered most of the questions while his wife sat quietly for the most part, though she did occasionally interject a few words. The Torres family had lived in the United States about three years and came here from Guerrero, Mexico. The child in the doorway turned out to be 12 years old; I learned they had a 15 year old son who was away. The younger child, a Caucasian American next door and was being babysat by Mrs. Torres while her parents worked. Later in the conversation, I asked if the neighbor's child was learning to speak any Spanish from being around the Torres. Mrs. Torres then spoke to the child in Spanish and the child looked up at me, smiling broadly, and said "si, senior!".

From the very beginning of the interview, Mr. Torres listened carefully to each question and took a few seconds to consider his answer before replying. He indicated that he understood a little more English than he could speak, and indeed, smiled with recognition at a remark I made in English to the interpreter before she had interpreted it for him. He described his work situation and said that his "boss" spoke no Spanish but that communication was still possible between them. He also indicated that Mrs. Torres spoke and understood almost no English at all. Both of them were able to read Spanish, he said.

Mr. Torres was proud of how hard his children had worked in school, saying that both of them had understood no English at all three years earlier but that they both now were "95 percent" able to read and write it. He spoke of the academic achievement of his 12 year old with pride and indicated that he and his wife worked hard to encourage and bribe their children to study hard and learn as much as possible:

When we came to the U.S., we all spoke no English, and now my children both speak English and understand everything, 95 percent, and they can write it too, they write correctly and well. The girl, she is very bright, she speaks English and has friends that are Americans, we encourage her and see that she does her homework, we bribe or threaten (laughing) as we must, her studies are very important, she is smart.

The son had recently been honored by winning an art award at a local bank, and had his work on display at the bank. Mr. and Mrs. Torres both spoke excitedly about the award and obviously were very pleased with this recognition and accomplishment, describing how they had gone to the bank and had seen the work there with the other winners. Later, it was mentioned that the prize for the second place award was five dollars:

Our son, Pedro, is very smart at drawing, he is an artist. The school showed his work to a bank in an art contest, he won second place and we went to the bank and saw his drawing on the wall. There was lots of other artwork, our son was the second best of all though. The bank people talked to us and showed us where his work was hanging.

As would be the case with all those parents interviewed, the Torres said that learning was very important to their children and they encouraged them and saw to it that they did their homework, but that they were unable to help much because of their own lack of English comprehension. Later, when asked about things in the schools that seemed to frustrate their children, Mr. Torres said “Too much homework!” After making this remark, he went on to say that he felt the teachers tried hard to help his children learn

and that generally he thought they were doing a very good job.

One concern that the Torres had was the bad influence that some other children might have on the Torres children. Mr. Torres said that his children had reported that other children on the bus sometimes spoke of having drugs, and that his own children would come home and tell about these things. Much information was volunteered by Mr. Torres on the topic of drugs in the schools, and he stated that another suburban community nearby was commonly thought by his Hispanic co-workers to be a place where many students used drugs, and that this made him glad his children were in a more rural school district. He stated that the children in this suburban area were “rich and racist against Mexicans” and that his children were emphatic that they did not want to move into that community. They seemed to feel well accepted in the community in which they lived and had no complaints about the way the other children treated their children or how the school employees treated them.

Mr. Torres told that he had quit school and gone to work at the end of the fifth grade, and that learning in Mexico at that time had been less important than working, but that he wanted something better than that for his own children. He thought there was a chance for a college education if his children worked very hard, and he stated several times that he saw the parents as being responsible to see that the children worked hard, followed the rules, and were courteous. When asked on his ideas about how the schools might be improved, he shrugged and said apologetically, “I know nothing about schools, the teachers are the one who know these things”. He stated again that he saw his own role as seeing that his children worked hard and followed the rules.

Mr. Torres expressed frustration that the school had no bilingual personnel other

than the ESL teacher, and that he went to all the meetings and parent-teacher conferences and used his children as interpreters. When relating this arrangement, he smiled and said he wondered “if the nice things the teacher said were real or something the child makes up” during the interpretation! Mr. Torres said the newsletters and other school communications that were sent home were only in English, another source of frustration for them. Both Mr. and Mrs. Torres emphatically stated that they would go to school to learn English and that they wished the school would offer that.

An interesting example of cultural differences was illustrated when Mrs. Torres, after her husband excused himself to go to the school to pick up the other child, said she hoped that her daughter could find an “Americano” husband eventually, but that she wanted her son to marry a Mexican girl. When I asked why, she went into a lengthy explanation:

Mexican men expect much more work from their wives than American men do, my daughter would have an easier life if she married an American man, they treat women better! But my son, he should have himself a Mexican girl, to do all the work. (After hesitation) I made salsa with a blender a while back. My husband came in and caught me. He was angry, very angry. Mexican women make salsa by grinding jalapeno peppers and other ingredients between rocks, he was very unhappy that I was not making the salsa in the old way. He did not want salsa to be made in this way. He demanded that I never use the blender for this purpose again.

It was obvious from her telling of this story that she saw this as unreasonable but it also was clear that she had capitulated to his wishes: “My son can have himself a slave

to do all the work” she stated again as the reason she wanted him to marry a Mexican girl.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Torres expressed thanks and appreciation for being selected to participate in the interview and seemed to view it as an honor that had been bestowed upon them. Mrs. Torres offered food and drink to the interpreter and myself, which we declined. Upon conclusion of the interview, Mrs. Torres followed us to the car, talking constantly to the interpreter and seemed reluctant to see the session end. The interpreter explained later that Mrs. Torres had talked of her own unhappiness in coming to the United States but had gradually come to like it, and that her children had adapted much more quickly than she had. She said that her husband had paid “a lot of money” to get herself and the children smuggled across the border, and that at one point she had told him she wanted to go back to Mexico and that she would work for \$1 an hour if she must in order to pay the money back to her husband. Now, she said, she liked the United States much better. But it had been very hard, she said, “very hard at first here in the U.S.”

*Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez*

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez live in an attractive suburban-style home in the country with a beautiful lake immediately behind it. As we approached the home, the interpreter told me that they were caretakers of a nearby horse farm and that the owner of the farm, a doctor, allowed the Gonzalez family to live in a house he owned on the premises. Unlike the other Hispanic residences I visited, this one was luxurious and indicated affluence rather than poverty. The furnishings inside were very nice and our interview was conducted in a formal dining room at a large, expensive looking dining room table. In

addition to the income from Mr. Gonzalez's work as a caretaker at the horse farm, Mrs. Gonzalez worked on weekends at a flea market. They left Acapulco, Mexico nine years earlier to come to the United States, and had worked at the horse farm since arriving.

Three young children played happily in the next room when our interview began, and like Mrs. Torres, Mrs. Gonzalez asked several times if we would like something to drink. As the interview began, Mrs. Gonzalez, holding a quiet and seemingly shy toddler in her arms, told us her husband would be along shortly.

Each of the Hispanic families answered some of the questions with numbers rather than adjectives as is typical in English speaking Americans. Mrs. Gonzalez response to a question about her ability to understand and speak English was "five." The interpreter explained to me that this was the equivalent of five percent and that this was a common Hispanic way of responding. When asked of the English comprehension abilities of her school aged child, Maria (age six), Mrs. Gonzalez said "100" while her four year old was judged to be "80." After some thought, she added that Maria had been a "10" a year before, so obviously much progress had occurred in the past year.

Mrs. Gonzalez said that Maria loved school and talked about it constantly. At about this time, Maria walked into the room and since her mother had indicated her English comprehension was excellent, I took the opportunity to talk directly to Maria and asked her if she liked school. As her face beamed, she told me she liked it very much and that she had a good teacher. Mrs. Gonzalez answered again that there was "nada" that frustrated Maria, and that she loved learning and seemed to be thriving in the school.

When asked what things she felt were important for the school to teach her children, she identified respect, obedience, and the ability to listen quietly as very

important and that the teacher should teach these things. On following up, again she responded in a similar manner and did not identify any subject matter or academic knowledge of any kind as being important. Mrs. Gonzalez indicated she helped Maria with her homework but that Maria did not like it, because she had to translate the assignments into Spanish so her mother could understand and then translate the answers back into English. She told of her own frustration about not being able to speak English and said she would like very much to go somewhere where they could help her learn.

Mrs. Gonzalez told of trying to be involved at the school and that she had volunteered to help in the kitchen at a recent school event, but that no one else in the kitchen spoke Spanish and that it was awkward and hard and that she left in frustration. She said there was no one to “tell me what to do.” She repeated that she would work very hard to learn English herself if there were someone who would teach her.

Unlike the Torres family who felt their children were treated respectfully by students and teachers at school, Mrs. Gonzalez related a story about Maria’s kindergarten teacher a year earlier who had grabbed Maria and shaken her in anger, and that Maria had cried and did not want to return to school. She related that the teacher seemed to use very heavy-handed tactics and she wondered if it was because the teacher did not like Hispanics. Upon hearing of the shaking incident, Mr. Gonzalez complained to the school principal but they were not sure of what was done, if anything. She went on to say that Maria liked her current teacher very much and that she tried very hard to stay out of trouble, possibly because it had embarrassed her that her father had complained the year before. “Maria is a good girl” she said with obvious pride.

As was the case with the Torres, Mrs. Gonzalez said it made no sense to her that

the communications that came home were not in Spanish, and that there were no bilingual staff available for parent-teacher conferences. She said she would like to keep up with Maria's progress on a regular basis, and not wait "until it is too late" at parent-teacher conference time, but that it was impossible.

Mrs. Gonzalez told about certain days at school where students were not required to wear the regular uniform, but that Maria had showed up at school dressed in the uniform anyway because they had not known and that she had been embarrassed. The same problem had occurred with changes in the cheerleading team's schedule which Maria belonged to since the newsletters were entirely in English rather than in Spanish too:

One day Maria came to school in her uniform, none of the other children except Latino wore this, the rest wore free clothes as they chose. We did not know, Maria was very embarrassed, and so was I. The school newsletter had told this was free clothes day but we could not understand it. The cheerleaders changed their time to practice too, in the newsletter, we did not know it and there was a problem because Maria missed practice, we did not know of the change. We cannot read the English.

Mrs. Gonzalez was very emphatic, she said she would go "at any time" to learn English, wherever she needed to go.

After the interview was finished, Mr. Gonzalez arrived and introduced himself briefly before leaving again. Mrs. Gonzalez said that she was disappointed in her husband's lack of involvement with the children and their schooling. She spoke at length about her frustrations with him and that she wanted a better life for each of her children

than she had been able to have for herself, and that a good education was the key to that. “I wish he would help more with the children”, she said.

*Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez*

Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez moved to the United States in August, 2000 from Jalisco, Mexico. Mr. Hernandez works as a gardener for an American while Mrs. Hernandez sometimes works in a taco stand. They have a 15 year old boy and a 12 year old girl.

While sitting at the kitchen table in their modest mobile home located in a neighborhood that consisted entirely of older mobile homes, many in need of paint and repair, Mr. Hernandez answered virtually all of the questions in the interview while Mrs. Hernandez sat quietly. He indicated he understood some English though the formulating of sentences in English was very hard for him. When Mrs. Hernandez was asked about her own understanding of English, Mr. Hernandez answered for her that she understood very little. He said that the children had spoken and understood none when they arrived but that in the past four years they had become very fluent and he was proud of them.

The Hernandez children enjoyed school very much, we were told, and had many friends. It seemed to be important to Mr. Hernandez for us to know that the children had friends that were not Hispanic. Both children were involved in school activities beyond the regular academic course and spent many extra hours at school, with the daughter being very involved in photography, though Mr. Hernandez said he thought it was important that they learned as much English, math and art as they learned in the other areas that seemed to be more fun.

Mr. Hernandez, like the other parents interviewed, felt that it was important for

his children to be encouraged to do their homework and to work hard. He indicated that this was a major priority in their home, and even though he and his wife were unable to help with homework because they didn't speak English, they could still offer structure and require their children to work hard. Sometimes, he said, the daughter helped the son even though she was the younger one. "She has less trouble than he has," Mr. Hernandez explained to us. "She is able to help him with his work even when we cannot."

After telling about an occasion where the daughter had come home crying because of being made fun of by her American classmates, Mr. Hernandez told us she had developed a friendly relationship with an eighth grade teacher and that this connection had been very important to turning her attitude around. He said that he thought most of the teachers were very good and worked hard to help his children succeed, and that he felt they treated both his children and himself courteously and respectfully. The bus rides were identified as being problematic for his children, however, and in this setting he felt they were not treated respectfully. When asked if the disrespectful treatment was because they were Hispanic, he said he thought it was more "because they are kids", and that it was partly because the bus driver was "rough around the edges and grouchy."

Mr. Hernandez said it was important that respect and courtesy be taught at home by the parents, and that the school should teach the academics. He suggested that extra time after school would be a very good thing for those children who needed more help, and that he would work out any transportation issues that might arise because it was very important that they learn as much as possible.

The lack of available bilingual school staff and the failure of the school to translate written material sent to parents into Spanish were his biggest complaints about the school. Mr. Hernandez relied upon the ELL teacher and his own children as translators:

We take our children to school when there is a meeting, they will translate for us what we need to know and for the teachers too. Their language teacher will help tell us what to do and translate the written materials into Spanish for us too. But the school does not send the papers home in Spanish, they are all in English. It is hard for us.

*Mrs. Sanchez*

Mrs. Sanchez, a young woman in her early to mid twenties, met us in the home of a friend. The interpreter explained to me that Mrs. Sanchez wanted to talk with me but was uncomfortable doing so in her own home. Her friend, a Hispanic man about 40 years old, welcomed us into his suburban home in a community near to the rural community where Mrs. Sanchez and her children resided and remained in an adjoining room during the entire time the interview was in progress. Mrs. Sanchez seemed nervous at first, but nodded assent as the consent form was explained and sat intently on the edge of her chair as the interview began. She was dressed in jeans and a colorful short sleeved shirt and had a small crucifix around her neck which she held in one hand absentmindedly as she listened to the interpreter.

Mrs. Sanchez told us she had come to the U.S. in 1994 from Agua Calientes, Mexico. She left Mexico as she entered the ninth grade, she told us, and began cleaning houses in order to earn a living, though she had also worked as a waitress in a restaurant.

She has three male children, aged 4, 5, and 7 years old and told us she lives with her mother. No mention was made of a husband throughout the interview.

Mrs. Sanchez told us she could speak very little English, though she said she understood more than she could speak. Indeed, there were several times in the interview that her facial expressions indicated comprehension of questions or comments that I made to the interpreter before they had been translated. She relaxed little by little as the interview proceeded, and eventually was smiling and seemed to be enjoying the process. Her answers gradually changed from clipped phrases to complete and sometimes expansive sentences.

Like the other Hispanic parents previously interviewed for this research, Mrs. Sanchez expressed that she tried very much to help her older child who was in school but that it was very difficult because all of the work was in English. She smiled sadly and indicated that no English was spoken in the home, and then added that she wished she could learn. She interjected without being asked that she did feel it was important that her children were taught to work hard, and that was something she felt she could do even if she was unable to help them with homework. When queried about how she taught them this, she told us she sat her son down and had him work every night, and even if he indicated he was finished with his homework, she had him continue to sit and study at least 30 minutes because she felt he was behind the other students.

Mrs. Sanchez voluntarily told us that his teacher was very mean. After a lengthy dialogue with the interpreter, it was explained to me that his teacher had often grabbed him by the shoulder or arm and had shaken him and fussed at him, and that he did not want to go back to school after the first of several occurrences of the shaking. After

going to the school and talking with the teacher (aided by a bilingual school secretary) to determine if she could somehow help, Mrs. Sanchez was told her son was slow and that he should have repeated first grade. She additionally was told that her son would not sit still and that he needed tutoring. After asking where tutoring might be obtained, Mrs. Sanchez was told that it was her responsibility to find someone, and that the teacher could offer her no suggestions. She related that her son had made a card of some kind for the teacher and presented it to her as a gift, only to have the teacher return it to him and say that she did not want it. The interpreter's tone was very serious as she related Mrs. Sanchez's concern about her son's teacher. I asked her if she had made any subsequent trips to the school after the first meeting, and if she had informed the principal of the concern she had for her son's education. She shook her head in the negative before my question to her was interpreted, and after a momentary hesitation, she asked what I thought she should do, and that she didn't want her son to dislike school or be afraid. She told me of another Hispanic parent that she knew of who had transferred her child out of the same teacher's classroom a year before, and that this parent had never even talked to the teacher. She stated that she felt there was bias on the part of her child's teacher against any child of Hispanic descent.

Though Mrs. Sanchez question directed at me about what she should do was not part of the interview protocol, I answered her and suggested to her that she contact the school principal and express her concern. I explained the role that the principal might play, and told her that most principals would be very concerned to see that all children were treated fairly and not intimidated. In a surprising twist, she asked me if I would mind calling the principal on her behalf, and asked me to not mention anything that

would identify her to the teacher. She told me that there were several other Hispanic children in the class, and that she was very concerned about repercussions that might occur toward her child if the teacher knew who had complained. I told her I would be willing to call the principal of her child's school and that I could simply state that I had heard, in the course of doing confidential research, that possible inappropriate actions and bias against Hispanic children had occurred. I specifically asked her if she wanted me to do that, and again, before the question had been translated, she nodded her head yes and answered affirmatively. She then asked if I could do this in such a way that she could not be identified, and I assured her that I would try. Her concern for the well being and fair treatment of her child were very obvious throughout this exchange.

The question by Mrs. Sanchez about what I thought she should do followed by her request for intervention on my part presented two ethical dilemmas for this researcher. First, the simple question she asked about what she should do, as part of a structured interview, deviated from the protocol followed during interviews of the other subjects as no provision had been made for subjects to ask questions of the interviewer other than for clarification of a question being posed. The deviation, in this researcher's view, did not compromise the integrity of the research but rather indicated that a sufficient degree of trust had been established that the subject felt comfortable in venturing forth with a question of her own. As stated by McClain (1997):

Rapport, trust, and a sense of shared purpose are often essential in order to get an accurate sense of a cultural scene. Yet developing the human relationships upon which ethnography is built is an endeavor fraught with ambivalence. Differences in perceptions of the situation and of power affect the relationship, and there are

constant pitfalls of interpersonal and cross cultural miscommunication (p. 343). McClain goes on to quote Clifford Geertz's assessment of the inherent ambiguity of the research situation calling it the "the day in, day out, one step forward, one step back, effort to get genuinely close to a handful of people who have no particular reason to get close to you" (p.343). In this case, the opportunity existed to further the development of trust between the subject and myself while simultaneously helping a frustrated student and parent in a difficult situation.

The second issue, of being asked to intervene by calling the principal of her child's school in order to protect her child from discrimination meant that her anonymity as well as the anonymity of her child's school might be lost if this request were to be honored. Since she willingly disclosed this information under no duress whatsoever that was related to the research being conducted, it was determined by this researcher that the greater ethical concern was for the well being of the child. After explaining that the anonymity guaranteed to her in the Consent Form might be lost to some degree if her request were to be honored, I agreed to contact the principal as she had asked if she still wanted me to do so; she indicated that she did. The greater compromise to the integrity of the research, in my opinion, would have been to have refused her request and lost the trust that apparently existed between this subject and the researcher, and of course the ethical responsibilities held by all educators for the well being of children would have been violated as well. After agreeing to contact the principal of her child's school, the interview immediately returned to the protocol. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked once again if she wanted me to contact her child's school and again explained that the anonymity that had been guaranteed to her in the Consent Form might be lost to some

degree. She stated that she wished for the contact to occur, regardless of any consequences or lost anonymity but that she would prefer it to be done in such a way that her child could remain anonymous if possible. I agreed to try to do that and she seemed relieved and pleased.

Surprisingly, Mrs. Sanchez said that she herself felt welcome in the school and that school employees were courteous and helpful to her. She told me that it was important to her to go to the school during parent-teacher conference time but that she felt that the teacher had concluded that her child was slow and didn't want to spend much time with her. Mrs. Sanchez again stated that she felt it was very important for her child to do well in school and that she was sad that he did not like it, and that she was very concerned that her two younger boys might get the same teacher when they reached the age to be first grade. Her five year old seemed to be struggling with what she described as "his sounds" and she again asked what I thought she should do to help him. She said she had tried to find him a tutor but that it was too expensive. As she waited for my response, her concern and sincerity were apparent. I must admit I was somewhat at a loss to make a suggestion that a non-English speaking mother might implement to help her son, and eventually suggested that she ask others in the Hispanic community if they knew of someone bilingual who might help him. My answer sounded very hollow to me, and it probably did to her as well.

Mrs. Sanchez was very emphatic about her desires to help her children do well in school and said that she wished she could somehow learn to speak English, and that she would go anywhere she could to do so:

I've tried to learn English, I've learned some but it is very hard to do. My boys don't

learn to make the sounds at home, I cannot help them because I do not know them either. The teacher says my son needs help with his sounds, and I know that he does, but how can I help him? What can I do? I wish I could help them. If someone would teach

English to me, I would try to learn, I want to learn. I would go anywhere to learn if I could get there, it is very important.

When asked what suggestions she had to improve the school, Mrs. Sanchez answered without hesitation that whole day kindergarten as well as after-school and summer programs would be welcomed as a way to get additional help for her children. She also indicated that the newsletters, programs at school events, and other communications from the school to her were always in English and that she did not understand them. She noted that report cards were in Spanish as well as English and that she did not understand why all communications could not be the same way.

Upon concluding the interview, Mrs. Sanchez was very enthusiastic in expressing appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the interview and it seemed that she viewed it as a privilege that had been bestowed upon her. She also thanked me for my interest in Hispanic children and my efforts to help them do better in school. Finally, she thanked me profusely for being willing to call the principal of the school on behalf of her child and reiterated that she hoped it could be done in a way that it would not be known who had complained. She struck me as being very vulnerable and simply a concerned parent who did not know where else to concerned parent

#### *Information Obtained from Written Questionnaire*

A written questionnaire was developed to create a detailed demographic picture of the subjects interviewed and their backgrounds. Questions posed in this instrument were

deemed to be appropriate for short answers in a written format, intending to add important detail in understanding (see Appendix C).

*Summary of Responses from Written Questionnaire*

The written questionnaire contained 20 items (see Appendix C) and helps to create a detailed demographic picture of the subjects interviewed. The responses to the written questions used as part of the interview follow:

1. The average number of children in the households interviewed was 2.5.
2. There was an average of 2 attending public school.
3. The average number of years lived in the United States by the respondents was slightly more than 6.
4. All respondents immediate previous place of residence was Mexico.
5. Two respondents arrived in the U.S. in 1994; one arrived in 2000 and one arrived in 2001.
6. All respondents' country of origin was Mexico.
7. Occupations of the respondents were house painting, house cleaning, gardening, and working as a clerk in a flea market.
8. Previous occupations included working in a restaurant (two respondents), painting, and working in a store.
9. Three of the four respondents indicated that they regularly helped their children at home with their schoolwork.
10. Three of the four respondents indicated that there were friends, neighbors, or relatives who helped their children with schoolwork at home.
11. All four respondents indicated that their children moderately or strongly

liked school.

12. Two of the four respondents indicated that English was spoken in the home. All respondents indicated they encouraged and motivated their children, taught them to work hard, and attended parent conferences and other meetings at the school.
13. All respondents said that transportation was not a problem for them in attending school meetings.
14. Three of the four respondents had pre-school age children at home.
15. Only one of the respondents said that lack of childcare was a problem in attending school meetings.
16. None of the respondents received school-to-home communications that were translated into Spanish.
17. All respondents said they could read in Spanish but not in English.
18. Three of the four respondents said they felt welcome in their schools.
19. All four respondents said that school employees treated them courteously.
20. All respondents said their children spoke English well or moderately well.

*Development of the focus group protocol.*

Based upon the responses received to the original interview protocol and the written survey materials, five main areas emerged that warranted further inquiry in the focus group interview. Those areas to be followed up were:

1. Failure of the school to send general information letters, school calendars, lunch menus or newsletters that have been translated to Spanish.
2. Inability of the parents to speak and understand English in personal

communication with the school.

3. Reluctance of the parents to question authority or advocate for the rights of their child.
4. Ideas from the parents about how schools might better serve their children.
5. Hispanic parents, in spite of communication difficulties, seem to generally feel welcome in their children's schools and feel they are treated respectfully.

### *Focus Group Findings*

The focus group consisted of six adults (four mothers and one husband and wife couple) whose children attended the same non-urban school as those previously interviewed. Participants were selected by the same ELL teacher used earlier from the local elementary school. All subjects had previously indicated a willingness to participate in a discussion about their experiences and ideas about their children in school. Consent forms were given to each participant and explained at the time of the focus group meeting, which occurred in mid-morning at a corner table of a Mexican restaurant in which two of the participants worked. All of the participants knew each other prior to the session, and seemed to be comfortable and reasonably relaxed. The translator from the original interview sessions was present and the session was tape recorded.

The issue of important written communications from the school to parents not being translated into Spanish was a major concern to the focus group as well as those interviewed previously. It was noted by one mother that translated documents were often difficult to understand, if not impossible; others in the group nodded assent at this

remark. Mild frustration was expressed by two individuals that any expectation of the school that was considered important enough to be put in writing and sent home but that was not translated to Spanish seemed to be indicative of a lack of interest in the Hispanic child's success. One mother asked: "How can they expect us to read it in English? They know our children are learning English. It seems that we do not matter very much to them." Other members of the group nodded.

The focus group participants seemed resigned to the problems in communicating with their schools since only two of them spoke English with any degree of proficiency. One mother who spoke English reasonably well remarked that communication was often difficult even when the language barrier was removed, and would obviously be very hard when there were individuals who spoke different languages with no interpreter present. The use of the ELL teacher as well as the children themselves was a common practice, as was the case in the earlier interviews. When asked if their schools or communities offered adult English language instruction in any form, the answer was that they do not, but that it would be greatly appreciated if it was offered. There seemed to be a general willingness to set aside time to attend such instruction if it were offered.

When asked what ideas they might have about ways the school might help their children succeed better, one subject stated that the "school is doing a very good job" and quick assent was expressed around the group. After acknowledging their compliments, I again attempted to get their ideas about how improvement might occur, and again encountered what seemed to me to be reluctance on their part to say anything that would seem to be a criticism of the school. I asked their opinions about some ideas that had been previously mentioned during the initial interviews such as celebrating Hispanic culture

with art, dance, food, and poems. Their response to these was lukewarm at best, and once again there seemed to be reluctance to state anything critical about the school. Though one mother said “those would be good,” she seemed to lack conviction, and the silence by the others that followed her answer seemed to confirm ambivalence on their part.

The focus group respondents confirmed the findings of the earlier interviews and offered no substantially new or different information from that already obtained, and, like the earlier subjects, seemed pleased to have been asked their opinions. At the conclusion of the session, warm expressions of “thank you” accompanied by smiles and nodding heads came from each of them. As the translator and I walked to our cars in the parking lot, I remarked to her that our subjects seemed to be very nice people. “Yes”, she said, “they are. And they love their children very much.”

## CHAPTER V

### Analysis and Interpretation

#### *Similarities and Differences in Interview Responses*

Though there was some variability, all of the respondents described their ability to speak English as non-existent or very low, though three of the four indicated that their ability to understand some English exceeded their ability to speak it. Each of the parents perceived the ability level of their children to understand and speak English as being moderate to high, however, and in interacting with the school, it was a common practice to use the child as an interpreter. It was an obviously high priority of all families interviewed that their children be fluent in English, and in three out of the four interviews, the parents expressed a desire (without being asked specifically) to learn English if there were a place that would offer suitable instruction. None of the families interviewed spoke English in the home.

The perceptions of the families of how their children were doing in school varied substantially, roughly representing low, moderate, and high levels of success. Even with 10 children being involved and with their school levels ranging from early elementary to high school, none were in a full time ESL program at their school, though all but one had regular contact with their ESL teacher. The Gonzalez parents, in particular, expressed great pride that their two children did not need to be in ESL instruction and that their daughter had removed herself so she could be in the academic mainstream.

All of the respondents except Mrs. Sanchez indicated that their children generally

liked school and had positive things to say about their experiences at school for the most part, although several anecdotes were related that suggested that the children's initial entry into school had been a frightening and often negative experience for them. When specifically queried about what the children had said they disliked about school, the general responses were not very different from what any child might say about school dislikes: being teased, bad food in the cafeteria, or long bus rides to and from school. No comments about ethnic discrimination were made spontaneously, and upon specific follow up questioning about this, only one parent felt that her child had said he had been the subject of discrimination. Similarly, when asked if their children seemed frustrated, the general responses did not seem to indicate any greater level of frustration than that which might be experienced by any child with the exception of the one child who seemed to be doing poorly in school.

Parental expectation of what a child should be taught in school varied greatly. The only agreed upon element identified by all respondents was fluency in English. The other priorities of what should be learned ranged from specific subjects such as math, art and social studies to behavioral objectives such as obedience, learning to show respect, and learning to listen quietly.

All families stated that they felt their own role in helping their children succeed in school was to oversee the completion of homework and to help where possible, even with the enormous difficulties involved (such as translating an assignment into Spanish, helping the child, and then translating it back into English). All four families stated without being specifically questioned that motivating their children to work hard and to behave appropriately was a high priority, and one commented that it would be a

disgraceful thing to have a child who was lazy or who misbehaved in school.

When asked about the level of active involvement with the school their children attended, two of the four families stated that they had tried to help as a volunteer but had been frustrated because there was no one else involved who spoke Spanish and they had not known what to do. All families seemed to see attending meetings and conferences as very important, and all used their children as interpreters at these events. Two parents expressed that they would gladly attend more meetings if there were more!

Two of the four families had negative things to relate about things their children had said about being treated badly by school employees. One of these respondents was the parent who felt her child had been discriminated against because of being Hispanic; this also was the child who seemed to be struggling the most to succeed in school. In both of the incidents related, it was the child's teacher who had been inappropriate in the opinions of the parents and in one case the school principal had been involved. There was obvious difficulty encountered by the non-English speaking father who felt his child was being unfairly treated. He said the language barrier made him very reluctant to complain (and using his child as an interpreter which was his normal practice when interacting with the school seemed undesirable to him) but his concerns for his child outweighed the obstacles. Though a successful resolution occurred in this instance, it is likely that many non-English speaking parents who find themselves in similar circumstances would tend to simply avoid the conflict, leaving the child in a somewhat defenseless situation. One parent mentioned that a Hispanic friend of hers had quietly removed her child from the school because of discriminatory behaviors by the teacher toward her child with no protest to administrators at all.

Of all of the interview questions, none received more consistent responses than the one that pertained to things that should be changed to improve the school from the non-English speaking Hispanic parents' perspective. The first item mentioned by every family was that there should be better communication from the school to the home. No parent received newsletters or other school information in Spanish, except that the report cards used were written in both English and Spanish. Many anecdotes about poor communication from the school that resulted in frustration were related. One parent remarked that she knew the school had been frustrated when she had failed to return some paperwork to them, but she had not known what the paperwork was about since it was in English, and obviously did not understand that it was time sensitive because that information was also in English. She had learned later that even the monthly newsletter had reminded parents to get that particular paperwork returned by a certain deadline, but again, this reminder was in English only. This same parent related that it was hard for her to question the authority of the school, that it was inappropriate for her to question them, yet she also recognized that if the school had expectations that parents should return critical paperwork by a certain time, there was a responsibility on the school's part to make sure that this deadline was communicated and understood by all affected by it. Another parent was concerned that her child was regularly embarrassed because she wore the required daily school uniform to school on days that were identified as a "free dress day" in the monthly newsletter. Since this information was in English, only the Hispanic children came to school dressed differently from the other children.

Another area where two parents saw that school could improve was to have more bilingual teachers and other staff, and to recognize the Hispanic culture. One parent

wished that the celebrations, art, dance, and music that are so much a part of the Hispanic culture could be recognized and experienced in the schools more than they currently are.

Other important data received in the preliminary interviews that were not associated with any particular line of questioning but nonetheless came out in a somewhat consistent manner were that the parents strongly felt that their own responsibility was to prepare children to learn by teaching them to work hard and be respectful, and that the school teachers were seen as authorities of great knowledge and power and should be accorded appropriate respect. Even in responding to the questions in the interview, the tendency to be deferential with respect to me as someone who had been identified as a “school principal and researcher” in the pre-interview explanation was very obvious. Throughout the course of the interviews, questions posed to the parents were prefaced with statements that indicated that what the parents actually thought about a given situation was of the utmost importance. All parents, without exception, expressed seemingly heartfelt appreciation at being asked their opinions and seemed to be pleased that to have been selected to be asked.

Lack of transportation, a previously identified factor in existing research that was shown to be important in hindering parental involvement did not seem to be a factor in the sample interviewed in this research as all apparently had adequate transportation. Another deviation from the findings of this research when compared to research conducted in urban areas rather than the non-metropolitan area used in the current research was that the Hispanic parents interviewed did not seem to fear any changes that might occur to their children from contact with American popular culture.

Though there were no questions specifically targeted toward after school

programs or learning opportunities for their children, all subjects interviewed expressed willingness for their children to participate in after school programs such as tutoring or English language instruction, and in each case, no such program was available. All parents stated that they would attend English language instruction for adults if such a program were offered, though no interview questions were targeted in this area.

#### *Analysis of Responses from Written Questionnaire*

The written questionnaire contained 20 items (see Appendix C) and helped to create a detailed demographic picture of the subjects interviewed. The responses to the written questions used as part of the interview follow:

1. The average number of children in the households interviewed was 2.5.
2. There was an average of two attending public school.
3. The average number of years lived in the United States by the respondents was slightly more than six.
4. All respondents' immediate previous place of residence was Mexico.
5. Two of the responding couples arrived in the United States in 1994; one couple arrived in 2000 and one individual arrived in 2001.
6. All respondents' country of origin was Mexico.
7. Occupations of the respondents were house painting, house cleaning, gardening, working in restaurants, and working as a clerk in a flea market.
8. The immediately previous occupations included working in a restaurant (two respondents), painting, and working in a store.
9. Six of the seven respondents indicated that they regularly helped their children at home with their schoolwork.

10. Six of the seven respondents indicated that friends, neighbors, or relatives that helped their children with schoolwork at home.
11. All respondents indicated that their children moderately or strongly liked school.
12. Four of the seven respondents indicated that English was spoken in the home. All respondents indicated they encouraged and motivated their children, taught them to work hard, and attended parent conferences and other meetings at the school.
13. All respondents said that transportation was not a problem for them in attending school meetings.
14. Six of the seven respondents had pre-school age children at home.
15. Only one of the respondents said that lack of childcare was a problem in attending school meetings.
16. None of the respondents received school to home communications that were translated into Spanish.
17. All respondents said they could read in Spanish but not in English.
18. Six of the seven respondents said they felt welcome in their schools.
19. All respondents said that school employees treated them courteously.
20. All respondents said their children spoke English well or moderately well.

The data obtained from the written questions identifies some important characteristics about the participants in the interview. Substantial differences were not evident in the subjects and, in fact, the commonality in most areas is indicative of the similarity between these subjects and the larger population of Hispanic immigrants

moving to non-metropolitan areas of the United States. All were originally from Mexico, and though each had been in the United States for an average of more than 6 years, acquisition of English language skills had still essentially not occurred for any of them. A picture emerges of families that sincerely try to encourage their children to do well in school as they also try to instill a serious work ethic in them and teach them to be courteous and respectful.

It is important that the group of subjects interviewed did not identify lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and feelings of being treated disrespectfully by school staff as factors they regularly experience, since each of these was identified in previous research as being factors influencing low parental involvement of urban dwelling Hispanics. However, the lack of effective communication channels from school to home (i.e., translated newsletters and other communications and the lack of bilingual staffs) and from home to school (i.e., the inability of the parent to speak and read English) remained constant as factors influencing low parental involvement of urban dwelling Hispanics as well as those who have settled in non-metropolitan areas.

#### *Focus Group Responses*

In the initial interviews, the lack of written communication such as newsletters and general information letters or written announcements by the schools in Spanish emerged as a substantial hindrance to parental involvement and as a source of frustration. One subject remarked that she understood that the school had been frustrated with her for her failure to return some paperwork by an important deadline, but then asked a simple rhetorical question: How can I know to return the paperwork by a certain time if they write that in English in the newsletter? In addition to the obvious problems that this

communication failure on the part of the school creates, it was hypothesized that the non-English speaking Hispanic parent could interpret this action by the school as being indicative of a lack of interest and respect by the school toward Hispanics. These areas of inquiry were therefore included in the focus group protocol.

Previous research identified as a major hindrance to parental involvement of non-English speaking Hispanic parents their inability to participate in personal communications with teachers or other school employees that do not speak Spanish, and this was confirmed in the current study. The solutions to this were shared by the school and family in an interesting manner: Schools used the ELL teacher as a resource while the non-English speaking Hispanic parents used their children as interpreters, regardless of the proficiency level of the child. In both cases, the resource used was the convenient one and not necessarily effective. Until something better is available, these approaches to the communication barrier will continue to be used. Each parent expressed interest in attending English language instruction were it available at a convenient time. Because of the obvious need for Hispanic parents to understand English better in an English speaking society, focus group questions were included to determine how the parents thought the process of the school offering adult English instruction might best work.

The reluctance of the non-English speaking Hispanic parents to advocate for their children or to question authority at the school is a complex issue. Since one subject freely admitted that as many as half of the Hispanics in her circle of acquaintances are illegally in the United States, it is understandable that Hispanics might be fearful about approaching authority figures and advocating for the rights of their children, while the cultural reluctance to be seen as being discourteous by questioning authority is an issue as

well. Questions about this were also included in the focus group protocol in order to gain a greater understanding of ways to approach this problem.

The parents interviewed provided several ideas as to how schools could help their child succeed better, ideas about greater recognition of Hispanic children and Hispanic culture, and indicated that additional after school and summer learning opportunities would be welcome. All of this information was used to develop the focus group protocol and included questions as to allow comparison to the information already received.

Of the initial subjects interviewed, all but one indicated they felt welcome in the schools their children attended and felt that their children were generally treated respectfully. Though some individuals had encountered problems in the schools, it apparently did not affect this perception of cordiality received from them by the school. However, an alternate interpretation was provided by a school principal used for member checking of this research. This individual hypothesized that any reluctance to question authority by Hispanic parents might be carried one step further and manifest itself as statements made by the parents that they felt well received and respected even when they did not, in order to not appear to be offering criticism against the schools. It was determined by this researcher that pursuit of an answer to this possibility was beyond the scope of the current study.

### *Focus Group Findings*

The focus group consisted of six adults (four mothers and one husband and wife couple) whose children attended the same non-urban school as those previously interviewed. Individuals were selected by the same ELL teacher from the local elementary school and had previously indicated a willingness to participate in a

discussion about their experiences and ideas about their children in school. Consent forms were given to each participant and explained at the time of the focus group meeting, which occurred in mid-morning at a corner table of a Mexican restaurant in which two of the participants worked. All of the participants knew each other prior to the session, and seemed to be comfortable and reasonably relaxed.

The issue of important written communications from the school to parents not being translated into Spanish was a major concern to the focus group as well as those interviewed previously. It was noted by one mother that translated documents are often difficult to understand, if not impossible; others in the group nodded assent at this remark. Mild frustration was expressed by two individuals that any expectation of the school that was considered important enough to be put in writing and sent home but that was not translated to Spanish seemed to be indicative of a lack of interest in the Hispanic child's success.

The focus group participants seemed resigned to the problems in communicating with their schools since only two of them spoke English with any degree of proficiency. One mother who spoke English reasonably well remarked that communication was often difficult even when the language barrier was removed and would obviously be very hard when there were individuals who spoke different languages with no interpreter present. The use of the ELL teacher as well as the children themselves as interpreters was a common practice, as was the case in the earlier interviews. When asked if their schools or communities offered adult English language instruction in any form, the answer was that they do not, but that it would be greatly appreciated if it was offered. There seemed to be a general willingness to set aside time to attend such instruction if it were offered.

The reluctance to question authority that seemed to be a factor in the original interviews was approached by simply asking the group how they would respond if an injustice of some kind occurred to their child at school. The initial reaction to this query was silence, and upon additional explanation and a rewording of the question, it was clear that this was an uncomfortable topic. Little was said in actuality, leaving what was NOT said as a data source: These parents, as were the first group, are highly reluctant to complain to a school about issues that concern their children. Whether or not this is primarily due to cultural conditioning or a fear of reprisal that might occur to themselves or others due to illegal immigration status is unknown and is beyond the scope of the current research.

The general mood of the focus group was positive and agreeable throughout, and at the conclusion of the session, I was warmly thanked for asking them for their opinions and thanked again for my efforts to improve conditions for Hispanic children. Though the information obtained was less than I might have hoped for, the experience was a positive one for me as a researcher.

The focus group confirmed to a high degree the most important conclusions drawn from the initial interviews:

1. Schools often do not translate written materials into Spanish and subsequently create frustration for the parents who do not speak and read English. Non-English speaking parents have great difficulty in personal communications with the schools, while the schools represented have very limited bilingual personnel. Hispanic parents consistently indicate a willingness to attend English language classes if they were to be offered.

2. Hispanic parents are reluctant to question authority or to offer suggestions about how the school might better educate their children.
3. Hispanic parents generally state that they feel welcome in the schools their children attend and also generally feel their children are treated respectfully. This finding strongly contrasts with the findings of Ramirez (2003) in which urban Hispanic parents in California believed that the schools did not listen to or care about their needs as parents.

*Summary of Conclusions from Findings*

The factors predicted from existing research (based upon Hispanics living in metropolitan rather than rural areas) that would inhibit parental involvement were placed into the left side of Table 2 while the responses from the interviews were coded by subject into the columns below. As seen, there were different responses obtained in this present research than those predicted in some cases. The lack of perceived receptiveness and cordiality by school staff, economic issues, and transportation issues were not indicated as obstacles by the subjects of this research:

Table 2: Factors derived from interviews that indicate Hispanic parental involvement is inhibited:

Factors \_\_\_\_\_ Interview: 1            2            3            4 \_\_\_\_\_

A lack of receptiveness and cordiality perceived by the parents from the school	NI	NI	NI	NI
A lack of effective communication channels between parents and the school	SI	SI	SI	SI
The amount of support, training, and encouragement given by the school to enlist greater participation by the parents	WI	MI	MI	NI
The parents' previous educational levels and experiences	MI	MI	NI	SI
English language proficiency and usage	SI	SI	SI	SI
Economic issues	NI	NI	NI	NI
Transportation issues	NI	NI	NI	NI

Key: NI= not indicated, WI=weakly indicated, MI=moderately indicated,

SI=strongly indicated

## CHAPTER VI

### Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

#### *Summary*

This study sought to identify obstacles that prevent limited English proficient Hispanic parents living in non-metropolitan areas from greater involvement with the schools their children attend. Since abundant research (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Trusty, 1999; Simon, 1999, et al.) shows a strong correlation between parental involvement levels and student achievement, identifying those obstacles that impede involvement should help in the process of improving Hispanic student achievement, a group that lags behind other student subgroups in the United States (Inger, 1992; Gibson, 2002, et al.).

Prior research has identified several factors that impede Hispanic parent involvement, although the majority of this research has focused upon Hispanics living in metropolitan areas and not upon the relatively recent phenomenon of Hispanic settlement in non-metropolitan areas. These previously identified factors are:

1. The receptiveness and cordiality perceived by the parents from the school.
2. The effectiveness of communications channels open between parents and the school.
3. The amount of support, training, and encouragement given by the school to enlist greater participation by the parents.
4. English language proficiency of parents.

5. Economic issues.
6. Transportation issues.
7. Parental aspirations for their children's success.

To determine any similarities or differences from previously identified factors known to inhibit parental involvement levels, a qualitative approach was selected that used a pre-ethnography, individual interviews of non-English speaking parents, and a follow up focus group interview of five Hispanic parents who settled in the same Midwestern non-metropolitan area. Member checking by the interpreter who participated in the interviews as well as knowledgeable individuals (such as the local ELL teacher and a principal from a local school) confirmed that the results seemed consistent and relevant with their own personal experiences. After concurrent data collection and analysis, several predominant themes emerged that are important factors in the levels of Hispanic parental involvement level:

1. Failure of the school to send general information letters, school calendars, lunch menus or newsletters that have been translated to Spanish.
2. Inability of the parents to speak and understand English in personal communication with the school.
3. Reluctance of the parents to question authority or advocate for the rights of their child.
4. Hispanic parents, in spite of communication difficulties, generally state that they feel welcome in their children's schools and feel they are treated respectfully.

The findings are similar to previously identified factors thought to inhibit

Hispanic parental involvement in several ways, and different in some important aspects as well. It is noteworthy that the group of subjects interviewed did not identify lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and feelings of being treated disrespectfully by school staff as factors they regularly experience, as each of these were identified in previous research as being factors influencing low parental involvement of urban dwelling Hispanics. Parents interviewed seemed to have moderate to high aspirations for their children, although the interpreter made an insightful comment to me that the parents' willingness to participate in the interview process indicated that they probably would be much more interested in the education process of their children than others who refused to participate. "Some parents don't care about their kids," she said, "and they wouldn't be interested at all in talking with you about any of this."

The most significant findings of this study directly paralleled some previously identified factors that inhibit Hispanic parental involvement. The lack of effective communication channels from school to home due primarily to untranslated written communications and the lack of bilingual staff as well as the inability of the parents to speak and read English remained constant as factors influencing low parental involvement regardless of whether the subjects were urban dwelling or had settled in non-metropolitan areas. Each subject interviewed in the current research expressed willingness to attend English language classes if they were offered, and this indicates that the parents themselves have identified the language barrier as a major impediment.

As reported by Schmid (2001) about adaptation of immigrants to American society, key factors that are significant in explaining differences in achievement among immigrant groups are the immigrant group's ability to assimilate into middle class white

culture and the response of the existing culture to the immigrant group. It is significant in this current research that adult respondents stated a desire to learn to speak English in order to fit into the existing culture and that they experienced cordiality from the school staff they encountered. This desire to assimilate into the culture on the part of Hispanics and the cordial responses they report upon interaction with school staff seem to indicate a healthy movement toward cultural integration. Schmid's conclusion that Hispanics do not do well in economic and academic areas may well be subject to change if this small population is any way indicative of larger trends in rural America as successful adaptation seems to be beginning.

#### *Recommendations for Action*

1. It is imperative that schools reliably translate written materials into Spanish. Computer translation programs that are commonly used are often not intelligible and should be checked by someone fluent in Spanish.
2. Schools are a natural venue for offering English language instruction to Hispanic parents after school hours. There appears to a high degree of willingness to attend such instruction by Hispanic parents.
3. While progress seems to have been made in making Hispanic parents feel welcome in the schools, additional efforts are needed to encourage greater involvement and a corresponding increase in Hispanic student achievement.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

One primary factor found to inhibit the parental involvement of non-English speaking Hispanics (in previous research as well as the current study) was the failure of

schools to translate written materials into Spanish. Subjects in this current research whose children all attended the same school district indicated that translated materials were generally not being sent to parents while those materials that were computer translated and sent were generally not intelligible.

All of the parents involved in the initial interviews for the current study expressed a desire to learn to speak English and indicated that they would attend English language instruction if it were provided by the school or some other agency. Opportunities for Hispanic adults to learn English were limited if not non-existent in the community studied.

Anecdotal evidence obtained during informal discussion with one interview subject as well as with the interpreter suggested that the actual number of Hispanics having illegal alien status is much greater locally than the number suggested in the previous literature, reaching as high as 50 percent according to these individuals. The ramifications of this number of Hispanics being illegally in the United States are enormous and could be a substantial reason for reluctance to be involved with the schools or the reluctance of parents to advocate for the rights of their children.

Based upon this study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. A study should be conducted to determine which schools reliably translate and disseminate written materials into Spanish and determine what effects, if any, this has on parental involvement levels of non-English speaking Hispanics.
2. Research should be conducted on which schools offer English language instruction to Hispanic parents, what methods are used, and the

effectiveness of such programs.

3. Research should be conducted on Hispanics who are illegally in the U.S and on the effects their resident status might have upon parental involvement levels.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Many reasons exist for school leaders to find and implement solutions to increase the academic achievement of Hispanic immigrant students in the public schools. Beyond the pressures of school accountability mandated by the federal and state governments and the widespread tests used to determine the effectiveness of schools, there are millions and millions of other reasons: the Hispanic students themselves. With the burgeoning population, failure to successfully ameliorate the problem of Hispanic student low achievement and subsequent dropping out of school by many has major ramifications for the United States as a whole. The consequences over time of continued poor academic achievement for the majority of Hispanic students may well be that a vast underclass of poorly educated Hispanics will develop; the effects of this on American society as it has been known for the past two generations is unpleasant to contemplate. The time is right and the cause is worthy for American educational leaders to address the problem now, while continuing to conduct research for a better understanding of the problems of Hispanic low academic achievement and for better solutions to those problems. The very future of the country may be at risk if these efforts fail.

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Appendix A

**CONSENT FORM**

**Factors That Inhibit Hispanic Parental Involvement in Schools**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study named above to be conducted in December 2004 through May 2005. I understand that this research is intended to identify factors that may inhibit school involvement by Hispanic parents in regards to the education of their children. I will complete a brief questionnaire about my educational background, and if randomly selected, may be asked to participate in one to two interviews of 1-2 hours in length. The interviews will include discussions of the educational experiences of my family, questions and perceptions I have regarding the educational system in the United States, and my suggestions for ways that Hispanic families and schools can work together more effectively.

I understand that my children and family may benefit from participation through improved public educational services to us and better communication with the schools my child(ren) attend(s).

I understand that participation is voluntary and that every effort will be made to protect my identity, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation at any time, and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of such benefits mentioned above. My name will not be used in any reporting of findings or any other public reports. Any original documents from this research will be held in a locked file in the office of Jay Smith. Only he and the translator will have access to the original materials.

I understand that the questionnaire, which should take less than 15 minutes to complete, will be conducted according to commonly used research procedures and that information taken from the questionnaire will be recorded in such a way that participants cannot be identified.

I understand that the questionnaire and interviews will **not** cover topics that could reasonably place the participant at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participant's financial standing or employability or deal with sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior such as illegal conduct, drug use or alcohol use, or sexual behavior.

For any questions regarding this research, I may contact the dissertation adviser:

Dr. Kenneth Stern

College of Education; School of Educational Studies

311 Willard Hall

Stillwater, OK 74078

(405)744-8929

email: aks9445@okstate.edu

Additional information may be obtained from:

Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary

Oklahoma State University

415 Whitehurst

Stillwater, OK 74078

(405) 744-5700

email: sbacher@okstate.edu

I have read and understand the consent form and sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ A.M./P.M.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.

Jay Smith, Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

Hello,

My name is Jay Smith. I am conducting research toward completion of my dissertation for a doctoral degree at Oklahoma State University.

The topic of my dissertation is *Factors That Inhibit Hispanic Parental Involvement in Schools*. My interest in this topic stems from my work as a school principal and my desire to improve the academic achievement of Hispanic students.

I am asking for voluntary participation in the completion of a brief questionnaire and then will randomly select 4-6 participants to interview 1-2 times for no more than an hour each time. The interviews will pertain to the factors that Hispanic parents identify as those that inhibit or prevent greater involvement with the schools their children attend. After interviews are conducted, a focus group will be convened from volunteers to further discuss information obtained during the individual interviews.

Are there any questions?

Thank you for your time to complete the questionnaire about your educational and family background.

If you are interested in the results, I will be happy to furnish you a copy of the completed research project.

Jay Smith

Appendix C

**Questionnaire**

Do not write your name on this questionnaire. Circle the best answer or fill in the blank.

1. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many are in school here? \_\_\_\_\_ What ages? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you lived in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where did you live before? \_\_\_\_\_
5. When did you come to the U.S? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Where did you come from? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What do you do to earn a living now? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What did you do before? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you regularly help your children at home with school work? yes no
10. Does anyone else regularly help them at home? yes no
11. Do they like school here? yes no
12. Which of these do you do at home:  
Helping with home work? yes no if yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_  
Encouraging and motivating? yes no if yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_  
Helping them choose what courses to take? yes no  
Speaking English in the home? yes no if yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching them to work hard? yes no if yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_  
Talking with the teacher about their progress? yes no how often? \_\_\_\_\_  
Attending meetings and school events? yes no if yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

13. How much, if any, is transportation to get to school meetings or to see your child's teacher a problem for you?

not a problem    a moderate problem    a big problem

14. Do you have young or other children in the home?    yes    no

15. How much, if any, is lack of childcare a problem for you in coming to school to meetings or to see your child's teacher? (circle one)

not a problem    a moderate problem    a big problem

16. Do you receive written communication from the school that you can understand about the things that are important to you?    yes    no

17. Can you read in Spanish?    yes    no    In English?    yes    no

18. Do you feel welcome at your child's school?    yes    no

19. Are school employees courteous and helpful to you?    yes    no

20. How would you rate your child's ability to speak English?

(circle one for each child you have in school)

First child:    very good    moderate    not very good    not at all

Second child:    very good    moderate    not very good    not at all

Third child:    very good    moderate    not very good    not at all

Fourth child:    very good    moderate    not very good    not at all

Fifth child:    very good    moderate    not very good    not at all

Appendix D

**Cuestionario**

No escriba su nombre en este cuestionario. Rodee la mejor respuesta o llene el blanco.

1. ¿Cuántos niños tiene usted? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Cuántos están en la escuela aquí? \_\_\_\_\_ lo que se envejece? \_\_\_\_\_
3. ¿Cuánto años tienen en los EE.UU.? \_\_\_\_\_
4. ¿Dónde vieron ustedes antes? \_\_\_\_\_
5. ¿Cuándo llegaron a los EE.UU.? \_\_\_\_\_
6. ¿De dónde vinieron? \_\_\_\_\_
7. ¿Qué hace para ganarse usted la vida ahora? \_\_\_\_\_
8. ¿Qué hicieron usted? \_\_\_\_\_
9. ¿Ayuda regularmente usted a sus niños en casa con trabajo de escuela?      Sí      no
10. ¿Hay otra persona que los ayuda en casa?      Sí      no
11. ¿Les gusta escuela aquí?      Sí      no
12. ¿Cuál de estos hace usted en casa: Ayudando con la tarea?  
Sí      no      si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_  
les apaya con motivacion?  
Sí      no      si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_  
que Ayuda les ayuden con la seleccion de cursos van a tomar?  
Si      no  
ellos escoge qué cursos para tomar?

Sí no

Hablan inglés en el hogar?

Sí no si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_

Enseña a trabajar duramente?

Sí no si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_

Habla con el maestro acerca de su progreso?

Sí no si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_

que Asisten las reuniones y eventos escolar?

sí no si sí, con qué frecuencia? \_\_\_\_\_

13. ¿Tienen transporte para asistir a las reuniones y juntas?

No un problema

un problema moderado

un problema grande

14. ¿Tiene jóvenes o otros niños en el hogar?

Sí no

15. ¿Mucho, si cualquiera, cómo tienen problema en asistir a causa de no tener  
nadien para cuidar sus nino en casa?? (Rodee uno)

no un problema

un problema moderado

un problema grande

16. ¿Recibiendo usted comunicación escrita de la escuela puede entender la  
cosas?

Sí no

17. ¿Puede leer usted en el español?

Sí no

en inglés?

Sí no

18. ¿Se siente agustos en la escuela de s?

Sí no

19. ¿Los empleados de la escuela son corteses en que nivel esta su hijo con la idioma de ingles?

Sí no

20. ¿Cómo valoraría usted a su niño'la habilidad de s para hablar inglés?

(rodee uno para cada niño que usted tiene en la escuela

al principio niño:

niño de Segundo:

Tercer:

Cuarto:

Quinto:

## Appendix E

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **Interview Questions: First Interview**

Hello, my name is Jay Smith and I would like to ask you some questions about your educational background and about your experiences in U.S. schools. All of the answers you give will be completely confidential, and will be used to help school leaders hopefully to identify areas where we can help you in your efforts to help your children succeed better in school. Okay?

If you are unsure as to what a question is asking, feel free to ask what we mean!

There are no wrong answers to any of these questions, we just want to know what you think. Okay?

Muchas Gracias!!

1. How would you describe your ability to understand and speak English?
2. How would you describe your children's ability to understand and speak English?
3. How do you think your children are doing in school here?
4. What do they say about it?
5. What do they dislike?
6. Do they seem frustrated? What is it that seems to frustrate your children most about school?
7. What do you think the most important things are that the school should teach your children? What do you want your children to come away knowing?

8. What do think the parents (or extended family) role is in helping them to do better in school?
9. Describe how active you are with your children's schooling.
10. What would you do more of to help them, if you could?
11. What is keeping you from helping them more? (Follow
12. What have your children said about the way they feel they are treated by school employees?
13. If you could change a few things about this school to make it better for your child, what would you change? Why?
14. What ideas do you have about things the school could do that could help your child succeed better?
15. What ideas do you have that you could do to help your child in school?

## Appendix F

### **La entrevista Pregunta: Primero Entrevista**

Hola, mi nombre es el Jay Smith y querría preguntarle algunos preguntas acerca de su experiencia educativo en EE.UU. Todas las respuestas que ustedes dan serán completamente confidenciales, todo sera utilizado para ayudar líderes de escuelas a identificar áreas donde podemos ayudar a los papas a apoyar su ninos lograr ser bueno alumnus preguntanos ¿Bueno?

¡Si no entienden alguna pregunta preguntanos, se siente libre preguntar lo que significamos! las respuestas no son fijos, son sobre su propio estudiante. ¿Bueno?

¡Muchas Gracias!

1. ¿Entienden inglés?      Hablar inglés?
2. ¿Su niños'hablan inglés?
3. ¿Que opinion tienen de sus ninos asistiendo esta escuela?
4. ¿Qué dicen ellos acerca todo esto?
5. ¿A qué tienen ellos aversión?
6. ¿Parecen ellos frustrados? ¿Qué opines del causo de su frustracion de la escuela?
7. ¿Quales son los puntos más importantes de la escuela que estab enseñando a sus niños?
8. ¿Qué debe hacer una familia para apoyar a sus hijos en la escuela?
9. Que nivel de apoyo dan a sus hijos en la escuela.
10. ¿Qué haría más para apoyarlos si pudrias?
11. ¿En que aspecto opines que necesitan más?

12. ¿Qué les han dicho su niños acerca de la manera que ellos sienten son tratados por los empleados de la escuela?

¿13. si usted podría cambiar unas pocas cosas acerca de esta escuela para mejorarlo, qué cambiaría? ¿Por qué?

14. ¿Qué ideas tiene usted acerca las cosas de la escuela para ayudar su niño aprovechar mejor?

15. ¿Qué puedan hacer ustedes para ayudar su niño en la escuela?

## Appendix G

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. What experiences have you had with the schools your children attend where there was communication difficulty?
2. What did you do to work through the communications difficulties?
3. What did the school do?
4. Do your schools offer any English instruction for adults? Would you attend them if they did?
5. What should the schools do in order to help your children more?
6. Would you be in favor of sending your child to after-school programs if they existed?
7. Would you be comfortable in approaching the school teacher or principal if there were a problem that affected your child?
8. Would you be concerned that the teacher (or principal) might view your questions or comments as being disrespectful?
9. Would you have any other concerns about approaching the school staff?
10. What other comments do you have about anything we have discussed?

VITA

Jay Everett Smith

Candidate for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Thesis: FACTORS THAT INHIBIT SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT OF HISPANIC PARENTS

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born March 27, 1953, Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Education: Graduated from Pine Bluff High School, May, 1971; received Bachelor of Music Education, December, 1978; Master of Music Education, May 1983, and Master of Education, May 2001 from the University of Central Oklahoma; Doctor of Education, December 2005 from Oklahoma State University.

Experience: Employed as a high school band director in Piedmont, OK (1979-1983); Putnam City North High School, Oklahoma City, OK (1983-1988); Lawrence, KS (1988-1999); Guthrie, OK (1999-2001). Employed as a principal in Waukomis, OK (2001); Claremore, OK (2002-2005) and as superintendent, Harding Fine Arts Center, Oklahoma City, OK (2005).

Professional Memberships: Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators; National Association of Secondary School Principals; and National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Name: Jay Smith

Date of Degree: December, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, OK

Title of Study: FACTORS THAT INHIBIT SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT OF  
HISPANIC PARENTS

Pages in Study: 117

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Educational Administration

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to identify factors that inhibit parental involvement of Hispanic parents in non-metropolitan areas. Participants in the study were 15 non-English speaking Hispanic parents. Seven of the participants completed a 20 item written survey in Spanish and subsequently participated in a focused interview for approximately one and one-half hours each; eight participants were interviewed as a focus group after the initial interviews. All interviews and documents were translated into English and coded into predominant categories and analyzed.

Findings and Conclusions: The difficulty of communication created by the language barrier is substantially inhibiting, especially where schools do not translate school-to-home materials into Spanish. A majority of the participants indicated a willingness to attend English language classes for adults if they were conveniently offered. Hispanic parents in this study generally felt welcome in their children's schools but were reluctant to offer suggestions that might be viewed as being disrespectful. In contrast to earlier research that focused on non-English speaking Hispanics living in metropolitan areas in which subjects expressed a reluctance to fully integrate into and embrace the existing non-Hispanic culture, participants in this study indicated a willingness and desire to fit into the non-Hispanic culture of their community.

Advisor's Approval: Dr. Kenneth Stern

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