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How Spanish -speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a school

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HOW SPANISH-SPEAKING PARENTS

UNDERSTAND KINDERGARTEN AND SUPPORT THEIR

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A SCHOOL

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
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in
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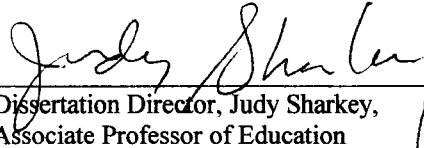
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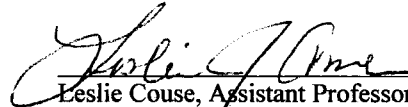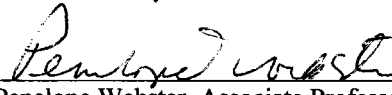
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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Olga and William Barton, who always had great faith in me and encouraged me to do my best. They instilled in me a set of values based on the moral virtues of faith, hard work and diligence. I had the advantage of opportunities they never had. It was that characteristic of "stick-to-it-tiveness" that allowed me to finish what I started. Mom and Dad, you were with me at the beginning of this long journey and I know that you are with me now. I love you both.

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To Carol Birch, your dedication to the Spanish-speaking families with whom you work has been an inspiration to me. Through our many hours of conversations and experiences together, I have come to know how important it is to give voice to the parents and families with whom we have worked, to acknowledge their dedication to their children's education, and to call attention to their experiences in our public schools.

I am humbled by the families in this study. I am so grateful for your willingness to share your life stories and daily experiences with me. You have inspired me to continue with this work.

To my husband, Bo, and our three wonderful daughters, Heidi, Greta, and Margo, it has been a valiant family effort to complete this dissertation. Bo, your conviction that I would complete this process and your encouragement to faithfully reflect the experiences of the families in my study, sustained me. So many times, you were the sounding board for my ideas and writing. I couldn't have done it without you. To the girls, you have

progressed through so many stages in your lives during the course of this study and I want you to know that I am so proud of you.

At the foundation of my gratefulness, I thank God for my gift of faith that has stood by me as the essential resource in completing this work.

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UNDERSTAND KINDERGARTEN AND SUPPORT THEIR

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A SCHOOL

by

Phyllis Barton Schlichter

University of New Hampshire, May, 2008

The intention of this study was to examine the experiences of nine Spanish-speaking families in a public kindergarten setting during the 2005-2006 school year to understand how individual agency of parents, access to a community's practices and events, and the resulting interrelationship, shape parent understanding of and participation in school practices and events and ultimately impact student achievement outcomes. In a nation that is becoming increasingly diverse, the Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the country. There are more than two million English-language learners in the U.S. K-3 classrooms with Spanish accounting for almost 80% of the non-English languages (Abedi, Hofstetter & Lord, 2004). The documented trend of educational underachievement of Hispanic students as well as reports of limited parent involvement patterns among diverse families make this study significant both locally and nationally. Added to the landscape of this study are the conditions and provisions of No Child Left Behind with its high-stakes system of accountability, the identification of subgroups based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and its impact on practices, programming and educators' assumptions.

A case study method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning for the participants with the unit of analysis being the families. Using Cummins' (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (2005; 1997) frameworks as analytical tools, I found that parents placed high value on their children's education and were motivated to be engaged in the process, yet, parents' role construction and the development of a sense of efficacy in the education of their children were totally dependent on opportunities for engaging in the practices within the community and the perceptions of educators who dictate the ensuing micro-interactions that exist. The conditions for the Latino parents reflected both the existence of collaborative and coercive relations of power (Cummins, 2007; 2001).

The findings counter negative assumptions held by wider society concerning Latino parents' orientation toward education and challenge a deficit perspective of language-minority parents. Implications for deep educational reform that will lead to the creation of collaborative school environments for culturally and linguistically diverse families are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

I think they see their role as a parent, they're at home taking care of their
children, in a physical way, they're well-fed, they're well-dressed, they're clean,
that kind of thing and I think they see school as that's where they go to learn...

(Mrs. Gallo, Kindergarten Teacher)

(I) share everything with him. He comes home and he says this is what I
learned. So we do the calendar ... and so I repeat with him what he has done
during the day. He explains everything to us.

(Maria, Kindergarten Parent from Mexico)

As a language and literacy educator in a diverse, high-poverty public elementary

school, I am confronted with the tension that exists between Spanish-speaking parents in

an English-only school environment and assumptions held by educators and educational

organizations concerning such parents and their intrinsic capacities to understand school

curriculum and practices and support the education of their children. When parents come

from a different country and speak a native language other than English, they enter this

new context of a public school kindergarten setting with personal histories, values and

beliefs, desires to maintain home language and culture, aspirations for their children,

beliefs of education, and current life circumstances. It is a fusion of these elements that

creates a lens through which non-English speaking parents view the promise of schooling

and school practices.

School assumptions about a parent's sense of place in the process of educating

children, especially non-English speaking families, frame the participation opportunities

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that are provided for the parents by the school; assumptions about parents get translated into school practices and may reflect an array of educator definitions of roles parents play and subsequent school practices. How do assumptions about parents who represent some marginalized group due to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or language invite or deny participation in a school's culture? It is this interrelationship between parents and a school's perception of and response to families that shapes the potential for parent participation in the educational system.

Pursuing a focus on this relationship between parents and opportunities for learning and participation provided by the school, the intention of my study is to examine the experiences of nine Spanish-speaking families in a public kindergarten setting during the 2005-2006 school year to get at their understanding of the kindergarten year and their support for their children's academic advancement through home practices and engagement with the school. The participants were immigrants from a variety of locations: Mexico, Honduras, Panama, El Salvador and Puerto Rico, reflecting the diversity within this Spanish-speaking group of parents. The roots of this inquiry stem from a pilot study I conducted in 2004-2005 at the same site as the dissertation research: Maplehurst Elementary School - a diverse, high-poverty elementary school in a small city in the Northeast with a student population of approximately 700 children.

Through my interactions and discussions with Charlotte Brown, the school district's Spanish Special Education Liaison, I began to appreciate how little the school and district knew about the Spanish-speaking families who comprised 31% of the student population at Maplehurst Elementary. It appeared that the families were present but invisible. Moreover, no organized school programming was available for addressing the

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need for making school curriculum and practices accessible to non-English speaking families. Subsequently, Mrs. Brown and I initiated a group for Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students, meeting on a monthly basis, to provide information about language and literacy practices in kindergarten with curriculum and practice materials accessible in bilingual form.

As a result of this work, I found that parents cared deeply about education and were eager to participate in home and school practices that would benefit their children. Yet, as I pursued this pilot study, I frequently heard comments from fellow educators that revealed a perception of Spanish-speaking parents as not caring about education, failing to view ethnic identity as the complex construct that it is; educators at Maplehurst Elementary School perceived homogeneity rather than diversity among Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students at the school. Teacher statements reflected a sentiment about Latino parents indicating an intrinsic loving and nurturing parental nature with little care about educational matters and the value of getting a good education. I found that teachers had no understanding of what parents were doing in their homes to support their children's education because there was little communication between Spanish-speaking parents and teachers. Conditions were accepted as " the way things are". This way of thinking conveys my understanding of a deficit perspective of low-income or language-minority parents as having inadequate parenting skills, attitudes about education, practices, and materials for supporting academic success, locating the responsibility for poor student outcomes and lack of family engagement outside of school and placing the responsibility or blame on families.

Clearly, the pilot study indicated that more work was warranted. Given the discrepancy I witnessed in the pilot study between parents' words and actions and educators' perceptions of parents' values, motivations and actions, I decided to design a case study with the overarching question: How do Spanish-speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a school? Subquestions included: What motivates the parents in this study to be engaged in the education of their children? What aspirations do they have for their children? What do they do at home that supports the academic advancement of their children? What is the role of the school in parents' participation? What forms of access are valuable to parents? What affects parent participation? How do teachers perceive parent engagement at home and at school? Over the course of the 2005-2006 school year, I was interested in how the experiences of these parents would reveal existing relations of power within the larger context of the whole school structural organization.

This study is of national and local significance. In a nation that is becoming increasingly diverse, multicultural and multilingual, the Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the country, with projections for continued growth. The documented trend of educational underachievement of Hispanic students in Derryfield as well as the nation and reports of limited parent involvement patterns among diverse families is cause for concern. In Derryfield, results of the 2006-2007 state mandated standards-based test of reading and math achievement indicate that Hispanic students are trailing behind White student outcomes by at least 20 % across grades and curriculum areas in terms of student proficiency levels. For students who are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP), proficiency levels barely hit the 15% level across grades and curriculum areas. As

educators, we must explore the interplay between the parent and school variables that either support or deny parent understanding of and participation in school practices and the subsequent student outcomes. Such work can lead to guidelines for how English dominant schools with culturally and linguistically diverse student and family populations can analyze their own contexts and design environments that reflect a family-school relationship that promotes mutual understanding and engagement in the educational process.

A qualitative method of research was chosen because it best gets at how people make sense of their world and how experiences are lived or felt. The attention focused on nine families with kindergarten students in Maplehurst Elementary School in the Northeast city of Derryfield. To achieve a depth of understanding as a researcher, I had to go into the context and get close enough to people and their circumstances to describe and analyze what was happening. I realized that the answers to my research questions could only be discovered by adopting a sociocultural approach to this study. By considering the parents in a situated learning experience, kindergarten and membership in the Spanish Parent Literacy Group at Maplehurst Elementary School, I could gain insights into the relationship between the individual agency of these parents and the types and quality of access afforded to them by the school context. Therefore, there was a dual focus involved in this study: the parents and the school community. I was interested in parents' motivations for being involved in their children's education and their perceptions of the role they played in supporting their children during the kindergarten year along with the school community and the role it played in the parent participation patterns.

While the participants share their immigrant status, native language of Spanish, and their roles as parents of kindergarten students at Maplehurst Elementary School, the diverse personal histories, educational backgrounds and individual family constellations attest to the complex mosaic created by the parents in this study. Simplistic labels such as " Latino" and " Hispanic" fail to reflect the cultural diversity within the "Hispanic" category and the various motivations, aspirations, values and current living conditions that interplay with one's desire and ability to participate in the educational process. Personal interviews provided the data that detailed the distinct characteristics of each family. Parents arrived at Maplehurst Elementary School from very different geographical and experiential places. For example, Adalia, a native of El Salvador, escaped her homeland in the dark of night, hoping to escape death.

> ... thieves came to the house... they took everything... they robbed everything... we came to the U. S. hoping to start fresh. It was really awful because they came with machine guns and shoot at the house and we were afraid that no one was going to live so we left...

On the other hand, there is Maria, a native of Mexico, who came to the United States to join her husband who was working here. Maria completed four years of college with a certificate in business administration. While she also hoped for a better life in the United States, she entered this country with far less urgency and far more resources than Adalia. At the beginning of the year, each parent hoped to be an advocate for their child during the kindergarten year. All nine participants agreed to participate in the study, striving for recognition and a place in the education of their children. As she started the school year, Rosa, who is a native of Mexico, best summed up what she wanted the

school to know about beliefs she held about her and her family's status as an immigrant family in an English-only school context: " ... that we are here... that we come from another country... we are in school but that we are the same... that we are equal."

In addition to the individual characteristics of the participants, the other critical element of this study focused on the school with its existing educational structures and educator role definitions that influence the policies and practices that create a school climate that is perceived by parents. One vehicle for getting at parent perspectives within Maplehurst Elementary was the kindergarten Spanish Parent Literacy Group. This group operated with assumptions about parents that aligns with a discourse of strength. Viewed as capable contributors to the education of their children and to the school community, the parent group sought a collaborative relationship with families that respected the individuality of each family while embracing the potential that exists for learners who participate in the social practices of their community. This notion of learning, particularly learning about language and literacy practices, reflects the sociocultural nature of learning which is at the heart of this study. Participation in the parent group created opportunities for exercising individual agency within the school context and accessing a variety of school resources while serving as a vehicle for informing this study. Following a case study design, I appreciated the bounded nature of studying the phenomenon of Spanish-speaking parents who were nested not only within the context of a parent literacy group but also the contexts of a grade level within a school, a school district and a community.

Also key to understanding the context of this study is the current state of kindergarten education in Derryfield and on a national level. To the extent that education

is a reflection of the political, social and cultural conditions of a society, federal legislation in the form of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB-P.L.107-110) and its impact on educational policies, practices and achievement expectations must be considered at the local level of this study. As the three kindergarten teachers who were interviewed for this study indicated, the teaching of kindergarten curriculum has moved from a developmental approach with an emphasis on language development and socialization skills to a lock-step skills-based academic approach to teaching and instruction. For U.S. public school educators and educational organizations, the primary focus of attention and responsibility may center on aligning daily instruction and the classroom day with standards constructed by state and local educational entities aimed at closing achievement gaps and equalizing student outcomes for all students regardless of English language proficiency, early childhood experiences, socioeconomic status or family conditions. With high-stakes testing commanding much local and national attention, standards for academic outcomes expect similar performance of all children at the same time in their education with significant implications for students who are entering school with limited or no English skills. The impact of these policies and practices have an impact on language and literacy programming and the role parents play in this process.

The school district and community of Derryfield also add richness and complexity to the contextual make-up of this study. Maplehurst Elementary School is situated within a public school system with its own characteristics and identity. With a total student enrollment of 17,511 students in October of 2005, Hispanic youth represented 11% of the population (State Department of Education). The demographics for Maplehurst

Elementary School reflect a student body with 48% considered Limited English Proficient. In the city of Derryfield 4.6% of the city residents are Hispanic with approximately 8000 documented immigrants and refugees in this city and surrounding area. The presence of immigrants and refugees is reflected in the public schools where 70 languages are now spoken.

With this introduction to the study, I will now provide an overview of the chapters. In chapter one I locate this very local story into a larger context with definitions, historical background and research woven into the discussion of Hispanic achievement in U.S. education, the history of kindergarten, bilingual education in terms of programs, service delivery and legal considerations, and the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind. In chapter two, I will lay out my theoretical framework, drawing on a sociocultural perspective of learning, literacy and family programming and the interplay between the individual motivations and capabilities of the parents in relationship with the school and the resulting participation patterns that reflect the nature of power relations in place between the school and minority language parents and students. Relations of power and how those relations play out in legislation and educational policies and pedagogy will be discussed. In chapter three, I present my methodological and analytical choices for achieving a depth of understanding about Spanish-speaking parents' perspectives in a situated learning context and chapter four will describe this context in great detail. In chapter five, data will be presented that supports parents' level of care and motivation to support their children's education. Evidence of parent understanding of the curriculum and subsequent activity supported by that understanding will be described and analyzed. In chapter six, I will focus on what the interactions between the parents and the school

reveal about the educational structures and educator role definitions in play at Maplehurst Elementary School. Parents' access to school resources and practices will be described with an analysis of the parents' abilities to exercise agency within this context. Finally, conclusions and implications will be discussed in chapter seven.

CHAPTER 1

LANDSCAPE

The purpose of this chapter is to place the story of nine Spanish-speaking families in a public kindergarten setting during the 2005-2006 school year into a larger context that includes an overview of kindergarten, the impact of legislative educational initiatives on programming for students who speak English as a second language, and Hispanic achievement trends in the United States. A definition of parent involvement and a literature review of how it relates to student achievement will be offered with a concluding discussion of research concerning Latino parents' hopes, aspirations and contributions to the educational process.

Kindergarten Focus

Why study parents during their child's kindergarten year? Transitioning into the public school system during the kindergarten year is a critical time for examination of parent understanding of and engagement with the school. Educational researchers have focused on this transition time to study communication patterns between diverse families and school. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2005) found that there is a change in communication patterns between preschool and kindergarten with a decrease in the amount of communication between parents and school at the kindergarten level. In addition to a change in frequency, the nature of exchanges also changed with exchanges moving from shorter to longer types of communication. Yet, LaParo, Kraft-Sayre &

Pianta (2003) determined that when parents from a high minority school were given the opportunity to engage in transition activities that encouraged communication such as parent orientations, newsletters and teacher-parent interactions, more than 50% of the participating parents engaged in almost all of the activities that were offered.

Other researchers (Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, Cox & Bradley, 2003; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufmann, Gerke & Higgins, 2001;) have also centered their attention on this transition time from preschool years into kindergarten and found that efforts aimed at bolstering communication and building collaborative relationships between families and the school result in the establishment of support systems for students and their families that promote student achievement. Generating patterns of relationship and involvement at this early stage in education appears to have long-lasting effects.

At the core of these studies is the notion of collaboration and connectedness. Parents, many of whom were culturally and linguistically diverse and low-income, were provided access to school practices and chose to take advantage of those opportunities to participate; the more connections, the more successful the transition into kindergarten for students, families, and schools. The more successful the transition, the greater chance of parent involvement in a child's education. By access, I am referring to opportunities to communicate with school personnel to learn about school curriculum and practices and receive materials to reinforce school academics in a form that is linguistically comprehensible. The implications from these studies reveal that to create a school climate that is conducive to a relationship of trust, collaboration, respect and shared involvement of all stakeholders requires thoughtful planning, implementation and commitment on the part of the school.

Findings from the School Transition Study at Harvard Family Research Project (Kreider, 2002) supported these studies and identified perspectives on transition into kindergarten from a subset of low-income and ethnically diverse parents. Reported fundamental processes that facilitated transition into kindergarten and encouraged parent involvement in the kindergarten year included: leadership and learning opportunities that developed a sense of efficacy among parents; information and guidance about child development and family involvement; continuation of involvement routines and practices established in preschool programs; and sustainable, trusting relationships between parents and educators.

Using existing transition research findings as a springboard for exploring local needs, this study seeks to understand what matters to this group of Latino kindergarten parents as their children transition into public school and what roles they and the school play in serving as a critical resource for their children. The voices of Latino parents and their perspectives of school and school initiatives is essential to successful transition practices and sustained relationships with school. Yet, the meaningfulness of initiatives has to be co-constructed rather than "imparted". Research findings suggest that the transition into kindergarten for children and their families holds great promise for all families regardless of race, ethnicity, language spoken or economic status when a plan that provides for a mutually-meaningful relationship is thoughtfully designed and implemented.

A Brief History of Kindergarten

"... the present and future living conditions of men of all social classes rest on the careful consideration and rounded mental and physical care of early childhood."

Friedrich Froebel

In this section, the stories of a few eminent early childhood educators will be presented to appreciate the historical context for present day kindergarten. At the conclusion of this section, I will move from notable theorists and educators to current challenges facing kindergarten educators. The term 'kindergarten' has a commonly understood meaning of educational programming that precedes first grade and represents the first stages of a child's formal education. The origin of this term and its implications for teaching practices stem from a German educator, Friedrich Froebel, who coined this term and changed the perception of early childhood education in a way that has resonated for more than a century in the United States (Wolfe, 2000; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002). Froebel experienced an unhappy childhood, and an even unhappier experience with formal education. He railed against " parrot-like" tasks that had little connection to the natural world. Perceived as stupid by his family due to reading difficulty, he wandered from job to job until he accepted a position as a teacher in his early 20s and found his niche.

He advanced his philosophy of education based on self-activity leading to creativity, social participation and the principle of learning by doing rather than following instructions, yet it was not until he was 55-years-old that the notion of "kindergarten" was born. His autobiography indicates that he viewed his school/community of learners

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as a garden in which children could grow and learn and so he created the word "kindergarten". (" Eureka! I have it! Kindergarten shall be the name of the new Institution"). Kindergarten was seen as " a garden in which two- to six-year old children could grow as naturally as flowers and trees grow, bud, and bloom in a garden" (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002, p.5). The goal of kindergarten for Froebel was to bring children to unity with God through play, self-activity, expression, sense perception, and harmonious living with one another.

Believing in the value of play, Froebel focused on different forms of learning: forms of life, forms of knowledge, forms of beauty. For instance, with a presentation of blocks, the child may first use the blocks to symbolize things from his life as an association between inner and outer worlds of a child; next, forms of knowledge would include math and vocabulary concepts such sorting and counting blocks and words to talk about the number of cubes, such as "equal" or "half"; finally, forms of beauty would be created through free form block designs, tapping into a sense of beauty through concepts of symmetry, proportion, etc.

While the first kindergarten opened in Germany in 1840, it was the later half of the nineteenth century before Froebel's philosophy of education spread to the United States. Walk into any kindergarten today and you will see evidence of his influence on strategies and materials. For example, "circle time" was created to help children gain a sense of unity and interconnectedness. Manipulatives in the forms of soft woolen balls and wooden shapes were used to stimulate problem-solving skills, observational skills and self-expression. Evidence of Froebel's innovative thinking is obvious in one famous student of a Froebel kindergarten, Frank Lloyd Wright. Many of his notable structures

bear a striking resemblance to the block designs he would have been exposed to as a

young kindergarten student. The influence of this educational theorist and teacher is as

relevant to educational discussions about best practices as it was one hundred years ago.

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" ... the children, like butterflies, mounted on pins, are fastened each to his
place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless
knowledge which they have acquired."
                                                            The Montessori Method

Just as Friedrich Froebel left his mark on early childhood education, so too did

Maria Montessori, starting in the early twentieth century (Wolfe, 2000). Like Froebel,

she opposed the predominant method of education in her native Italy which entailed a

system that smothered individuality and maintained an adherence to predetermined skills

sequenced at the same pace for all students. In response, she trained her teachers to make

lessons come alive with realia and visual aids such as charts, diagrams and photos. She

viewed the social mission of her teachers to improve society by responding to social as

well as academic needs of students. For instance, she encouraged free lunches for

children who were coming to school hungry. She felt that the children of poor parents

deserved the same care as children from wealthier families. Her hands-on approach to

learning encouraged manipulatives that instructed students about properties of materials

as well as abstract concepts. As in Frobel's case, her ideas traveled to the United States

but because she began her work with children with cognitive difficulties, she focused on

repetition, sequence and daily living skills and her lack of attention to free play,

imagination and socialization drew criticism. Her philosophy reflected her understanding

of periods of opportunity for child growth and development. For example, she believed

that the fertile time for imagination was during the ages of six through twelve, thus,

adding to an explanation for her lack of emphasis on imaginative play in her program.

While some of the tenets of her philosophy were subject to criticism, her programs

remain a presence in American early childhood education today.

****

> " A large part of educational waste comes from the attempt to build a
> superstructure of knowledge without a solid foundation in the child's
> relation to his social environment."   John Dewey

An American who had a great impact on early childhood education was John

Dewey, a native of Vermont, who was a proponent of an educational movement called

Progressive Education (Wolfe, 2000). His life spanned from the late nineteenth into the

twentieth centuries, a time in which educational practices reflected a focus on rote

learning of subject matter with little individualized instruction. Proponents of progressive

education favored a different approach to the education of young children, an approach

that required adaptability to change and response to social conditions. Like Montessori,

the focus was on the whole child, including physical well-being. Unlike Montessori, he

supported the importance of social relations in learning with co-operative learning and

inquiry among children operating as a basic tenet of this movement. The importance of

social relations also extended to home and community. Dewey believed that any theory

of education must be connected to a political system and for him that meant a democracy

for all citizens, a society of equality, participation and voices that were heard.

The current effort to turn the clock back in education is real cause for alarm but not for surprise. The educational system is part of a common life and cannot escape suffering the consequences that flow from the conditions prevailing outside of the schools. The repressive and reactionary forces are in such entrenched strength in all our other institutions that it would be folly to expect the schools to get off free.

John Dewey

The voices from the past seem to reflect contemporary concerns in the field of early childhood education: How do we create a learning environment that supports young children's development in the social, cognitive, physical and emotional domains while also mastering academic skills that address local, state and national demands for accountability? Central to the current tension that is felt in kindergarten education is the conflict that is waging between academic-based instruction and a developmentalist approach which is play-based. In the current era of federal legislation that regulates what is learned by whom and at what pace, the respect for the individuality of students may seem to get lost in lock-step instructional practices that may mimic Froebel's loathing of "parrot-like tasks." Early childhood education is no longer exempt from curricular and instructional expectations that were once relegated to upper grades.

Goldstein (2007) suggests that the challenges facing the field of kindergarten education may be simplistically framed by presenting a dichotomy of developmentally appropriate practices versus standards-based teaching. Rather, she contends that standards represent shared expectations and goals for children's learning that can co-exist with developmentally appropriate practices. However, it is the changing climate of kindergarten that is complex and challenging. As Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2003) observed:

Teaching is unforgivingly complex. It is not simply good or bad, right or wrong, working or failing. Although absolutes and dichotomies such as these are popular in the headlines and in campaign slogans, they are limited in their usefulness. They ignore almost completely the nuances of...(the) teaching of real students collected in actual classrooms in the context of particular times and places.

(p.4)

Thus, context becomes a critical element in the instruction of young children. For educators of children who enter a public kindergarten from a socioeconomic or linguistic background that is not represented by the dominant English-speaking middle class stereotype, the tension to meet the individual needs of children and their families while at the same time meeting the achievement expectations of an educational institution is intensified and magnified. I will now review the historical forces that have shaped the nation's response regarding the education of language minority students and their families and have contributed to the current climate in public schools today. (Wright, 2005; Ovando, 2003) This review will demonstrate how the issue of language policy is embedded into the larger framework of quality education and access to that quality education for language minority students and their families.

Language Minority Students in U.S. Public Schools: Historical Development and Contemporary Perspectives

Response to language diversity in our schools is a dynamic process, reflecting the sociopolitical tenor of different historical periods. The response at a local and national level sets a tone for the type of relationships that may be established between schools and families. More than forty years ago, President Johnson introduced a set of domestic social

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reform programs as a part of the Great Society. Among these programs was the War on

Poverty which targeted "disadvantaged" youth and the poor of all ages through numerous

programs. As a component of this program, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) was signed into law in 1965, providing federal funding to public education that

was earmarked for schools with high concentrations of poverty. Another offshoot of the

War on Poverty was the passage of the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), signed into

legislation in 1968, bringing federal attention to the presence and needs of students who

speak a native language other than English, but with the recognition came the association

between language status and poverty. This association positioned students with "limited

English speaking ability" (LESA) as lacking in skill and ability and requiring

remediation. While the BEA significantly impacted language policy in U.S. schools,

dissatisfaction with the BEA's ambiguity and lack of clarity concerning public school

programming for language minority students resulted in law suits being filed in defense

of the civil rights of students. In 1974, the Supreme Court found that equal treatment of

English-speaking and non-English-speaking students did not constitute equal educational

opportunity. As Chief Justice Douglas concluded:

> There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with
> the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students
> who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any
> meaningful education … (Lau v. Nichols, 1974) (Ovando, 2003, p.9)

Thus, this decision had a significant impact on the development of bilingual

education in the United States. After 1968, numerous revisions addressing the target

population and educational programming details occurred with each reauthorization of

the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA- 1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994, 2001). As John Dewey observed, educational policies and practices are intricately woven with the political environment at any given time, and so each reauthorization reflected the tenor of contemporary political efforts. Changes included a change in terminology from "limited English speaking ability" to " limited English proficient" (1978) with the addition of reading and writing added to the concept of language proficiency. Through 1994, there was still a federal perspective that viewed multilingualism as a national resource.

Early Childhood Education in the Era of No Child Left Behind Legislation

Everything changed with the 2001 reauthorization and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. In a bipartisan effort by lawmakers, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (NCLB-P.L. 107-110) was signed late in 2001 as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act. A cornerstone of the NCLB Act is setting high standards and holding schools accountable for improving student achievement for all students. The target is 100% student proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year. As a result of these expectations, students are taking more tests to measure performance. Accountability is then measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a state's measure of yearly progress individual schools and whole school districts must achieve on state standardized tests within time frames specified in law in order to meet the 100% proficiency goal. When a school or district receiving federal Title I money fails to make AYP for two or more years, increasingly punitive actions are imposed. Title I refers to Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Title I is the largest federal education program

for elementary and secondary schools with funds earmarked for students in high-poverty schools who are at risk of failing to meet state standards.

Thus, the federal government is taking a more active role in regulating the nature of public elementary and secondary education resulting in curriculum and instructional efforts by local educational agencies aimed at meeting state and federal requirements for learning. One byproduct of increased attention to testing data is the disaggregation by subgroups with greater attention being paid to students who, historically, have performed less well than white middle class students: low income families, ethnic and racial minorities, those who are learning English or those who have an educational disability.

Additionally, with the adoption of NCLB, the Title VII Bilingual Education Act was eliminated along with the word "bilingual" in the legislation, and was replaced with Title III – Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. Overall funding for schools with a large percentage of Limited English Proficient students saw a dramatic increase with formula grants becoming available that channeled funds from the federal government to the state education agencies to local education agencies. The federal directive for student programming charged schools with teaching English and teaching the state content standards. While the federal government did not legislate a particular pedagogical approach, it left the authority for granting funds based on appropriate programming to state education agencies.

Unlike the previous reauthorizations, the 2001 NCLB Act made no reference to multilingualism as a national resource, cultural differences and multicultural understanding or issues facing this population of students such as underrepresentation in gifted and talented education and overrepresentation in special education. What was

made loud and clear was the need for state and local educational agencies to be held accountable for increasing student English proficiency and ensuring adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state achievement tests. For schools with a significant percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs), the law's accountability system becomes problematic. ELLs, who are defined by their lack of proficiency in English, must become proficient or their schools will be considered a "failing" school. Sanctions are tied to failure to meet these requirements and the schools with the most to lose are those who receive considerable Title I monies due to the proportion of economically disadvantaged students in a school and/or district. Consequently, the notion of equating students from poor and diverse backgrounds with the labels of "deficient", "disadvantaged" and "not proficient" has been perpetuated but with greater punch than in the past few decades due to the financial ramifications and institutional school-ranking status tied to schools' and districts' performance on high-stakes state-mandated testing. This deficit posture has positioned students with "limited English speaking ability (LESA) as deficient and requiring "remediation" but with little agreement about what "remediation" should look like. In the following section, I will discuss the current condition of instructional programming for English Language Learners and how that programming has been shaped by national legislation.

Instructional Programming

In response to this climate of high-stakes accountability, educators have debated the nature of programming that will meet the needs of ELLs and achieve desirable outcomes. NCLB neither prohibits or encourages bilingual instruction; however,

developing a student's native-language proficiency is not among the goals of Title III. Under NCLB, parents of students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and attend a school that receives Title I funds, must be notified by the school to inform them of the type of programming their child will receive: bilingual education or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In both cases, the principal goal is acquisition of English with the difference being in how the students are taught. Different pedagogical approaches reflect the emphasis placed on native language use in learning a new language and academic content as well as native language maintenance or loss.

In general terms, a bilingual approach uses the native languages of ELLs for instruction. However, in practice, there are different bilingual education models that vary considerably in goals and outcomes and mirror a specific response to local conditions within a national context. The distinction between additive and subtractive forms of bilingual education has been discussed and debated by many (Cummins, 1999; 1989; Lambert, 1975; Roberts, 1995; Wong Fillmore, 1992;) with the focus of distinction on linguistic goals: an additive view of bilingual education views one's native language as a resource with the addition of a second language as unlikely to replace or displace a child's native language while a subtractive model seeks to replace a child's first language with English as soon as possible. Three common forms of bilingual programming include: maintenance, dual language immersion and transition models. Maintenance bilingual programs promote the development of two languages: one's native language along with the addition of English development, resulting in bilingualism and biliteracy. The outcome is additive bilingualism with languages other than English seen as a resource. Dual language immersion programs also subscribe to an additive view of

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bilingual education by instructing in the languages of majority and minority speakers. Multiple languages may be viewed as a resource. With transition models of bilingual education, a non-native English speaker may receive content area instruction in one's native language but the goal of this model is to serve as a bridge, moving from one's native language to English as soon as possible. The outcome of this model is subtractive bilingualism, with language diversity losing its status as a resource. In all bilingual educational models, English is taught as a second language (ESL).

ESOL programs teach all curriculum content in English. The delivery of service may consist of pull-out, push-in or self-contained models. Pull-out models pull students from their regular classrooms for instruction by an ESL teacher for part of the day. In a push-in model, an ESL teacher works in the regular classroom and provides support to English Language Learners. Self-contained classrooms consist of non-native students who receive ESL instruction throughout the day with the goal being the development of English proficiency as soon as possible to permit mainstreaming into the general student population of a school.

Cummins (2001) argues that the pedagogical practices that prevail in schools mirror a system that has disempowered minority students and their families. He states:

> Educators who see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to students' repertoires are likely to empower students more than those who see their role as replacing or subtracting students' primary language and culture in the process of assimilating them to the dominant culture. (p.60)

Understanding the conditions and provisions of NCLB becomes critical at this time because there are more than two million English-language learners in pre-

kindergarten through grade 3 with Spanish accounting for almost 80% of the non-English languages. (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). It is clearly stated that developing a student's native-language proficiency is not among the goals of Title III; thus, the devaluing of language diversity as a national resource sets the tone for the type of relationships that may be established between schools and families and the types of programs available to students and their families. In this environment, limited proficiency in English has the potential for restricting one's access to programming, materials, and relationships with school personnel and maintaining a marginalized position and role in the educational process. With these conditions in mind, in the following section, I will present what we know now about shifting demographics in this country and achievement trends that have resulted from the response to diversity in our schools.

National Demographics and Achievement Trends

Terminology

For the purpose of this review, Hispanic and Latino may be used interchangeably to address the target population of Spanish-speaking parents. " Latino" is a generic term that identifies a culture shared by several ethnic groups in the United States. " Hispanic" is a governmental category developed for the purpose of census recording (Zapata, 1995). Although this terminology is linguistically expedient, both terms fail to reflect the complexity and diversity in terms of culture, countries of origin, economics, education, racial, religious and social conditions represented within this classification of people. Consequently, while common themes have evolved in the research about the perspectives

of this population, the designation as "Hispanic" or " Latino" should not create an impermeable perceptual boundary for anyone falling within this category. As Weisner, Gallimore, R., & Jordan (1988) noted with regard to individuals with a common ethnic identity, within-group variability may be quite common . Thus, this research review provides a general frame for understanding Spanish-speaking students and their families in American schools.

U. S. Latino Demographics

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2003), the Hispanic population is now the largest minority group in the United States comprising 17% of the total enrollment of students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Between 1972 and 2000, the percentage of Hispanic students in public schools increased 11 percentage points and it is estimated that by 2020, Hispanic students will comprise 28% of the national student population. With regard to school demographic characteristics, the NCES reports that in 2000, almost two-thirds of all Hispanic students lived in large cities or the urban fringe of large cities. 77 % of Hispanic students were enrolled in public schools where 50 % or more of the school population was non-white. Hispanic students also represent the poor of our schools. The National Center for Children in Poverty detailed the 2004 demographics of children in low-income families and indicated that 62% of Latino children reside in a low-income household. The distribution of children within that statistic places the youngest children in the most economically vulnerable households.

National Achievement Trends and Parent Involvement Policy

As the demographics reflect greater diversity in our classrooms, a review of national achievement trends indicates that school districts may not be responding to the multicultural needs of students and their families. Grover Whitehurst, Acting Commissioner of the National Center of Educational Progress, reported in July, 2005 that the long-term trend of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) results indicate the gap between white and Hispanic students has not changed in size since 1975 even though the scores for both groups have increased . (http://nces.ed.gov/commissioner/remarks2005/7_14_2005.asp)

Fifty-seven percent of a national sample of Hispanic fourth grade students are reading at the novice level. Nationally, by the end of high school, the typical Hispanic student has acquired reading skills equal to a white middle-schooler (Education Trust; U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics). Beyond high school, college enrollment and completion rates for Hispanic students have not increased over the last 20 years. If this trend continues, only 11 out of every 100 Hispanic kindergartners will obtain at least a bachelor's degree.

Greater attention is now placed on national student achievement trends since the No Child Left Behind Act which was signed into law in 2001. What this legislation means for students who are learning English was detailed in the previous section. Researchers are starting to map the national achievement trends as NCLB proceeds in implementation. In June, 2006, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University released findings from a comparison of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) with state assessments for public fourth and eighth grade students in the areas of reading

and math during the pre-period (1990-2001) and the post-NCLB period (2002-2005). The overall achievement gap between White and Hispanic students remains statistically unchanged (Lee, 2006).

In April, 2005, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), a not-for-profit agency that works with school districts and educational agencies throughout the United States, reported on student achievement trends prior to implementation of NCLB (school year 2001-2002) and following implementation (school year 2003-2004). Using NWEA tests of more than 300,000 third through eighth grade students in both reading and math, achievement and growth scores were calculated and compared. The findings indicated that math and reading scores have improved over the past two years under NCLB but student growth scores (the difference in scores for a single student from one point in time to another) have decreased since NCLB was implemented. Of particular concern was a comparison of Hispanic and Anglo student achievement. Across grades and subject areas, Hispanic students who had the same initial test scores as Anglo students made noticeably less growth.

Coupled with instructional and assessment reform, the importance of parent involvement has been acknowledged by NCLB. Section 1118, the parental involvement excerpt, mandates a parental involvement policy and program at schools receiving Title I funds with an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness at the school and district level. Identifying barriers to greater participation by parents who are "economically disadvantaged", "disabled", have "limited English proficiency", have "limited literacy", or are of "any racial or ethnic minority background" is compulsory, requiring modifications in the parent involvement policy to mitigate limited parent engagement.

Explicitly defined in the local education agency policy, as stipulated by NCLB, is the commitment to: shared responsibility for improved student achievement among parents, entire school staff and students; development of a partnership between parents and the school that assures communication between teachers and parents with reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class and observation of classroom activities; and assistance to parents in understanding the district curriculum and forms of assessment.

This commitment to engage parents in the education of their children aligns with recommendations of the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/PSDAP98.PDF). One of the five global dimensions of DAP that focuses on best practice for children from birth through 8 years of age is establishing reciprocal relationships with families; explicitly stating the interdependent roles of schools and families that center on achieving shared goals for children. The official position statement recommends:

· Teachers work in collaborative partnerships with families to establish and maintain ongoing, two-way communication.

· Parents are welcome in the program and participate in decisions about their children's care and education.

· Teachers acknowledge parents' choices and goals for their children and respond with sensitivity and respect to preferences and concerns without abdicating their professional responsibility and expertise.

· Teachers and parents share their knowledge of the child and his development and learning as part of day-to-day communication and planned conferences.

· The program involves families in assessing and planning for individual children. The program links families with a range of services based on identified resources, priorities, and concerns.

· Teachers, parents, and social service and health agencies share developmental information about children as they pass from one level or program to another.

Creating legislative mandates and guidelines for best practices is easier than individualizing a course of action that meets local needs, and critically reflecting on its effectiveness. Charging schools with attaining equal achievement outcomes for all students within the same timeframe across all contexts is also easier than understanding and responding to the unique needs of students and their families. By reviewing literature pertinent to the subjects of this study, Latino families in a public school setting, we begin the process of informed inquiry. Research into the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement will be considered with Latino parents' hopes and aspirations and involvement in the education of their children receiving particular focus.

Parent Involvement

" The low level of meaningful contact with the schools among disadvantaged parents has led many educators and others to conclude that such parents lack sufficient interest in their children's education and do not want to work with the school." p.28 (Moles, 1993)

This viewpoint pervades the thinking of many in education today, a symptom of assumptions made about parents who represent diversity in the form of culture, language

and socioeconomic status. Such belief systems presume parents do not value education and as a result, fail to encourage their children to do well in school. If the goal of welcoming and inviting parents to the school is parent engagement, a working definition of parent involvement is needed. Scribner,Young & Pedroza (1999) contend that the complex nature of parent involvement defies a simple explanation. Rather, the determination of what parent involvement is depends on whom you ask: school personnel or family.

School staff reported that parent involvement is comprised of attendance at school events, meetings, workshops, governance activities, and teacher support within classrooms- with a central focus on student achievement. Parents recognized more informal activities such as checking homework assignments, reading and listening to children read, providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with children, and sending them to school well fed, clean, and rested as forms of parent involvement in the educational process. Parent support involved a broader notion of the child's development: affective, social and academic.

Mapp (2003) and Chrispeels & Rivero (2001) describe parent reports of involvement that align with Scribner, Young and Pedroza's account, revealing a mix of formal and informal parent engagement. Mapp stated that parents were involved in their children's education both at home and at school with many of the informal ways not recognized by school staff as valid and legitimate forms of participation. These informal types of activities included verbal encouragement, involvement in outside activities, and direct one-on-one help with homework, The topic of homework surfaced in many studies of parent engagement in children's education (Mapp, 2003; McCaleb, 1997; Chrispeels &

Rivero, 2001;). Homework was reportedly a concrete way for parents to show involvement and support.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) argues that part of the empowerment process in parent involvement requires a context for discourse that makes negotiation and understanding possible for families and school. Recognition of conventional and non-conventional forms of parent support and participation is a source of information for school personnel about parent perspectives and parent capacity for supporting their child's growth and development. Opportunities for exchange of information undergird this process of empowerment.

At the heart of this different definitional nature of parent involvement in education is what school personnel and parents value about parent involvement. Analysis by Scribner, Young & Pedroza (1999) found that in high-performing Hispanic schools, staff value: building and strengthening relationships, increasing student achievement, creating a community environment, engagement in formal involvement activities and providing parent education about the curriculum, standards and assessment. Like the school staff, parents valued building and strengthening relationships. Additionally, parents felt that being involved in their children's education meant enhancing the school environment, showing concern for the development of the child through love and support, providing role models for the child by stressing the value of school to the child, and the potential for enhanced benefits to oneself.

Thus, the researchers concluded that parent involvement is defined through the eyes of the beholder and that creating opportunities for shared experiences and regular communication represents one aspect of best practice with Latino families in the public

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school sector. Carger (1997) is hopeful that the goal of *bien educado* can transcend

Latino homes into the academic world as schools and families grow in their

understanding of each other's experiences and expectations. Delgado-Gaitan (1991)found

in her study that expectations of the school and families were sometimes at variance:

school personnel expected parents to take more initiative to inquire about a child's

academic progress on a regular basis and parents expected more parental instruction and

frequent communication from school. The goal of Delgado-Gaitan's program was to

forge a home-school relationship in which both parties could learn from each other,

develop a mutual support system, with the unified goal of helping children progress

through school. She best defines parent involvement as a process not a conclusion.

Relationship between Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

Research syntheses have been conducted to study the relationship between parent

involvement and student achievement (Mapp & Henderson, 2002; Jeynes, W., 2002;).

These syntheses have sought to understand the relationship between parent engagement

in the educational process and academic outcomes with data aggregated so that patterns

can inform future educational policy and practice. The results of these meta-analyses

indicate that parent involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes

and that the effects cross ethnic and racial groups. I will next review a sample of studies

that reveal the influence of parent involvement on student achievement that have

particular relevance to this study.

In a study of kindergarten students and their parents who were involved in a

literacy project called Early Access to Success in Education (EASE), Jordan, Snow, &

Porche, (2000), the researchers found that greater gains in language and reading skills were achieved for children in the program than for a comparison group. Parents in the program were involved in at-school and at-home activities. Language scores that were significantly better than the comparison group included vocabulary, story comprehension, and sequencing in storytelling. Program students with parents who reported home literacy support performed well on word activities: labeling, defining, describing and relating. The study determined that the group that gained the most was comprised of students who initiated the program with low language skills but high home literacy support. While generalizations for this study are limited by the suburban population that was involved, the connection between parent engagement and improved language and literacy scores with kindergarten students was significant.

Two sources that looked at the long-term effect of parent involvement on student achievement were conducted with low-income parents and students. Meidel & Reynolds (1999) interviewed 704 parents of eighth graders and inquired about parent involvement when their children were in preschool and kindergarten. Of the students who were involved, 97% were African-American and 87% were low-income. 76% of the parents interviewed had participated in a Title I-based program called Chicago Parent Centers. The results indicated that the number of activities that parents engaged in during kindergarten was positively related to eighth grade reading achievement, reduced rates of grade retention and few incidents of placement in special education by eighth grade. Opportunities for parent engagement with the school at entry points into the public school system and parent agency in accessing those opportunities resulted in long-term positive educational outcomes.

Shaver & Walls' (1998) findings were consonant with the abovementioned findings. In their study of students in Title I schools in grades 2-8, children from lower-income families made less gain in reading and math than students from higher-income families but low-income students made greater gains if their parents were involved in a series of workshops and discussions sponsored by the school district. Income-level did not affect the level of family involvement.

The U.S. Department of Education also reviewed achievement data of students in 71 Title I schools from grades three through five to see if teacher outreach patterns to families impacted achievement longitudinally (Westate and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). While the negative relationship between poverty and student achievement persisted throughout this study, patterns evolved that indicated that reading and math achievement significantly improved for students with high-outreach teacher patterns in third grade. For example, math test scores increased at a rate 40% higher for low-achieving students in schools that reported high levels of teacher-parent connections in third grade. The findings from this study bolster the relationship between strong school-family interactions and a positive long-term impact on student achievement with the critical variable being teacher outreach patterns that invite parents to participate in the educational process.

The large amount of available research on parent involvement and its effect on student achievement is noteworthy. Yet, many families are still isolated from the process. Returning to the assumptions about parents who represent diversity in the form of culture, language and socioeconomic status, researchers have sought to understand what parents hope and aspire for their children and how they contribute to their children's education.

Apart from opportunities and invitations to participate, what individual variables

contribute to participation patterns? Research into parents' hopes, aspirations and

contributions will be provided in the next section.

Latino Parents' Hopes, Aspirations and Contributions

Hopes and Aspirations

Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, (2001) examined the role of parental

aspirations and expectations and student achievement in a longitudinal study of 81 Latino

children, grades kindergarten through six, and their families. Operationally, aspirations

were defined as, 'how far do you *want* your child to go in formal schooling?' and

expectations were defined as, ' how far do you think your child *will* go in schooling? The

data from this study challenges the view that Latino parents' low aspirations and

expectations lead to lower motivation and poor achievement of their children. Parental

aspirations remained high throughout the course of the study. Expectations fluctuated

based on student performance with the directionality flowing from performance to

expectations and not the reverse. In this performance-driven model, parent expectations

of educational attainment for their children shifted with school reports of student

performance. Expectations reflected school realities. Thus, these findings debunked the

idea that Latino parents' expectations result in low academic achievement. Latino

immigrant parents in this study overwhelmingly aspired to schooling beyond high school

for their children. Advanced schooling was associated with personal and financial

success. There was also no correlation between the years in the United States for these

immigration-generation parents and expectations for educational attainment for their children.

Other work has supported these findings (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Auerbach, 1989; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Ada, 2001;). The high value placed on formal schooling was a dominant theme in these research studies with Latino families. The values attributed to a good education were numerous: careers, financial success, and freedom from many of the burdens the parents had experienced. Schooling was seen as a key to mobility. Ada notes that when Latino parents are queried about their hopes for their children's education, the question is sometimes met with bewilderment for there is no acceptable alternative to a good education. Chrispeels & Rivero found through interviews and video data with Latino participants in their study that all parents hoped their children had more opportunities than they did. They hoped for a better future for their children. As parents reported in Monzo & Rueda's study, they wanted their children to receive university degrees " to be somebody". Parents acknowledged the benefits that education can provide – " it's a crime that there are so many children that don't take advantage of the benefits they have in school." (p.6)

Parents' Contributions

Monzo & Rueda (2001) observed that the theme of persistence was evident in the advice that Latino parents gave to their children. Both negative experiences and positive successes in the workplace within families served as models for the value of persisting with a formal education. Schooling was promoted as a means to a better life. Ada (2001) also observed the value of not giving up, " de no dares por vencido." As one parent

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stated, " that they not become discouraged by failure, because from those experiences, they can learn how to succeed" (p.232.). Ada (2001) captured parents' wishes to contribute to their children's lives by maintaining their native language and culture, as these quotes reveal: " I wish for my children to develop the richness of their two languages, and that they never forget their roots and where they came from."; " We should teach our children that it is important to speak Spanish, and to not lose our language nor our culture." (p.233). It is this set of beliefs that questions the "melting pot" theory and challenges the mainstream ideology that promotes a "melting" of cultural and linguistic differences. Halcon (2001) argues that because many Latinos hold this belief, they are viewed as falling short of the ideal American virtues: assimilation into the mainstream and English fluency.

Throughout the literature concerning Latino families and contributions made to a child's education, the notion of "respeto", a deep sense of respect for self and others, emerges. This concept is displayed by " an internal dignity that includes a commitment to honesty, to cooperation, and to protecting others, as well as a deep sense of respect for elders, youth, and one's family" (Ada (2001), p. 231).

In Valdes' (1996) ethnographic study of Hispanic families, this concept was a guiding belief system and was manifested by parents' providing support and the provision of a foundation for these values at home. Carger (1997) found that Mexican-American families that he worked with defined education in broad, comprehensive terms that embraced the notion of "respeto". The term "bien educado", " well-educated", described a wider sense of being " well-bred, mannerly, clean, respectful, responsible,

loved and loving" (p.42). This finding was confirmed by Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg (1995) and Reese & Gallimore (2000) in their work with immigrant Latino families. Parents' definitions of education and the contributions they could make embraced academics along with manners, morality, and respect.

Lightfoot (1978) maintains that this Latino view of education reflects a perspective that is "worlds apart" from schools' perspective. Parents focus on the needs of their children with an intensity and concern for a child's academic growth as well as his emotions and self-esteem while teachers and other school staff must attend to the needs of many children, balance limited manpower, and attend to the social needs and academic achievement and standards. She contends this difference in perspectives and definitions of education adds to the existing differences in culture, background class or power between families and school.

Conclusion

In summary, by situating this study in a public kindergarten with Spanish-speaking families, I am placing a small story in a larger context. I have described the larger setting including an overview of kindergarten and the state of early childhood education in the era of recent legislation with special emphasis given to programming for students who speak English as a second language. After detailing Hispanic achievement trends in the United States, I provided a literature review of research concerning the role of parent involvement in student achievement and insights gained about language-minority families and their hopes, aspirations, and contributions.

As this chapter indicates, Latino parents' perception of kindergarten and the

nature of their support of children's education is dependent upon multiple factors:

individual characteristics such as motivation, aspirations and expectations and

opportunities to participate that are provided within a given context and that are shaped

by larger, societal forces such as assumptions about minority families, legislative views

of students and families who speak languages other than English as their native language

that govern programming and responses, and power relations that underlie routes of

access for parents. Borrowing from Cochran-Smith's view of teaching, understanding the

experience of Spanish-speaking parents in a public school setting "…is unforgivingly

complex. It is not simply good or bad, right or wrong, working or failing". The

influences of governmental policies, past practices within a school district, parental

characteristics such as language and culture, research and current thinking about practice

all interweave to create a unique educational context.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In working and reworking the theoretical framework for this dissertation research, I frequently reflected on what kind of information I was seeking and the purpose of the research. Returning to the main question of the study, I wanted to learn how Spanish-speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a particular school. Parent perceptions and support were dependent on multiple factors: individual characteristics, opportunities to participate in the events and practices within a given school context, and larger societal forces such as assumptions about minority families, legislative views of students and families who speak languages other than English as their native language that govern programming and responses, and power relations that underlie routes of access for parents. But, to cite Dyson (2001), " to be doable, a qualitative project must not only be focused on some purposeful end, it must also be contained in a bounded social unit and it must exploit the social and human resources of that unit." (p.329) With these goals in mind, I adopted a sociocultural framework for understanding the experiences of language-minority families at Maplehurst Elementary School and their perspectives of kindergarten and how they support their children's education in relationship with the school.

Definition of Learning from a Sociocultural Perspective

In developing my understanding of the basic assumptions of sociocultural theories of learning, I have drawn on the work of many theorists (Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Lantolf, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; 1995; 1998; 2003; Scribner, 1990/1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, Del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995;) Taking a sociocultural approach means that any assumptions about parents and what they bring to the task of educating their children must include the role of context and opportunities for learning within that context; learning from this perspective is situated in activity, context, and culture and viewed as a tranformation of participation in the practices and activities of their everyday lives. A sociocultural perspective provides an explanation of how we get to that point of transformation. Three essential aspects of the sociocultural approach to human cognition have been detailed by Scribner (1990/1997): human development and cognition is mediated by tools and signs; it is founded in socially-constructed systems of activity; and it develops historically as psychological organization is influenced by changes at the sociocultural level.

Matusov & Hayes (2000) describe the evolution in psychological theories about the nature of learning moving from Piaget's emphasis on change in the structure of an individual's action to Vygotsky's attention on an individual's competence with tools, signs and speech in a social context. Vygotsky (1978) focused on interaction between children and more knowing members of a society who help mediate learning through the use of a culture's practices and tools, with emphasis placed on language as a mediational tool. Sociocultural theory expands beyond individual development and social interaction

and looks at development from the perspective of transformation of an individual's participation in the practices within a context.

Rogoff (1990; 1995; 1998; 2003;) advances this dynamic view of learning and development and proposes that three planes of analysis: apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation, constitute the nature of learning and development. Thus, these different planes of focus in sociocultural activity, personal, interpersonal and community/institutional, are viewed as intertwined with each other with the smallest unit of analysis being the activity setting. Activity setting encompasses the who, what, why, where, when and how of the routines of everyday life (Ashton, 1996) with an interdependence of all three levels of analysis ever present. In order to understand the perspectives of parents in this study, understanding the activity setting is critical.

Rogoff (1990) explains that the metaphor of apprenticeship has sometimes been used mistakenly to reflect a focus on expert-novice dyads when in theory the idea of apprenticeship "… relates a small group in a community with specialization of roles oriented toward the accomplishment of goals that relate the group to others outside the group" (p.143). Therefore, the attention is on interpersonal relationships and how people participate in culturally organized activities and become more responsible participants. Guided participation is a term that Rogoff employs to describe the interpersonal plane of sociocultural analysis which provides a perspective for looking at interpersonal interactions to understand learning and development. The guidance portion of this process may be direct or indirect but always involves the meaning of some activity that is shared with others. Participatory appropriation is defined as a dynamic process in which

individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation in activities. Rogoff (1998) contends that people move *through* rather than *to* understanding. For instance, unlike a transmission model of literacy in which "knowledge" is imparted and received in a unilateral direction, participatory appropriation is an active process in which an individual changes as a result of participating in a language or literacy event and making it meaningful.

Lave (1996) contends that social theories of learning are preferable to psychological theories of learning for marginalized groups because the marginalized get blamed for being marginal when learning is viewed as individual mental capacity and activity. When a community group is marginalized, they are negatively perceived as being outside the larger community structure and they are seen as lacking or deviating from group norms due to cultural, linguistic or economic characteristics, for example. With psychological theories of learning, the zero-sum theoretical construct comes into play in which someone's gains are balanced by someone's losses. She purports that when notions of better and worse and more and less learning become the predominant mode of thinking about learning and development, divisions of social inequality will be perpetuated. With social theories of learning, there is a view of learning as a social, collective psychological phenomenon, basically a non-zero-sum approach, in which our social interdependence forces an expansion of thinking about learning where each member can "win"; each member is capable of reaching his learning potential within the group; the better "they" do the better "we'll" do.

In their essay on "good language learners", Norton and Toohey (2001) critique the traditional notion that looks at learners' individual characteristics, cognitive traits,

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attitude, motivation and past experiences as the causal elements in language learning success. This line of thought assumes that good language learners are motivated and poor language learners are unmotivated or deficient, with the emphasis centered on the intrinsic capacities of a person. Instead, Norton and Toohey shift attention to a sociocultural perspective of good language learners by considering the dialectic between the individual and the context; the interplay between internal characteristics and experiences and opportunities for learning within a given context. Extending the notion of 'good language learners', then, the critical focus of attention in this study becomes the context, the school, and the existing conditions in that context that influence the educational structures and perspectives of language minority parents and students that either invite or constrain minority language parents' participation and engagement in the educational process. Like a "good language learner", I want to know how the context allows parents to participate in the education of their children in a meaningful way, what factors provide a basis for understanding what constitutes a "good", supportive, minority parent in a public elementary school, and how that experience shapes parents perspectives. Using Norton and Toohey's explanation of success of good language learners on the basis of their access to a variety of conversations in their communities, my study has a dual focus: the parents and the school and how those two entities interrelate. Thus, I will examine the environments in which the study participants find themselves with accompanying constraints and possibilities for learning, while also exploring the individual characteristics of parents and their families and their abilities to make effective use of a variety of resources to gain access to their children's education. Analyzing the

interaction between context and individual agency may help us understand parent

perceptions and levels of participation.

Locating Literacy Within a Sociocultural Framework

> As sociocultural activities, literacy events are not static determiners of what
> and how children learn. Rather, they are ongoing accomplishments, negotiated
> by children and other participants as they respond to each other. In this
> negotiating, participants decide what is salient about the activity and therefore
> how they should respond (i.e., what relevant resources they have). (p.329)
>
> Excerpt from A. Dyson's *Coach Bombay's Kids Learn to Write: Children's*
> *Appropriation of Media Material for School Literacy*

There are competing definitions of literacy that have very different orientations to

literacy (Lytle, 2001). The excerpt above is an example of a view of literacy as practices

which create opportunities for critical reflection and action. From this perspective,

practices may differ between and among groups within a society. The role of context in

this perspective positions literacy development within a complex social and cultural

system. On the other hand, when literacy is viewed as skills and tasks, development is

viewed as independent of social context. This decontextualized view of literacy as a set

of fixed, neutral skills views development and opportunities for development in literacy

as independent of social and political factors.

Coming from a background of early childhood development with a concentration

in language and literacy, I believe a sociocultural model of literacy development

embraces the concept of emergent literacy. This stance of literacy assumes that a child

acquires some knowledge about language, reading and writing from practices within a

home context before coming to school; thus, valuing the influence of home context on

development. To become literate, young children must learn about the functions and uses of literacy, conventions of written language, decoding and encoding strategies, and comprehending and composing strategies (Teale, 1987; Morrow, 2001). There is a large corpus of research which has examined emergent literacy development in young children (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991; 2001; Morrow, O'Connor, Smith & Smith, 1990; Gunn, Simmons & Kameenui; Snow, C., 1991; Sulzby,E., 1991). This approach to literacy translates into the following learning objectives for children from birth through seven (Morrow, 2001, p.154):

· develop positive attitudes toward reading and writing

· develop concepts about books

· develop comprehension of story

· develop phonemic awareness and alphabetic principles

· develop the functions, forms and conventions for writing and reading

Inherent in this model is the assumption that young children are developing these concepts in home and school contexts prior to entering kindergarten. In contrast, literacy viewed from a bottom-up conceptual framework considers literacy as a set of decontextualized skills of learning letters, sounds and the combination of letters and sounds to form words with the idea that once these skills are established, meaning will follow.

While the mandated state testing associated with NCLB does not begin until grade three, the pressure for accountability in student achievement has trickled down to the kindergarten level. Using the kindergarten language arts curriculum at the site of this research study as an example, " language arts" has now been subdivided into categories

such as " alphabetic principle", " phonemic awareness", " word recognition/vocabulary", "comprehension", " fluency", " reading enjoyment", " writing" and " language development". However, the emphasis of early language and literacy instruction has shifted from the development of language as a foundation for literacy success to a phonological/orthographic focus, devoid of meaning. The reality for students in this study who entered kindergarten with no understanding or limited understanding of English, is that by third grade they will be held to the same standards as children who entered kindergarten as English-proficient students. There is a compressed timeframe for developing proficiency in English and mastering the content tested on state tests of achievement. Consequently, the bulk of early instructional time has shifted to lower-level processes that can be easily tested and measured. The long-term impact of this shift in instructional focus is less clear.

Because the intent of No Child Left Behind concerning language is transparent – proficiency in English is expected of all students with multilingualism regarded from a deficit perspective- the local educational response in the form of policies, programs and curriculum and assessment may either regard language as a problem or language as a right and a resource. I believe that the languages and cultures that students bring to school with them are resources for the school community. The work of Sonia Nieto (1992; 1996; 2000;) on multicultural education captures my perspective of students and families who represent a non-dominant form of language, culture or socioeconomic status. She maintains that multicultural education is not so much about curriculum as it is about how you view the world; the values, attitudes and beliefs that we have about one another. The issues of access and equity frame her work in the field.

Returning to the basic tenets of sociocultural theory, if learning is situated in activity, context, and culture and viewed as a tranformation of participation in the practices and activities of everyday lives, it becomes difficult to reconcile this understanding with the contemporary view of literacy and learning that is equated with test scores. The complex, embedded nature of language, literacy and learning within the practices of families and communities is ignored in favor of a simple presentation of learning and achievement that denies the realities in our schools and communities. This tension in perspectives and assumptions about the nature of learning, and in particular the nature of literacy development, has also become an integral part of family literacy programs and the design and implementation of such programs.

Locating Family Literacy Programs Within a Sociocultural Framework

Auerbach (1989) attributes the achievement disparity among language-minority, low-income families to the inadequacy of some approaches to literacy. Citing family involvement as the key to student achievement, she maintains that the underlying assumptions of some family literacy programs have limited their effectiveness. Undergirding a school's response to culturally and linguistically diverse families is a relationship of power that either invites or denies parents to participate in the education of their children. Instructional implications in family literacy programs may vary significantly based on assumptions about the nature of learning and learners and the role participants are expected to play, (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman, Celano, & Fischer, 1996).

When literacy development is viewed as a socially-constructed phenomenon, family literacy program planning acknowledges a sociocultural perspective of learners

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participating in practices within a community, contributing to their own learning. Describing this view of family literacy, Auerbach (1989) describes " ... activities and practices that are integrated into the fabric of daily life, the social context becomes a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning" (p.166). At the other end of the continuum of family literacy programming, is what she terms a "transmission of school practices model" in which literacy practices are imposed on families. Stemming from a deficit stance, features of a transmission model of family literacy programming include the notions that: 1) low-income and language-minority families are literacy impoverished; 2) there is a directionality to literacy transactions that moves from school to parent to child; 3) successful literacy outcomes are achieved by parents doing school-like activities at home; 4) what happens at home is the key to school success; 5) parents' own issues thwart the creation of positive literacy contexts.

Inherent in this approach to remedying the perceived deficiencies in families who are diverse in regard to class, culture, language and ethnicity is the understanding that there is a power relationship that legitimates the inferior status of a group. As Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano and Daly (1995) contend, lower status parents are getting the message that they are linguistically and cognitively failing their children by not providing an "enriching" environment for learning.

Power relations in education, including family literacy programs, have also been examined by theorists who promote a critical literacy stance which is based on a sociocultural theory of language. Work with diverse student populations and their families is studied in relation to the key elements of critical literacy: domination, access, diversity and design (Janks, 2000). With the goal of critical literacy work being equity

and social justice, Lodge (1997; cited in Janks, p.176) observes the dilemma that accompanies issues of dominance and access: how is access to dominant forms afforded while at the same time valuing and promoting diverse languages and literacies of students in a broader society? If culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families achieve access to dominant forms, is dominance maintained? If students and their families are denied access to participation in dominant forms, is marginalization preserved? Lodge calls this the 'access paradox' and it deserves consideration in any work that involves diverse students and their families in a public school setting. As Swap (1993) concludes from her observations of parent involvement patterns with marginalized groups of parents:

> How can we account for this paradoxical state of affairs? Despite the urgent need for partnership and the weight of supportive evidence, parents continue to be kept at a distance in most schools. One must conclude that there are powerful barriers that are inhibiting educators from reaching out to parents. (p.13)

Alternative perspectives of family involvement in literacy programs that I subscribe to and provide a framework for guiding my research align with a discourse of strength regarding the contribution of parents to the educational process (McCaleb, 1997; Scribner et al., 1999; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Mapp, 2003; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Auerbach, 1989). Characteristics of this stance on family literacy include: 1) an appreciation for the individuality of parents within any given group while valuing interconnected relations; 2) the recognition that parent role construction and the

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development of a sense of place in a child's education is complex; 3) an understanding that parent involvement in the education of one's child is a process not a conclusion; 4) the valuing of parents' and children's voices in a partnership process; 5) opportunities for dialogue and communication; and 6) a collaborative relationship in which power is created and shared among participants.

Thus, the nature of family literacy programming has the potential to either perpetuate a deficit view of families who represent a minority language or culture and/or live in poverty or to refute these assumptions and move beyond an emphasis on "fixing" these families toward a model that highlights the strengths and literacy practices of families. As Neuman et al. (1996) reported in their study of adolescent mothers in a family literacy program, literacy was seen not as a set of skills to be learned but " as part of a hope for a better life – a life that reflected independence, self-respect, respect from others of their culture, and responsible parenting." (p.516) Family literacy was viewed as an opportunity to create a better future for themselves and their children.

This theme of parent motivation and involvement will be explored in greater depth in the next section. I found the framework that Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005, 1997) have proposed, served as a tool for analysis for me regarding the parents in this study and their interactions in home and school contexts.

Motivational Factors of Parent Involvement

In light of what research tells us about Latino parents' aspirations and expectations for their children and belief systems that guide their interactions with their children, a conceptual framework for understanding why parents become involved in

their children's education will be examined. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005, 1997) have provided a conceptual framework aimed at understanding what motivates parents to become involved in the education of their children. Their research is rooted at the level of the individual parent and intervening variables that impact decision-making. It is proposed that basic involvement decisions are influenced by: 1) a parent's active role construction for involvement and a sense of efficacy for helping one's child succeed in school; 2) a parent's perception of invitations from the school to be involved; 3) important elements of a parent's life context that encourage or discourage involvement.

Role Construction and Sense of Efficacy

Parent role construction and sense of efficacy in supporting education, how parents understand what they should do to support their child's education and how effective they can be, are shaped by lived experiences within a family, a community, and a school. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) contend that parent involvement roles are defined in part by a set of expectations for behavior that is informed by parents' ideas about child development and desirable child-rearing practices and outcomes. A sense of efficacy is dependent upon a parent's belief that some level of control can be maintained over one's life and the lives of their children.

Examining this role construction and sense of efficacy from a cultural perspective, Chrispeels & Rivero (2001) moved beyond the theoretical to application of Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's conceptual framework as a springboard for understanding Latino parents' sense of place in the educational process. The intervening variable that contributed to shaping parent perspectives about role construction and sense of place in a

child's education in this study was parent participation in eight weeks of parent classes. This program provided an organizational structure for developing relationships and getting at parent understanding. Borrowing from Delgado-Gaitan's (1996) term "cultural broker", Chrispeels & Rivero viewed the parent education program and its instructors as playing a role of mediator between school culture and the cultural experiences and expectations held by this group of Latino parents. Parent role definition and sense of competence in engaging with the schools was negotiated through relationships within this organizational framework.

Sivan (1986) stated that judgments of self-efficacy are a construct of motivation and a sociocultural perspective of motivation represents a paradigmatic shift from viewing motivation as in individual process to viewing motivation as contingent upon context. Regarding parent involvement in the schools, the contextual realities of setting, social relationships, and personal agendas all contribute to motivation. As Reese & Gallimore (2000) concluded from their work with Latino families, role constructs may change with time as a response to experiences within the group. Cultural role constructs may coexist with new constructs. Monzo & Rueda (2001) concurred with this perspective for understanding motivational processes and achievement orientations within Latino families they studied. While motivational processes are often viewed as occurring within an individual, they observed that social and historical factors mold the context within which individuals act. They noted that when parents were able to advocate for their children and make the school system work in their favor, a sense of control and competence resulted. Effectiveness in supporting their children's education resulted in a sense of efficacy and served as a continuing source of motivation.

While this notion of developing relationships within an organizational structure, such as a school, seems to be a logical way for understanding parents' perspectives about their role perception and sense of efficacy in supporting their children in school, Comer & Haynes (1991) observed that their findings about parent involvement since the '60s have not carried into practice in many schools. They maintain that to understand what motivates parents to be involved in the school process, a social ecology perspective is needed where the interactions of individuals in groups in a social system are considered and valued. An example of such a perspective has been proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1998; 1979;) in his Ecological Systems Theory. He maintains that learning occurs within the context of a system of relationships, complex layers of environment, and that to understand learning and development, individuals and their interactions within their environments must be examined. The emphasis moves from the individual to the individual in specific contexts. Parent role construction and a sense of efficacy evolve as parents interact within the contexts of home and school and they provide perspectives on matters that serve the best interest of children. There is a reciprocity that can potentially occur between parents and schools: the more mutual understanding there is about parent/school roles and responsibilities, the more parent involvement will occur and more parent involvement results in greater mutual understanding.

Perceptions of Invitations

Invitations and opportunities for parents to become involved in the educational process may serve as a motivational factor in parents deciding to become involved. If schools hope to increase parent involvement then parent perspectives of the process are key. While schools may place an emphasis on the content of a parent involvement

program, parents have reported that school initiatives that welcome and value their contributions lead to trusting relationships and greater involvement in their children's education (Mapp, 2003). Thus, invitations and opportunities to work together as a community lead to collaborative relationships that result in parent investment in the process. Three relational factors were reported to have had a significant impact on parent decisions to become involved in Mapp's study: welcoming, honoring and connecting with parents through a focus on the children and their learning. Parents' strengths were recognized and their efforts to support their children were affirmed by the school.

Prior to Mapp's (2003) study, an analysis of characteristics of high-performing Hispanic schools was conducted, indicating that great emphasis is placed on how parents perceive the school environment. In high-performing schools with large Hispanic populations, parents reported that they feel acknowledged, welcomed, and empowered by positive relationships with the school staff (Scribner et al.,1999). Thus, parent perceptions that are formed by interactions with the school may either fuel parents' motivation to be involved or suppress parent involvement. Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel (2001) agreed that the perception of invitation from the school to parents appears to be a critical factor in motivation to get involved. They caution that minority parents' interaction patterns with the school may not be as they appear. They suggest that lack of involvement may be more about lack of opportunities and invitation than lack of interest.

Chrispeels & Gonzalez (2004) provided further confirmation of empirical studies and theoretical considerations that have been reviewed in this section concerning the factors involved in Latino parent role construction, parent sense of efficacy and perception of invitations from the school community. With a sample of more than 1000

participants in a parenting program called the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), a survey before and after participation in a nine-week program was conducted. Seven areas related to parent involvement were examined: 1) home literacy activities; 2) parenting practices; 3) home-school connections; 4) parents' knowledge; 5) sense of self-efficacy; 6) parent role construction; and 7) college expectations.

Results indicated a significant difference in parent knowledge, beliefs and practices as a result of participation in the program with the largest effect, (1.06 with >.80 = large), obtained in the category of parents' knowledge such as knowledge of academic standards. Parents' knowledge was the strongest predictor of parent involvement, impacting all the other factors. The researchers concluded from this pre and post program survey that increasing Latino parents' knowledge about how the school system works and how to help their children with school through educational programming offers large returns on parent involvement in the educational process.

Limitations did surface with this type of short-term educational programming and survey study. Chrispeels & Gonzalez (2004) found that there was only a small effect for home-school connections. The researchers suggested that home-school connections are the most resistant to change and require more sustained effort by schools and teachers to invite and involve parents in the schools. More detailed information is needed about what supports home-school connections, expanding the current knowledge about Latino parents' perceptions, beliefs and practices and their sense of connectedness to schools. The nature of relationships among Latino parents and students and the school community needs to be explored with a greater attention given how schools invite or deny family participation and what it means to be involved.

Parents' Life Contexts

In addition to role construction, sense of efficacy, and perceptions of invitations from the school, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) cite one more factor in parent decision-making about involvement in the school that has the potential to isolate parents from the process: parents' life contexts. Socioeconomic status (SES) is one such element of a parent's life that has received the attention of many studies which have looked at parent engagement in the educational process. SES does not generally explain the variation in parent involvement practices within and across SES categories (Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Delgado-Gaitan, (1992); Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) instead suggest that it may be more fruitful to consider the connection between resources that accompany lower-SES and parent involvement patterns such as a parent's time and energy available beyond a work schedule, access to schooling and school-related knowledge and skills .

Others have suggested that lower-SES families may be denied access to schools due to assumptions based on SES status such as parent deficiency in ability, interest, skill, time, motivation or knowledge (Moll et al. 2005, 1992; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Henry, 1996;). Rooted in deficit discourse, Delgado-Gaitan states that such assumptions depict parents who are lower-SES and/or culturally or linguistically diverse as uninvolved parents because they " have a different language, work long hours away from home, belong to different ethnic groups, or are just not interested"(p. 22). This third aspect of Hoover- Dempsey's et al. conceptual framework for parent involvement decision-making, parents' life contexts, is vulnerable to different interpretations based on assumptions and the discourse that accompanies those assumptions. Delgado-Gaitan

(1991) provides an alternative life context that may explain lack of parent involvement in the educational process: lack of access to specific cultural knowledge gained by participation in cultural events and practices which is at its core, power.

Power relations in education have been examined by theorists seeking to explain patterns of interaction between schools and families. These patterns become a part of the culture of a school and reflect the possibility of achieving a relationship that makes learning opportunities for parents and the school possible. Relations of power determine the potential for parent involvement. In the next section, I will discuss power relations using a framework for data analysis that was devised by Cummins (2001) in which the connection between schools and parents and students can be generated from either a deficit stance or from a perspective of shared power and potential. Assumptions that operate within a deficit paradigm place a lack of parental engagement at the individual level and do not consider the impact of context; whether or not access is afforded to the parents by school practices. From a perspective that views parents as a resource, school communities and their practices facilitate learners' access to the resources of their communities; sources within the school community become a route to participation for families. Cummins conceives these relationships as coercive and collaborative, providing a lens for analyzing the nature of interactions that is unique to a particular combination of parents within a particular school.

Returning to Hoover-Dempsey's (2005, 1997) conceptual framework aimed at understanding what motivates parents to become involved in the education of their children, power relations underlie parents' role construction and sense of efficacy as an essential partner in the education of their children and they become an important element

of a parent's life context. It is the combination of individual motivation to be involved with access to opportunities to participate in school events and practices that defines the notion of best practices.

Power Relations and Sociocultural Theory

From a sociocultural perspective, participation in a community's events and practices become intertwined with the learning that results. As Lave and Wenger (1991) observe, " ... understanding and experience are in constant interaction- indeed, are mutually constitutive" (p.51-52). From a school's standpoint, the desire to engage parents in the educational process and a plan to promote that engagement and participation, that is, the plan to provide access to the school community's events and practices, are guided by implicit beliefs and philosophies about family-school relationships. For children and families who are culturally and linguistically diverse, Cummins (2001; 1996) proposes that relations of power that are reflected in the culture of a school may reflect power relations in the wider society and must be scrutinized if the paradigmatic shift from coercive to collaborative relations is to be realized. Participants in these two types of power relationships experience different realities.

Within his framework, Cummins asserts that coercive relations of power assume that there is a fixed quantity of power and that a dominant group exercises power over a subordinate group. Consequently, the subordinate group is viewed as intrinsically inferior. Racism, homophobia, sexism, etc. represent examples of coercive relations of power. Cummins contends that the discourse surrounding incidents of coercive relations of power often rationalizes actions by claiming more insights about what is in the best

interests of society as a whole and particular communities. This power relationship is reflected in the culture and policies within school communities. Conversely, collaborative relations of power assume that there is no fixed quantity of power but that power can be generated through interpersonal and intergroup relations. Cummins refers to "power" as " being enabled" or "empowered" to achieve more.

Studies have been conducted that support the argument that coercive relationships negatively affect academic achievement of language minority students. For instance, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1995) conducted a study that examined Mexican youth in Mexico and the United States with the intention of determining factors that contribute to poor academic performance; does Mexican culture contribute to an orientation towards education that results in academic failure? The researchers concluded in their findings that academic performance was not connected to particular cultural characteristics but rather to inherent shortcomings within the American educational and social system. A sense of disenfranchisement lead to lack of motivation and failing academics for the student participants.

Ruiz and Moll (2002) have also investigated the schooling of Latino children in the United States. In their study of the Los Angeles Unified School District, they determined that the majority "minority" students' academic needs were not being met, resulting in a high school drop-out rate of 20%. With Latinos representing 69% of the total student population, their analysis considered wider societal forces that have created a coercive relationship between language minority parents and students and the schools that has negatively impacted academic achievement. They point to two factors that have significantly contributed to the disenfranchisement of minority students in the district:

1) legislation in 1998 banned bilingual education and they contend that this perpetuates a coercive ideological context that fails to acknowledge diverse languages and cultures; 2) additionally, in an era of standards-based curriculum and instruction, pedagogical strategies that focus on prescriptive, packaged curriculum have effectively reduced teacher autonomy when responding to the educational needs of individual students. They argue that presentation of early literacy curriculum in a decontextualized, skill-and-drill format to English Language Learners limits the potential for making meaningful connections between second language development and print. Combined, these ideological, societal forces have created a climate in which culturally and linguistically diverse students do not thrive academically in this school district climate.

Another case in point is detailed by Soto (1997) in her description of "Steel Town" in Pennsylvania. In a community with an increasing, active Puerto Rican enclave, the local bilingual program became a target for deflecting expressions of racism in the wider community. The wider community proposed the elimination of the bilingual program in favor of an English immersion program with the premise of preparing students to communicate in the language of this country – English. Even in the face of objective data that supported the continuation of the bilingual program and vocal activism on the part of the families, the program was abolished. Citing a sincere belief that language-minority children are best served by mastering English as soon as possible, the local school superintendent's action reflected the larger community's views on multilingualism and the need for maintaining an English-dominant status in the community and in the schools. The dominant forces in the community reclaimed their power by exerting forces on programming that recognized bilingualism as a resource.

The Puerto Rican community in "Steel Town" was treated as inferior to the dominant

English-speaking residents of the town, and decisions were made that were couched in "

the best interests of the minority-language children." By defining Latino families from a

deficit stance, a pattern of interaction and discourse evolves that restricts the development

and potential of children and families. Consideration of the intrinsic traits of parents, and

assumptions about families who are classified as a group by definition of language or

culture, to the exclusion of context and opportunities for participation in a community's

practices, feeds into deficit-model thinking.

In contrast, Cummins cites the "Oyster Bilingual School" in Washington, D.C. as

an example of what constitutes an example of collaborative relations of power within a

school community (Freeman, 1998). With a dual immersion model of bilingual

education, this school maintained a goal of developing biliterate and bicultural students.

Parents, students, and staff valued the benefits of developing strong native language (L1)

proficiency in both oral and written forms. In addition to achieving positive student

incomes in the areas of math and reading, families and students received the message that

linguistic and cultural diversity is not something to be overcome in order to participate

and achieve at school.

Cummins (retrieved 2007) suggests that to impact the deep structure of

educational change, patterns of interaction between educators and students/families in the

school, identified as *micro-interactions,* must challenge current patterns of relationship

between dominant and subordinated communities in the wider society (*macro-

interactions*). Relations of power, ranging from coercive to collaborative, shape the

educator role definition and types of structures that are established in any educational

system. Cummins defines educator role as a mindset of expectations, assumptions and goals that educators bring to the task of educating culturally diverse students, for example, with educational structures referring to schooling in a broader sense to include programs and policies and curriculum and assessment. Cummins maintains that educator role definitions combined with educational structures establish the micro-interactions that occur among educators, students and communities; hence, either a reinforcement of coercive relations of power or the promotion of collaborative relations of power.

Sonia Nieto (1999) expressed the future of education for language-minority students and their families that hangs in the balance and the nature of the paradigmatic shift that needs to occur if families and students who are culturally and linguistically diverse are to thrive in U. S. public schools:

> In the end, if teachers believe that students cannot achieve at high levels, that their backgrounds are riddled with deficiencies, and that multicultural education is a frill that cannot help them to learn, the result will be school reform strategies that have little hope for success. On the other hand, if teachers begin by challenging social inequities that inevitably place some students at a disadvantage over others; if they struggle against institutional policies and practices that are unjust; if they begin with the strengths and talents of students and their families; if they undergo a process of personal transformation based on their own identities and experiences; and finally, if they engage with colleagues in a collaborative and imaginative encounter to transform their own practices and their schools to achieve equal and high-quality education for all students, then the outcome is certain to be a more positive one than is currently the case. (p.175-176)

Reflecting on contemporary issues in education, in the next section I will argue that the language of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with its subtractive view of multilingualism, is an example of what Cummins refers to as a macro-level coercive relationship.

NCLB: An Example of Coercive Relationships at the Macro Level

John Dewey believed that any theory of education must be connected to a political system and for him that meant a democracy for all citizens, a society of equality, participation, and voices that are heard. Although he expressed his perspectives of education during the first half of the twentieth century, like Cummins in contemporary education, he recognized that micro-interactions often reflect macro-interactions, the patterns of relationship between dominant and subordinated communities in the wider society.

> The educational system is part of a common life and cannot escape
> suffering the consequences that flow from the conditions prevailing
> outside of the schools. The repressive and reactionary forces are in
> such entrenched strength in all our other institutions that it would be
> folly to expect the schools to get off free.

John Dewey

A current example of the relationship between micro- and macro-interactions is illustrated through the impact on public education of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (NCLB-P.L. 107-110) which was detailed in Chapter One. As Cummins (2001; 2000;) has stated, coercive relations of power are reflected in the language and discourse that surrounds actions taken, legitimating the inferior status of some subordinate group. For language-minority students in the U. S., NCLB has shaped both the instructional programming and the national perception of students who are English Language Learners.

When the Bilingual Education Act along with the word 'bilingual' was eliminated from the legislation in 2001, the substitution of the Limited English Proficient label marked a dramatic shift in the national perspective of students with a native language

other than English. Instead of viewing multilingualism as a national asset, children were viewed through an inferior lens, not meeting the standard of English language proficiency. Word choice is powerful. In this era of accountability in our schools, test scores are the indicator by which schools are held accountable. With expectations that all schools will make Adequate Yearly Progress for all students within a school, attention has been drawn to subgroups of students based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language, who might contribute to a school's designation as a "failing school." Just the word 'subgroup' connotes a designation as not part of the dominant group. For language-minority students, mandating testing in a language in which you are not proficient stacks the deck against them, perpetuating the likelihood of a deficient label.

Schools with a high proportion of poor and diverse students are at a crossroads; they are at a point in time when critical decisions must be made about how schools respond to culturally and linguistically diverse students. Central to the understanding of Cummins' (1996) stance on relations of power is that coercive relations can only operate through the micro-interactions between educators, students and families. " Thus, educators, students, and communities can challenge this coercive process" (p.203).

From her work with language-minority students, Nieto (1992; 1996; 2000) proposes a way of thinking about schools and diversity that is additive in nature. Rather than seeing diversity as a challenge, she suggests viewing differences as adding to everyone's education with students and families coming to schools with talents to contribute. The challenge for educators comes from trying to balance individual differences while also acknowledging cultural and family realities. Like Cummins, Dewey and many other educational theorists, Nieto points out that institutions of learning

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are never neutral. The business of education is always a reflection of the conditions of wider society.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have laid out a theoretical frame for the initial analytical lens of my research study with Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students at Maplehurst Elementary School. By adopting a sociocultural framework for understanding the experiences of the families in the study, the role of context moves to the forefront of my analysis. By locating literacy and family literacy programs within a sociocultural framework I am positioning them within a complex social and cultural system.

With the focus of my study on parents, the school, and the interrelationships that exist, I have stated two frameworks that I will use as tools for analysis of my data of Spanish-speaking parents in relationship with Maplehurst Elementary School. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997; 2005) provide a frame for understanding factors that affect parent motivation and engagement in the educational process that encompasses both the individual characteristics of parents as well as conditions at a school that shape parent perceptions of their efficacy in supporting their children's education. Cummins (2001; 2007;) offers a framework that analyzes the nature of relations of power that are in place within a school that reflect societal forces in play in the wider society and affect parent participation in a community's events and practices. An analysis of the macro- and micro-interactions that present themselves within this study will yield critical insights into the experiences of the nine families studied.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the
words. You listen not only to the 'music,' but to the essence of the person
speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is.
Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the
eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in
yourself, so you can slow our mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and
hear beneath the words to their meaning.

Peter Senge

Qualitative Research: Basic Tenets and Application to this Study

A qualitative method of research was selected for this study based on the research

question and the kind of information I was seeking. In this section, I draw on the work of

Merriam (1998), Patton (2002) and Dyson & Genishi (2005) to understand the key

philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. Qualitative research is interested in

the how people make sense of their world and how experiences are lived or felt. Merriam

presents the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research: quantitative research

takes apart a phenomenon to explore the key elements and qualitative research reveals

how all the pieces fit together to form a whole. As Patton states:

This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what
may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting-
what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's
going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in
that particular setting – and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully
to others who are interested in that setting... The analysis strives for
depth of understanding. (p.1)

By the nature of this work, the researcher becomes the instrument for data collection and analysis. In order to achieve a depth of understanding, the researcher must go into the context and get close enough to people and their circumstances to describe and analyze what is happening. When this method matches the purpose of the research, Patton suggests that face-to-face interaction is necessary. Engaging in this type of fieldwork becomes a necessary prerequisite for achieving understanding. He proposes a notion of *empathic neutrality* which seems to be a contradictory term at first glance: how can you show empathy and still be neutral? But he proposes that to be a good qualitative researcher, one must be exhibit empathy in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of others while avoiding becoming too involved and clouding one's judgment. At the same time, the investigator must be nonjudgmental so that data is not manipulated in a way to prove a particular perspective. Patton calls this research effort to strike a balance between fairness and completeness in representing the perspectives and meaning of others as "trustworthiness" and "authenticity".

As qualitative researchers engage in the analysis of data, an inductive approach is utilized where themes and categories emerge from the data that can build toward theory. To accomplish this thematic analysis requires data that is rich in description. Instead of hypotheses deduced from theory to guide the research, qualitative research seeks theory that explains the data. Unlike quantitative research that relies on numbers to explain a phenomenon, qualitative research looks at people in a context engaged in some activity and can only be understood through rich description in the form of words, actions and products of the process.

Case Study Method in Relation to Research Question and Subquestions

The method of qualitative research that I utilized was case study. This design addressed the main question I was asking: How do Spanish-speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a school. As Merriam (1998) states:

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p.19)

The focus of case study is on the bounded nature of some phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). The boundaries of my study are: 1) nine Spanish-speaking families in one school; 2) during one school year; 3) within a specific context or situation – parents of kindergarten students at Maplehurst Elementary School; with the unit of analysis being the families.

Case study method was selected as the design that would best investigate the subquestions that underlie my primary research question. Referring back to the introduction, I wanted to know: What motivates the parents in this study to be engaged in the education of their children? What aspirations do they have for their children? What do they do at home that supports the academic advancement of their children? What is the role of the school in parents' participation? What forms of access are valuable to parents? What affects parent participation? How do teachers perceive parent engagement at home and at school? Over the course of the 2005-2006 school year, I was interested in how the experiences of these parents would reveal existing relations of power within the larger context of the whole school structural organization.

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The case study method allows me to explore how the participants in this study make meaning of the kindergarten experience while recognizing that the participants are embedded within a school and community. It is the study of individual agency, access to a community's practices and events, and the interrelationship that results that is of interest to me as a researcher. As Merriam states in the above passage, case study research unleashes the potential for discovery that may inform policy, practice and future research. It is the interaction of these factors and the bounded nature of the phenomenon that allows a deeper understanding of "a case"- a group of parents who share some common characteristics who find themselves in a common context where opportunities for learning and building relationships is either supported or denied. Through this process of discovery and the examination of many variables that are embedded within the context, I am trying to get at the heart of what an experience means to *others,* the families in this study. As a researcher, a certain "letting go" has to occur in which the process for the participants starts to take on a life of its own and the researcher is there to collect data that reflect the meaning and perspectives from the participants' perspective. I had to constantly be conscious of the goals of my study and what my role was in the process to maintain the credibility and authenticity of the overall findings. Trustworthiness in educational research is dependent on detailed description of "the case" along with an analysis and a set of conclusions that are based in data. To ensure this rigor, I will next describe the elements of case study design that I subscribed to during this study.

Elements of Case Study Research Design

Yin (2003, p. 21) has described five components of case study design that include: 1) a study's questions; 2) its propositions; 3) its units of analysis; 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings. In the following sections I will detail the key elements of research design as they pertain to this study.

Pilot Study

Determining the study question, the driving force behind this research, involved a process of evolution in thought. It consisted of reviewing available literature pertinent to Spanish-speaking families and students in urban schools that are culturally and linguistically diverse, observation of Spanish-speaking families in this study site to understand existing patterns of communication and involvement, and the implementation of a pilot study to help frame my research study. The pilot study allowed me to develop lines of questions that reflected a growth in my understanding of the experience of culturally and linguistically diverse families within a public school setting, the role of access to participation in a community's practices and events, and a respect for the complexity of it all. I will review the course of the pilot study and some of my observations.

Because there was no existing school or district parent support group for Spanish-speaking parents, I initiated a group during the 2004-2005 school year which had at its focus, literacy development and instructional practices. I joined with Charlotte Brown, the school district's special education Spanish liaison, to develop a pilot program that

would explore Spanish-speaking parents' understanding of the language and literacy expectations in kindergarten. Unlike the dissertation research that regarded language and literacy practices as an embedded activity within a larger context, the pilot program had a very narrow focus that reflects my lack of understanding of what I was studying.

Monthly meetings were held at Maplehurst Elementary School with aspects of the kindergarten language and literacy curriculum addressed at each meeting. Children of the parents or guardians in attendance were allowed to leave their classrooms and work with their families at the meeting. Materials for home use were distributed and instructional strategies were modeled. Parents reported that they only visited their children's classrooms on rare, mostly formal occasions. So, language and literacy practices described and modeled in the parent group were decontextualized.

Although the parents in this group were homogenous in terms of primary language spoken and their child's attendance in a high-poverty, diverse elementary school, the cultural and educational backgrounds varied. What did unify these parents through their experience in this parent group was a validation of their language and culture by a group sanctioned by the school district. Parents were provided with a context for discussing their own educational experiences and cultural expectations and learning about what is taught in kindergarten.

Barriers to participation in the program existed. Ecological factors such as multiple jobs and long hours, financial stress, and a general sense of vulnerability prevailed. Communication barriers persisted during the year. Written notices and forms of school communication were reportedly sent home in English even when the Spanish

version was available. I found that personal communication about meetings and activities was time-intensive but it seemed to be the preferred method of communication.

During the last parent meeting that year, I asked more probing questions and received answers that seemed at variance with my own perceptions. I found that the perception of limited English proficiency as a barrier to supporting their children in school was not shared by all the parents. Many parents felt that their "act of being present" at school was what their children needed from them. Limited English did not present an obstacle to fulfilling a perceived parental role. I also found out through a kindergarten teacher questionnaire at the end of the year that the perception of Latino parents not valuing education persisted among some staff members in spite of contradictory behaviors of parent involvement at home and in school on the part of these families. Incorrect perceptions persisted due to communication breakdown. I knew what types of language and literacy practices were occurring in the homes of these families but the teachers did not.

As a result of this pilot study, I developed an initial research proposal question that revealed my own bias and dominant institutional perceptions. The question was: How do Spanish-speaking parents understand the particular language and literacy demands of kindergarten and their role in expressing involvement and support of their children during the entry year into the public school system? I soon found that this question was faulty. My perceptions were altered by the participants' responses as early as the initial interviews of this research study. My selection of the word 'demands' exposed my perception that acquiring English as a second language was an obstacle to be overcome by the students and their families. The nuances in wording within my research

question quickly seemed biased to me. I also developed a proposition as I began collecting data that indicated that my question did not reflect the role of the school in the parent involvement process. My initial research question placed emphasis on parent perceptions of school and their actions to support their children's education without addressing how parent perceptions and actions are shaped by access to opportunities within the school community.

Proposition

The proposition that I developed as the study progressed reflects the nature of relationship between families and schools and how that relationship impacts parent understanding of the kindergarten experience and support of children's educational development through participation in the events and practices of a community. The thread that runs throughout my theoretical framework is the notion of a shared meaningfulness that is achieved through participation in cultural events and practices. Participation requires access and continued access is necessary if transformation in participation is to be achieved. Therefore, the proposition of my research study is: The nature of parent involvement reflects the individual agency of parents as well as school practices that support or deny family participation in school events and practices; when responsibility for educating students is shared by the family and school through a collaborative relationship, parent understanding of the curriculum and patterns of involvement become a powerful tool for shaping children's achievement.

Unit of Analysis

As a result of the research question, subquestions and proposition, the unit of analysis for this study is the families. How do parents understand the curriculum of kindergarten, their role in supporting their children's education, their relationship with the school, and how the school helps or hinders their understanding and involvement in their child's education. This study sought to understand and analyze the parents' meaning making, their perceptions, revealed through words and actions.

Linking Data to Propositions/ Theory Development

This study of Latino families is viewed in relation to empirical results from research studies and theories about: culturally and linguistically diverse parents and their role construction and sense of place in the educational process of their children; relationships between families and schools; and theories about learning and meaning-making within the contextual realities of setting and social relationships. The purpose of Chapter One-Landscape was to place this study into a larger context. As I build towards theory in the research process, I move from the data to a conceptual overview of this larger context, moving from a description of what happened to an analysis of events that are embedded in a larger context. I will now detail the criteria used for interpreting and analyzing the findings.

Criteria for Interpreting the Findings

When conducting educational research, there is a responsibility to produce work that is trustworthy, authentically reflects the events within a particular activity setting,

and draws conclusions from the data that make sense. In this section, I will draw on work by Yin (2003), Merriam (1998), and Patton (2002) to understand how trustworthiness in case study research is dependent on validity and reliability.

Validity

Tests of validity in social science are concerned with whether an account is an accurate reflection of some social phenomenon. Criticism of case studies charges that the research may actually be just a collection of anecdotes and personal impressions that are subject to researcher bias. Patton (2002) refers to the goal of accurate representation of some social phenomenon as "trustworthiness" and "authenticity", striking a balance between fairness and completeness in representing the perspectives and meaning of others. Yin (2003) suggests that with case study research, *construct validity* is best guarded by selecting the specific types of changes that are to be studied and then relate them to the objectives of the study. In this study, evidence of parent understanding of the curriculum in kindergarten was obtained through parent verbal reports and artifacts from home language and literacy practices, observation of participation in the parent group involving curriculum materials from kindergarten, the development of an informational brochure for incoming Spanish-speaking parents which included curriculum information, and communication with their children about the curriculum through a journaling technique.

Understanding of parent role construction and sense of efficacy in the parent involvement process was measured through occurrences such as:

- attendance at monthly meetings

- attendance at the general school Parent Teacher Group

- attendance at formal school functions such as Open House and a final spring program

- attendance at parent-teacher conferences

- requesting spring conferences

- volunteering within a child's classroom

- home practices that reinforced the academic goals in kindergarten

- parent reports of informal methods of support and involvement

- reports of strategies for overcoming language difficulties encountered

- development of the informational brochure

- journaling with their child

Recognition that these behaviors happened within the context of relationships established at school was measured by parent verbal reports, recording of the setting in which activities occurred, and teacher reports of parent understanding of the curriculum and involvement in the process through established relationships with school personnel and programs. These indicators of parent understanding and engagement provide multiple sources of evidence while providing a rich description of the phenomena, supporting the study's proposition and bolstering construct validity.

External validity in case study design returns to the notion of analytical generalizations and the ability to generalize a set of results to particular theory. Generalizing to other people or settings is not an underlying goal of single case study

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design; instead, the researcher is interested in understanding the particular in depth and to build towards theory. Dyson & Genishi (2005) best describe this intention:

> So if a study gives readers a sense of "being there", of having a vicarious experience in the studied site, then readers may generalize from that experience in private, personal ways, modifying, extending, or adding to their generalized understandings of how the world works. (p.115)

Reframing the idea of external validity and generalization to reflect the underlying assumptions of qualitative research helped guide my data collection, always relating what I saw and heard to a broader conceptual landscape. It was a conscious process aimed at getting the best possible data from the participants to reflect their perspectives and detail the social phenomenon that occurred during the course of the kindergarten school year with nine Spanish-speaking families. Sociocultural perspectives of learning served as the main umbrella of theory.

Reliability

Reliability of a study in the traditional sense refers to the extent to which another researcher can replicate the research findings as a result of discussion of significant theoretical underpinnings of the study, detailed documentation of the setting, autobiographical information about the researcher, the participants, the methodological procedures followed, data collection techniques and tools for analysis and measurement, and a timeline. Yet, qualitative research poses a challenge to this notion because given the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, how can one be sure that the researcher is a reliable instrument? Would the same results be obtained if

someone else conducted the study? Merriam (2002) asserts that " achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible" (p. 206) when engaged in educational case study research due to its dynamic, multifaceted, and highly contextual nature. Rather, with case study research, the notion of reliability shifts from a focus on the repeatability of the findings to whether the results are consistent with the data collected; that the results make sense and are dependable and consistent (Merriam, 2002). To improve the likelihood that the study results are dependable, I designed and adhered to a case study research protocol which will be clarified later in this chapter. Before that, I will discuss the effect of translation on the validity and reliability of qualitative research with non-English speaking participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Authenticity with Translation

Translation deserves special attention when trying to understand a phenomenon when the researcher and the participants do not share a common language. While multicultural and multilingual research contributes uniquely to research, translation poses challenges to validity and reliability in research studies that are seeking to understand participants views and perceptions. Temple & Young (2004) argue that the issue of translation and interpretation in research involves language and power.

> In mainstream society, individuals who do not speak the dominant language in that country become dependent on others for speaking for them; speaking for others, in any language, is a political issue which involves the use of language to construct self and other. (p.167)

About the Translator

Because values, beliefs, thoughts, concepts and cultural meanings are embedded in language, there is more that happens than just a transfer of information in the translation process. In this study, Charlotte Brown, the translator, collaborated with me, the researcher, on monthly meetings with the Spanish-speaking kindergarten parents. She translated notices about meeting dates and content, and she translated the verbal interactions during the meetings. She was instrumental in making personal contacts by phone or in person on school grounds to notify parents of upcoming events. Although I was often physically present on school grounds to smile and greet the parents, my inability to communicate in Spanish made me very reliant on Mrs. Brown.

As a check on the validity and reliability issues involved with translation in this study, biographical information about Mrs. Brown and her linguistic competence and knowledge of the Latino community will lend insight into her expertise and suitability for this role. It should be noted that Mrs. Brown was the only translator for this project so there was built-in consistency for reliability in the translation process.

Charlotte Brown has established credibility within the educational and Latino community in the city of this research study. She holds three graduate degrees: English, Spanish and Counseling and has worked for the past six years in the target school district as a Special Education Spanish liaison. She has been a director of the Latin American Center in this city, a teacher of ESL and parenting classes, a bilingual school counselor in a city in a neighboring state, and a bilingual clinician in a mental health center.

Mrs. Brown has an understanding of the Spanish-speaking families that includes an appreciation of parent education levels, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic input that

is comprehensible. She epitomizes who Delgado-Gaitan (1996) refers to as a 'cultural broker': a white educator who because of a long affiliation with the Latino community, is able to translate between her ethnic and cultural group and the Latinos.

Mrs. Brown's relationship with the Latino community enabled her to create rapport with the participants in this study. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) define rapport as " a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism" used primarily to benefit the researcher so the participant feels comfortable speaking about their culture.

I was not only dependent on Mrs. Brown for her words, but her relationships and perspectives. We engaged in frequent conversations about all aspects of the research study. We discussed words and concepts that did not easily translate from one language to another such as the word 'literacy'. We talked about different ways to say things without changing the intended meanings. During interviews, Charlotte was always conscious of maintaining as neutral and objective a stance as is possible in any complex social situation.

Even with these attempts to control for negative methodological effects caused by translation in this research study, the language barrier between the participants and the researcher and the need for a translator limited the collection of some data. From review of the research with multicultural and multilingual groups, I had anticipated that focus groups would be a valuable source of data for this study (Kitzinger, 1995). This method of obtaining data is often used in cross cultural research and work with ethnic minorities. The notion is that group processes promote the exploration and clarification of views in ways that would be less accessible in a one to one interview.

In reality, Mrs. Brown was called upon to translate for the participants and the researcher, and in the context of focus groups, this process became unproductive and unwieldy. Mrs. Brown could not translate all the side conversations and comments, restricting the spontaneity that occurs in a focus group.

Consequently, opportunities for exchange of viewpoints and perspectives were limited to one to one communication situations or very small groups where each person's turn in conversation could be translated. Because there was a dependence on the translator, communication opportunities often had to be planned. From this experience grew empathy for what it is like to be in an environment, the Spanish parent group, and not understand or speak the dominant language. I found out how disenfranchising it is to not know the spoken language. There are missed opportunities for exchange, a feeling of dependence on another to act as a mediator, and a lack of privacy in conversation. Conversation always involves at three people. While translation presented a limitation in gathering data from focus group settings, it did provide an experience that broadened my appreciation for the situation that study participants found themselves in daily.

About the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, I became the instrument of data analysis. My lived experiences as a white, English-speaking, middle-class, college-educated person are different than those of the participants. Although I have tried to account for intrinsic bias, I can't appreciate the meaning of school and school experiences to the participants in the study without the input they provide to me. In terms of ethics, my job as a school employee positions me as having more power than the families. Parents were guaranteed

in oral and written form that participation or denial of participation would not affect their access to school services for themselves or their children; anonymity was guaranteed to those who enrolled in the study. However, there is no way to neutralize the different roles and status that the families and I held within that educational context.

During my course of involvement in this dissertation study, I focused on the nature of power relations among the families, school personnel and the Spanish Parent Literacy Group at Maplehurst Elementary School. Unlike the pilot study which, in retrospection, was more a top-down process in which I was controlling the course of events with a fixed quantity of power in play, this dissertation study showed an evolution in my thinking about how the relationships that result in patterns of mutual understanding and desired involvement may require a different balance of power, more a 'posture of reciprocity' (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997). As Cummins (1996) noted, when collaborative relations are present, power in the form of advocacy for one's child and family through participation in a community's practices and events, can be generated through interpersonal and intergroup relations.

As a researcher, I realized I was an instrument for understanding the perspectives of the families; however, I did approach this research from a theoretical stance that views experiences and opportunities for learning within a given context as a critical element in the development of parent perspectives of the kindergarten year and subsequent parental involvement patterns. By adopting this stance, I acknowledge that it becomes a lens through which I analyze data. Often, educator role definitions in a diverse, high-poverty public elementary school create a climate in which coercive relations (Cummins, 1996) between minority families and the school dominates. Instead, I needed the participating

families to reach my goal of increased understanding of the experience of this population of parents. Yet, from the parents' perspective, I was a representative of the school district and they may have viewed me as a gatekeeper to the school system and subsequent academic success for their children.

I have been employed in public schools for more than 25 years as a reading specialist and a speech pathologist. I have also worked as a research teacher on a National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD)-funded study. During the 2005-2006 school year, the year of this research study, I was employed as a district elementary language arts implementation specialist, providing professional development related to the language arts curriculum for the teaching personnel in 14 elementary schools. While my days involved traveling to many different sites in the district, my office was in the school in which this research study was conducted.

For two years prior to this research study, I was employed at the research site as a Title I supervisor, and in that role I established relationships with the kindergarten teachers who became a part of this study. Negotiating a research relationship with the teachers presented advantages and challenges for me. Hammersley and Atkinson(1983) employ the term 'reflexivity' to label the recognition that the researcher is an integral part of the phenomena being studied, and contend that:

> Once we abandon the idea that the social character of research can be standardized out or avoided by becoming a "fly on the wall" or a "full participant," the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process becomes clear. (p.18)

Since understanding is the primary rationale for this investigation, my pre-existing relationships allowed me access to teachers; staff members were not afraid to voice their

opinions and perspectives. I was able to get information that allowed me a view of people's construction of reality in order to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework. Yet, as an instrument of the research, I had to step back from their words and analyze the data through the lens that was stated in Chapter Two and an important part of the research design. I had to construct plausible explanations for the data. The challenge is that I don't think there is any way to completely divorce oneself from who we are or from what we know.

Principles I Followed

Yin (2003) outlines skills required of case study investigators. These were principles that I followed during the course of this dissertation study. Investigators need to be competent at asking questions and interpreting the answers. This skill is required not only at the beginning of the study when formal questionnaires are designed, but throughout the data collection process. The ability to respond to participant responses with questions that extend the line of inquiry is a dynamic process. There is no blueprint for all the opportunities that could reap valuable information. The investigator has to be adaptable and flexible, and able to pick up cues from what is said to keep the study moving in a way that will inform the study about parent perspectives.

From my experience with the pilot study and with my extensive review of literature and the constant weeding out process of material that didn't fit the population, context and questions that I was investigating, I was able to construct questions for the interviews that gleaned salient information. My initial plan was to give the same questionnaire in the fall and spring with the exception being elimination of biographical

information from the parents. However, as I moved forward in the data collection phase, I found that the questions did not completely engage the concepts I wanted to find out about and so I revised the spring questionnaire.

In order to ask good questions, the investigator must also be a good listener. Sometimes this is the hardest skill to acquire. As I listened to audiotapes of my transactions with families in this study, I observed missed opportunities for pursuing an idea or clarifying what was said because I wasn't a good listener. As I progressed through the data collection process, I became conscious of this skill, and hopefully, improved.

The final two principles that guided my practice were an informed understanding of the theoretical issues related to this study and a sensitivity to what appears to be contradictory evidence. For example, these two principles became apparent to me when I reflected on my experience with three parents who developed a brochure for incoming Spanish-speaking kindergarten parents. When emphasis was placed on other things of importance than what I thought was going to be put forward as critical for parents to know, I had to be a good listener, be flexible, and keep my focus on the purpose of the study: how do the parents understand the curriculum, their role in supporting their children's education, and how they view their relationship with the school. Then, when I reviewed the literature, the contents of the parents' brochure made sense – their broader definition of 'educacion' was staring me in the face. These principles reflect a recursive process in thinking. The investigator has to quickly review the evidence and ask why events or facts appear as they do and then respond. Case study research can yield

insightful information if the principal investigator is aware of guiding principles and adheres to them.

About the Participants

Recruitment

The participants of this study were parents who attended the Spanish-speaking kindergarten parent literacy group. While all the participants of the study were involved in the parent group, membership in the parent group extended beyond the participants in the dissertation study. In September, 2005, all kindergarten registrations were reviewed and any parents who listed Spanish as the home language were identified by the researcher. There were a total of 30 families identified. It is of interest to discuss the nature of the families listed as having a home language of Spanish. When Mrs. Brown surveyed the list and contacted each family, the responses fell into two categories. One response of no interest in participating in the Spanish Parent Literacy Group came from nine individuals who maintain some level of Spanish-speaking in their homes but have grown up in the United States and Mrs. Brown believes this response stems from their identifying more strongly with English. A second group of 21 parents expressed an interest in participating when contacted by Mrs. Brown.

When parents attended visitation day in kindergarten, September 9th, the Spanish-speaking parents were invited to the cafeteria to discuss the monthly group meetings. Fifteen parents attended this meeting. A notice, written in Spanish, was sent home to each family identified from the registrations and from the first day meeting, inviting them to attend the initial meeting of the kindergarten parent group on September 22, 2005. Two options for attending were available: the morning session or 5:00 p.m. evening

session. Mrs. Brown identified two families whose work schedules and/or health conditions precluded them from participating at school.

Ten parents of ten kindergarten students and some extended family members attended the first parent group in total: seven in the morning and three in the evening. The context was different for both sessions. In the morning, we met in the cafeteria where the acoustic conditions were very poor. In the evening, the meeting was moved to a kindergarten classroom, and the ambience was more conducive to conversation. The agenda for the first meeting included a welcome and an overview of the kindergarten language and literacy curriculum. Miss Dubois, a kindergarten teacher and Miss Jones, an ESL teacher, introduced themselves and fielded any questions for the morning group. Parents were given a packet with an audiotape and hand-out with basic skills such as the alphabet, shapes, colors, and numbers that included directions and rationale for each activity in Spanish and the labeling of each item in English. Parents also received take-home bilingual stories with tips for reading and conversing about stories. A bilingual lending library with emergent literacy that is located in the translator's office was introduced. Mrs. Brown spoke of upcoming parent conferences and accepted requests for translation services. Finally, the research project was broached with the parents.

The flyer that gave a general overview of the project and that had been approved by the Internal Review Board of the University of New Hampshire was distributed. Mrs. Brown gave an oral summary of the dissertation study and explained my position and my educational pursuits. A pre-approved informed consent was also provided. Of the ten parents that attended these meetings, only two parents from the evening session agreed to

participate immediately. The rest of those present asked to take the forms home to read them thoroughly and consider their decision whether or not to participate.

The enrollment process took longer than anticipated. By the first week in October, only six kindergarten parents had been recruited for the study, so I then frequented the playground before and after school, socializing with the families and developing a familiarity with each other. Because I could not speak Spanish, I was totally dependent on the translator during the recruitment process. By the second week in October, 11 families were recruited. Ten parents completed the initial interview but only nine families were able to participate in the whole study from beginning to end. Work schedules and inaccessibility due to lack of phone service appeared to be factors that affected participation.

In the following section, I will examine the data collection process for this dissertation study. I will reflect on principles aimed at guiding this case study through the data collection and analysis stages with consideration given to construct validity and reliability of the case study evidence. Then, I will detail the main sources of evidence in this study.

Principles of Data Collection

Yin (2003) identifies three principles of data collection that guide the process so that the data accrued represent an accurate portrayal of the phenomenon being studied and can be examined from the conceptual process to the findings and used as the basis for implementing future research in a similar fashion. The principles include:

1) use multiple sources of evidence; 2) create a case study database; 3) maintain a chain of evidence.

In this study, the unit of analysis is the families. Yin recommends in the first principle that multiple sources of evidence be incorporated into a case study design. In so doing, the study's findings are strengthened by a triangulation of sources that explore the phenomenon being studied. Getting at parent understanding in this study requires the analysis of multiple sources of evidence that converge and provide more than just a description of a social phenomenon but also an integration of the meaning of what is revealed in the study. Patton (2002) suggests that the goal of designing for multiple sources of evidence in a case study is the corroboration of a fact or phenomenon. The various sources of evidence in this dissertation study will be detailed in the upcoming section.

To increase the reliability of a study, the construction of a database provides documentation of the study. In this case, the database is comprised of written transcripts and artifacts that have been collected over the course of one school year. The contents of this database are included in Figure 3.3. To further increase the reliability of a study, a third principle by Yin suggests that a chain of evidence should be maintained in which any reader of this study can track in a bi-directional way the course of the study: from the research question to the findings or from the results back to the commencement of the study. This path can only be traced by citing within a dissertation report the source of information within a database and adherence to a stated design protocol.

Figure 3.1 Case Study Database

Interviews
Fall Interviews   9 audiotapes and written transcriptions
Spring Interviews   9 audiotapes and written transcriptions
Teacher Interviews   3 audiotapes and written transcriptions
Focus Group Interview   October, 2005   notes
Focus Group Interview   November, 2005 notes
Focus Group Interview   December, 2005 notes
Parent Conversation   May 31, 2006 notes

Observations (direct and participant)

Fall Teacher Conferences   participants: 5   non-participants: 2
Spring Teacher Conferences   participants: 5
Field Notes/ Working Session for Brochure Development   5/2/06
Field Notes/ Bring Your Parents to School Day   5/31/06
Field Notes/Parent Meeting for Incoming Parents/ Parent Presentation   6/8/06

Documentation

Informational Flyer about the Research Project
School Sign-Up Sheet for Parent Conferences/ Spanish
Monthly Meeting Dates: 9/9/05; 9/22; 10/20;11/17;12/21; 2/3/06; 3/15; 4/18; 5/24; 6/13;
Agendas for Each Meeting
Notice for Kindergarten Visitation   5/31/06
Notice for Incoming Spanish-Speaking Kindergarten Parents 6/8/06

Archival Information

NHDOE Title I Evaluation Report for Maplehurst Elementary- 2005-06 year
English/Spanish Kindergarten Report Cards
Completed Kindergarten trimester report cards for 9 students
Parent-Completed Report Cards/before Teacher Conferences – 3 students
First Trimester Progress Reports
Parent Certificates for Completion of the Program

Physical Artifacts

Parents' writing during Development of Brochure
Parent Writing of Rhymes Created by Child
Journal Questions
Journal Entries for 7 students and their parents
Parent-Developed Informational Brochure for Incoming Parents

Sources of Evidence

Sources of data for this study are summarized in Figure 3.3. These sources are categorized as: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Documents are gathered to corroborate information from other sources. Documents in case studies are relevant to the study and reflect forms of communication for a variety of purposes. Bilingual documentation includes: informational flyer about the research study, announcements of monthly meetings and other events, agendas for each meeting, a list of meeting dates, and kindergarten teacher notices about events.

Archival records provide another source of corroboration in a case study yet recognition of the purpose of such records and the intended audience is important. While these records can provide another source of data, they can only corroborate other findings and not stand alone. In this study, archival records include New Hampshire Department of Education Title I, ESEA Evaluation Report , kindergarten report cards for the participating students, and a parent-completed report card filled out by some parents before a parent-teacher conference.

Interviewing comprises a critical source of evidence in this investigation because as Patton (2002) suggests: "…qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p.341). Interviews in this study were conducted in Spanish and were audiotaped for later transcription. The procedure for interviewing was changed after the first interview. Initially, the pre-designed questions were asked by the translator with little opportunity

for exchange between the researcher and the participant. The tape was later translated into English by Mrs. Brown. The first participant asked about the translation process and recommended that the translation occur as the interview was being conducted. She felt that the extra time needed with the translation step would not be an inconvenience to participants. As the researcher, this change in procedure allowed more probing to occur if I felt that I wanted to proceed with a certain line of inquiry. The tape was then transcribed. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour and involved some closed questions for collecting straightforward data and some open-ended questions to allow the participants to explain more complex feelings, philosophies and attitudes. Fall and spring questionnaires varied in content.

In the fall questionnaire, the questions sought to provide a context for understanding: parent journeys that have brought them to Maplehurst Elementary School, family information, perspectives on parenting and education, perspectives on involvement in the educational process, beliefs about first language maintenance and second language acquisition, and home practices with particular emphasis on language and literacy development.

In the spring interview, the questions focused on: parent experiences during the year regarding their understanding of the kindergarten curriculum, their child's development during the kindergarten year with specific attention to language development and literacy, their involvement in the educational process, home practices as an extension of school, and connectedness with the school via teachers, the parent group, and other parents.

Direct observations also served as another avenue for evidence gathering in this study. As a researcher, I observed the context within which this study occurred. I had the opportunity to directly observe: parent conferences with some of the participants, parent participation in the Parent Teacher Group, parent participation in school functions, and an orientation for newcomers entering Maplehurst Elementary School.

Participant observation, another occasion for gaining insight into parent understanding of the curriculum and expression of support for a child's education, is a method that permits researchers to study people in a given context in order to understand "things" from the participants' perspectives. During the course of this study, my role as a participant observer varied from passive participation to active participation (Spradley, 1980). For example, during the brainstorming/writing session for the parent brochure, I was present but played no role other than to record the session. On the other hand, I fell in the active participation category of Spradley's typology when I played a key role in the kindergarten parent group by acting as a liaison between the families and teachers, providing the content for each meeting, and serving as a representative of the school district to the Maplehurst Elementary School families. The advantage of being a participant observer in this capacity is that I was able to gain access to the school and family communities. I was able to develop a perspective of one who is inside a given context. The disadvantage to such a position is that the course of the study could be altered by the researcher, allowing bias to drive the data that is collected. Reflecting on this risk, adhering to a case study protocol and principles of data collection enabled me to preserve the credibility of this study.

Finally, physical artifacts may supply another source of evidence. In this case study, physical evidence of parent understanding and perspectives was revealed in the form of two projects: parent-child journals and a parent-produced informational brochure for incoming Spanish-speaking parents. Details of these projects will be provided in an upcoming chapter. These sources became valuable sources of information as the study evolved.

In summary, developing a case study protocol and adhering to basic principles of data collection improve the likelihood of completing a case study that is supported by multiple sources of evidence and meets the necessary criteria for establishing construct validity and reliability.

Data Analysis

Analysis in qualitative research aims at achieving an in-depth understanding of the context and the meaning for participants in a study. Managing and categorizing the data involved a three-step process: data preparation in which all the interviews and transactions were translated into English and then transcribed; data identification in which the data was divided into meaningful, retrievable chunks; and data manipulation whereby the database was coded for patterns in concepts, words and phrases. Coding is one way to scrutinize multiple forms of data and make it retrievable for comparison and analysis. This laborious, line-by-line scrutiny of text identifies a number of themes that evolve from the initial coding system. In this study I have used techniques suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998; 1990), Ryan and Bernard (2003), Patton (2002), and Merriam (1998) for arriving at a type of coding that describes what is in the data and analyzes the

nature of the data. Merriam cites Altheide's (1987) understanding of qualitative content

analysis:

> Ethnographic content analysis is used to document and understand the
> communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships. Its
> distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the
> investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis... The investigator is
> continually central, although protocols may be used in later phases of the
> research... The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid. (p.68).

My methods have included: 1) determining frequently-used words in phrases and

sentences to help understand what people's words reveal about their perspectives; 2)

marking the text by underlining and highlighting portions that indicate different meanings

and codes; 3) searching for patterns and codes from the color-coded texts; 4) sorting

similarly coded segments to prepare for analysis. The second type of coding I engaged in

involved analytic/theoretical coding in which I took the descriptive codings and searched

for the reason behind the research data obtained.

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. I had running lists of

comments, terms, and notes and compared them with lists from other transcripts,

observations and artifacts. Categories were generated from the response of the

participants, outside sources such as literature in the field, and me. The codes/categories

were answers to the questions about parent understanding of the kindergarten curriculum

and practices, parent support of their child's education and the role of relationship with

the school. Merriam (1998) suggests strategies for developing categories from data that

are insightful and comprehensive: 1) the frequency with which a concept surfaces; 2)

uniqueness of a category; 3) a unique perspective on a common practice or experience; 4)

the credibility of a category for a particular audience. I did not employ any computer

software to sort text because, for me, the analysis is an intimate process. As I read the data repeatedly, I could hear the participants speaking their thoughts to me. Because the nature of the research required listening to parents to get at their perspectives of meaning-making opportunities during the kindergarten year, I felt that utilizing software would distance me from the process and remove me from context in which information was revealed.

A running list of unsorted themes, concepts and words with varying levels of importance and abstraction is included in the appendix. As I worked to categorize these codes on a descriptive and analytical level, key ideas surfaced. The purpose of the study was to learn how Spanish-speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a particular school and I found that parent perceptions and support were dependent on multiple factors such as individual characteristics, opportunities to participate in the events and practices within a given school context, and larger societal forces such as assumptions about minority families, legislative views of students and families who speak languages other than English as their native language that govern programming and responses, and power relations that underlie routes of access for parents. Thus, analysis of these multiple factors helped me understand how parent perceptions were shaped by their experiences during the kindergarten year. Analysis narrowed my focus to three categories: 1) the parents, including personal meanings of education and motivations for supporting their children's education as well as evidence of knowing and caring that supports their children's educational needs; 2) the school, including educational structures and educator role definitions that create a climate that invites or denies parent participation; and 3) the

intersection of the parents and the school. I analyzed each of these areas separately and the interrelationships among them to construct the complex story of parents' perspectives and understanding of the kindergarten year.

In this chapter, I have explained the methodology and why I chose a qualitative case study design for examining my research question. I have presented the issues of trustworthiness and authenticity from a research perspective that seeks to strike a balance between fairness and completeness in representing the perspectives and meaning of others (Patton, 2002). I have described the recruitment process, principles for data collection with a detailed description of the sources of evidence along with a summarized chart of the case study database. Finally, I described methods of data analysis that accompanied data collection.

Since a comprehensive description is the first layer of analysis in case study, in the next chapter I will provide a rich description of Derryfield that will include a thorough account of the context including: the city, the Hispanic community within the city, the school and the participants in the study. This chapter will present an ecological view of the nested contexts of the community that create the landscape for the experiences of the participants and the opportunities for participation and learning within this landscape.

CHAPTER 4

A RICH DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In single case study design, the researcher hopes to study the particular in depth.

To achieve this, a rich description of the context becomes the first level of analysis. Since

I have adopted a sociocultural approach to this research, the context includes the

participants and the setting in which they find themselves and how this context creates or

hinders opportunities for learning. In this chapter, I will return to my understanding of

Norton and Toohey's (2001) explanation for "good language learners" and how their

argument applies to the purpose of my research; namely, success in learning is best

viewed as an intersection between individual agency and access to a variety of

conversations and opportunities for participation in one's community. I will describe the

different communities that are nested within each other that create the context for this

study. They include the city of Derryfield and its history as an immigrant city; the

Hispanic community within the Derryfield region; the school community including

Maplehurst Elementary School and the Derryfield Even Start Preschool Program, the

kindergarten program, the program for English Language Learners; and finally, a rich

description of the participants in the study.

The City

Derryfield is a city which grew in prominence during the American Industrial

Revolution by hosting an impressive textile manufacturing industry. By the beginning of

the twentieth century, this status as a prosperous manufacturing city attracted a labor

force of immigrants from countries such as Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Scotland, Germany,

Poland and Greece to relocate in the city to work in the textile mills. This pattern of

industrial success plummeted during the Great Depression causing the city to struggle to

recover for decades. It became known as "the city that would not die." Today, Derryfield

has not only recovered but has become one of the nation's fastest growing cities since the

mid-1990s. The mills, that once housed the massive textile industry, are now home to a

university, several high tech companies, manufacturing companies and a mix of large and

small businesses.

Derryfield, the state's largest city, is now designated as a small city in the

Northeast with a 2006 census estimate of 109,000 residents

(http://factfinder.census.gov). It is designated as one of 49 urban areas in the United

States identified as an Enterprise Community by the Secretary of Housing and Urban

Development. Enterprise Communities were instituted during the Clinton

adminstration in an effort to revitalize economically distressed urban areas. The goal

of this federal intiative is to spark private enterprise by providing investment

incentives for business owners that result in job creation for residents. Maplehurst

Elementary School is situated in the center of the Enterprise Zone.

To get a clearer picture of the neighborhood in which Maplehurst Elementary

School is situated, I acquired information from the Derryfield Planning and

Community Improvement Office (retrieved 9/25/07). A neighborhood profile indicates

a densely populated, diverse, low-income area. Using census data from 2000, Figure

4.1 reveals that when compared to the city at large, this neighborhood has 10,000

more people inhabiting per square mile than the rest of the city and the percent of land

area and open space is reduced. Race and ethnicity statistics indicate that the Hispanic

population has a greater representation in this neighborhood than the city at large. The

median household income is $12,000 less per average household and the overall

poverty is 12% higher than the rest of the city.

Figure 4.1 Neighborhood Profile for Maplehurst Elementary School		
	Maplehurst Neighborhood	Derryfield
Density, persons per square mile	13,904	3,319
Open Space	6.5%	11%

Race and Ethnicity
    White
    Black
    Hispanic
    Asian
	83.5%
	3.5%
	13.5%
	4.7%
		92%
		2%
		5%
		2%

Median Household Income	$28,541	$40, 774
Poverty	22.8%	11%

The demographics by race reveal 92% of the population is White and 4.6% of the

city residents are Hispanic with approximately 8000 documented immigrants and

refugees in this city and the surrounding area. Historically, the face of this city has been

white; even the immigrants have been white: Irish, French Canadian, Bosnian, etc.

However, The Mauricio Gaston Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston

reports that the general population trends in this northeast state changed from 1990 to

2000 with the population of people of color – African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Native

Americans, and Pacific Islanders- growing at a higher rate than the non-Hispanic White population. This trend mimics a national trend. Overall, the total population of this state grew by 11.4% in this ten year period, with Latinos growth at 80.8%, representing the largest numerical growth of any group. In Derryfield, the number of Hispanics grew by 133% from 1990 to 2000. While the demographic patterns have changed significantly in the past decade in this state, Latinos now represent 1.7% of the population which ranks 44th in the 50 states. Derryfield's statistic of 4.6% Hispanic residents is greater than the state percentage, indicating a burgeoning Hispanic community within the community of Derryfield.

In addition to the Latino presence in Derryfield, there has been a surge of immigrants who have arrived as a result of The Refugee Act of 1980 which was created by Congress to aid individuals fleeing persecution in one's homeland. As a result of the federal relocation program, the influx of Bosnian refugees in the mid 1990s has been followed most recently by a wave of African refugees fleeing Liberia, Somalia and Sudan. Derryfield has received the bulk of relocated refugees arriving in the state; Unlike some immigrants, refugees have a temporary safety net in the form of institutionalized support in the form of language services, employment coordination, and other social services that are guaranteed through a coordination between the U.S. Department of State and local private non-profit institutions.

Glick Schiller, Gulbrandsen, Caglar and Karagiannis (2004) have studied the migration patterns in this city and other small-scale cities and have examined assumptions that are held about immigrants and refugees. Historically, the predominating national and political thinking has portrayed immigrants as having only

one country and one identity with ethnically marked populations conceived as an ethnic group such as Hispanic; yet, Glick Schiller et al. maintain that this tendency to think in terms of national identities fails to recognize multiple simultaneous identities that migrants possess. Rather, they advocate for a perspective that views incoming populations as identifying with particular localities, rather than a new nation-state as a whole, where patterns of relations evolve as an individual becomes a participant in multiple and diverse networks. This process called *incorporation* connects immigrants to the daily life, institutions and social relations of a new home and creates a web of relationships within that locality. However, Glick Schiller et al. recognize this perspective may not be in sync with the current political climate.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Congress enacted the Patriot Act on October 25, 2001 which is aimed at expanding the clandestine surveillance powers of domestic and international intelligence agencies to fight terrorism. In practice, some of the provisions of this act have had a significant impact on immigrants and employers of immigrants. All documentation in an employee's file must comply with the Department of Labor regulations. This heightened attention to immigration documents has resulted in job loss for immigrants, many of whom are long-term lawful permanent residents. Other provisions of the Act entitle the government to detain immigrants for up to seven days without any criminal or immigration charges and to also deport immigrants for low-level immigration violations such as failure to report an address change or minor criminal charges. In this political climate, one can envision the obstacles to identifying with a new locality and establishing a web of relationships within that locality for immigrants who

hope to *incorporate*. Thus, this political climate becomes a part of the context in which this study is conducted.

The Hispanic Community

The governor of this state released a press statement in September, 2005, marking the first day of Hispanic Heritage Month and issuing an Executive Order creating the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (http://www.nh.gov/governor/news/2005/91505Latino.htm). The governor stated at this time, " (this state) is becoming increasingly diverse and our Latino community is now one of the fastest-growing communities in our state. The growing diversity is strengthening our communities, our economy, our culture, and our state." Citing this state's long and rich history of welcoming new generations of immigrants, the governor created the commission in response to changes in the state's population, acknowledging a commitment to embracing this change will benefit the state's economy, culture and lives of all citizens.

A Representative from Derryfield, a Latino, was named as chair of the 19-member commission. In an interview with Voice of America in November, 2005, this representative gave his view of the Hispanic presence in the state and in the city of Derryfield, noting that the census numbers underestimate the population. " That's not the true number. Right now the Latino community, statewide, is anywhere between 35,000 to 40,000 people. People from Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Colombia and Mexico make up a big percentage of the Latinos that are here. Now we are starting to see a big influx of people from Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Ecuador"

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Having an awareness of his community's problems and hoping to help solve these problems, he ran for public office, gained his community's support and was elected to the State legislature. He noted," We need to start focusing more on education, getting our kids educated, getting them to not just think of high school, but college." He says some Latinos who come to (this state) in search of a better dream "… have language issues, so that is an issue." But beyond language, he is looking at economic development and how "Latinos engage themselves in the system here and make a better future for themselves." When asked about the purpose of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs, he said that the goal is to advise the governor on legislation that will both improve the Latino community and integrate Latinos into the mainstream; the goal is to make " everybody feel that this is our state".

At the city level, a center has been serving the Hispanic community of Derryfield since 1972. It was originally funded by Model Cities, an element of President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty and is now affiliated with a county community action agency. Its core activities include: interpretation and translation services, bilingual assistance in understanding and completing forms, advocacy in educational and workplace settings, ESL and computer classes, a bilingual summer program for children, and sponsorship of a variety of educational and cultural events.

Refugees and immigrants in Derryfield have also been embraced by some church communities. In Derryfield, Catholic masses are now offered in several languages and styles. Weekly Spanish masses, biweekly Vietnamese services, and a combination of English, French, Swahili and Arabic is used in an African-style liturgy once a month.

One Catholic church that became distinguished as the city's first French parish in the late

1800s for the Canadian immigrants is now embracing a new generation of immigrants

and refugees who have arrived in Derryfield with the same hopes and aspirations for a

brighter future.

Maplehurst Elementary School

This wave of recent immigrants and refugees is reflected in the public schools of

Derryfield where 70 languages are now spoken; in fact, Derryfield is the largest and most

diverse school system in the state. In this city there is one preschool and 14 kindergarten-

grade 5 elementary schools, four middle schools and three high schools with a total

enrollment of 17,511 students as of October, 2005. Race/ethnic enrollments indicate

Hispanic youth representing 11% of the enrollment and White-Non-Hispanic youth

representing 80% of the student population (State Department of Education).

Maplehurst Elementary qualified as a schoolwide Title I school during the 2005-

2006 school year, meaning that all students in grades K-5 were considered Title I

students and eligible for services funded by the program. As I explained in Chapter One,

Title I funds are earmarked for students in high-poverty schools who are at risk of failing

to meet state standards. The following statistics were obtained in October, 2005 for the

2005 –2006 school year at Maplehurst Elementary School (see Table 4.2). With a total

enrollment of 670 students, this schoolwide Title I school had a poverty level of 83 %.

Students who were identified as Limited-English Proficient students totaled 48 % of the

total population.

Figure 4.2 Maplehurst Elementary School 2005-2006 School Year	
Student Population	670
Poverty Level	83%
Special Service Category Limited-English Proficient Students	48%

During the year of the pilot study, statistics were reported in a more detailed fashion to the state and Table 4.3 summarizes the data.

Figure 4.3 Maplehurst Elementary School 2004-2005 School Year	
Student Population	711
Poverty Level	84%
Racial/Ethnic Group Hispanic Black (not of Hispanic origin) White (not of Hispanic origin) Other	 31% 16% 48% 5%
Limited-English Proficient	40%

During the year of the study, there were five kindergarten classrooms, twenty-six classrooms for grades one through five, and four self-contained classrooms for English Language Learners who were either non-English speakers or very limited English speakers. Due to space issues, there were six portable classrooms in the parking lot adjacent to the school building. In addition to the four teachers in the ELL magnet classrooms, there were two full-time ESL teachers and a full-time paraprofessional, along with a Title I Reading Supervisor, a Title I Math Supervisor, 19 certified teachers hired as instructors for Title I and three full-time special education teachers. Figure 4.4 represents the demographics of the teaching staff.

Figure 4.4 Demographics of Teaching Staff at Maplehurst Elementary School 2005-06			
Total Number of Teachers: 40			
Years of Experience	0-5 years	5-10 years	>10 years
	15	9	16
Gender	Male	Female	
	4	36	
Ethnicity	White	Hispanic	Other
	40	0	0
Bilingual	1		

The teacher demographics indicate that the staff was all White and mostly female. Except for one paraprofessional who was Hispanic and bilingual, the teaching staff included just one teacher who was bilingual in Spanish. This demographic pattern is in striking contrast to the demographic pattern of the student population who were nearly 50% non-White and 50% Limited English Proficient.

Maplehurst is a neighborhood school where most children walk or are driven to school so it is quite common to see a group of parents, grandparents and students congregating around the entrances to the school in the morning and at dismissal; an observer might hear many languages and dialects being spoken and see adults wearing multi-colored head scarves and billowing dresses with young children strapped to their mothers. Across the street from the school is the school playground- a paved surface with climbing equipment and basketball hoops. An addition to the playground during the 2005-2006 school year was a huge map of the world, painted on the playground by school staff and volunteers, that lets the school's many immigrant and refugee pupils point out their homelands. Also painted on the blacktop are boards and markings for dozens of games. In addition to the new equipment, a curriculum for teaching children the rules of the games and how to resolve conflicts accompanied the new playground.

At the entrance to the school, the word "welcome" is written in many different languages. Once inside this two-story building, the most striking characteristic of the building is the open concept that was popular when this school was built in 1974. There are no walls between groups of three classrooms. There are various visual barriers constructed such as moving walls and curtains, but the sound from one class to another

often blends together. During the 2005-2006 school year, school renovations carried over from the summer into the school year, with ceiling tiles absent for the first quarter of school; combined with the open concept walls, the acoustics were often poor.

This state is the only state in the nation that does not offer public kindergarten in all of its school districts. In Derryfield, kindergarten is available for all students, but the type of programming is inconsistent. In most of the Title I schools, all-day programming is available but this is not the case in much of the city where half-day programs are the norm. For the children in this study, they attended kindergarten all day in a class of approximately 20 students.

Services for English Language Learners (ELLs) in kindergarten included push-in and pull-out models of ESL service delivery . In push-in service, the ESL instructor supported the students with whatever classroom activities the teacher was instructing; with pull-out service, the students would go to the basement of the school with the ESL teacher in small groups and the emphasis would be on language comprehension and expression. Vocabulary development and sentence construction was reinforced. Wearing both hats, the ESL teachers were confronted with the dual charge of balancing the development of oral language skills and oral English proficiency with English academic skills, especially English early literacy skills which are measured frequently at the kindergarten level.

Title I support for reading and math was available at all grade levels, with writing instruction receiving special emphasis in the kindergarten classrooms. A veteran educator was hired for a new position as a mentor for the five kindergarten teachers and

classrooms. In July, 2005, a new Elementary Language Arts Curriculum was approved by the local school board and this document became a driving force for kindergarten language arts instruction during the 2005-2006 school year.

Even Start

As a backdrop to understanding how parents were prepared to engage in the education of their kindergarten children at Maplehurst Elementary School, parents were asked about their children's preschool educational experiences. Five of the nine participating families were involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program that is funded by the federal government and implemented by the Federal Projects program in the Derryfield Public Schools. During the years that these children attended the program, Derryfield had been awarded the grant for a program that emphasized Latino families. Thus, Spanish-speaking home visitors and bilingual language services were available for the children and their families. Although the children's educational programming was not bilingual, a Spanish-speaking teaching assistant acted as a bridge for communication in the classroom.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program was authorized in 1989 as Part B of Chapter 1 of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). When Even Start was reauthorized in 1994, the intention of the program focused on breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by: 1) helping parents become full partners in educating their children; 2) helping parents improve their own literacy and basic educational skills; and 3) assisting children in reaching their full potential as learners. (Retrieved 11/24/06: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EvenStart/ch1program/html)

Consequently, five of the nine families in this dissertation study had already experienced early schooling for their children with accompanying educational programming for parents that recognized their native language of Spanish and provided services that allowed the families to fully engage in the program. As Miguel, Fernando's grandfather, noted in the fall interview when asked what he wanted the school to know about him, his response was:

" With Even Start, they really kept us in touch with the school – what was going on. If there was anything we could do to help, if we had any questions or problems, then we could get in touch with the school." (Miguel)

The impact of this early relationship-building within the context of school-based programming at Even Start was sustained through the kindergarten year. As one parent remarked during the spring interview when asked about her knowledge of strategies that she uses with her child to get him engaged in academic tasks:

" Even Start had lots of talks about that kind of stuff. We did that. That program is good. It taught me a lot." (Isabel)
" When (we) were in Even Start… we attended in Even Start too… we learned lots of really nice things. (Margarita)

So for a majority of the participating families in the study, the stage was set for receptivity to the notion of developing a collaborative relationship with personnel at the elementary school. If families are to become engaged in schools with high populations of

low-income and culturally and linguistic diverse populations, the transition from preschool to kindergarten requires conscious planning and outreach. For that reason, at the end of the 2004-2005 pilot study, all the Even Start families who would be attending Maplehurst Elementary School and another neighborhood school in the fall were invited to attend an orientation about the programming that would be available when their children entered kindergarten the following September. One such program was the Spanish Parent Kindergarten Group.

The Spanish Parent Kindergarten Group

During this dissertation study in the 2005-2006 school year, the Spanish parent kindergarten literacy group became a focal point for interaction with the Spanish-speaking kindergarten parents and representatives of the school. Charlotte Brown, the Special Education Spanish Liaison for the school district, and I collaborated on the development and implementation of this program. For Charlotte, time and energy commitment was recognized by the school but she participated in these activities in addition to her job as the Special Education Spanish Liaison. My involvement with the group was also acknowledged by the school district but was in addition to my responsibilities as a district language arts implementation specialist.

The meetings occurred monthly at the beginning of the school day. Usually 90 minutes was allotted for the agenda. Families would drop their children off for class and then come to the meeting. At the beginning of the school year, evening meetings were offered and attended. As soon as the clocks were turned back in the fall, attendance dwindled at the night meetings and we soon held just the morning gatherings. As mentioned in an earlier section about the setting, this school is located in an urban

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community where families who walk to all the functions at school might refrain from walking in the neighborhood after dark. By holding the parent meetings in the morning, it most likely limited consistent interaction with families who had a conflict with daytime work. Whenever parents received notices and they could not attend at the designated time, Mrs. Brown and I would arrange another personal meeting time to distribute the materials and talk about a child's academic progress. These informal meetings covered the content of the agenda from the formal meetings.

Mrs. Brown's role in the parent group included translating from English to Spanish any written materials to be distributed to the kindergarten parents. Personal phone calls and greetings on the school grounds served to remind parents of upcoming meetings. In addition to literacy materials, notices of school functions and upcoming events were included. During the meetings, Mrs. Brown orally translated all group-intended verbal transactions. Her translation role has been described in a prior section. As a researcher, I was involved in this study as a partial requirement for my doctoral program. While the school district superintendent and principal of Maplehurst Elementary School granted permission for me to conduct this study at this location for the year, my job responsibilities were at the district level. Having been employed at Maplehurst Elementary School the previous two years as a reading specialist provided me with an understanding of the students and families in the school, school personnel, practices and policies.

In one of my roles with the parent group, I served as a conduit between the kindergarten program, teachers and curriculum and the Spanish-speaking kindergarten parents. I conversed with the kindergarten teachers and mentor beforehand to discuss key

elements of the language arts curriculum that were currently being emphasized in classroom instruction. I then coordinated bilingual materials, with the assistance of Mrs. Brown, for the meeting.

One of my other roles with the parent group involved communication between the teachers and the parents and parents and teachers. When the teachers knew that the parents were in attendance, they would have me relay messages through Mrs. Brown about topics such as progress in class or lunch money or field trip forms. Knowing that the families and Mrs. Brown and I were gathered together ensured successful communication of a message. Parents would also ask me to get clarification from the teacher about something occurring in the classroom while they were present at the meeting. Intentional communication between families and teachers was accomplished through this structure and relationship.

Kindergarten teachers rarely attended the meetings. Although it was my intention to increase teacher involvement in these morning family meetings after my observations of communication breakdown in the pilot study, logistics of coverage for classrooms presented an obstacle. Instead, parents and teachers communicated in the abovementioned way or through Mrs. Brown on other occasions.

The location of the meeting in the school varied by availability depending on the number of parents who attended. Among the meeting places were the cafeteria, the front lobby of the school, and a conference room. During the first quarter of the school, an unfinished summer reconstruction project resulted in poor acoustics due to an absence of ceiling tiles. When combined with an 'open concept' school with few walls,

communication was challenged due to an unfavorable signal-to-noise ratio. By late in the fall, this situation was remedied.

The protocol that was followed each meeting involved refreshments and then a greeting to the parents followed by Mrs. Brown's discussion of any upcoming meetings or events. I then retrieved the children from their classrooms so that they could sit with their families in attendance. Sometimes that involved younger siblings, parents, grandparents, and guardians. Next, I introduced language and literacy materials that correlated with the children's language and literacy development and the kindergarten curriculum. I would discuss the significance of certain activities such as reading a story and making predictions, model engagement with the materials, and then the parents worked with their children.

Mrs. Brown and I circulated while the parents worked with their children. We praised the children for their efforts and observed the interactions between the families and the students. Parents always had the opportunity to comment or ask questions during the meetings. Someone observing a typical meeting would see a high level of activity: parents were speaking to other parents and their children and often siblings were talking or moving to and fro. I took on the role of facilitator at this point in each meeting. At the end of the session, I took all the children back to their classrooms. Mrs. Brown was usually barraged at this time with other parent questions and concerns that extended beyond academics. Ecological issues of family, job-related concerns, housing, and health were topics of conversation during these exchanges with the translator at the end of the sessions.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Since the introduction of No Child Left Behind, the federal government is playing a bigger role in education. The impact of the legislation is a coercive, high-stakes system of accountability that has been introduced at the federal level and has been implemented vigorously at state and local levels. For school districts that receive federal aid, standards have been set together with detailed testing plans to ensure standards being met. NCLB requires schools to achieve a minimal level of proficiency for students overall. The states create their own definition of proficiency based on their curriculum standards. The state definition then filters down to the curriculum at the local district and school level. As a result, this initiative in U.S. public schools has created a standardization of instruction.

As the title of the legislation suggests, the goal of NCLB is to leave no group behind, including subgroups defined by economic disadvantage, race/ethnicity, disability and English language learner status. For schools with significant proportions of students falling within a defined subgroup, the risk of failing to achieve minimum proficiency in reading and math threatens the achievement of adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the imposition of a sequence of punitive steps as a consequence. Consequently, schools with diverse student populations now require a specific amount of time for reading and math instruction. Jennings & Rentner (2006) state that 97% of high-poverty districts have this requirement compared to 55%-59% of districts with lower levels of poverty. This translates to curriculum and instruction in high-poverty schools that is highly regulated and constrained.

Such is the case at Maplehurst Elementary School. The academic focus for the Spanish parent group was language and literacy. As mentioned beforehand, a new

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district language arts curriculum was implemented in July, 2005, that directly reflected state standards for language arts. State-mandated testing is based on these standards and so this curriculum formed the basis for teacher instruction and assessment in Derryfield. For kindergarten, the curriculum consisted of the following essential areas.

In reading, the instructional objectives at Maplehurst Elementary School fell under the categories of phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and reading enjoyment. In writing, the instruction focused on handwriting, spelling, conventions, content and attitude. I will now expand on the developmental continuum in each area that was reflected in the content of our parent meetings.

Reading

Phonemic awareness is the ability of a child to attend to the form of speech, to hear sounds in words and be able to manipulate them. In kindergarten, a child's development in this area moves from bigger chunks of sound to smaller units, from syllables to onset and rime and finally to the phoneme level. Instruction emphasized rhyming, clapping syllables, alliteration, isolating sounds in different parts of words, and finally segmenting sounds within words at the end of kindergarten.

The alphabetic principle refers to the coordination of sound and print, being able to map speech and print for decoding and encoding. Included in this category is the recognition and naming of upper case letters, lower case letters and the recognition of vowels a,e,i,o,u. At the kindergarten level, the letter/sound relationship consists of producing the appropriate sound when shown a letter, producing the appropriate beginning sound when shown a word and recognizing that written words are made up of

beginning phonemes and the rest of the syllable. Sound/symbol relationships in the kindergarten curriculum refer to the identification of consonants in the initial and final positions in words that are heard and orally producing the onset and rime in a syllable.

In the area of word recognition, the critical concept that reading is about meaning is taught. Environmental print is recognized as a bridge to reading, with the children reading and using print in everyday settings. Strategies for identifying unknown words are introduced and reinforced such as: using letter/sound correspondences, illustrations, the meaning of a sentence, the structure of a sentence in predictable text, a knowledge of words, and the ability to picture the topic or concept in one's head. Designated preprimer sight words are introduced to the children with the expectation that these words will be recognized with increasing speed and automaticity.

Concepts about print, an indicator of a child's exposure to print, being read to and the act of reading, involves identifying key elements of a book such as front, back, title, author and illustration. Directionality from top to bottom and left to right is reinforced in whole group, small group and individual instruction. One to one matching of voice to print is an early kindergarten reading behavior. Knowing the beginning and end of a word and the beginning and end of a sentence and making a distinction between words, letters, sentences and pictures all relate to concepts about print.

Vocabulary, a fundamental language skill that involves a dynamic process that expands and differentiates word understanding and usage as it develops, is an essential area of growth and development during the kindergarten year. Vocabulary is expanded through many opportunities to read and talk and through exposure to literature.

Categorization of words such as antonyms, synonyms, basic concept words of time and space, organizes existing and new words.

Comprehension skills at the kindergarten level emphasize the ability to listen to read alouds and engage in meaningful text, generate related questions, answer questions, and identify story elements such as characters, setting, problem and resolution with some prompting. Comprehension skills are the foundation for making sense of what is heard or read. Activities that assist the development of comprehension include activating prior knowledge and experience, visualizing words or groups of words, and connecting story information to one's own experiences and other stories that have been read. At the kindergarten level, fluency is practiced through the repeated practice of anything in a string such as strings of letters, strings of words, or patterns. As a child emerges into reading, expression, accuracy, and rate develop. The enjoyment of reading encompasses all the language and literacy experiences that have been mentioned. As a child develops an appreciation and enjoyment of reading, shared reading experiences and the self-selection of materials for independent reading become a routine experience in the kindergarten classroom.

Writing

During the course of the kindergarten year, a student is expected to learn how to write the first name and last name correctly. In spontaneous writing, phonetic spelling and the presence of some high-frequency sight words are typical. The fine motor aspect of writing receives a great deal of instructional attention such as holding the pencil correctly, directionality, spacing and forming letters in accordance with a district

handwriting program. Punctuation and capitalization are modeled and directly instructed. The notion of writing as a means of communication is emphasized in activities such as drawing and labeling pictures, writing a sentence when given a prompt and dictating a story to an adult.

Reading and writing evolve during the kindergarten year as language develops and exposure to print increases. A balance of reading, writing and language activities that corresponded with the district curriculum and the instruction in the kindergarten classrooms comprised the core content for the children and families in the Spanish parent kindergarten group. I have included a detailed description of each strand within the core language arts curriculum to emphasize the breadth and constraints of curriculum and instruction at the kindergarten level. The context of kindergarten is now academically driven with significant attention paid to students who are entering kindergarten without the expected language and skills proficiency.

In addition to the city, the school, and the curriculum, I will now present a profile of the participants in this study. They are not presented in any specific order. As I engaged in fieldwork for this study, face-to-face interaction was a prerequisite for achieving understanding of parents' perspectives. As Patton's (2002) notion of *empathic neutrality* suggests, to be a good qualitative researcher, one must exhibit empathy in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of others. Each portrait portrays personal characteristics of the participants that I came to know through the process of research.

The Participants

The profile of each parent/grandparent who was able to participate in the dissertation study is presented in Figure 4.5. Each family brought unique histories of experience to the context. Five of the parents came to the United States from Mexico. Other places of origin include El Salvador, Panama, Honduras and Puerto Rico. Six families had lived in rural settings in their native countries and three had lived in urban areas. The time in the United States ranged from one year to 18 years. The education of the parents/grandparent guardians interviewed ranged from 6 years of education to 16 years of schooling. Six of the families had two children, one family had the one kindergarten child, one family with three children and one family with four children. Eight of the nine children were born in the United States. Also, eight of the nine kindergarten children had some preschool experience with seven children being the recipients of programs that were publicly funded by city or state/federal funds.

Figure 4.5 Participant Demographics

Student	Parents	Country of Origin	Years in U.S.	Education Of Parent	Preschool Experience
Javier	Miguel/Mercedes grandparents	Panama	6	12	Evenstart- 2 years
Gracia	Margarita	Honduras	7	12	Evenstart- 7 months
Andres	Luisa	Mexico	3	9	Evenstart - 1.5 years
Abella	Adalia	El Salvador	9	9	No
Vincenzo	Juanita	Mexico	11	6	Evenstart - 1 year
Fernando	Geraldo/Maria	Mexico	12/14	16	City summer program - Pre-K
Santiago	Isabel	Mexico	6	8	Evenstart - 2 years
Savannah	Elisa	Puerto Rico	1 year-mainland	13	Headstart- Puerto Rico One year
Ramiro	Rosa	Mexico	9	14	Mexico -1.4 years

Parent Portraits

In addition to the facts about each family, I will give you a glimpse of the spirit of each participant in this study. Nine families agreed to participate and provide me with an insight into who they are and why the education of their child is so important to them. It is through their eyes and words and actions that an understanding of their perspectives and experiences is achieved. While their life experiences illustrate the varied paths these families have followed to get to Maplehurst Elementary School in the year 2005, the overwhelming focus of parent discussion was always the child. The following vignettes provide a window into the personalities, motivations and sources of inspiration for these parents.

Mercedes and Miguel: Grandparents as Advocates

Natives of Panama, Mercedes and Miguel came to the United States five years ago because they had the opportunity to do so. Miguel had worked for the American government in Panama and he had family in Rhode Island and Florida. Mercedes finished high school and started university but did not finish her studies. Both grandparents work full-time jobs. Self-effacing in their demeanor at school, their involvement in school is motivated by their love and concern for their daughter and their grandson. As Miguel relives his painful experience with his daughter as a young child:

> " ... when she was 18 months, she could speak very good; she was starting to dance and sing and everything but she had meningitis... high fever... we didn't know that... we didn't know what it was... so when we went to the doctor he say why you waste so much time come to the doctors... well, we didn't know, they say, we come too late, there is not much that we can do, he told me that... that's the way because if she alive she gonna be like a coma, that's terrible..."

The daughter survived but was left with permanent deafness. She attended special

school in her early years and then graduated from regular high school in Panama by

lipreading but she never learned sign language. In the United States, she uses sign

language to communicate. Javier, her son, is negotiating three languages: Spanish,

English and sign language. An added factor is that the son-in-law is still in Panama.

" The last papers got lost in the mail. She had to make copies all over again.
She talked to a lawyer."

Consequently, Mercedes and Miguel see their role as advocates for their daughter

and grandson. Cultural perspectives of "disability" have forced them to reconsider what

had been long-held perspectives of their daughter's condition:

" Yeah, well you know, we care, my wife, me and his mother. His mother, she
doesn't work but the problem is that she can't talk with you... you can't
communicate with her, because this disability. We call it disability but in this
country that's not disability. That's another thing. We think that she is disability
but in the program that helps they say that she is not disability... she can drive the
car, and she can do many things that you don't know, and I say, well I surprise...
in our country people like that..."

" that's why I want to learn something to teach her to help the kid..."

" ... she live in my house but we work all day, so she's the one that be home
fulltime... she take care home, she not working... she know how to take care
the house and everything but she can communicate with people too but she scared
you know, she scared, she say maybe people not understand what she say, what
she want..."

Margarita: A Legacy of Love and Learning

Margarita, a native of Honduras, graduated from high school and moved to the United States in 1998 because her future husband moved here. Now she and her husband have two children and are joined in the area by her nine brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles… " es grande !" Margarita exudes joy when she speaks of her children and extended family. Because her youngest child became sick with digestive difficulty, she now stays home and cares for some other children as well as her own. Her husband works 40 hours/week.

When asked if she is raising her children the way she was raised, she replies:

> " Yes. They raised us well and we're teaching the same things… our parents raised us with caring and love but also with strictness, rigor, but I think I do more with trying to hook them, with more kindness, more negotiation…
> … because I love my kids and I want to raise them with that kind of love and caring. And I don't want to have anger or rancor."

Margarita recalls that she learned how to read because her Dad taught her… " my Dad spent a lot of time teaching us…" And so, Margarita also engages in reading, singing, saying rhymes and jokes. It is a family affair. In the fall, she attended the interview with her father and they joyfully shared rhymes they say together in their household. For instance,

Mi madre es una rosa,	(My mother is a rose)
Mi padre es un clabel (sic),	(My father is a carnation)
Yo soy un botonsilo (sic)	
acabado denaser (sic).	(I am the bud/boutonniere completed at birth)

Margarita had also memorized a rhyme that Gracia had created:

Queso duro
Queso blando
La escuela de Manchester
Esta triunfando

Each developmental milestone that Gracia made throughout the year was a source of joy

to the family. As Margarita said, "… she's close to my heart."

Luisa: A Study in Perseverance

Luisa, a native of Mexico, is inspirational in her ability to persevere in the face of

adversity. She came to the United States with her husband and young son three years ago

because, " … we came from necessity… we didn't have money to eat, for clothes… so

we just struggled for everything." Her husband knew people in this state who were able

to get him work, so they left Mexico, leaving two daughters temporarily behind with

grandparents. In just the year of the study, Luisa experienced weeks of ill health with the

sole responsibility of her two children because her husband had returned to Mexico to

bring the older daughters back but was stalled in returning due to bureaucratic

entanglements. Her apartment was extremely small for four people and then her family

expanded to six. But Luisa is no stranger to hardship. When asked about her hopes and

aspirations for her children, she replied: "… that doesn't happen to them what happened

to us."

In the fall interview, her responses revolved around the basics of life such as food

and childbearing. Referring to the birth of her youngest daughter, she said:

> " In Mexico they treat you like an animal. You give birth and you are out the
> door. Here, my husband was allowed to stay. I had my own room. They treated
> me really well. And they didn't throw me out – I was allowed to stay."

" Here, people eat better. There, people eat less... another difference is that here they give you food at school."

" And there, you don't have many toys. And here there are many, many. When a child comes from there to here, he wants EVERYTHING!... (referring to her home in Mexico) "...it's a ranch, but not the American idea of a ranch. It's more like land, and people cultivate the land, there are about 100 people... so all the animals are there... there you don't have toys to play with... you go walk with the cow. They give you work to do with the animals. Even now, when I see a toy in the store, I get excited. Many differences!"

Basic principles of communication and trust have also been shaped by her lived experiences.

"With my parents, they are very closed and they don't talk a lot about things. I had my first child when I was 15. My parents didn't tell me anything about having babies, nothing, so I didn't know anything... and I don't want to raise my kids in the same way... and I want to talk about things."

" I think if my parents had spoken to me I wouldn't have had so many kids."

" I'm the kind of person that come and pick him up and I wouldn't want to be with anybody. I don't trust anybody. That's why I don't work during the week... I want to be the one to be with my kids. If I work on the weekend, I know their father is taking care of them."

As you will see in the findings sections of this dissertation, Luisa successfully advocated for her children during this school year. She developed patterns of communication with the school and built a relationship of trust with personnel within the school.

Adalia: A Resourceful Mother

Adalia, a native of El Salvador, is a single parent of two children who arrived in the United States in 1996. Although she has been in the United States for ten years, she has little economic security. She depends on three brothers who live in the same city to

provide support when needed. As the opening of this chapter reveals, Adalia's life has been filled with trauma and hardship.

> " Thieves came to their house… they took everything… they robbed everything
> when they found the thieves, they ended up going to jail, so the families of the
> thieves were persecuting (Ana's family) and going after the families that sort
> of turned them in… so then they had to leave… so the people who wanted to
> come to the U.S. got caught so the families were sort of after the families that were
> robbed. It was really awful because they came with machine guns and shoot at the
> house and they were afraid that no one was going to live so they left. There
> were eight – her parents, five brothers and her. That's why we came here."

Adalia lives in a portion of another's apartment and is in very crowded conditions. She is resourceful in her efforts to financially support her children by using her cooking talents to sell her food products to make money. I can attest to her delicious cheese papusas. As you will see in upcoming sections, Adalia remains stalwart in her determination to support her children and provide a bright future for them.

Juanita: A Thirst for Knowledge

Josefina, a native of Mexico and mother of three, exemplifies the qualities of a lifelong learner even though her formal education was cut short after sixth grade.

> " In Mexico, there was no to continue studying. The option was to come here.
> So after sixth grade, the next day, I came here. The next day I went to Monterey,
> Spent about six months there, then I went to Mexico City and then Corpus Christi,
> Texas and then Florida."

For her children and herself, the pursuit of knowledge is a matter of paramount importance. When asked to reflect on how she learned to read, she responded:

> " I learned by a miracle. The teachers that they sent us, they just came and
> played with us; they didn't really teach us… but I was always interested… so
> they would send us home with the homework and my parents if they sent us out
> in the field to do some sort of chore, I was always reading my book, and that's

how it is now... they send me home and I'm cooking and I always have something to read."

For Juanita, her pursuit of advanced education for her children embraces a broader understanding of what constitutes a good education. You will see from her participation in creating an informational brochure for incoming Spanish-speaking kindergarten parents that like her parents did with her, she also is inculcating in her children the importance of respecting themselves, respecting others and teaching values.

Geraldo: A Teacher by Training

Maria, a native of Mexico, arrived in the United States in 1991 after she completed four years in business administration at the Technological Institute of Zacatecas but failed to get her degree because she didn't finish her thesis. Her husband, Geraldo, finished high school. Both parents work 40-45 hours/week with Maria able to see her kindergarten son for any extended time only on the weekends because she and her husband work alternate shifts so that a parent is always available for their two sons. In the spring of the kindergarten year, Geraldo changed jobs, allowing him to participate more in the Spanish kindergarten parent group.

Geraldo embraced a parent-journaling project that was aimed at finding out what children who are learning English tell their parents about school. He continued to "refine his work" and after several weeks he had taken this project beyond anything I had envisioned. As you will read in upcoming sections of this dissertation, he was able to teach his son how to think and talk about learning so it could be reported back to his father in nightly journal sessions. He also was able to make recommendations to the

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school about how teachers might better able prepare students to talk about what it is they do all day.

When he talked about the project he exuded an enthusiasm for the process and I observed that he sounded like a teacher. At that point he told me that in fact a long time ago he had been a teacher in a mountain school in Mexico for two years where he had been responsible for approximately 15 students. Motivated to continue his engagement in the educational support of his son, before he arranged a parent conference he read and processed a detailed kindergarten progress report that is completed by the teacher and then he and the teacher compared notes about their assessment of his son's progress. It was a perfect match. Through engagement with the parent kindergarten group, Geraldo was able to reveal to the school his competence for teaching his child and making recommendations to improve school practices. Geraldo's contribution to the study demonstrated the level of competence and caring that is present within many households that can be a valuable resource to a school community.

Isabel: Keeping Her Commitment

" I try very hard to be a good parent, to give them the best, and I love them."

Isabel kept this commitment to her son during his kindergarten year. As a native of Mexico whose own education was interrupted after eight years, education is very important to this mother of two. In the fall, she stated how she hoped to support her son's education in the upcoming year:

" ... to try to work with him at home; to practice the material that you give us;

to read with him and to practice with him at home."

As an active member of the Spanish kindergarten parent group, she participated in many

activities and projects. Even though her English skills are somewhat limited, she

volunteered in her son's classroom once a week. She established a pattern of commitment

even earlier as she enrolled her son in the Even Start Family Literacy Program and

engaged in the adult education and parent-child learning activities for the two years prior

to kindergarten. From her experience with Even Start and the Maplehurst kindergarten

parent program and her own good sense, she has gained insight into how best teach her

child:

> " Whenever I want to work with him I try to do it like a game – OK let's play school –
> let's play this game. "... well if I sit down with him and I say, OK, let's work on this
> because you don't know this, like a sound, you don't know it very well, then he's not
> too happy with that. But if I do it like a game, like when we're outside and we're just
> kind of looking around, that works better."

Her involvement with her son's education and her presence at school was not lost on him.

In a spring interview with his teacher, Ms. Demers noted :

> " ... well Santiago will say, " Oh my mom's here" and that's it."

Elisa: A Natural Born Writer

Elisa is a native of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico who moved to the

Mainland of the United States a year before the study (2004) for improved job

opportunities and salary for her husband. As a graduate of high school and a one-year

cosmetology program, she finds herself now drawn to working in early childhood

education. As a result, she responded to a request by her daughter's kindergarten teacher for parent volunteers and became a part of her daughter's classroom one day a week.

Elisa became an instrumental part of a project that worked on creating a brochure to inform incoming Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarteners. During the working session for this project, Elisa became engrossed in the writing process. She and another mother brainstormed ideas that they considered important for new parent understanding and then she started the recursive process of writing, revising, and rewriting. She was very aware of the audience to whom she was writing and wanted to share her own process of learning:

> " ... that does confuse me because in Spanish, the vowels are so different, because you learn the letter "a" but you then say it like an "ah" so that has confused me...

As a result, the parent brochure included this statement:

> " There will be meetings about reading and how to learn the sounds of the vowels. That helps us to learn as parents as well."

Elisa extended this engagement with writing through the parent-child journaling activity. She and her daughter enjoyed a shared writing experience with Elisa expanding the journal from a report of the day's events at school to an opportunity to create learning activities for her child.

Rosa: Vitalidad

Whenever I read the words of Rosa in the research transcripts, I can hear her laughter and see her smile. As a mother of two, she brings a vitality and passion to any activity in which she engages. For instance, as an active member of the Spanish

kindergarten parent group, she engaged in home practices that reinforced and extended the curriculum in kindergarten. Laughingly she recalls her children playing school at home:

" Juana (older sibling) is the teacher and she bawls him out!"

She collaborated with two other mothers on the incoming kindergarten brochure and she submitted a lengthy plea to parents about respect and responsibility. She cautioned other parents:

" ... and the most important thing is to Grow Better Every Day. Parents, please, let us not forget our children, because there is no age or limit to the love and understanding we have for our children."

At a spring parent-teacher conference, her son's kindergarten teacher reported about her child:

"He's like a good role model... he's what I would want every child to be in the class... his interest, his engagement in his work, you know... he's good..."

I then replied:

" Rosa, that's just what you said on this letter (the parent brochure for incoming parents) about respecting yourself and respecting others and how important, and that's what Mrs. Gallo. is saying, he's a perfect role model. Did you get that about the role model?"

Translator: "yeah"

Researcher: " so good job Mama!"

And everyone laughed.

In this chapter, I have provided a rich description of the local context that formed the local landscape of this study. The context included the city of Derryfield, the

Hispanic community within the state and Derryfield, the impact of national legislation on the curriculum and instructional practices in kindergarten and finally a portrait of who the participants are and what motivates them to engage in the education of their children. In the next chapter, I will present the first half of the findings that focuses on the individual characteristics and activities of the participants in the study, revealing the extent of parent knowing and caring about their children's education that was demonstrated throughout the kindergarten year.

CHAPTER 5

PARENTS EXERCISING AGENCY FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Unfortunately, the typical educator rarely understands the high expectations parents have for their children. In fact, we often have encountered well-meaning teachers who hold the assumption that Latino parents do not place a high value on their children's education.

Alma Flor Ada and Rosa Zubizarreta
The Cultural Bridge Between Latino Parents and Their Children

Introduction

In reviewing educational literature concerning families and students who do not

represent the dominant population in terms of socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, a

deficit discourse over children and their families frames groups and individuals as lacking

in something; perhaps lacking in caring or lacking in ability. Assumptions that emerge

from a deficit paradigm may hide what is in plain sight: the inherent capacity of diverse

children and their families to care about education, to understand curriculum and school

practices, and to possess the desire and ability to strive for academic success.

Assumptions I heard voiced while I was at Maplehurst that reflect assumptions

held in the wider society run the gamut from "they care but they don't know what school

is all about or how to support the education of their children" to " they don't know and

they don't care". Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to address two underlying

elements of deficit discourse in relation to the participants in this study: Do parents care

about their children's education and do they know enough about language and literacy

development and school practices to be capable of supporting their children's educational needs?

By caring, I am not drawing on the literature about an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005;) rather, my meaning of care in this study focuses on issues of engagement from the perspective of parents recognizing the potentialities of their children and within an educational framework, how parental motivation, aspirations for one's child, and actions that support those aspirations are entwined in the notion of caring. In this study, parent caring will be examined in the contexts of the home and the school. By knowing, I return to Lave and Wenger's (1991) observation that " … understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive" (p.51-52), with the concept of knowing being shaped by lived experiences within a family, a community and a school. In this study, parent knowledge about language and literacy development, school practices and individual child development, will be analyzed through the lens of engagement in home and school practices that reflect parent understanding.

From a sociocultural framework, parent knowledge is dependent on multiple factors such as individual characteristics, opportunities to participate in events and practices within one's home, school and community, and larger societal forces such as assumptions about minority families and routes of access for parents to school personnel, practices and materials. Thus, parent knowledge is situated within activity and understanding the activity setting is critical. It is the inquiry into these two aspects of deficit thinking about parents, caring and knowing, that will reveal the answer to the research question driving this dissertation: How do Spanish-speaking parents understand

kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a school? In this chapter, I will also address specific subquestions of this study: 1) What motivates the parents in this study to be engaged in the education of their children? 2) What aspirations do they have for their children? 3) What do they do at home that supports the academic advancement of their children?

By addressing these questions, the level of caring and knowing of the nine families in this study will be revealed. In this chapter I will argue that the talents, abilities and dedication of these parents challenge the stereotypical assumptions held by many educators concerning Spanish-speaking parents. The findings, based on participants' words and actions, will shed light on: 1) what education means to individual families and how that meaning serves as a motivational force; 2) parent perspectives on bilingualism for themselves and their children; 3) examples of parent engagement and support before and during the kindergarten year and how that support translates to knowledge of child development and school curriculum such as language and literacy development . In conclusion, I will discuss the parent-child journaling project that occurred at the end of the kindergarten year that provided a rich source of evidence for parent knowing and caring. These findings will serve as a source of information that flows from parents' homes to schools, augmenting the potential for shared understanding and collaboration.

Education: Individual Meanings – Shared Importance

All nine participating families in this study consciously decided to be involved in their children's education both in their homes and through interactions with the school. Parents' motivations to show their caring and be involved in the education of their

children were driven by different aspirations and life experiences. While the meaning of education was unique to each family, the importance of a good education was shared by all participants. In general, the majority of responses to fall interview questions about aspirations for one's child indicated that the parents hoped their children would study, graduate from college and have a career. In anticipation of the kindergarten year, all the participants expressed their plans for how they would contribute to realizing the aspirations they had for their children in the kindergarten year. The most recurring themes in fall interviews involved parents intending to help their children with tasks from school/homework and providing a lot of attention to their children. Specific kindergarten curriculum-related topics were mentioned such as reinforcing the ABCs, reading books to their children, math and coloring.

It is the analysis of the individual meanings of education to the participants and how that meaning motivates parents to be involved in their children's education that illustrates the flaw in assuming that families who are classified as a group by definition of language, culture or socioeconomic status, derive the same meaning from very different life experiences. In this next section, I will feature four of the participants who represent a mosaic of what education means to each parent for his child.

Personal Narratives

" Education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity."
                                                            Aristotle

Luisa

Luisa, a native of rural Mexico, entered the United States just three years ago in an attempt to escape poverty. "… we came from necessity… we didn't have money to

eat, for clothes, so we just struggled for everything. I have been through a lot and it makes me mature… when you suffer, you don't want your child to suffer what you have suffered." As a mother of four children ages eight and younger, with a ninth grade education, her aspirations for her children revolve around education with the hope "that doesn't happen to them what happened to us." For her and her husband, " … (my) greatest hope is that he (Andres) has a career. I didn't think that people who were not born here could even think of the university. If (there is) choice, (I) would hope that he could go to college." For Luisa, her experiences in the United States are viewed through the lens of poverty that framed her world in Mexico. For instance, when recounting differences in raising her children in the U.S. compared to Mexico, she stated:

"… and also over there it costs a lot to go to school; you have to pay for the notebooks, the uniforms, and sometimes you can't pay, you can't go… and when I first came, I talked to you about what I was supposed to bring for Andres and you said, "nothing"… how can that be? Another difference is that here they give you food at school." (Interview: 11/9/05)

Traumatic life experiences are close to the surface of her thinking. Luisa frequently retold experiences from Mexico such as having her first child at age 15, being treated like an animal when she had the baby, and having a fire when trying to heat a bottle of milk for her baby. While she continues to live in poverty in the United States, she maintains a desire to support her child's learning. At the beginning of the school year, she hoped to " give him a lot of attention and (give) him help with whatever he is

asked to do... participating in everything that I can." Her desire to participate is evidenced by her involvement with the Evenstart program for 1.5 years during Andres' preschool years. While the experience of an American education is very different from her experience in Mexico, her love and caring for her son drive her motivation for being involved in his education at home and at school.

> To read is to empower
> To empower is to write
> To write is to influence
> To influence is to change
> To change is to live.
>
> Jane Evershed
> *More than a Tea Party*

Juanita

Juanita, a mother of three elementary age children, grew up in rural Mexico and attended school for six years. The day after she graduated from sixth grade, she left her home with her siblings to help earn money for the family; " We went to the United States to get more opportunities. I went to help my parents because in my country, my town, it's very, very poor... I work and I sent them money." Her first stops in her journey included Monterey and Mexico City, Mexico, with an arrival in the United States in 1994. Since then, she has lived in Texas, Florida, and New Hampshire. Juanita is home with her children while her husband works 14 hours a day. When asked about her hopes and aspirations for her children, she replied:

"... desires, hopes, aspirations – I have many. I want them to be well, to do well,

to learn English, to get ahead. Who knows how long I will be alive? I want them

to be able to prepare themselves. I always tell them that the only work you have,

the only job you have, is to study and to study." (Interview: 11/1/05)

Juanita's early family experiences shaped her vision for her role in supporting her

children's education. Her mother had no formal schooling and her father went through

second grade. She hopes that she can change that familial pattern in her children's lives.

She observed:

" The biggest difference I think (in how I am raising my children compared to

my own upbringing) is that my parents didn't know how to read and write so

they couldn't help us learn how to read. They asked us what we had to do but

we had to do everything ourselves. I have always thought that when I grow up

I want to be able to help my kids and my mom couldn't help me and it's one

thing that I always wanted to be able to do. So that's kind of encouraged me

to help my kids." (Interview: 11/1/05)

Juanita recalled that as a child, her desire to read and to learn was a part of who she was.

Giving an account of how she learned to read, she responded:

"I learned by a miracle… the teachers they sent us, they just came and played with

us; they didn't really teach us… but I was always interested…so they would send

us home with the homework and my parents if they sent us out in the field to

do some sort of chore, I was always reading my book, and that's how it is

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now, they send me home and I'm cooking and I always have something to read."

She also reported that at breaktime at the Latin American Center where she is taking English classes, she reads local newspapers that have some bilingual articles. Confirming this behavior, she had a bilingual newspaper with her while she was waiting in the school lobby for her first interview. In sum, Juanita's caring and knowing are inextricably bound to her hopes, aspirations and school preparation for her children. Learning and education represent core values in Juanita's life.

"Family traditions counter alienation and confusion. They help us define who we are; they provide something steady, reliable and safe in a confusing world."

Susan Lieberman

Margarita

Margarita, a native of Honduras and a high school graduate, came to the United States in 1998 to be with her future husband. She is now joined here by her father, nine brothers and sisters, and many extended family members. As a married mother of two young children, she has many hopes and aspirations for her children. When reflecting on what it is like raising children in the United States, she responded:

" It's better in the U.S.... it's easier... education in the schools... if they need help there are people here... a good education... also, they're going to have two languages." (Interview: 10/27/05)

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She and her husband hope that their children "study, that they graduate, and they have a career." Margarita believes that the best thing she can do to help achieve this aspiration is to " help her study. My husband and I work to give her (Gracia) everything she needs to be able to study." Margarita believes she is a good parent because:

"... I love my kids and I want to raise them with that kind of love and caring. And I don't want to have anger or rancor. I want to have a loving environment. Sometimes you start to scream and that doesn't help them. And so we try to raise them with love." (Interview: 10/27/05)

In the fall interview, she stated that she wanted the school to know that:

"...Gracia is very kind of peaceful and she's kind of quiet and she's close to my heart and I would like the teacher to tell her to participate. I would like the teacher to tell me how Gracia is doing, progress whatever... last year (Evenstart program) it was a different kind of program. I went every day, I had English every day, I liked to participate. It's different this year..."

(Interview: 10/27/05)

Thus, the perceived role that participation plays in success with schooling for her daughter and herself is uppermost on her mind. Participation in home activities that

encourage academic thinking is also intricately woven into the intergenerational traditions in her family. Gracia's grandfather, parents and little brother engage in school-like activities such as reading books together, doing homework with her grandfather, copying from books, doing math such as, " how much is two and two? and one and four? "Grandpa is also teaching (her) how to count money using pretend money... and likes to play cashier... how much things cost, how much things weigh...". Gracia aspires to be a teacher so she often takes on the role of teacher for her little brother and grandfather. Margarita proudly notes that her young son already knows the alphabet in English. Margarita speaks to her daughter in Spanish but Gracia wants her to speak to her and read to her in English so that she can learn. Margarita reported that Gracia said, " read it to me in English and translate it to me in Spanish. She's very smart and she says that she likes school a lot." For Margarita, the show of love and caring that surrounds learning completes the circle that her father started: " ... my dad taught me, and we didn't watch much TV and my dad spent a lot of time teaching us." (Interview: 10/27/05)

"First and most fundamentally, educators and others who work with children of Latino immigrants should stop assuming that low levels of parental aspirations and expectations are part of the reason for children's low achievement levels."

Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier

Maria

Maria earned four years of college credit in Mexico before coming to the United States in 1991. As a mother of a teenager and a kindergarten child, her notions of what it

means to support her child's education have been shaped by her older child's experiences. Despite full-time work schedules, she and her husband juggle their responsibilities so that they can focus on education. Many times throughout the year, she would come for a meeting or an interview having no sleep the night before. Yet, she wanted the school to know that "... we are a united family... that we really want to make progress... get ahead." Her hopes for her kindergarten son is that "... he can make it at least to college... at least something more than high school... that he'll follow the best path that he can." To achieve this aspiration, she and her husband are a constant source of encouragment and guidance.

"He comes home from school and he wants to say his ABCs and to show me everything he has done in school and what I want to do is to encourage him... to pay attention. I share everything with him. He comes home and he says this is what he learned. So we do the calendar and so I repeat with him what he has done during the day. He explains everything to us." (Interview: 10/31/05)

Later in this chapter, Geraldo, Maria's husband, takes on an even greater role in supporting the education of his son when his work schedule changes and he is more available for participation at school and home. Both parents of Fernando support their aspirations with actions that reveal a deep-seated desire for academic success for their son.

From just four examples of the nine families who participated in this study, many variables exist among these families that influence the meaning of education: time in the

United States, current living conditions, family constellations and personal histories. While a deficit perspective might view these families in a monolithic way in terms of notions about caring and supporting their children's education, the only authentic uniformity these participants brought to the start of the kindergarten year was a firm belief in the power of education and the desire for a role in supporting it.

As a result of participation in this study, the parents had opportunities to engage in conversations with the researcher and the translator about their perspectives of education and how those perspectives motivate them to be engaged in the process. Thus, sources within the school became a route to participation for the families. This practice is atypical of school communication patterns between educators and families, regardless of race, language, culture or socioeconomic status. In my experience, it is uncommon for educators to ask parents about what they value about education and aspire for their children. Rather, educator role definitions are more likely to be founded on assumptions, and those assumptions are often based on membership within either a dominant or marginal group in wider society. For example, I am currently employed as a reading specialist in a high socioeconomic school district and as I have reflected on aspects of this study I realized that white middle class parents would never be asked about the hopes and aspirations they hold for their children. There is a tacit assumption that all parents within that group value education and aspire to attainment of a college education for their children. This instance of critical reflexivity is integral to good qualitative studies. It has changed the lens through which I view parents, educators, policies and practices.

In addition to the aspirations parents held for their children's education, I also examined how families perceive bilingualism, both their own bilingual language

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proficiency and that of their children. These findings will be explored in relation to the

national context that has embedded the issue of language policy into the larger

framework of quality education and access to that quality education for language

minority students and their families. Also, the findings will be analyzed in relation to

current political climate in which multilingualism is viewed as a threat.

Parent Perceptions of Their Own Language Proficiency and Its Impact on Teaching Their Children

With the exception of one father in the study, a translator was required to carry on

a conversation between the parents and me. Thus, the English language proficiency status

of the parents was mostly Non-English or Limited-English proficiency. Even with the

father who had the greatest English language competence, rich and descriptive language

was not retrievable for use in conversation. Understanding parent perceptions of their

own English language proficiency was critical to understanding their sense of efficacy in

teaching their children the curriculum of kindergarten in an English-only program.

In the fall interview, all nine participants who were interviewed stated that they

thought English was very important and that they wanted to learn more in the coming

year, with five parents mentioning limitations in their ability to teach their children due to

difficulty with the English language. They all expressed interest in taking classes to learn

English. This was different from the findings during the pilot study year (2004-2005),

when I found that the perception of limited English proficiency as a barrier to supporting

their children in school was not shared by a majority of the parents. In the pilot study,

many parents felt that their "act of being present" at the school was sufficient and was

what their child needed from them. Limited English did not present an obstacle to fulfilling a perceived parental role. Of the nine participants interviewed in this study, one parent was currently taking an English class at a local church once a week and another mother was attending classes three hours per day at a Latin American center.

" I do want to study English… last year at Evenstart I learned a lot of words; I understand some but I want to learn to speak well."

(Margarita) (Interview: 10/27/05)

" My problem… I don't know how to write… I can write a little bit… I can understand almost everything I read… but it different how you pronounce and how you write."(Maria) (Interview: 10/31/05)

During monthly sessions with the 2005-2006 group of parents, at the parents' request we always reviewed the names of letters, the sounds that they made in isolation and in words, and the pronunciation of sight words from the kindergarten curriculum. They welcomed the assistance with English pronunciation so that they could work with their children at home.

" My knowledge has helped me to teach him but it also isn't quite adequate because there's a difference in the language and the way we do things. So I can teach him to be responsible, I have taught him to be responsible, make him do his homework, keep up with things, but also there is a difference in the way we do things, a difference in language."   (Miguel) (Interview: 5/11/06)

Ms. Demers, the kindergarten teacher, confirmed Miguel's concern about the language difference and his ability to teach his grandson. She reported that:

"...Javier's grandfather came and asked me what each letter sounded like and made sure that he knew what they all sounded like so Javier would know because he was having trouble with them at the beginning of the year."

(Interview: 4/14/06)

Ms. Demers also noted that Santiago's mom was:

" a little frustrated with that (limited English), that's why she started taking classes with Mr. S. because she wanted to know more English so that she could communicate better with teachers and school and everybody."

(Interview: 4/14/06)

One mother expressed her confusion with her child learning a second language and her inability to judge how her child is doing.

"It's hard for me because I think that he does not know very much. I ask him and he'll say, 'I don't know', but then yesterday I came and I saw him speaking with the teacher in English and he asked the teacher where's my work, and the teacher showed him. I kind of don't know what's going on. He's saying things

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that we don't understand or if he is really learning. So, I don't know...

But like yesterday we were looking at his work and it was the story of the Three

Little Pigs and he showed us his drawings and he could tell us in English what...

And then he told us in Spanish so that we could understand. But if you ask him

what did you learn today, he doesn't say anything. It's like when he wants to."

(Luisa) (Interview: 4/20/06)

Thus, at the kindergarten level, when parents were working on sound-letter

correspondence, sight word recognition, and patterned texts with repetitive linguistic

phrases, a certain level of English by the parents facilitated their ability to support their

children's progress in the kindergarten curriculum. As the cited excerpts indicate, parents

were less sure at the conversational level; parents, such as Luisa, expressed concern that

she was unable to assess what Andres did or didn't know because of the language

difference and parents such as Santiago's mother, recognized that her conversational

language skills did not meet her needs for communicating with "his teachers, his school

and everybody".

My thinking returned to Norton and Toohey (2001) when considering this

concern about parents' English language proficiency and its impact on their ability to

support their children's academic progress. In their essay on "good language learners",

they adopt a sociocultural perspective by considering the interplay between the individual

and the context; between the individual and the opportunities for learning within a given

context. During the 2005-2006 school year, ESL instruction for adults was available for

parents after school twice a week for a short interval of a few weeks, unlike parents' experiences at Even Start where English instruction was available daily. For parents working during the day, there were no options for language learning at the school site in the evening. When deficit discourse positions Latino parents as not caring about education, it is a similar position to the Norton and Toohey (2001) critique, that learners do not "succeed" because they are not motivated. Instead, I argue that an analysis of the context and opportunities within that context to engage and participate is necessary. For the parents in this study, there was a desire to learn English, but opportunities for instruction were limited. Parents who had attended Even Start reported participation in language instruction when the opportunities were available. Thus, it is the interrelationship between parents and context and the parents' ability to exercise agency within a context, that becomes a focal point of examination.

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997; 2005) maintain that parent role construction and sense of efficacy is not just based on parent understanding of what they should do to support their child's education but also how effective they can be. Parents in this study were aware that their own English language development was an integral part of supporting their children in kindergarten and in future years of education, and they all expressed a desire to learn more English, but opportunities for doing so in the context of Maplehurst Elementary School during this school year were limited. Although the realities of 'life contexts' (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler) presented obstacles for parents developing bilingual skills, they shared their desire for bilingualism with their children.

Parent Perceptions of Bilingualism For Their Children

When the participants were initially asked about what effect their child's native language of Spanish might have on the ability to learn how to read and write in English, all participants responded that they thought it would have no effect. All participants viewed second language acquisition for their children from an additive perspective. The typical response was:

" I don't see it having an effect especially now because he's little... he's learning and he can learn both." (Juanita) (Interview: 11/1/05)

Two parents reflected on bilingualism and responded:

" It's not going to affect her at all. She's learning. What will affect her is Mother's need to learn English to be able to help her. It will be hardest for me teaching her Spanish because she is learning English here." (Elisa)

(Interview: 10/24/05)

"I don't think it will affect him as long as he keeps it separate; at school he does it in English – at home he does it in Spanish; One teaches the differences. At school you write it this way, this is how you pronounce it, this is how you say it; in Spanish – it's different. I don't think it's going to affect him. All day long he is going to be learning English and in the afternoon he's going to be learning Spanish."

(Rosa) (Interview: 10/6/05)

By the spring, five of the nine families reported that their kindergarten children were progressing in both English and Spanish language development with their children switching languages based on communication partners.

" ... with my brothers (Abella's uncles) she speaks English (and with her mother she speaks Spanish)... because I have always said it's important that she speak both."   (Adalia) (Interview: 5/8/06)

" ... with J. (older sister) he speaks English but with me, no. And I tell him here, try and speak in Spanish." (Rosa) (Interview: 4/19/06)

" yeah, she has really improved a lot (speaking English). In school she uses a lot of English. At home with me, it's more Spanish, but when she's with her cousins and aunt, then more English. J. (younger sibling) is learning English too." (Elisa) (Interview: 4/10/06)

But for the other four families, they experienced different language results with their children. Two parents reported that English language development was progressing more than Spanish language development.

" She's more now progressing in English.I sit with her to write in English and in Spanish. In Spanish she reads but not very much... she's progressed a lot (in

English)... I sit with her, she wants to know how to add, like 1+1=2, she wants to

know how to do things like that... it's good because when she came in here, when she

started here, she didn't know very much English." (Margarita)

" In English, I think it's a little more. (more than when he came to school)

I don't know why but in Spanish, he doesn't seem to pronounce very well the

words in Spanish. You can understand him but he doesn't speak well. He'll cut

pieces of the word off. He spoke more clearly when he first came from Mexico

but I don't know how much his dad kind of indulges him." (Isabel)

A continuum of student language development and usage was also reflected in the

journal project. Although the goals of the journal writing will be explained in detail at the

end of this chapter, the main focus was to examine the nature of what kindergarten

English Language Learners tell their parents about what happens at school. A review of

the seven journals that the children and their parents completed revealed a mix of Spanish

and English written literacy. Of the five journals that children wrote in, one student

wrote numerous sentences in Spanish only, three children combined Spanish and English

vocabulary in their writing, and two children wrote in English only. Thus, Spanish and

English oral and written language development was unique to each student.

Three dimensions of language proficiency have been outlined by Cummins

(1996): conversational fluency, discrete language skills and academic language

proficiency. Conversational fluency is the ability to communicate in familiar face-to-face situations that are contextually redundant with facial cues, gestures, etc. English Language Learners tend to develop this type of language within a school environment in a year or two of exposure. Discrete language skills also may be acquired at an early stage of English language acquisition. These skills may include decontextualized school tasks such as learning letter/sound correspondences, decoding skills, and basic lower level reading processes. Academic language proficiency develops on a slower trajectory because it involves complex oral and written language, low-frequency vocabulary, and abstract thinking through language. Kindergarteners, whether they are English Language Learners or native English speakers, are experiencing language proficiency at the conversational fluency and discrete language skill levels. Participant perspectives of bilingual language development did not seem to reflect the complexity of language proficiency and the stages that children progress through, and yet, I think this perception would not be unlike English-speaking parents' perspectives of language development in the early years of school. The parents in this study have only their children's current development and performance in their current context to make judgments about language proficiency.

Parent views of bilingualism for themselves and their children seem to contrast with the current political and legislative climate that views bilingualism from a subtractive perspective. Unlike the thrust of No Child Left Behind in which English Language Learners are encouraged to develop English language proficiency as quickly as possible to the exclusion of one's native language, the parents in this study believe that

language development in both languages can co-exist, resulting in child language development that reflects the complex worlds in which these children are being raised.

Returning to Glick Schiller et al. (2004), the participants in this study defy the assumptions that are often made of immigrant groups; all parents studied valued English and desired to improve their own skills. The results of this study indicate that parents did not seem to think in terms of one country, one identity but instead were developing simultaneous identities by virtue of their participation in daily life, institutions and social relations of a new home and the web of relationships that created within that locality. As I noted in the theoretical framework, these relationships and opportunities for participation are the "stuff" of micro-interactions that can either reflect and perpetuate coercive relationships between minority parents and schools or create a climate that embraces this additive view of bilingualism and minority language families and creates possibilities for parents to exert individual agency within a given context to advocate for one's child by participating fully in the practices a community has to offer.

Given parent perspectives on the value of education and the importance of bilingualism and how those perspectives reveal the notion of parent caring, I will now focus on examples of parent engagement and support before and during the kindergarten year and how that support translates to knowledge of child development and school curriculum such as language and literacy development. Within the area of home literacy experiences, I will explore the social organization of learning at home and also the role of play in home instructional practice.

Early Literacy Experiences as Evidence of Caring and Knowing

Findings from the fall interviews revealed that the participants in this study supported early literacy experiences in their homes in anticipation of formal schooling at the kindergarten level. Parents filled out a questionnaire describing the way they thought one should teach a child to read. Respondents noted what literacy and language activities they had engaged in prior to their children attending kindergarten. As noted in the fall questionnaire (Appendix A), the possible choices included: reading aloud with my child, practicing letters and sounds, talking about what words mean, rereading books many times, talking about how written words match what is said, telling the child what a printed word says, using flashcards and workbooks, having the child read by himself, computer activities, talking about parts of the story and asking questions about the book. The most typical home practices centering around literacy prior to entering kindergarten included reading aloud, practicing letters and sounds, talking about what words mean, rereading books, telling a child what a printed word says and talking about parts of the story. The most frequent unused resource for early literacy experiences involved computer use. The reasons included lack of access to a computer or lack of knowledge about how to use the computer for which they had access.

Home literacy practices in the preschool years seemed related to perspectives of emergent literacy development in children. While all parent and grandparent participants recognized that children acquire some knowledge about language and reading in the years prior to kindergarten, home practices appeared to reflect one's understanding of when children are ready to benefit from interactions around books. Three of the nine

participants responded that children need to be 5-6 years old before they can understand what is being read to them with the other six families indicating the belief that children can understand what is being read to them and benefit from being read to from an early age. Even with these differences in understanding, the value of reading was recognized as important to development because they all responded that children should be read to during the preschool years. Only Maria believed that reading aloud to a child was not that important. While she had acquired the most education in her native country of all the respondents, (sixteen years), her view of early literacy and home experiences with literacy prior to kindergarten was the most limiting. The number of children's books in the home was said to be in the category of 1-10. When asked what age she thought children could understand what is being read to them, she responded, "six years".

The presence of children's books in the home, another indicator of home literacy practices, ranged from the category of 1-10 to 20-40 with the most typical response being 20 books. Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley (1998) studied the presence of books in the homes of middle and upper middle-class English speaking parents and determined that 61-80 children's books was the most typical number of books present in the studied homes. While the overall number of books in the participants' homes was less than typical middle and upper middle-class English speaking parents, the importance of books was highly valued. As Juanita noted,

" For me, I don't have many (books), my husband doesn't have books, but for the kids we (have) books." (Interview: 11/1/05)

Parent understanding of reading acquisition and instruction at the beginning of

kindergarten was related to their recall of how they learned to read as children. Parent

recollection for five mothers involved open syllable structures, a combination of

consonants and vowels, learned in a rote manner.

"... it's the syllables, ma mama... we just learn the syllables and then we stick

them together." (Maria) (Interview: 10/31/05)

"... with syllables ... ma me mi mo mu" (Isabel) (Interview: 10/24/05)

Home Literacy Experiences During The Kindergarten Year

Given the participants' educational aspirations for their children and their reported

beliefs and home literacy practices during the preschool years, this study examined

participation and involvement practices reported by parents during monthly meetings,

parent conferences, and other occasions for communication. Accounts of engagement

activities indicated that parents were able to follow through on their commitment to

support their children's kindergarten experience. Most frequently, parents reported that

they took the time to sit with their children and focus on schoolwork. Plans for ways of

reviewing schoolwork were revealed. Parents used a variety of materials to instruct their

children from paper and envelopes to blackboards, puzzles and materials from the parent

literacy group.

" I know because I sit with my daughter and I read books in English and in

Spanish. Also, helping her with her homework... (I'm) really astounded at what she

knows... really just astounded at how much she's learned." (Margarita)

" ... practicing with the child... with the three! (children) I always ask him what

he   learned. Sometimes he'll say things and sometimes he won't and then

when we sit and do the writing and do the work that he did in school... what we

do the most is pronunciation because he doesn't know them well. This test that

they give him every six months or whatever, it seems he doesn't know the ABCs.

He's learning them. We do it by playing... by making cards... and we play on

the table. So he picks up the cards on the table and he has to say "A".(Luisa)

" This is what I use for Vincenzo (and his two siblings) – that if the paper comes

back and it is all signed and everything is ok then I throw them out but if I see that

there are some things that are not right, then I go over them with them one or two

times to make sure they know. About writing... when he brings things home,

then I have him write... if he doesn't have anything to do then I use the papers

that you have given me. I'll write a line and then he'll write a line ... as far as

reading, something they have been doing this Read Across America so he reads

and I read or he'll ask me to read something. He's been coming home with these

little books ... then I sign to say he has read them. And then time to ask him

questions too like, " What do you think?", " What do you think is true?" (Juanita)

" The teacher sends home a paper each month with the letters that they're going

to see and the work that they're doing in class. So, we're not going to throw

this out, we're going to review this." (Rosa)   (Interview: 4/19/06)

" ... I bought him envelopes and they play letters to write sentences, to write

letters, the other one (son) used to fill pages and Fernando starts doing it..."

"... yeah, we motivate him, trying to keep most of the tools that he needs; you

know we bought him a little chair, just for kids his age, we bought him a

blackboard with everything on it: letters with magnets, numbers and everything

like that; and one thing he doesn't do, he doesn't play with most of the toys... he

doesn't use toys like soldiers or stuff like that..." (referring to his desire to play

with school-like materials). "...and some (papers) we keep or we save,

everything he did through the year, it's inside a box and sometimes we pick some

of that and he goes back in time and he finishes something because sometimes he

has something he didn't finish or (do) well... let him go through it and finish what

he didn't finish and you know that help and refresh everything..." (Geraldo)

(Parent Conference: 6/7/06)

Social Organization of Learning and Instruction at Home

When considering the teaching and learning experiences of young children in

their homes, the social organization of learning is worthy of examination. Sociocultural

theory expands beyond individual development and social interaction and looks at

development from the perspective of transformation of an individual's participation in practices within a community. As was noted in Chapter Two, Vygotsky (1978) focused on interaction between children and more knowing members of a society who help mediate learning through the use of a culture's practices and tools, with emphasis placed on language as a mediational tool. This type of learning activity setting is often thought to be dyadic in nature with the expert (parent) guiding the novice (child). With regard to literacy development, this perspective embraces the social interaction involved in the meaning and knowledge construction of the parents and their families, recognizing theorists who purport that literacy is not content or context free and that it is always used as a mechanism of or is filtered through one's culture (Gee,1992; Vygotsky, 1978).

Eight out of the nine families reported that teaching events were not restricted to isolated dyads in their households. Rather, siblings, cousins and other family members became integrated into the instructional interactions. While parents utilized parent-child instructional interactions as an opportunity for learning about the kindergarten curriculum and their own child's growth and development, they also capitalized on family resources with the understanding that the home was an important context for learning for all family members. Locating literacy within a sociocultural framework, literacy events in the participants' households were cultural practices, " ... ongoing accomplishments, negotiated by children and other participants as they respond to each other." (Dyson, ?year, p. 329) As a consequence of literacy activities within the home, pretend play became a frequent practice in the majority of homes.

Role of Play in Home Practices

By the spring, eight families were indicating that pretend play had become a predominant practice in their households. What the Spanish-speaking families in this study engaged in intuitively, the use of pretend play for developing cognitive and linguistic competence, has been the subject of research in early childhood development. (Bergen, 2002; Pellegrini, 1980; Roskos & Neuman, 1998; Curran, 1999;) Participation in pretend play involves role and perspective taking, interactive social dialogue and negotiation, and problem solving skills. Pretend play facilitates receptive and expressive language skills along with mental representation that develop during the preschool years. Curran (1999) explored the rule structure used by 3-, 4-, and 5-year old children in social play and found that there were explicit rules such as taking a role and rules for fair play and implicit rules such as maintaining engagement with others so that the pretend sequence could continue. While I recognize that early representational play in children cuts across the many themes in children's lives, supporting literacy development, the participants in this study only reported play that followed teacher and school-like scripts. The following excerpts are a sample of the participants' responses.

" Their play is really all school. M. (older sibling) plays teacher and they practice their letters, and they do their drawings and if something is right, then M. marks that it is right, and if it is wrong, then they have to go fix it, and they get a happy face and a sad face. Letters, the upper case and the lower case letters, the colors, and they play snacks too. (Juanita) (Interview: 4/14/06)

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" ... she sits there and reads – she looks for books and she sits with her sister and reads. She pays more attention to her sister than she does to me! She's really more of a teacher than I – she takes the ABCs and she sits with her and she teaches her. She'll say to me, " Oh I'm tired" and so then I wait, and then when her sister comes in she helps her. She pays more attention to her.

... she said to me that she wants to be a teacher. I say, 'what do you want to do when you grow up?' and she says, 'I want to be teacher. " (Elisa)

(Interview: 4/10/06)

" J. (older sibling) is the teacher and she bawls him out." (Rosa)

(Interview: 4/19/06)

(Referring to playing school at home)

" The three practice... what they've learned. Letters and words. The oldest one is the teacher." (Luisa) (Interview: 4/20/06)

(Referring to playing school at home)

"She's the teacher...(she plays with) her little brother, her little cousins..."

" ... she was talking like the teacher, " Oh My My!"... she gets dressed up and says she is the teacher. So for Halloween she is going to be her teacher."(Margarita)

(Interview: 10/27/05)

" He sits with his little sister to teach her how to read. And he reads. (Isabel)

(Interview: 4/10/06)

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Parents reported that the play also involves the adults in the family, with the child taking the role of teacher.

" When my husband and I are sitting together and then Gracia says, ok, I'm gonna be the teacher, and she starts teaching them in English, and she wants them to answer... she wants to be a teacher..." (Margarita) (Interview: 6/13/06)

" Yes, everyday when he gets up, he'll say to them, you're the boy leader, you're the girl leader at home. As soon as they get up he starts. He wants everybody to play at home with him like they play here at school. He teaches me the songs, he teaches me how to say the alphabet, and then I repeat them and he says, " No, Mom, it's not like that!" (Maria) (Interview: 4/17/06)

It's of particular interest that the study families reported these extended learning opportunities within the family in the form of pretend play. From a language use perspective, the play served as an opportunity to rehearse the content and scripts the children were exposed to in school. From a curriculum and policy perspective, it is interesting that the focus in most kindergartens in this era of high-stakes proficiency testing, particularly in classrooms like in Maplehurst Elementary where there is a significant level of poverty and diversity, has shifted from opportunities for child-initiated play to teacher-directed academic instruction. What is serving as a fruitful means of academic and linguistic growth in home practices may also serve as good practice in kindergarten classrooms.

Parent reports of home literacy practices before and during the kindergarten year

illustrate Auerbach's (1989) view of family literacy, described as "... activities and

practices that are integrated into the fabric of daily life, where the social context becomes

a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning"(p.166). These reports

became one source of evidence of parent knowledge of language and literacy

development. Additionally, in the spring, parents were questioned about what they think,

from their experiences, the important things are that children need to know in

kindergarten. The breadth of responses reflect the scope of skills and developmental

milestones that are introduced and accomplished during this critical year in education.

The broad notion of language arts serves as an umbrella for many of the important

accomplishments involving reading, writing, listening and speaking. Also, behavior was

considered important for learning how to get along with others, having a good attitude,

and keeping things in order. Basic identifying information was also mentioned as

important for children to know such as one's address, telephone number and parents'

names. In the next section, I will report on curriculum areas that were most representative

of parent responses to this inquiry together with parent observations about child

development during the kindergarten year.

Parent Understanding of Key Elements of the Kindergarten Curriculum

Parents were asked in the spring interview about their understanding of the big

ideas of kindergarten curriculum. I used the city kindergarten curriculum, based on the

state kindergarten curriculum, as a framework for organizing parents' knowledge into

categories. Although parents did not use phrases such as "alphabetic principle", I analyzed parent responses and ordered them accordingly.

Alphabetic Principle

Parents observed that learning letters and corresponding sounds, the alphabetic principle, is very important for kindergarten success. Incorporated into this topic was phonological and phonemic awareness.

"... Gracia likes the way you work with her, you make her understand things, so when she has to write something, like 'happy', she's like, h-h-h, she makes me hear the sound and she makes me understand what she wants to write. The teacher does the same thing."   (Margarita) (Interview: 6/13/06)

Teacher Question during Fall Parent Conference: " Has he been clapping his name? We've been doing a lot of clapping to names..."

" ... he does it with the spoon at supper..." (Juanita)

(Parent Conference: 10/12/05)

" In writing, he does really well. He copies well. And now he's starting to do what you taught us at those sessions, "k – k – k"... yes, he tries to do that..."

"... I think it's easier in English than in Spanish to read... in Spanish you have to start and read with syllables and then put the syllables together... English would be easier because you start with the sounds... just what you hear... not memorizing..." (Rosa)   (Parent Conference: 6/9/06)

" He'll write cat – the C and the T and I'll say that he's missing something and he will say, no, the teacher says it's ok, so I remember when I was little and my Ma would tell me the same kinds of things. I also thought of another thing when we did sentences, of the paper that you gave us, when we talked about writing at first and the sounds that they make and that it is ok when they write a C and a T because that's what it is – they hear it." (Isabel) (Interview: 4/10/06)

" ... it's very different...because (her experience) you put together the letters and make the syllable, like bebe, mama, and here it's very different... the sounds, really different, hard, it's really hard, rhyming words because everything goes with the sounds." (Maria) (Interview: 4/17/06)

Writing

Parents frequently referred to writing as a critical element of the kindergarten learning experience. Parents' observation of their children's writing included an attention to form and content. The developmental nature of writing development was also noted in their comments about their children's behavior. For other parents, writing development resurrected memories of their learning how to write within family traditions.

" She's really improved in her writing. At the beginning she just sort of did more like a scribbly kind of thing but now everything is very straight." (Adalia)

(Interview: 5/8/06)

" One thing they learn (is) how to write about what they like." (Margarita.)

"… I remember when my Dad used to sit with me and I do the same thing with Javier and his mom will do that and sit with him writing… I did that with my daughters and now it's my turn to do this as a grandfather with my grandson because he doesn't have his father here." (Miguel) (Interview: 5/11/06)

" Here they read stories, and they write their little things. In Puerto Rico they don't do those kind of things. There is a difference – there is more a focus on the notebooks, on the assignments, on how to read and here it's different… (Elisa)

" She writes a lot and she even writes these little letters and she'll leave them in my bureau, like Mommy and Daddy, I love you… sometimes like when Gracia thinks she's made me angry like sometimes she she'll say she wants to go to the park and then I say, "no I'm sorry I can't", and so Gracia writes, " I'm sorry, I love you" and she gives it to the little brother to give to me." (Margarita)

" I see that he is progressing in his writing. I'll ask him to write me something about the cat so he'll he say the cat is jumping – like a whole sentence – and it's getting longer. He likes to draw. He likes to draw and then write below what it is

he drew. He'll say, like that's like a little kid." (Isabel) (Interview: 4/10/06)

Reading

Reading remained a central focus of monthly meetings and materials distributed
to families within the Spanish kindergarten parent group. Participants in the study
conveyed their perspectives of reading development during the kindergarten year. For
many families, literacy became a source of pride in families.

" I started at the beginning working with her with little words, so she'd learn

to read better..." "...(Abella shows the most interest in reading)... " The uncles

come and they ask her to read... they admire too how she's learned." (Adalia)

(Interview: 5/8/06)

After I worked with Javier and his grandfather one morning in May, Miguel was moved
by Javier's advanced literacy skills. Miguel replied:

" I never ask him about reading because I didn't know that he knows that but

he surprised me today! He can read all the word that you put on there... yes,

he can read, I didn't know that. I work with him every day and I did not know

that." (Interview: 5/11/06)

Other parents recognized the developmental steps that occur during literacy acquisition
by working with their children at home. One parent questioned what she was observing in
her son's early reading acquisition. She said:

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" I really don't know if sometimes he's reading or not because sometimes I'll

read to him and he'll read but I don't know if he is reading from memory or if

he really knows what he's reading." (Isabel)   (Interview: 4/10/06)

Another parent recognized how the high-frequency sight words serve as basic

building blocks in reading and writing connected text:

" (she didn't know who had sent home the high-frequency words)…so we

worked with those and then I thought it would be a good idea to use all those words in

sentences so he's (son) writing all the sentences with high-frequency words."

(Juanita)   (Interview: 4/14/06)

Functional reading also became a part of home practice in some homes. For example,

Geraldo relayed a story of Fernando's play with a Pokemon game and his constant

requests for help with the reading from his mother and father. Both parents told

him that he would have to learn how to read so he could read what it says:

" … and then well he did it… he started it so now the only kind of thing he

have trouble is on the names sometimes, there are real weird names and I told

him this is not real, this is just a game… and then he's starting to read the little

book of blocks and everything…"   (Parent Conference: 6/7/06)

One parent expressed a change in her child's behavior that appeared to reflect an attempt to recall and rehearse things he had read and heard during the school day.

" He starts to play… and he starts to speak to himself as if he's saying a story.

… by himself… in English or Spanish… he's like remembering…" (Rosa)

(Interview: 4/19/06)

When questioned further about this newly acquired behavior, it was reported that her son likes to have his mother tell him stories at different times in the day and now as a result of home routines and practices and his experiences in kindergarten he is becoming the storyteller and narrator.

One child made a strong connection between reading and asking questions to assess comprehension. Her mother stated:

"Gracia wants me to sit with her and read a book and then afterwards she says, now you ask me these kinds of questions… so I ask her, like what happened and why… she explained why… you know Gracia says, well this kid fell and why he fell… and Gracia wants me to be like the teacher." (Margarita)

(Interview: 6/13/06)

Parent Understanding of Kindergarten Students becoming Independent Learners

Many parents made reference to a level of independence that developed during the kindergarten year and was exhibited when the children engaged in language and literacy skills at home and at school. Opportunities to practice language and literacy skills

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were encouraged by the parents, and many children relished their newfound skills that allowed them to function independently. One child, Abella, took the opportunity to write in a journal about school. While she had the option to work on the project with her mother, her mother reported that she said:

" I'm gonna do this… I'm gonna write that I behaved well because you're gonna say   that I didn't…I'm gonna write down what I like and don't like about the kids."

Mother: " I said to her, 'well I don't think you ought to put that you behaved well because I know you don't behave so well'… she says, "no, I'm gonna write it all." (Adalia)   (Parent Conference: 6/16/06)

The nature of her journal writing and her Spanish and English literacy skills will be examined later in this chapter. This child was able to assert her independence, convey her feelings about herself and other students in her class, and demonstrate Spanish and English written competence.

Relaying observed differences in childrearing and developmental expectations in the United States and Panama, Miguel noted:

" … there is a big difference in their independence that for example a kid at home in my home country, seven years old and he won't know how to put on his shoes but here the kids learn to do those things, more independent. There are differences." For example, "… well sometime when he went on the computer,

he said, "Dad, you want to play with me this game?" I say, "but I don't know", he

say, " try, try, I teach you"... " he teach me computer at home you know..."

Another mother stated that her child resisted her assistance with writing activities. When

working with high-frequency words and sentence construction, she started to tell him

how to write and he replied:

" No, no, no, you don't have to tell me, I can do it !" (Juanita)

One parent who frequently volunteered in her daughter's kindergarten class was surprised

by the independent level of engagement of most of the kindergarten children she

observed.

" What surprises me is that all the little kids are sitting and reading... separately...

In Puerto Rico they focus so much on the reading, but my nephew, I don't see that but

here they're reading what they see..."

Researcher: " And here it just seems to be generated by the kids, that they like to

read? Is that the difference?"

" Yes, I like that a lot." (Elisa) (Interview: 4/10/06)

In summary, in this portion of the chapter I have provided examples of parent

engagement in activities and support within the contexts of home and school that reveal

students and families coming to school with talents to contribute. The parents displayed

competence in constructing roles for supporting and advancing their children's educational development. The data provided description and analysis that reveals a complexity that defies simple, stereotypical notions about Spanish-speaking parents and their children. The parents in this study brought forms of knowledge and home practices to the task of educating their kindergarten children that warrant legitimatization and acknowledgment by the school community. By having access to the school through the vehicle of this research study, the level of knowing and caring that the participants in this study acquired from participation in home and school practices was revealed. In the concluding section, I will look at one source of evidence, parent-child journaling, in depth.

Parent-Child Journaling: A Rich Source of Evidence for Parents' Knowing and Caring

As the study progressed, I wanted to find out more about how this group of Spanish-speaking parents came to know about the curriculum and practices of kindergarten at Maplehurst Elementary so that they could support their children's education. Information gained from parents during spring interviews led me on an unanticipated path. I expected parents to report that their sources of knowing about kindergarten curriculum and practices would be their children, school personnel, and other parents.

While all these parents were working with their children at home supporting what their children were learning in school, only four parents explicitly mentioned their children as a source for developing understanding. All the parents cited Mrs. Brown and

me and the Spanish Kindergarten Literacy Support Group as a primary source of information about kindergarten curriculum and practices and ways to help their children. Two parents noted that the teachers and the papers that they send home also helped them to know what to expect in kindergarten. One parent mentioned that she learned a lot from volunteering in the classroom because she had the opportunity to watch how the teacher read to the students.

Surprisingly, seven out of nine parents reported that they did not learn about kindergarten from other parents. Although many of the parents were in the same physical space, the schoolyard, most days of the school year, communication about what children are learning in kindergarten was not a part of their typical communication exchanges. As one mother stated:

" No, I don't really learn anything from the other parents. I hardly ever

see them... we sort of pass." (Elisa)   (Interview: 4/10/06)

As a result, one avenue of investigation became the children themselves and the nature of their performance as informants for the parents. What do kindergarten English Language Learners tell their parents about what happens at school? One way to find out was through the use of parent-child journaling, an unexpected rich site for understanding parents' perspectives and understanding, which will now be described. Seven parents agreed to participate in the journaling project. Each parent was presented with a personal journal with questions written in Spanish on the inside cover as a prompt if they were unsure about how to start the inquiry process. Sample questions were:

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- What did you do in school today?

- What did your teachers teach you?

- What did you learn?

- Can you show me something that you learned?

- Was there anything in school today that you did not understand?

The parents were free to interpret this activity the way that best suited them. Written Spanish was the primary language used by all parents with some English interspersed throughout the entries. The results indicated that when these children acted as a filter for parent understanding of kindergarten curriculum and practices, great variability was present. Variability existed in the oral and written language proficiency of each child, the amount of information relayed to parents, the number of entries for each journal, the type of interaction involved in the journal writing, the content of conversations, and the probing skills of parents. For one kindergarten student, the journal was written in Spanish independently.

What is most obvious about the children's responses about what happened at school is that the day is viewed through the perspective of a five-year-old. So it is no surprise that for many of the students, the primary themes in their reporting revolved around food, friends and play. For example:

" May 11, 2006: Ramiro likes to play with his best friends who are Andres
and Fernando and also B.. He liked the chicken nuggets that they gave him
in the cafeteria with peaches." (Rosa)

" Andres is happy in school because he plays with his friend Ramiro, and Fernando and they play with cars and they cut with scissors." (Luisa)

General categories of curriculum were also noted by the students. Children talked about coloring, writing, singing songs, reading stories, learning letters, writing words, etc. While this provided parents with a general sense of the day, there was little specificity that could guide parents in extending learning to the home context.

It became apparent when viewing the journals that the process itself served as a tool for interaction between the students and their parents. In addition to the parents asking questions and the children responding, there was also a demonstration piece that children were eager to share with their parents. Children drew pictures of activities within their classrooms, words they knew how to spell, shapes, and colors with color words. The journals also chronicled the development of competence in students. For example, the journal captured Savannah's ability to learn about the calendar. It was cited seven times in her journal from April 10 – June 12, 2006.

April 17, 2006: " I can't learn the calendar very well."

May 2, 2006: " What she most liked today was to study the calendar."

May 9, 2006: " Today what I most liked was to practice the calendar… I did it alone…"

Savannah also documented her attempts to write about what she likes. Savannah wrote:

" The wod is the rrbb...rnbow" (The world is the rainbow – lyrics from a class song)

<div align="right">(Elisa)</div>

For Andres, his mother reported that he was most proud of his ability to learn his ABCs. No date provided: " Now I know how to say my ABCs... the teacher taught me and now I can." (Andres)

" He came home happy because now he knows the ABCs."   (Luisa)

This report coincided with reports from his teacher and the kindergarten mentor that Andres had been receiving Title I support three times a day at the end of the year because of a lag in his progress. His awareness of his developing competence aligned with school personnel's assessment that he did acquire most letters and sounds by the end of the year.

As the journal process progressed, the names of children's literature started to appear more frequently in the entries. Stories such as The Three Little Pigs, Curious George, Dr. Seuss, Sylvester the Donkey, and The Firetruck were described as well as their own creation of books including titles and sentences within their stories. Yet, language proficiency played a role in children's ability to retrieve information for their parents. Even with a variety of questioning strategies, some information was not retrievable. For example, Savannah drew a picture of a bee with the words, " the color is yellow and black" and her mother reported:

" Savannah says she doesn't know what they're doing in the school but she does these things..." (Elisa)

Thus, as Goldenberg notes (2005), the challenge for English Language Learners is that they are simultaneously learning the language in which they are being instructed. English Language Learners follow individual trajectories in language and literacy growth. Abella, the daughter of the Adalia, whose words about escaping violence in El Salvador were introduced earlier in this study, displayed advanced skills in English and Spanish reading and writing during the kindergarten year. She viewed the opportunity of journal writing as an avenue for expressing her thoughts and feelings. Written in Spanish, her journal initially responded to the prompts and she wrote:

" I like to see a movie in my class and I like to play and to sing and to dance and to read and to draw and to play."

She then moved to a line of thinking about behavior that remained the topic for the rest of her journal entry. A portion of her journal reads:

" And I like to play with my friends too but only with little girls who behave well but not with the ones who don't behave well because I don't like little girls who behave badly... And I behave well always, always. I go to school and I behave well there all day long. ... What I don't like is when a little boy when he kind of made a face when he saw me because I don't like to make a face and (illegible – something about making a green and bitter face)... I behave well in school but not badly – never." (Abella)

Thus, Abella was able to take her newly developed skills of written biliteracy and express her individual thoughts independent of any adult's intervention or supervision.

The role of language proficiency in recounting the day's events also became a focal point in the journal of Fernando. This journal will be analyzed by itself to demonstrate how the act of journaling aligned with underlying theoretical considerations proposed in Chapter Two. From a sociocultural perspective, this activity revealed how understanding is formed within the context of home, family and school: the confluence of three factors that results in meaning making. Geraldo started journaling with Fernando on May 5, 2006 and continued until June 14, 2006. When I met with Geraldo on 5/31/06 he reported that at first Fernando did not want to engage in the activity because he thought it was a negative thing, somehow reporting on bad behavior. After one week, he started to realize that the purpose was to give his parents an understanding of what happens during the school day and so he began to ask his father if they could do the journal each night. By the end of May, Geraldo stated that he thought it was a very good activity and that he was continuing to refine his work with it. He moved beyond the journal provided to him and used a spiral notebook for recording in more depth.

The topic of language use arose in my conversation with Geraldo when he observed that sometimes reports of the school day may make no sense to a parent and cannot inform because the terminology may be unclear with no referents for activities. For example, Fernando would say general topics such as "writing", " center", "options", "read a book", with no detail or explanation provided. For some of the words, such as "cubby", there may not be a Spanish word that can be substituted for explanation to their parents. Thus, Geraldo recommended that children need to be taught *how* to talk about

what they do; they don't necessarily have the skills to be able to talk about their school day.

In an attempt to improve the quality of Fernando's reports about school, his father coached him on how to know about knowing – metacognition. In thinking about how he was going to tell his Dad about what he did that day at school, he changed Fernando's awareness of school activities. For example, Geraldo suggested that when saying, " we read a book", think about the title of the book, who the characters are, and what happened in the story. Fernando's eye and ear for detail quickly advanced. Geraldo completed sixteen entries with Fernando that were replete with amazing detail for a five-year old student. This is the transcription of the journal entry from 5/30/06:

- He read a book about a Red Dog
- He greeted his friends and then they saluted the flag
- They did writing
- Fernando wrote about a bike ride with his friends and he drew it also, then he read it to the teacher
- They read after Fernando read, about construction trucks
- The teacher read a story about a woman and how people relate to all living animals
- And then in the work centers they did activities with numbers
- Afterwards, they went to the gym and they did exercises, they jumped, they climbed, they ran, etc. There were obstacles.
- They drew a rainbow and they colored the rainbow
- They did math figures and the exercise of the day was to organize shapes
- The teacher read a book to them about grasshoppers and they went home

Fernando's detailed reviews of the day provided a clear understanding of the school day for his father. His ability to recall each event with such preciseness is noteworthy for a five-year-old. Geraldo and Fernando took this project on as a mutually enjoyable joint endeavor that resulted in precise questioning strategies and coaching by his father and explicit revelations by Fernando. Thus, in an attempt to examine what children reveal about school to their parents, journaling afforded many opportunities for learning for the children, their parents and school personnel.

In summary, using Cummins' characterization of relationships between schools and families, I would characterize this activity as collaborative: parents were enabled to achieve more knowledge about kindergarten by exercising agency within the contexts of home and school; parents successfully gained access to specific kinds of knowledge such as curriculum, daily routines, and language to label newly acquired information by participating in practices that were recognized by the school. A pattern of interaction among the parents, students, Mrs. Brown and me created engagement beyond the possibilities that I had envisioned. The discourse surrounding this project placed parents and students in teaching roles. For example, students were able to showcase new skills for their parents and parents were able to coach their children about how to think about daily events in kindergarten. In this relationship with the Mrs. Brown and the researcher, there was no dominant group exercising power over a subordinate group. The purpose of the activity and the journals were provided, and the parents were free to interpret the activity individually. Parents took on the project and created their own process for communicating with their children about the school day. One parent, Geraldo, was able to make suggestions about teaching practices that would improve children's abilities to

tell about the day's events. Journaling with Spanish-speaking parents and their children seems to embody the basic tenets of critical literacy work: through this design, parents were afforded access to dominant forms, English oral and written language, while at the same time valuing and promoting diverse languages and literacies. This project served as an example of microinteractions in place.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the level of caring and knowing displayed by the parent participants in this study debunk stereotypical, deficit-driven notions of Spanish-speaking parents at Maplehurst Elementary School. To all parents, education had a personal meaning based on their own lived experiences and aspirations for their children. What all parents maintained was a firm desire for their children to study hard and to achieve in school. Parent perspectives of bilingualism seems to contradict discourse that predominates national and political thinking about immigrants. Rather than behaving as an ethnically marked group with just one country and one identity, the participants in this study valued bilingualism for themselves and their children. For themselves, they desired to learn English to help their children succeed in school by understanding the language of the curriculum and by improving communication patterns with school personnel. For their children, bilingualism represented the best of both worlds, both cultures.

Evidence of caring and knowing can be traced to early literacy experiences before entering kindergarten. This pattern of behavior continued during the kindergarten year, with a variety of home literacy practices that supported literacy development and

broadened parents' understanding of child development at this critical developmental stage. Rather than viewing literacy as a set of skills, literacy became embedded in the everyday lives of the families, with family members playing various roles in the process. As a result, by the end of the school year, parents increased their knowledge about kindergarten by participating in practices within their home and school communities.

Finally, the journal writing project defied the common but inadequate approach to partnerships between school and families that follows a unidirectional flow of information, with the school adhering to a "teacher-knows-best" philosophy. In this study, parents were able to inform their children and school personnel while gaining access to knowledge for themselves.

Many of the nine families in the study were dealing with issues in their lives such as long and irregular work hours, health concerns, crowded living conditions, relationship stresses within the family, and financial worries. Yet, very little of these concerns became a part of the study transcripts. Parents usually were very focused on their children and their children's education whenever they were in contact with the researcher. Mrs. Brown, the translator for this study, was very aware of these family issues and often acted as a conduit between the families and community agencies that could assist the families. Thus, having a 'cultural broker' available at the school afforded the study participants to get help with "life contexts" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) within the organizational framework of the school, permitting parents to address their family needs and focus on the educational needs of their children. By providing this type of support, the school empowered parents to advocate for their children in the school setting, developing a sense of efficacy in the education process. As Delgado-Gaitan

(1991) stated, assumptions that are rooted in deficit discourse depict parents who are lower-SES and/or culturally or linguistically diverse as uninvolved parents because they " have a different language, work long hours away from home, belong to different ethnic groups, or are just not interested" (p. 22). Yet, when support from the school was available, the parents in this study contended with their 'life contexts' and played an active role in the support of their children's education. Through a sociocultural lens, I had the opportunity to observe the interplay between individual motivation to be involved along with access to opportunities to participate in school events and practices that defines the notion of best practices.

In the next chapter, I will shift the emphasis from the parents to the school and analyze the critical role of the school in relationship with the families in this study. By exploring the patterns of interactions between educators and families within the school context, I will examine both the mindset of expectations, assumptions and goals that educators within this context bring to the task of educating culturally diverse students along with educational structures such as curriculum, programs and policies. Thus, micro-interactions will be at the heart of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE NATURE OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE FAMILIES AND THE

SCHOOL: WHAT MICRO-INTERACTIONS REVEALED ABOUT EDUCATIONAL

STRUCTURES AND EDUCATOR ROLE DEFINITIONS

> ...survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom
> he is dealing and... at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the
> subject-matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these
> capacities. The planning must be flexible enough to permit free play for individuality
> and yet firm enough to give direction towards continuous development of power.
>
> John Dewey

The Spanish-speaking parents in this study revealed through their actions and

their words that they care about their children's education and that they possess insights

about child development that lead to home practices and activity settings that promote

extended-family involvement in mastering kindergarten academic milestones. Yet, as the

John Dewey quote suggests, surveying the needs and capacities of a given set of parents

is not enough; the other part of the equation that leads to parent understanding of and

participation in school practices involves the role of the school in developing a context

and conditions that promote relationship-building between families and the school, giving

direction towards continuous development of power.

With so much national and local attention directed toward reversing the pattern of

school failure among culturally and linguistically diverse students, the nature of

relationships between schools and students and their families must be examined to get at

the deep structure of educational reform (Cummins, 2001). The nature of relations of power, coercive or collaborative, will affect the nature of interactions and the potential for student and parent development of identity and sense of efficacy in the educational process. Cummins contends that patterns of school failure reflect coercive relations of power that result in differential access to quality education among social groups.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the nature of interactions between the study participants and the school during the 2005-2006 school year. I will view these interactions through Cummins' framework for understanding micro-interactions between educators and students and their families. This framework submits that "culturally diverse students are empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools. These interactions are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to four institutional dimensions of schools "(p.205). The four dimensions of schooling are: 1) cultural/linguistic incorporation; 2) community participation; 3) pedagogy; and 4) assessment.

I will examine the findings in this chapter by considering these four dimensions of schooling, the interrelationship of each dimension, and how they impacted the way parents in this study perceive the school and develop a sense of efficacy in supporting their children's education in relationship with the school. The primary focus will center on the first two dimensions. I will look at the intersection between the parents and opportunities for exercising agency within the context of Maplehurst Elementary School. The substance of this interaction will consist of educational structures in place that are formed by national and local forces as well as educators' assumptions and expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families that lead to the

possibilities that parents have for establishing relationships with the school and effecting

the course of their role in their children's education and their perceptions of the school.

Dimensions of Schooling

Cultural/Linguistic Incorporation

The extent to which a student's language and culture is integrated into a school

contributes to both the implicit message given about how one's language and culture is

viewed by the school as well as the explicit, operational reality of how one is able to

communicate within a system; the ability to gain entry and take advantage of something

such as educational services or membership within a community. For the participants in

this study, language represented a surface form of access to the school that is necessary

but not sufficient for developing a relationship that results in parent engagement with

one's child and the school. A common language is a prerequisite for: 1) access to the

kindergarten curriculum, materials and school practices; 2) access to school personnel

who can assess the progress each child is making and report information to parents; and

3) access to potential for relationship-building between the family and the school. From

a research perspective, the mediating roles of Charlotte Brown and the Spanish Parent

Literacy Group were instrumental for getting at parent perspectives and understanding of

the kindergarten year and how those roles contributed to an additive orientation to

families' language and culture.

Charlotte Brown

As was stated in Chapter Three, Mrs. Brown has established credibility within the

educational and Latino community in Derryfield. She has an understanding of the

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Spanish-speaking families that includes an appreciation of parent education levels, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic input that is comprehensible. Although she is a white, native English-speaking educator, her long affiliation with the Latino community enables her to translate between her ethnic and cultural group and the Latinos in the Maplehurst Elementary School community. Mrs. Brown's capacity to establish rapport and build trust among the parents in the kindergarten parent group transferred to the participants in the dissertation study. In the spring, their perspectives of her job revealed their respect for the role she plays in their lives and the lives of their children. The nature of their responses indicated that the job of translating does not adequately capture the affective factors that constitute the sum and substance of her role in the school.

" We learn, thanks to you, many things…you taught us how to be able to communicate with parents, and with the teachers, and with the kids… you're always outside to remind us if there's a meeting or we have to fill out this paper or something… and I've been very happy because you've kept us in mind… and all that motivates us to be here.. like you and you, like everybody" (pointing to Mrs. Brown and the researcher)   (Margarita) Interview: 6/13/06

" It's very hard work … to translate… she helps us a lot with problems at school."

(Rosa)   Interview: 4/19/06

"Thanks to the reading teachers and to Charlotte the translator for supporting us and taking care of our kids." (Rosa's note to Mrs. Brown and the researcher at the end of her son's journal) June, 2006

" I have felt a sense of confidence and trust with you and that (you) have a

very special way of treating us. If they were talking of changing you (Mrs. Brown)

to another school or something there would be lots of signatures to say "no". The

kids talk about you ... they notice that you are here and they say nice things about

you." (Juanita) Interview: 4/14/06

The role of Mrs. Brown and her relationship with the Spanish-speaking parents at

Maplehurst Elementary must be viewed with respect to educational structures that are in

place and are formed by relations of power in the broader society. For example, as I

detailed in Chapter One, the national push for English-only programming and the lack of

acknowledgement of bilingualism in national legislation gives a message to linguistically

diverse students and their parents that their home language and culture have no place in

school. This subtractive view of bilingualism has the potential for developing parent

perspectives of the schooling process as coercive. By providing a school professional

who can communicate in the home language of the students and families, Mrs. Brown

represented an educational structure in place at Maplehurst Elementary that can mitigate

some of the harsh realities of being a minority language parent in a school.

Spanish Parent Literacy Group

In addition to the services provided by Mrs. Brown, the Spanish Parent Literacy

Group also contributed to an additive orientation towards students' and families'

language and culture. Since the initial design of the study, the Spanish Parent Literacy

Group was viewed as a vehicle for getting at parent perspectives of the kindergarten year.

Yet, by the nature of the program, it also contributed to parents' perspectives of the school. Although the program was described in Chapter Three, I will now review the highlights of the program and how the program contributed to the additive orientation toward students' and parents' language incorporation into the school.

Spanish-speaking family members of kindergarten students at Maplehurst Elementary School were invited to meetings that occurred monthly at the beginning of the school day and usually 90 minutes was allotted for the agenda. Initially, an effort was made to contact by phone all the parents in kindergarten who were listed on the Home Language Survey as speaking Spanish at home. However, as the year progressed, the invitations to the meetings were made in writing, in oral exchanges on school grounds, and by telephone and word of mouth and became a fixed group of parents. The average attendance ranged from 8-12 parents with at least three parents who were not part of the study. Families would drop their children off for class and then come to the meeting.

The protocol that was followed each meeting involved refreshments and then a greeting to the parents followed by Mrs. Brown's discussion of any upcoming meetings or events. I then retrieved the children from their classrooms so that they could sit with their families in attendance. Sometimes that involved younger siblings, parents, grandparents, and guardians. Next, I introduced language and literacy materials that correlated with the children's language and literacy development and the kindergarten curriculum. I would discuss the significance of certain skills, model engagement with the materials, and then the parents worked with their children. All discussion and materials were presented in bilingual form.

Mrs. Brown and I circulated while the parents worked with their children. We praised the children for their efforts and observed the interactions between the families and the students. Parents always had the opportunity to comment or ask questions during the meetings. Someone observing a typical meeting would see a high level of activity: parents were speaking to other parents and their children and often siblings were talking or moving to and fro. I took on the role of facilitator at this point in each meeting. At the end of the session, I took all the children back to their classrooms. Mrs. Brown was usually barraged at this time with other parent questions and concerns that extended beyond academics. Ecological issues of family, job-related concerns, housing, and health were topics of conversation during these exchanges with the translator at the end of the sessions.

All parent participants in the study pointed to the kindergarten parent group as their key source for learning about kindergarten. Parents indicated that participating in the parent group helped them negotiate their roles in supporting their children's educational growth. Information about the content of the curriculum, strategies for teaching the key concepts of kindergarten, and materials to enrich the language and literacy development of their children was provided through the vehicle of the parent group. As the parents reported in the last chapter, fundamental elements of the kindergarten literacy curriculum were presented on a monthly basis and the parents took that information and incorporated it into home practices.

" Mostly what I've learned is from meetings when I come here because then I share with my daughter… I learn a lot that way…" (Margarita) Interview: 6/13/06

(Referring to how different the year would have been without the parent group

meetings):

" The kinds of meetings that we have – we wouldn't have somebody

sort of at my side to be able to tell me what is going on, to explain to me.

When we have meetings, that's what I do at home. The meetings that we have

with you... that's when I get materials, things that I can use at home."

(Elisa) Interview: 4/10/06

Establishing a relationship with school personnel through participation in the

parent group created a climate for parents that viewed their language and culture in an

additive way; there was no attempt to replace one's primary language and culture in the

process of assimilating one into a dominant culture. It's interesting to note that parents

pointed to this program as their primary source for learning about kindergarten; their

development of perspectives of kindergarten and the school were impacted by the work

of Charlotte Brown and the Spanish Parent Literacy Group; yet, no parent specifically

mentioned the availability of Spanish translation as a key factor in these perceptions. The

availability of bilingual exchanges was woven into the fabric of these interactions,

creating an orientation by the school towards parents that was unspoken but spoke

volumes. As the voices of these parents indicate, a school climate that embraces parents'

language and culture sets the tone for interaction patterns that will follow.

In a note at the end of her son's journal, Luisa wrote:

" I think that the school has given a lot towards my son's learning. He's progressed

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a great deal. I'm really thankful and grateful to all the teachers that they've had patience with him because he didn't know so much as now. Maybe he doesn't know so very much but I have seen the progress that he has had. Also, I am very grateful to Charlotte that she has helped me a lot. She was the first person that helped me with Andres' learning problem and the skills that he has.

"To the reading teacher: the reading teacher (researcher) is very good because with her advice and her activities one knows more about how to help our children and to have patience with them. One is impressed with all the work that the teachers do because it is very difficult to have patience with so many children. Thank you very much for everything. Congratulations – reading teacher."

(Luisa) June, 2006

Another mother referred to her perception of the climate at Maplehurst Elementary School as a determining factor in her housing decisions. Referring to a school experience of a friend's daughter at another elementary school in the city, she said:

" We've been looking for bigger apartments, down closer to Main Street so there the kids would go to Hilldale. But they want to take their child out of that school because it's very discriminatory, very racist... that's why I didn't take the apartment there, that's why I wanted to continue here." (Rosa) Interview: 4/19/06

Cummins (2001) purports that even when educational programming is English-only, the deep structure of a school can still function with an additive orientation towards minority language students and their families. As the parents' responses indicated, their interactions with Mrs. Brown and the Spanish Parent Literacy Group resulted in perspectives of the school that viewed their interactions as collaborative; they had the opportunity to expand their knowledge of kindergarten so that they could be in partnership with the school. Providing linguistic access implied a sense of welcoming and honoring to parents that served as a piece of the groundwork for developing patterns of interaction between the parents and the school.

Community Participation

Another dimension of schooling that Cummins (2001) maintains as a key contributor to parents' developing a sense of efficacy in relationship with the school is community participation and opportunities for relationship-building. He argues that, " students from subordinated communities will be empowered in the school context to the extent that their parents are empowered through their interactions with the school " (p.214). For the participants in this study, opportunities for participation took a variety of forms: Even Start, the Spanish Parent Literacy Group, Parent-Teacher Conferences, and the Parent-Teacher Group (PTG). Having already discussed the Spanish Parent Literacy Group, I will now present findings on parent perceptions that developed as a result of participation in Even Start, Parent-Teacher Conferences, and the PTG.

Evenstart

From discussion with the participants, it became apparent that some of the parents in this study were already primed to establish connections with the school and engage in the education of their kindergarten children at Maplehurst Elementary School due to their preschool experiences with the Even Start program. Five of the nine participating families were involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program that is funded by the federal government and implemented by the Federal Projects program in the Derryfield Public Schools. During the years that these children attended the program, Derryfield had been awarded the grant for a program that emphasized Latino families. Thus, Spanish-speaking home visitors and bilingual language services were available for the children and their families. Although the children's educational programming was not bilingual, a Spanish-speaking teaching assistant acted as a bridge for communication in the classroom.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program was authorized in 1989 as Part B of Chapter 1 of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). When Even Start was reauthorized in 1994, the intention of the program focused on breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by:

1) " helping parents become full partners in educating their children"

2) "helping parents improve their own literacy and basic educational skills"

3) "assisting children in reaching their full potential as learners"

(Retrieved 11/24/06: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EvenStart/ch1program/html)

While rooted in the language that dates back to President Johnson's War on Poverty, a perspective that reflects a deficit stance towards low income and minority language

families, five of the nine families in this dissertation study had already experienced a unique early schooling experience for their children with accompanying educational programming for parents that recognized their native language of Spanish and provided services that allowed the families to fully engage in the program. While promoting the development of English language and literacy development, it simultaneously incorporated the parents' and childrens' native language of Spanish.

As Miguel, Fernando's grandfather, noted in the fall interview when asked what he wanted the school to know about him, his response was:

" With Even Start, they really kept us in touch with the school – what was going on. If there was anything we could do to help, if we had any questions or problems, then we could get in touch with the school."

(Miguel) Interview: 10/28/05

The impact of this early relationship-building within the context of school-based programming at Even Start was sustained through the kindergarten year. As one parent remarked during the spring interview when asked about her knowledge of strategies that she uses with her child to get him engaged in academic tasks:

" Even Start had lots of talks about that kind of stuff. We did that. That program is good. It taught me a lot." (Isabel) Interview: 4/10/06

" When (we) were in Even Start… we attended in Even Start too… we learned lots of

really nice things.   (Margarita) Interview: 6/13/06

So for a majority of the participating families in the study, the stage was set for

receptivity to the notion of developing a collaborative relationship with personnel at the

elementary school. If families are to become engaged in schools with high populations of

low-income and culturally and linguistic diverse populations, the transition from

preschool to kindergarten requires conscious planning and outreach. For that reason, at

the end of the 2004-2005 pilot study, all the Even Start families who would be attending

Maplehurst Elementary School and another neighborhood school in the fall were invited

to attend an orientation about the programming that would be available when their

children entered kindergarten the following September.

Through my experiences with the pilot study, I found that personal contact was

the most effective means of communicating with families and inviting them to school

meetings and functions. Written communication in Spanish without the personal contact

was less effective in terms of parent response. The initiatives we made in reaching out to

the Spanish-speaking parents in the spring before kindergarten continued throughout the

2005-2006 school year. Mrs. Brown played a vital role in this undertaking.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

The role of Mrs. Brown took on greater significance when parents' expectations

for formal meetings and conferences with teachers were not realized. As Rimm-Kaufman

& Pianta's (2005) findings regarding the change in frequency and type of communication

patterns from preschool to kindergarten cautioned, without the intervening variables of people and programs that focus on communicating with families about school and developing collaborative relationships that seek mutual understanding, a pattern of misunderstanding and lack of engagement may evolve. During the school year of this study, parent-teacher conferences served as an example of the importance of establishing effective communication patterns between home and school, preventing the initiation of a pattern of miscommunication or lack of parental involvement.

Of the eight parents who were asked about the frequency of teacher meetings that they anticipated having during the year, five parents reported that at least three meetings were expected. The other three parents were unsure of what the frequency would be and one parent expected to meet with her son's teacher every month. However, only one formal parent conference was scheduled for the school district during the 2005-2006 school year. The dates for the school conferences were October 11-12, 2005 with only Mrs. Brown available for the Spanish-speaking parents of students in grades K-5 who needed a translator. The conference time request schedule was sent home to parents with first, second and third preferences. However, conferences were scheduled concurrently, making it impossible for Mrs. Brown to meet everyone's needs. Consequently, only five of the study's participants were able to meet with their child's teacher and Mrs. Brown at the designated times. Communication presented itself as a real obstacle for home-school communication due to the compacted time for all grade conferences and the limited translation services available.

Analysis of the transcripts from fall conferences I attended indicated that the bulk of the transcript was often a monologue by the teacher about specials that children attend

like art and music, classroom routines, kindergarten curriculum, and the continuum of

development and instructional practices to expect. Parents frequently responded " hmmm,

si, oh ok" after Mrs. Brown translated a lengthy explanation by the teacher.

However, teachers did have the opportunity for shared learning by listening to

what the parents were saying. Parents took the opportunity to inform the teacher about

home practices that reinforced classroom instruction. For instance, when one teacher,

Mrs. Gallo, asked Juanita about clapping syllables for developing phonological

awareness, she responded, " ... he does it with the spoon at supper." When the teacher

proceeded to talk about Humpty Dumpty, Vicenzo's mother, Juanita, replied, " yeah, he

has a book at home." And when the teacher talked about retelling the parts of a story,

Juanita said,

" when he reads us something, he doesn't really know how to read but he says a lot." to

which his teacher responded, " that's great and that's what he should be doing."

When Andres' teacher asked his parents, " ... do you know nursery rhymes like

Humpty Dumpty, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star?", his parents responded, " Every day he

sings these things... also he sings the abcs, the alphabet... and teensy weensy spider..."

When his teacher spoke of a story she read about red lights and green lights, Andres'

father replied, " when (we) go driving, so he explains the traffic lights to them... he says

what the red light's for, what the green light's for..."

Participating in parent conferences also gave the parents an opportunity to provide

teachers with a longitudinal view of the student's development. For example, when

Andres' teacher observed that " ... because he does a nice job participating... because we go around in a circle and he does do it...", his mother was delighted as she recalled, " last year, we were visiting over at Even Start, he didn't want to participate so that's tremendous that he's participating..."

For Javier's teacher, the parent conference provided an opportunity for his teacher to learn about the communication dynamics and history in his household. When his grandfather asked, " He lift the hand?... cuz he confuse sometime the language but I don't know if he respond you when you ask, but he understand what you ask him. Or sometime he think before he answer." The teacher answered, " yeah, he does... I think he's processing it and it takes him two seconds and then it will come out." From this discussion, Javier's grandfather revealed that Javier's mother is deaf and that Javier communicates in three languages: Spanish, English and sign language. With this revelation, Javier's slight delay in answering questions in class took on a new light.

Thus, the dimensions of language and community participation overlapped; for some parents, the concern of language access was addressed and parents were able to communicate with their children's teachers. Yet, this access to teachers for non-English speaking parents was not available to all parents. Parents' relationship with Charlotte Brown and the Spanish Parent Literacy Group facilitated the delivery of services to make communication possible for some parents. Currently, the needs of non-English speaking parents and the potential for mutual communication through parent-teacher conferences is limited by the lack of access to translation services.

As I reflect on this situation, I am reminded of Freire's (2002) thoughts on the nature of dialogue and how it relates to people who are marginalized in a society.

" I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing." (p.17)

"... To impede communication is to reduce men to the status of "things"- and this is a job for oppressors..." (p.128)

For the rest of the parents in the school, there were no more formal scheduled occasions for meeting with the teachers during the year to discuss student progress. However, in an attempt to enhance connections between parents and teachers, the parents in the Spanish Parent Literacy Group were offered the opportunity for a June conference if they desired with Mrs. Brown and the researcher arranging mutually acceptable times. The kindergarten teachers were willing to meet with parents before school, after school and during their planning times. Five participating families scheduled formal spring conferences. It is valuable to closely examine the exchanges that occurred during the spring conferences because evidence of collaborative orientation abounded. There was a willingness on the part of teachers to work closely with Mrs. Brown and the researcher to communicate effectively with parents in a non-condescending way. Parents demonstrated an efficacy, a capacity to produce a desired effect, for the best interest of their children.

A factor that changed parents' ability to be informed and prepared for the conference was the introduction prior to the conference of the Kindergarten Progress Report, in bilingual form, that teachers complete each trimester. The progress report informs parents about their child's progress in the key areas of: alphabetic principle, word recognition/vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, reading enjoyment, writing, language development, mathematics, social development, work habits, and physical

development. The progress report evolved as a result of implementation of a new language arts curriculum in July, 2005. In response to No Child Left Behind requirements, state and local curriculum and instructional expectations were revamped, resulting in a detailed set of expectations for each area of language arts at each grade level, including kindergarten. Language and literacy development is decomposed into its component parts. This view of literacy as a set of skills to be transmitted in isolation is unlike the reported practices that were happening at home through play. As a result of a narrow and constricted view of literacy, this pedagogical approach to teaching language and literacy especially challenges English Language Learners who must then develop language and literacy in the absence of ample opportunities for meaningful communicative interaction.

At the suggestion of the researcher, parents reviewed the form that teachers would be using to assess their children and four of the parents completed the form prior to the conference, assessing how they think their child had progressed in each of the developmental areas. This proved to be a valuable tool for improving the quality of informational exchange during the conference. A case in point, was Geraldo's conference on June 7, 2006. His son's teacher referred to her completed Kindergarten Progress Report and demonstrated how Fernando had made progress across the three trimesters. His teacher stated:

" ...so like at the end of the first trimester, we wrote down everything that he needed to know up to this point... and (you) can see that he was just starting school and needed a lot of skills to work on... and he's worked really, really

hard. So at the end of the second trimester there were just a few things that he

needed to work on... and at the end of the third trimester, he's well on his way,

he's mastered all the skills to be successful in first grade... he's done a really,

really good job. And I was looking at this (the progress report that Geraldo had filled

out) and you wrote down, 'recognizing vowels as vowels', that's very

good because over here (pointing to her assessment record of the report card)...

and the researcher said, " a perfect match".

Father: The only thing right here (pointing to the progress report) is that he didn't

know them (vowels) by name, but he knows they are the vowels... that's the way

it is, but he knows the sound and everything... I ask him, he stops, I say, " let me

give you a hint" and then he picks up on it..."   Parent Conference: 6/07/06

Geraldo, Fernando's father, was able to take his understanding of the kindergarten

curriculum and developmental milestones for kindergarten, assess his child's

development, and share his understanding with the teacher. Through a relationship-

building process that progressed through the year, Geraldo was able to utilize a tool

provided by Mrs. Brown and the researcher to enhance the communication potential of a

parent-teacher conference. Geraldo's assessment of his son's abilities when combined

with the teacher's evaluation resulted in a collaboration between the family and the

school. There was an exchange of ideas between the two parties with input shared.

Geraldo was also able to make some teacher suggestions based on his experience with the

journal writing project:

Father: And I was telling her (researcher), you know one of the things is like

to have the description of the activity for the parents. It will be helpful because,

Ok, when he mentioned the book bucket I mean for book bucket I understand that

a bucket with books or something... another activity that he mentioned is

'centers' so probably if the teachers get together and describe 'centers' means,

they get at a round table or groups of people or probably you guys did it and I

didn't know about it...

Teacher: Yeah, I did it at the beginning of the year... the book buckets, that

started in January and I don't think I did write about that...

<p align="right">Parent Conference: 6/07/06</p>

Ramiro's mother also came prepared to the parent conference. When she was

asked about the progress report that she had filled out prior to the conference, she

responded that there weren't any areas of concern for her...

" no, I think that he could do just about everything."

To this the teacher replied:

" He has done very, very well." (mother giggling with acknowledgement)

At the beginning of the year, he was kind of quiet and shy because he didn't have

the English, the language, and now he just talks all the time. He's really good,

yeah. He's done very, very well."

Mother: " He really learned a lot, he progressed a lot..."

Teacher: "... so really if you start at the top and you go down (on the assessment

page) that's how he progresses and then at the bottom is just the reading part,

concepts of words... he's right where he should be I think for first grade... he's

really, really strong."   Parent Conference: 6/9/06

Santiago's mother, Isabel, attended the conference and listened to his teacher's

report of progress made. Based on tests administered, Santiago scored above the cut-off

point for summer school. Through the mediation of Mrs. Brown, the teacher

reconsidered his enrollment in the summer program.. Ms.Demers said:

" I wouldn't object. If he's over 90 (point score), he technically doesn't qualify

but if she (mother) wants to, I would take him, it would benefit him, I mean it

wouldn't hurt..."

Isabel then explained her reasoning for this request:

" It's hard for me too because I don't know the sounds... it's hard for me to help

him so it would help him... if he could..."

The teacher replied:

" I understand totally..."   Parent Conference: 6/19/06

Isabel was able to successfully advocate for her son with the help of Mrs. Brown with the

sole intention of improving his academic achievement.

Luisa, Andres' mother, brought many issues up for discussion during the parent conference on June 8, 2006. She completed the progress report and had many concerns that she wanted to discuss. Her first concern, dating back to her concerns during the fall conference, was that he didn't speak very much. The gap in communication between Andres' teacher and Luisa during the school year is revealed. His teacher responded:

" He talks a lot more now. Even though on paper his scores are low, there are things that are not on paper that show a tremendous growth... like everyday we we do writing, and I've approached it from many different angles, and even though he can't do the writing himself, his comprehension is very, very good and he understood what I wanted from him. I'm really pleased about that... I can't remember when that started happening, somewhere between January and March, it's all of a sudden I realized he understood what I was talking about and he was able to draw pictures to show that... very good ideas." 6/8/06

The collaboration on the part of the educational support staff was evident with his teacher indicating that since May he received Title I service three times a day in an attempt to bolster his knowledge of letters and sounds with positive results achieved in a month's time. Luisa concurred that from her work with him at home :

" What seems to be a struggle for him is pronouncing the 'g' and the 'j' cuz I work with him and that's what seems to confuse him, that seems to be the biggest struggle." 6/8/06

The topic of summer school was mentioned by Mrs. Brown and there was confusion

about papers that had been signed for Andres and his two older sisters who had recently

arrived from Mexico. Although his teacher did not remember receiving any signed

permission forms from his mother, Luisa asserted her typical procedure for processing

school paperwork:

" If there's something for me to sign, then I sign it and then I return it but

the only thing I remember is the paper for the two girls..." 6/8/06

The issue was resolved by Mrs. Brown with Luisa and the teacher agreeing that summer

school attendance was a wise decision for Andres. In the middle of the conference, Mrs.

Brown mentioned that Luisa had called her in the morning because she was worried

because he was sick. Mrs. Brown assured Luisa that when she checked on him in class

that he was smiling and happy. A discussion of honey and lemon to treat his cough

followed. Luisa then asked if Andres is very much behind all the other kids. His teacher

responded:

" yeah, he is behind all the other kids, but the language is part of it, and he missed a lot

of school in the beginning."   6/8/06

However, she quickly stressed that he is now retaining the alphabet and letter sounds.

Luisa asked:

" So what can I focus on most to help him at home so he kind of comes back a little, recuperates?"

Teacher :   " … remembering his letters, writing his last name…"

<div align="right">Parent Conference: 6/8/06</div>

Luisa's impetus for asking if Andres is really very behind was a call from the clinic that he has attended for more than three years where they are concerned about Andres' development and wanted to know if she wanted a referral to the speech therapist at the hospital. Luisa delayed her decision and stated that she wanted to talk to the school first and find out what they thought. A relationship of trust seemed to be secured. A conversation ensued about his speech and language development between Luisa and his teacher with the decision made to monitor his growth and delay a referral for diagnostic speech and language services.

To sum up the productive and collaborative atmosphere present during this parent-teacher conference, Luisa acknowledged that she and her family were talking about moving but it was going to be farther away in another school district within the city and Luisa concluded that " Andres is finally comfortable and he has his friends, and to move him there, he'd just fall apart." And the teacher added, " Plus, the way the first grade program is going to be next year, he's going to have that intervention piece."

As these parent-teacher exchanges indicate, change occurred in the patterns of involvement and communication between the parents and their children's teachers. Instead of a unilateral presentation of information, a mutual understanding of perspectives and concerns was accomplished. Instead of being "worlds apart" (Lightfoot,

1978), the parents and teachers were able to gain access to each other's worlds within the context of a collaborative relationship. The intervening variable that made it achievable was the mediating potential of Mrs. Brown and affiliation with the Spanish kindergarten parent group. Parent- teacher conferences served as one indicator of construct validity in this study. Moving beyond just anecdotal and descriptive collections, the analysis of these conferences reveals the change that occurred in Spanish-speaking parents' understanding of kindergarten, with particular emphasis on language and literacy, their ability to construct a role for supporting their children and advocating for them, all within the context of a school environment that helped promote collaboration between home and school.

Although the thrust of this study revolved around parent perception of the kindergarten year within the context of a relationship with the school, an offshoot of this increased understanding and engagement is student achievement. Consequently, report cards were available on the last day of school for eight of the nine students involved in the study and they were entered as a piece of the database for this study. The report cards confirm student growth over the course of the kindergarten year and across the areas of social development, work habits, language development, reading readiness, mathematics readiness and physical development. This report card was combined with the Kindergarten Progress Report which provides more detailed information within each category.

Report cards were available for review on the last day of school for eight of the kindergarten students of parents involved in the study. For six of the eight students whose families participated in the study and the Spanish kindergarten parent group, all areas on

the report card and progress report indicated "satisfactory" or "making progress". Gracia, received the same assessment on her report card, but the teacher indicated 'having difficulty' in the area of word knowledge and usage. Andres also received 'satisfactory' or 'making progress' in all areas on the report card but there were several indicators of 'having difficulty' on the more detailed progress report. This specific information was discussed with his mother during the June parent conference. It is interesting to note that for three of the parents who requested the June parent-teacher conference, the teacher gave thanks to the parents for helping their children at home. The validation of what these parents had done for their children was conferred by the teacher.

Parent Attendance at School Organizational Meetings

Attendance at the Spanish kindergarten parent group and the whole school Parent-Teacher Group (PTG) is another way that parents demonstrated engagement with the school and developed a sense of efficacy in supporting their children's education. There were ten official meetings of the Spanish parent kindergarten group with accompanying attendance records. On average, monthly attendance at the Spanish parent group was ten parents. The PTG had monthly meetings but only five months of attendance records were recorded. Three white, English-speaking women shared the leadership role for that organization. Yet, the attendance records indicate that the overwhelming majority of attendees were Spanish-speaking women, some of whom were participants in this study. It is now necessary for Mrs. Brown to attend all the PTG meetings so that the three chairpersons of the group can communicate with the parents in attendance. In terms of parent perceptions, during a working session with two mothers from the Spanish parent

group in May, they asked if the PTG is only for Hispanics because it is only Hispanics who attend.

On June 9, 2006, my field notes from the PTG meeting indicated that there were more than twenty parents present, all of whom were Latino with the exception of one parent. It was noted that all but one of the people attending the meeting had had a relationship with Mrs. Brown and/or the researcher at Maplehurst Elementary School within the past two years. Thus, the pattern of an active and increasing Latino parent involvement in the Spanish parent group and the PTG is clear. The relationships that have been fostered through the pilot study in 2004-05, the 2005-06 program, and the general bond that Mrs. Brown has with the Latino community within the school have resulted in a transfer to engagement with whole-school organizational processes. However, the leadership does not reflect the membership, perhaps reflecting relationships in the wider society that are entrenched in this organization. When I asked Mrs. Brown about the leadership history of the group, she replied, " I guess that's the way it's always been."

In the next section I will examine teachers' role definitions for the education of minority language students and their families and how those role definitions constructed teacher perceptions of Spanish-Speaking parents' understanding of and involvement in the kindergarten year. The dimensions of language and culture, community participation, and orientation to teaching and assessment of bilingual students will be incorporated into the discussion.

Teacher Perceptions of Spanish-Speaking Parents' Understanding of and Involvement in the Kindergarten Year

The three participating kindergarten teachers in this study represent different points along a continuum in terms of kindergarten teaching experience. As the chart indicates, Ms. Demers and Ms. Barlow are in their second year of teaching and Mrs. Gallo is a veteran kindergarten teacher. The three teachers estimated that 21 students in the three classes were from Spanish-speaking homes with eight of the nine study families enrolled in their classes. Interview questions centered around parent access to the curriculum, forms of communication between home and school, English and Spanish language proficiency and patterns of use by parents, and types of known parent engagement and support at school and at home.

Figure 6.1 Teacher Demographics		
Teacher	Years of Experience	Participating Students and Parents
Ms. Demers	2	Javier Miguel and Mercedes Santiago Isabel
Ms. Barlow	2	Abella Adalia
Mrs. Gallo	20 +	Gracia Margarita Savannah Elisa Ramiro Rosa Fernando Geraldo and Maria Andres Luisa
Non-Participating Teacher	3	Vincenzo Juanita

There was a consensus that Charlotte and the need for translation services is critical for maintaining communication between school and home. All three teachers

noted that they have used Charlotte's services for translating notices, class newsletters, and face-to-face meetings with parents during parent conferences and special situations that arose with particular students. As one teacher stated:

" Charlotte helped an awful lot. If they don't know English you do need a translator because I don't know a word in Spanish... which is terrible but..."
" Like notices and stuff from the school... if you send them home in Spanish, then they know fine –as long as they are translated into Spanish because sometimes if they get the English, they'll ask a million questions, " What's this? What's this?"

(Ms. Demers) Interview: 4/14/06

When asked if there are a lot of notices that still go home that are primarily English, she responded, " Yes". The issue of language access also surfaced with Ms. Barlow when she talked about the curriculum trifold that goes home in September." It's just a guideline of what's gonna be taught for the year and what's expected for them to know by the end of the year." Although this is a critical source of information for parents, Ms. Barlow was unsure if a Spanish version is available.

Newsletters are a typical form of communication between the school and parents in kindergarten. Mrs. Gallo thought all the kindergarten teachers wrote newsletters but that the practice was inconsistent in terms of the number of communications sent home, the content, and the availability of the newsletters in Spanish. For her practice, she indicated that Charlotte has interpreted them and that she sends home English and Spanish versions.

" Well, it's once a month... I always talk about... I give a general thing about what we've been doing in class, whatever literacy things we've been doing, what specific like what letters we're working on, that kind of thing, and math things that we're working on... and then I talk about special projects we might be doing... I always give advice for the parents, some little tidbit."

" ... but I do them just once a month because I know in general our parents don't read things... once a month is enough... and a lot of them will ask Charlotte about it and ask her about it... because what happens is once a month something goes home that they've made that I want them to use at home to play with, whether it's finger puppets, or hand puppets or stories that they've written that they can do at home."

(Mrs. Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

The teacher responses to these questions indicate there is consensus about the need for translation services and the desire for the optimal condition of all written communication being forwarded home in a language that can be comprehended. Yet, there seems to be a level of acceptance that conditions are what they are and everyone does the best that they can. Unfortunately for non-English speaking parents, communication that is forwarded home in English only represents missed opportunities for understanding aspects of the school curriculum, practices and policies. The kindergarten teacher with the most experience seemed to hold a deficit perspective of all the parents in this context, not just the Spanish-speaking parents. Her response about sending the newsletters just once a month because "... I know in general our parents don't read things..." gets at the heart of a deficit perspective: failure to see the individual

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capacities and potential of parents. Assumptions about home practices and literacy levels ruled perception.

Teachers were also questioned about what they thought the Spanish-speaking families in their classes this year considered important for children to know in kindergarten, the responses varied. The less experienced teachers were less sure about what the parents understood.

" I think the alphabet, they all know that they should know the alphabet. They know that they need to know their numbers and counting... they've had a lot of colors and stuff... they weren't sure about letter sounds so I told them letter sounds go along with alphabet knowledge and stuff like that."

(Ms. Demers) Interview: 4/14/06

" I would assume just probably just letters, shapes and colors... what I thought it was before I came in... definitely not the phonemic awareness pieces and all these things that they probably haven't even heard of ... because I know even it's my second year but even after going through schooling all those pieces weren't addressed as major as they are now."   (Ms. Barlow) Interview: 5/18/06

Mrs. Gallo had more definite opinions about parents' understanding of the curriculum and the nature of kindergarten in 2005-2006; moreover, she was clear about what she wanted to communicate to the parents about the curriculum. Again, her perspectives

regarding the parents' abilities to understand the curriculum were limiting with her model of information flow being unidirectional in nature.

.

> I don't think that they really know what they should know... what they think
>
> is important... I think what they think is important is very, very, very basic
>
> things. "... because they come in so unprepared so I think they still think of
>
> kindergarten as a playtime activity... they'll be learning how to write their name
>
> and learning their alphabet might be some of their very basic goals... what impresses
>
> them the most is the art projects that they make... you know, that kind
>
> of thing.   (Mrs. Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

Commenting on what the key curriculum ideas she wants to communicate to parents, she replied:

> ... needing to learn how to write their first and last names, knowing their
>
> alphabet and their sounds, being really solid on that, identifying through pictures
>
> beginning and ending sounds... eventually writing that, writing stories with I
>
> beginning and ending sounds are the most crucial things... I think if they can at
>
> least have an understanding of that... the whole phonemic awareness piece, that
>
> would be another basic thing... and just a love of stories... loving to tell stories,
>
> looking at books, reading, however they interpret reading.
>
>   (Mrs. Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

Eight of the nine parents in this study required Charlotte to be present to allow communication of any consequence to occur. Teacher interpretation of parent language use of English varied among the three teachers with the responses falling along the continuum from limited English proficiency being a problem to English language usage being "pretty good". Ms. Demers noted that limited English proficiency presented difficulty:

" … but I do know that some parents do find it a little frustrating that they

can't… you know… they'll read to their kids but then they don't know the English

to translate it for them."   (Ms. Demers) Interview: 4/14/06

Ms. Barlow recognized that there had to be communication difficulty based on the level of English proficiency that she had observed in the parents in her class, but she acknowledged the role of Charlotte Brown and how indispensable she is to her parents.

I would assume they would have to be affected (by limited English proficiency)

but my parents have been great. I've had a really good year and they came to the

conferences, I see them in the morning, they're very kind, they seem like they want

to know what's going on and I know they feel comfortable going to Charlotte, very

comfortable, which is great because they have that.

                                    (Ms. Barlow) Interview: 5/18/06

Mrs. Gallo perceived the parents' English language skills as sufficient for communication with her. Superficial communication was inferred with the assumption that parents were not expecting any communication of substance.

" ... yeah, I didn't think that was a really big deal. I think they all spoke English enough... I could tell them some little thing about their child and they were ok with that... so in general I think it was pretty good... they weren't passive at all in terms of talking with me or eye contact or anything like that."

(Mrs. Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

It was interesting to note that in response to this question, the concept of native language and identity was revealed in one discussion with the teacher confounded by the parent's actions prior to her child entering kindergarten.

" K.'s mom has asked about how her English is and if it's getting better. I don't get her because she – Mom speaks perfect English and would not speak English with K. and her little brother so they wouldn't lose their Spanish, so K. came in with no English background whatsoever and she could have it because Mom speaks it fluently at home." (Ms. Demers) Interview: 4/14/06

Ms. Demers did not recognize that to K.'s mother, her native language of Spanish, carries within it the history, the culture, and the traditions of her family. The teacher's response suggests that bilingualism is not viewed as a resource but rather as a transitional state until English becomes the chosen language. From a monolingual English speaker's

perspective, why would one choose Spanish language development for one's child if English modeling is available?

The topic of parent engagement and support of the kindergarten curriculum through home practices and volunteering opportunities was broached. All the teachers recognized that the parents attended the formal parent conference, and two teachers indicated that two Spanish-speaking mothers were volunteering in their classrooms once a week. Yet, reports of home practices as an extension of school practices differed.

" I would have to assume with all the success that those kids have had that they're practicing at home... I don't know for sure... I know that they have been drilled here.. but I would hope that they were practicing at home."
"...they're just as involved as anybody else and after school their take-home folders come back every Thursday... stuff like that I consider involvement just because of what you're used to getting here...those four kids all have their stuff coming back on a regular basis... there's a consistency there... so at least I know they're seeing their stuff and they're signing their take-home folders and that's more than a lot of people... a lot of people do." (Ms. Barlow) Interview: 5/18/06

" I know that I have three kids that are attending the parent group with you at least. (When asked if she thought things like reading and writing together were happening at home, she replied, " I don't know." (Ms. Demers) Interview: 4/14/06

" They read together at home. If I read a story to them, they say, " Oh my

Mommy read me that story...or sometimes I will ask them if they get read to at home... they've been read to in Spanish as well... some little stories I have, they have the Spanish version. Gracia brought one in one time to show me that ...'cuz she was excited about showing me that she had the same book at home but in Spanish.... Writing... some kids have actually shown me things that they've written at home, it could be their parents' names, their names, ABC ... they bring it in to show me... pictures drawn that sort of thing, drawing pictures for me they'll do at home... so there is evidence of something going on... practicing the alphabet and numbers at home... well those kids that bring in writing their alphabet, I mean it's not in a formal way but it's just something is happening... making a time and place at home for school-like activities... I don't know how that's done... I talk to the kids about playing school at home..."

(Mrs.Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

The less experienced teachers appeared to have done less probing with their students about what their Spanish-speaking families are doing to support the kindergarten curriculum at home. For all the extensive home practices the parents revealed to Mrs. Brown and the researcher, these practices remained essentially hidden to the classroom teachers. Mrs. Gallo received the most confirmation from her students about home practices that support the kindergarten curriculum.

As the excerpts of interviews suggest, there is inconsistency on the part of the school concerning parent access to information about the kindergarten curriculum and

ways that parents can support their children's education. While teachers rely on communication modes such as newsletters to tell parents about the curriculum and kindergarten practices, there is no assurance that Spanish-speaking parents will receive that information in a language they can understand. The role of Mrs. Brown as a conduit between the school and the Spanish-speaking parents in the kindergarten classrooms was vital to all the teachers. Her role addressed communication needs for academic and a myriad of other purposes. On other issues, the less-experienced teachers responded differently than the seasoned educator. While the newer teachers were sure that limited English proficiency presented an obstacle to parents' ability to communicate with them, the more experienced teacher regarded limited basic interpersonal communication skills in English as sufficient for understanding teacher exchanges.

Teacher assessment of parent expectations and knowledge about school did not align with the knowledge that parents demonstrated in the various activities reported in chapter five. Many teacher-held assumptions were guiding their perceptions of the parents in this study. There was a breakdown in communication about what parents were doing to support their children's education and their competence to perform such a role and teacher perceptions. Again, assumptions ruled perceptions. Even when the children reported to teachers about school-like activities they were engaging in at home with their families, the perception was that parent understanding was "very, very, very basic."

The conflict about long-held perceptions and conflicting realities was present in Mrs. Gallo's responses. She was trying to reconcile what she believed and what she was experiencing. Her perceptions are in direct opposition to parents' words in the parent-

created brochure, that will be presented next in this chapter, concerning parent roles and responsibilities regarding education. For instance, she said:

" I think there is still just that underlying feeling that kids go to school to learn and then they come home and they take care of their children... but you've (the researcher) have been very instrumental in crossing that bridge and helping them... I think that's helped their kids be excited about school... I think that connection has been really... I hope it continues, that's the only thing...

Researcher: " so prior to that, before they had that avenue of help with the parent group, what did you see? What was the difference then in understanding their role? Did you see a difference?"

Mrs. Gallo: " I think they just see their role as a parent, they're at home taking care of their children, in a physical way, they're well-fed, they're well-dressed, they're clean, that kind of thing and I think they see school as that's where they go to learn..."

Researcher: "... and you're saying with this group you're starting to see a change in that role perception?"

Mrs. Gallo: I think so... but I think you've been very instrumental in helping that happen... because you've really tried hard to make them understand how important it is for them to work with their child at home... making that a part of their homelife... and I've seen that... they do talk about it... I think school is a priority for these families, it's just defining the roles... But I think they see school as very important..."   (Mrs. Gallo) Interview: 4/21/06

Parents' efforts to support their children's development in school, and changes

that had occurred in Mrs. Gallo's experiences with her parents this year were attributed to

Mrs. Brown, the researcher and the Spanish kindergarten parent group. The maintenance

of existing perceptions that appeared rooted in a deficit perspective prevailed as there was

a lack of recognition of what parents bring to the table in terms of motivation and

competence. Credit was given to Ms. Brown, the researcher and the parent group instead

of where it belonged – to the parents.

In the final section of this chapter, I will present a parent-created brochure in

which parents in the study inform incoming kindergarten Spanish-speaking parents of

their perspectives of important features of the kindergarten year. Using Cummins'(2001)

definition of empowerment as the "collaborative creation of power" (p.199), the creators

of this brochure made their perceptions and understandings visible and audible to an

audience of parents who would be in their place next year at Maplehurst Elementary

School.

Parent Informational Brochure: Parents Sharing Their Perspectives of Kindergarten with Other Parents

At the April 18, 2006 meeting of the Spanish kindergarten group, I approached

the group and asked if there might be any parents who would volunteer to create a

brochure for incoming Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students in 2006-2007.

Three parents volunteered to meet on May 2, 2006 to collaborate and create a draft of an

informational piece. The goal of the project was to create a brochure from the

experiences and perspectives of current Spanish-speaking parents that would inform

parents about what it's like to have a child in kindergarten at Maplehurst Elementary
School.

While I had components that I thought should be in the brochure such as
academics, language, daily routines, academic support within the school and report cards,
I kept these notions to myself. My role on this day was to run the tape recorder, facilitate
a space within the school, and be present for any questions. Mrs. Brown attended the
session to translate for me. Throughout the meetings, two parents discussed topics, wrote
down their thoughts, and followed a recursive process of writing and rewriting. As an
observer, it was fascinating to see these women in a role that was not typical for them in
this school setting. The third volunteer was not able to attend this working session, so
she met with me at a later date and I gave her a working copy of the document and she
extended the work with her own writing and thoughts. We next agreed that I would type
up their writing into a cohesive form and then have them proofread it before the final
draft was produced. Mrs. Brown then orally translated the written notes into English and
I typed them up.

Information included in the brochure by the parents reflects the parents'
perspectives of a broader notion of education. There did not seem to be a hierarchy of
importance of items. While for discussion purposes, I will present information in
conceptual categories, the brochure did not present topics in any ranking or importance.
For example, the notice starts with information about appropriate clothing to wear to
school, school supplies that are provided, and the value of checking backpacks for critical
information. Six key conceptual categories presented by the parents included: 1) Being a
non-English student and parent in an English-only environment; 2) the availability of

translating services at the school; 3) the school curriculum and child development during the kindergarten year; 4) values to be instilled in children; 5)kindergarten routines and school rules; and 6) parent responsibilities. The parents' words in the brochure portray perceptions arrived at through their experiences at Maplehurst School during their children's kindergarten year.

Speaking to the condition of being Spanish-speaking in an English-only environment and the availability of translating services, the mothers wrote:

" Parents, please don't feel frustrated or worried if you do not speak English. The important thing is that you are here with your child to support your child with issues like homework. Your presence is the most important. He/she needs you and your presence and understanding is the most important for your child."

" You don't have to worry if the children don't know English. They will grow in their understanding and will constantly improve. Although we do not know English it is important to not be afraid to spend time with the children in their classes and to be a parent volunteer."

" Also as parents we can read stories to them in Spanish and English."

" Every three months we receive progress notes about the children. It is possible to request them in Spanish."

" It is important to attend meetings. We will have an interpreter. They will have materials to give you at the meetings to help you help the children with English."

" The school has various programs for children. You can get information from Charlotte."

" We have an interpreter at school who you can call with any questions."

Another line of thinking involved school curriculum and child development during the kindergarten year:

"There will be meetings about reading and how to learn the sounds of the vowels. That helps us as parents to learn as well."

"The children will learn a lot. They will improve their language, make stories, use their imagination, draw to make stories and learn to write their names and other words."

"The children begin to learn looking at a drawing in a book until they almost can tell the story by themselves. They learn the alphabet, to count, the months and the days."

" Working at home with our children we can take advantage of studying with them to spend time as a family."

Parents' notions of education also included character and personal values embedded within the academics:

" At school the children learn colors, learn to write, to read, to speak English well and to have respect for themselves and for others. It is very important that they learn to value themselves and to value others."

" The children will learn manners, to share, to communicate."

The nuts and bolts of daily kindergarten routines and school rules were outlined so that parents could be prepared:

" Every Wednesday popcorn will be sold for 25 cents."

" Please send children with a healthy snack and juice."

" Every month you will be sent a sheet with information about lunch."

" If your child is going to eat breakfast at school, he/she should arrive at 8:05."

" Please bring the children on time at about 8:15 because they enter school at 8:20 a.m."

" Please do not let the children bring toys to school."

" Please arrive on time to pick up your children."

Finally, compelling advice is given to parents about responsibility as parents:

" Something very important is respect for the child himself/herself and respect towards others. It is important to talk about that every day because unfortunately as parents we make many mistakes and one of these is to leave your child as the responsibility of the school and think that the school is responsible for the general

education of your child, but no; education and respect come from the home. At home as well as at school there are rules and there needs to be respect in both places. Mothers or fathers of families, please, if your child is accustomed to hit, to scream, to not obey, or to do what he/she wants, please, children come to school to learn, to share, to get along together and the most important thing is to grow Better Every Day. Parents, please, let us not forget our children, because there is no age or limit to the love and understanding we have for our children."

The final draft was proofread by the authors and the incoming Spanish-speaking parents came to Maplehurst Elementary School on June 8, 2006. The parent authors came to the group and read the brochure that they had created. The brochure was included in each parent's packet and the new parents were very intent listening to the parents as they read along. There was no discussion and incoming parents did not ask any questions of the kindergarten parents except for starting time. There was obvious confidence and pride among Rosa, Elisa and Juanita as they read their work. The perspectives and understanding these mothers expressed were shaped by their life experiences and their experiences at Maplehurst Elementary School during the 2005-2006 school year. Because these are the perspectives of the parents, there is no filter or interpretation that can skew what the parents came to understand over time. The featured elements of the brochure reflected a melding of deeply-held convictions about parent responsibility and values to be instilled in their children along with the realities of what it's like to be in this English-only elementary school during the kindergarten year. The process and the product of creating the brochure demonstrated how the parents in the group quickly

moved from a more traditional model of parent involvement and family literacy

programming to the capacity-building community beyond anything I envisioned. Parents

were able to exercise agency within a context that promoted a collaborative approach to

parent involvement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported findings that reveal the nature of micro-

interactions between Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students and

representatives of Maplehurst Elementary School during the 2005-2006 school year.

Cummins (2001) maintains that the patterns of micro-interactions that culturally and

linguistically diverse students and their families experience in the educational system are

a function of the power relations that exist between dominant and subordinated groups in

the wider society. The culture of the school then reflects the relations of power and is

comprised of educational structures within the school and educators' role definitions that

influence the way language minority parents are viewed by educators. The patterns of

interaction that develop may either invite or deny parent participation. At the heart of

this study is the desire to get at parent perceptions of the kindergarten year and their

understanding of a role in the education of their children both at home and at school.

Parent perceptions are the litmus test for how well a school is responding to the needs of

culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Using the framework provided by Cummins, I have explored various dimensions

of schooling and addressed the experiences of the study participants in relation to these

dimensions. Particular emphasis was placed on language/culture incorporation and

community participation. As the findings indicate, there are both conditions that encouraged patterns of interaction that promoted parent engagement, such as the presence of Charlotte Brown as an established educational structure in the school, and conditions that limited participation and access to the school such as inconsistent policies and procedures for ensuring that language-minority families receive the same information about school as English-speaking parents. Results from this study indicated that standard practices in public school settings such as the implementation of family literacy programs and the nature of parent-teacher conferences need to be examined through the lens that was used in this study when considering the relationship between language minority families and the school.

Educator role definitions are complex. As I stated in Chapter Five, many of the beliefs, expectations, goals and practices of teachers concerning the families in this study were based on assumptions about Spanish-speaking parents in a high-poverty school . This mindset, based on societal macro-interactions, sets limits on the type of interactions that are possible between families and the school. Yet, even with these constraints in place, parent perspectives revealed an appreciation for the climate of the school for themselves and their children, as evidenced by the parent brochure.

The findings in this chapter speak to what Cummins cautions about the difference between surface level reforms and deep structure reforms. In the former case, initiatives are restricted to a limited number of school staff, leaving the culture of the school largely unchanged. In this study, Mrs. Brown and I were the primary agents involved in the initiatives. In the case of deep structure reform, school structures and collective role definitions reflect a change in climate that permeates the whole school. Still, he contends

that individual educators are not powerless; they have opportunities to challenge the status quo and become advocates for the creation of patterns within schools that generate possibilities for diverse families. In closing, I consider Paulo Freire's notion of liberation: not a gift, not a self-achievement, but a mutual process.

In the next chapter, the final chapter, I will review the results as they are situated in the local and larger context. I will then consider the implications of the results; how the findings from this study may serve as a springboard for critical reflection on minority language parents' experiences in public schools, the nature of relationships between the school and families, and the opportunities for participating in the practices of a school community and supporting their children's education.

CHAPTER 7

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter I will summarize the major findings of this study and insights I gained by conducting the study and how it contributes to current knowledge base, conditions at Maplehurst Elementary School one year later, and questions that surfaced as a result of this study that might lead to future research. In the last two chapters, I divided the findings into discrete categories of parents exercising agency for their children and the nature of interactions between the families and the school. Yet, it is the intersection of these areas of focus that provide insights about the perspectives of the participants in this study. In this chapter, analysis of the context will once again move to the forefront as I synthesize what the perspectives of parents revealed about micro- and macro-level interactions.

The aim of this study was to learn how Spanish-speaking parents understand kindergarten and support their children's education within the context of a particular school. My proposition was: the nature of parent involvement reflects the individual agency of parents as well as school practices that support or deny family participation in school events and practices; when responsibility for educating students is shared by the family and school through a collaborative relationship, parent understanding of the curriculum and patterns of involvement become a powerful tool for shaping children's achievement. I drew on the work of theorists such as Auerbach (1995; 1989), Cummins

(2007; 2001; 2000), Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005; 1997), Lave (1996), and Rogoff (1998; 1990).

In analyzing parent perceptions and support, I considered multiple factors: individual characteristics, opportunities to participate in the events and practices within a given school context, and larger societal forces such as teacher assumptions about minority families, legislative views of and programming responses to students and families who speak languages other than English as their native language, and power relations that underlie routes of access for parents. In this era of No Child Left Behind when considerable national and local attention and analysis is focused on student achievement, the importance of parent involvement to student achievement takes on added significance. For parents of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, the analysis of context reveals the opportunities for parent engagement that shape parent perspectives, understanding, role construction, sense of efficacy in the education of their children, and a sense of invitation to participate in the practices of a school community; but, it also reveals the roadblocks to participation that parents may face.

Although I have based this study on a sociocultural approach to learning and development, at the proposal stage, I believe I was still operating from a perspective that focused on individual process and individual understanding of the language and literacy "demands" of kindergarten. I quickly realized that my lens was too narrow to capture how participants in the study developed their perceptions of the kindergarten experience and I had to widen my lens to incorporate the opportunities parents had to exercise agency within a school context, opportunities that were impacted by existing educational structures and educators' role definitions for diverse parents. It is only through the

analysis of this interrelationship that the complexity of Spanish-speaking parents' experiences during the kindergarten year can be understood.

Summary of Findings and Insights

For the nine families who participated in this study, education was of paramount importance. While the motivations to show their caring and be involved in the education of their children were driven by a variety of life experiences, each family placed a high value on the attainment of a good education. As the personal portraits indicated, each family arrived at the kindergarten at Maplehurst Elementary School by a unique path but with a common desire to secure a good future for their children. The findings do not support a deficit perspective that suggests Latino parents either don't know or don't care about their children's education. Through parental reports of home practices and expressed eagerness to be engaged with the school, the parents in this study defied this stereotypical notion of Latino parents. These findings add to the knowledge base by countering negative assumptions held by wider society concerning Latino parents' orientation toward education.

The Spanish Parent Literacy Group became the primary vehicle for getting at parent perspectives of the kindergarten year. Although not part of the study design, the Spanish Parent Literacy Group also became the primary source for informing parents about school practices and providing opportunities for parent participation. Combined with the influence of Mrs. Brown, the group became a pivotal educational structure that helped shape parent experiences that influenced their perspectives of their roles in supporting their children's education at Maplehurst Elementary School. Their sense of

efficacy, their ability to take an active role in supporting the academic advancement of their children in their homes and at school and to have that engagement recognized and affirmed by Mrs. Brown and me, was impacted by their involvement in the Spanish Parent Literacy Group. The group played a mediational role between school culture and the cultural experiences and expectations held by this group of Latino parents. Consequently, I concluded that it is essential to establish and nurture parent groups that reflect the demographics of the school. If shared meaningfulness and transformation of participation is at the root of collaborative relationships, then organized groups should reflect the diversity of the school and should be tailored to the specific needs of parents.

As a participant observer of the Spanish Parent Literacy Group, with varying degrees of participation depending on individual activities with the group, I found out how important it is to define the underlying philosophy that guides the programming. During the 2005-2006 school year, the underlying assumptions of the program invited diverse parents to participate; planned, thoughtful efforts were made by Mrs. Brown and me to provide an environment that was bilingually accessible to parents whenever possible. Aligning with a view of literacy development as a socially-constructed phenomenon, much like the work of Auerbach (1989) among others, the philosophy of this group viewed literacy as an integral part of the daily life of the participants, with the social context becoming a rich resource that informed learning. Parents in this group, both study participants and other parents, got the message that 1) home practices were valuable in contributing to their children's advancement; 2) parents were capable partners in the education of their children; and 3) bilingualism was viewed as an asset to embrace. These three considerations promoted a climate that welcomed and honored parent

participation, adding to the base of educational research that identifies successful models of parent engagement in multicultural school populations (Chrispeels & Gonzalez, (2004); Chrispeels & Rivero , (2001); Delgado-Gaitan, (1993); Mapp, (2003); Nieto, (1999); Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, (1999).) This approach to family programming is in contrast to many federal, state and local parent initiatives that focus on "fixing" families who do not align with the mainstream model of White, English-speaking, middle class parenting.

As a monolingual English-speaking educator, I was as dependent on Mrs. Brown as a communication link as were the parents. This first step of accessibility, linguistic access, created the possibility of developing a mutual relationship that moved beyond language compatibility to the issue of developing a pattern of interactions that reflected a collaborative relationship between the parents and representatives from the school and school district. Thus, efforts by the Spanish Parent Literacy Group and Mrs. Brown to make parent participation possible for non-English speaking became a source of tangible evidence that parents' native language was valued and their role in supporting their children's education was critical. Parents acknowledged these school efforts in interviews and the parent-created brochure.

While linguistic access is crucial, the findings of my study indicate that language access alone does not guarantee ideological access and access to collaborative relationships with the school. The findings indicated that school practices and educator assumptions about diverse parents in the school at large were less accessible and welcoming, holding to assumptions that are largely unchallenged in the dominant society. Collaborative and coercive relations of power co-existed for the participants in this study.

Parent conferences represent a good example for analyzing this phenomenon. The value of parent conferences as an essential communication opportunity for parents and the school became apparent in this study. Yet, translation services were not available for all Spanish-speaking parents who requested a conference. The availability of Mrs. Brown determined the outcome. In addition, there was only one formal conference scheduled for the year in October, leaving communication for the bulk of the instructional year to progress reports, report cards and teacher communications. Inconsistency in providing such forms of communication in a linguistically comprehensible form meant a breach in communication about the progress of students to parents. With the Spanish Parent Literacy Group acting as a conduit between the families and the kindergarten teachers, the parents were able to engage in spring conferences with their children's teachers, much to the satisfaction of the parents and the teachers.

Teacher interviews also revealed how the nature of micro-interactions, as defined by Cummins (2001), were defined by teacher expectations, assumptions and perceptions of Latino parents as a group. Negative assumptions towards parents seemed to rule teacher expectations even in the face of contradictory evidence. While academic progress was noted in the participants' children in the kindergarten classrooms, teachers indicated that they were unaware of what parents were doing with their children at home to support their education. When it was assumed that parents were effective in teaching their children, credit was assigned to the work of the Spanish Parent Literacy Group and the efforts of Mrs. Brown and me. Even the desire of parents to have high educational aspirations for their children was credited to the Group as being successful in getting parents to value education. These findings are congruent with the findings of other

researchers such as Delgado-Gaitan (1992), Nieto (2000), Valdes (1996) and best summed up by Ada & Zubizarreta's (2001, p.231) observations that "... we often have encountered well-meaning teachers who hold the assumption that Latino parents do not place a high value on their children's education."

The perspectives of bilingualism by the parents, the Spanish Parent Literacy Group and the teachers were also quite different, shaping the nature of micro-interactions between the school and parents. From the teachers' perspective, bilingualism was regarded from a subtractive stance, as an obstacle to be overcome. Rather than seeing language as a strand of a braid that encompasses culture, tradition, family, and identity, it was viewed only as a communication barrier and a transitional condition until proficiency in the dominant language of English could be achieved. While the participating parents desired to learn English, they hoped to do so in addition to maintaining their native language of Spanish. The critical element for achieving this goal depended on opportunities for learning. Thus, parents and teachers held different perspectives regarding bilingualism; parents were operating within an additive notion of bilingualism and the teachers were working from a subtractive mode (Cummins, 2001).

The perspectives of the teachers reflected the view of Latino parents that is prevalent in the wider society. Teachers' lack of knowledge about the families of their students perpetuated existing beliefs that contradicted my findings. Thus, macro-interactions impacted micro-interactions at Maplehurst Elementary School, resulting in the co-existence of experiences for parents that demonstrated both collaborative and coercive relations of power between the parents and the school. As Cummins (2001) argues, practices that prevail in schools mirror a system that has disempowered minority

students and their families. When educators see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to students' repertoires, they are likely to empower students; whereas, educators who see their role as subtracting students' primary language and culture maintain the status quo and the marginalization of groups of students and parents.

Using the analytical tools of Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (2005; 1997;) and Cummins' (2001) frameworks allowed me to examine the findings in a holistic way. The parents cared about their children's education, they were motivated to be engaged in the process, they were capable of being partners in the process and yet parents' construction of a role and the development of a sense of efficacy in the education of their children were totally dependent on opportunities for engaging in the practices within the community and the perceptions of educators who dictate the ensuing micro-interactions that exist. The conditions for the Latino parents in this study reflected both the existence of collaborative and coercive relations of power.

As a researcher who had previously worked with this staff in a different capacity, I had to analyze the findings with as much *empathic neutrality* (Patton, 2002) as possible. While I thought this would only be a concern for me as a researcher with the parents, I found that I also had to be mindful of my relationship with the teachers and my knowledge of them as individuals working in a school context that presents many challenges to an educator who works with children who live in poverty and speak many diverse languages. I had to step back and view the findings through the frameworks that I employed as a theoretical base to this study, appreciating the structure it provided for me.

In the next section, I will summarize the results of an interview on 7/16/07 with Mrs. Brown to get her perception of the conditions at Maplehurst Elementary School one

year after the research study since I was no longer employed by the Derryfield School District. I was interested in factors that sustained or changed the experiences of Spanish-speaking parents in this setting. The two chief topics were: participation opportunities and language access.

Maplehurst Elementary School: One Year Later

Opportunities for Participation

Spanish Parent Literacy Group

As I previously mentioned in the description of the local context, during the 2005-2006 school year, a veteran educator was hired as a mentor/coach for the five kindergarten teachers and classrooms. This position, which was in a pilot phase during the study, was expanded to three coaches for grades kindergarten, one and two in 2006-2007. In my absence, literacy coaches took on the role of overseeing the Spanish Parent Literacy Group. During the 2006-2007 school year, the Spanish-speaking parents in kindergarten and first grade continued to meet every 5-6 weeks. However, the guiding principles of the group changed in three substantial ways: 1) Mrs. Brown's role in the group became specific to translating services and she was not included in the planning of the parent sessions; 2) the view of language and literacy and literacy practices shifted from a perspective of literacy as a sociocultural practice that cuts across languages and contexts, and instead, was viewed as a set of fixed, decontextualized skills, placing a heavy emphasis on phonics; Mrs. Brown stated that the presentation of materials proceeded even when the parents and children did not comprehend the vocabulary or the

tasks. There were no opportunities for communication to adjust the content or pace of presentation during the meeting. A transmission of school practices model of family literacy programming was reportedly in place; 3) the view of Spanish-speaking parents and their role in supporting their children's education in relationship with the school led to a punitive, coercive climate in interactions between the group and the parents. The coaches set the terms for parents' accessibility to materials and strategies for working with their children. If parents were unable to attend the monthly meeting on a given day, they would have to wait another month before they could get materials, sacrificing opportunities for parents to work with their children in home practices. Consequently, even with the availability of language translation, a deficit view of parents shaped the potential for participation.

This deficit stance was shared by federal auditors when they visited the Spanish Parent Literacy Group. One auditor questioned Mrs. Brown, " hmmm, shall I presume that these people aren't working?"

"...and it was interesting what one father said to me, "don't worry about it...we wouldn't have talked to them anyways... we have to have confidence in somebody, we have to trust somebody before we're gonna talk, we Latins... we wouldn't talk to them anyway..." (as reported by Mrs. Brown)

Open House and Parent Conferences

During Open House and Parent Conferences for the 2006-2007 year, translators were contracted so that parents could converse with teachers; however, Mrs. Brown

reported that some parents were overlooked because the teacher was unaware of the language skills of the parents. The informal protocol for securing a translator would be for teachers to ask Charlotte if a particular parent needed a translator and then it would be arranged. Yet, in some cases, the teacher asked the child about the need for a translator for parents, and the information from students was inaccurate. Children as informants for such tasks are unreliable. At the core of this difficulty is the lack of knowledge about families by the teachers. Assumptions were made about linguistic skills that sometimes proved wrong.

Issues of Communication and Access to Teachers/Curriculum/Materials/StudentProgress/School Events and Practices

Initiatives were undertaken by the district and the school to increase language access for language-minority parents. In one instance, funds were acquired for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes starting in the fall and proceeding through May and conducted in the evening at school with four or five levels of proficiency. It was open to the neighborhood, not just parents of students at the school. The district of Derryfield also hired two new Spanish interpreters this year with one being assigned to the elementary level. However, the directionality of access to this resource moved only from teachers to the translator and not parents to the translator. Thus, parents could not exercise agency and access this resource without initiation by the teacher.

Invitations to school events and explanatory notes about school practices were inconsistently sent home in Spanish, resulting in parents saying, " Please tell me what's

happening here." Thus, the nature of parent-teacher communication was less than ideal. Yet, the complexity of teachers teaching in this context was recognized by Mrs. Brown.

"... just sort of the style of how things are done... and also that teachers don't have aides, they don't have time off, so everybody is always very, very stressed..."

When reflecting on these changes, I have to consider what role I played in the previous year's conditions. I was respected in the district as a resource concerning literacy and parent-school involvement practices. When I left the district after the completion of my research, the literacy coaches filled that role at Maplehurst Elementary School. They did not share the same relationship with Mrs. Brown as I did; their perspectives of language and literacy differed from my own; and their relationship with Spanish-speaking parents seemed to reflect a deficit perspective.

Mrs. Brown's post-interview indicated that conditions for minority-language parents at Maplehurst Elementary School one year later are not simply better or worse. The fabric and climate of the school is created by a fusion of many elements that don't lend themselves to a simplistic label of "collaborative" or "coercive". It's the unpacking of this multifaceted composite that leads to questions about the nature of minority language students and families in public schools and directions for future research.

Limitations of the Study

In conducting this study and writing about the findings and the context in which those findings occurred, some limitations surfaced which include: 1) the role of translation in multicultural research and the relationship between the translator and the participants and the translator and the researcher; and 2) the size and local nature of the study.

As the previous section indicated, Charlotte Brown played a pivotal role in this study. I was dependent on her for all my communication exchanges with the participants in the study. While having one translator throughout the study ensures a consistency in translation, the relationship that the translator has with the researcher and the participants in the study and their community has the potential to impact the findings. In my observations of interactions between Mrs. Brown and Spanish-speaking parents in Maplehurst Elementary School over the past few years, I have noticed a relationship of mutual respect and genuine caring which creates a climate of trust that transfers to Spanish-speaking parents' interactions with the school in general. In my work, I know that Mrs. Brown's involvement in the study created a willingness on the part of the participants to engage in the research and to share their perspectives and experiences with me. Given another translator, it's possible I might not have been able to gain the trust of the parents in such a short timeframe, with a resulting influence on the findings. Mrs. Brown's rapport with the parents, as described by Glesne & Peshkin (1992), benefited the researcher by serving as a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that made participants feel comfortable speaking about their culture, their families, and their experiences both before and during the kindergarten year.

On the other hand, it is much harder to maintain researcher distance from the translator when years of collaboration are involved in a study of this nature. Mrs. Brown's years of experience with minority-language families in public schools have shaped her perspectives of school conditions and I had to be conscious of this fact to make sure that what I was studying and analyzing were parent perspectives and not the perspectives of the translator. I had to consciously analyze the data in as nonjudgmental manner as possible so that the data was not manipulated in a way to prove a particular perspective. This research effort to strike a balance between fairness and completeness reflects Patton's (2002) notion of "trustworthiness" in qualitative research.

Additionally, the reliance on a translator to conduct research creates a layer of distance between the researcher and the participants that increases the time that is needed to communicate and limits spontaneous exchanges and confidential discussions. Yet, there are no other options for a monolingual, English-speaking educators conducting research with minority-language students and parents. Given the preponderance of public schools with educational staff that do not reflect the diversity of the student and family population, I believe it is better to conduct research with limitations recognized than to not attempt to understand an educational issue in greater depth at all.

When I developed the research question and chose a case study method, I hoped to understand the nature of the setting, what it means to be participants in that setting, and to achieve a depth of understanding that could be communicated to others. To look at people in a context engaged in some activity can only be accomplished through rich description, and for me, working with nine families, allowed me a detailed description of "the case" that further contributed to trustworthiness of the research. The size of the

study served my research question and purpose and resulted in analysis of data and a set of conclusions that are based on data. However, I recognize that single case studies are just that and not accounts of the whole; as Guba and Lincoln (1981, p.377) caution, " ... they tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part- a slice of life." Even with these cautions, analysis of the findings and conclusions can directly influence policy, practice and future research.

Questions and Implications for Future Research

As I have reflected on the findings of my study, I have considered what meaning my research might have to schools across the nation who are grappling with the same issues that face Maplehurst Elementary School. In the face of demographic trends that indicate ever-increasing diversity in public schools and achievement trends that indicate unchanged disparity between White and Hispanic students, school districts are searching for solutions. With a heavy emphasis on instructional considerations, schools have focused on professional development that focuses on increased awareness of curriculum standards and instructional practices. In my experience, far less attention has been paid to parent engagement, its role in impacting student achievement, and the federal and local actions that promote or hinder parent involvement in the schools. Consequently, the questions that have arisen from my research are: 1) Under No Child Left Behind, what is the role of the federal government in promoting and enforcing parent-school partnerships for parents who are poor, and/or culturally and linguistically diverse? ; 2) Is it possible in an English-dominant public school to create a collaborative environment in which diverse parents are provided with opportunities to participate in a school community's curricula,

practices and events? If so, what are the essential educational structures and guiding

principles? 3) What can be done to assess and transform educators' assumptions about

and expectations for students and parents who are linguistically and culturally diverse?

How can this information inform and reform school practices?

Question 1: How does federal education policy and its enactment affect parent

involvement?

In Chapter One, I stated that Section 1118 of NCLB mandates a parental

involvement policy and program at schools receiving Title I funds with an annual

evaluation of the content and effectiveness at the school and district level. While the

legislation is aimed at identifying barriers to greater participation by parents who are

"economically disadvantaged", "disabled", have "Limited English proficiency", have

"limited literacy", or are of "any racial or ethnic minority background", school sanctions

result only from test outcomes and not parent involvement effectiveness assessments. As

a former Title I supervisor, I can attest to the lipservice paid to this aspect of federal

entitlement funds in annual reports. In recent years, it seems that accountability is

measured only by test outcomes. Thus, I have to question the value of framing

legislation that makes parent involvement practices compulsory without any design for

implementing, enforcing or evaluating school-parent involvement provisions of the law.

While closing the achievement gap among students of different races, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status and languages is a laudable goal and has resulted in much attention

paid to a system of funding and accountability regarding curriculum standards,

instructional practices, and test outcomes, designing a funding and accountability system

for implementation of the parent involvement component of NCLB by school districts is

in its infancy stage. Numbers tell the story about the importance placed on parent involvement at the federal level. According to NCLB, local education agencies who receive at least $500,000 in Title I funds are required to set aside only a minimum of 1% of their allocation for parent involvement. (Retrieved: 11/10/07: **http://www.doe.state.in.us/TitleI/docs/amendment_part-a-application.doc**). If the goal at the federal level is to build capacity of schools, this percentage of funding seems woefully inadequate for fully implementing the parent involvement and support provisions of the law.

Using Cummins' (2001) framework for understanding how micro-interactions are impacted by macro-level principles and policies, if culturally diverse students and families are empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools, lack of funding to implement the law by the federal government seems to send the message to local education agencies that parent participation in the education process is less important than all the other components of the legislation. It seems contradictory that while the thrust in education has been towards research-based practice, the research concerning parent involvement and its critical connection to student achievement has not been supported by federal funds allocation formulae. The result is missed opportunities for partnerships between parents and the school, one of the best tools for ensuring positive student achievement outcomes.

I am interested in future research that might focus on mechanisms at the federal, state and local levels that will strengthen the current provisions of Section 1118 of NCLB and I am guided by research questions that might lead to productive parent engagement practices.

- What do we know about parent involvement initiatives that have proven successful with culturally and linguistically diverse school communities and how can we get that information in the hands of educators?

    As a foundation to my research, I reviewed educational research journals for years in search of successful programs and the characteristics of those programs that resulted in success; however, this information is not easily accessible to educators and educational administrators in a form that is unintimidating to practitioners. There are resources available such as Henderson & Mapp's (2002) report : _A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement,_ which is a synthesis of 51 studies about the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement, and effective strategies to connect schools, families and community. Yet, even in this form, my experience as a professional development specialist tells me that it would need to be broken down into key components that are doable in steps that relate to specific needs in local contexts. So, my first suggestion for future research initiatives would be to study the impact of professional development that connects research findings about family involvement to practice for educators and future educators in teacher preparation programs. To facilitate such a project would require a person who has worked in a variety of educational settings and can take research findings and make them make sense to educators. Before educators will engage in professional conversations about research, they must believe that the facilitator "has been there" and can understand the school conditions in which they work.

- How can we build capacity in state departments of education that will enable local school districts to comply with the conditions stated in the legislation?

School districts who fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress due to inadequate achievement in student subgroups are required to devise and submit plans to the state education department that will change the achievement trajectory. In the area of parent involvement and its impact on student achievement, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study with a "failing" district with "failing" subgroups and implement a parent involvement program that is supported by state-level education representatives who could: 1) assess current parent involvement patterns for culturally and linguistically diverse parents within a school; 2) facilitate the creation and implementation of an action plan by the stakeholders in a local school as a result of a survey of school climate, opportunities and obstacles for parent participation, and parent access to school curriculum, instructional strategies and materials, and events and practices within the school community; 3) test the proposition that when responsibility for educating students is shared by the family and school through a collaborative relationship, parent understanding of the curriculum and patterns of involvement become a powerful tool for shaping children's achievement. To provide this service to local districts, the state department employee would have to be knowledgeable about: 1) research that has examined collaborative relationships between schools and families who are diverse; 2) school practices and the challenges that face educators in high-poverty, diverse public schools; 3) school practices and the challenges that face parents in high-poverty, diverse public schools. This is an area that is waiting to be studied.

Question 2: How can an English-dominant public school create a collaborative environment in which diverse parents are provided with opportunities to participate in a school community's curricula, practices and events? What are the essential educational structures and guiding principles?

The results of my study and a reflection on conditions of Maplehurst Elementary School one year later have provided me with insights about minority-language parents' perspectives of what it is like to be in an English-dominant school. It is possible to create a collaborative environment in which diverse parents and students can thrive; however, distinctions between superficial and deep educational reform must be made. During the 2005-2006 school year, relationships were forged between Spanish-speaking parents of kindergarten students and Mrs. Brown and me that created a climate that invited minority language parents' participation and engagement in the educational process. Returning to the frameworks purported by Norton and Toohey (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), the interplay between parents' individual agency and relationships with school personnel contributed to a sense of efficacy; characteristics of the context invited parent participation, resulting in a collaborative environment. Parents were able to make effective use of resources to gain access to their children's education.

When I consider the changes that occurred for the Spanish-speaking parents the following year, I realize that in my discussion of "the school" during the research year, I was really reflecting on the relationships between the parents and Mrs. Brown and me. In my absence, it was difficult for Mrs. Brown to individually offset the deficit views of poor and culturally and linguistically diverse parents that exist. The exciting transformations in parent participation that occurred during 2005-2006 indicated that it is

possible to create a collaborative environment, but for deep educational reform to take root, I return to Cummins' (2001) notion of the deep structure of educational reform: educators who collectively and individually redefine their roles in interacting with students and their families in a way that challenges stereotypical notions of families who belong to some subgroup based on socioeconomic status, language, culture and race. Policy and legislative reforms are necessary but not sufficient for creating such reform; the culture of the school must change. While one or two people may be advocates for such change, it takes a broader base of people to change a school's culture.

As a result, I have considered what educational structures would support long-term change, provide opportunities for parents to participate, and what the guiding principles might be.

I. Establish and nurture parent groups that reflect the demographics of the school and are based on the following principles:

A. Parents are capable partners who know their children best and can create learning contexts that encourage academic advancement with the assistance of input from educators;

B. Home practices are valuable contributions to a child's Education;

C. Bilingualism is an asset and not an obstacle;

As a result of opportunities provided by the overarching structure of the Spanish Parent Literacy Group, two activities that illustrate these three principles are parent conferences and the parent-child journaling project. Parent conferences proved to be a valuable tool for communication. When parents were given a bilingual checklist of benchmark skills

prior to the conference, parents were able to convey their understanding of their child's progress and communicate effectively. There was a shared exchange of information. As Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest, the factors that make " a good language learner" or " a good language-minority parent" must include opportunities for individuals to assert their agency to gain access to meaningful resources. In the case of parent conferences, parents had access to the skills and expectations assessed on the report card in advance and they were able to use their knowledge of their children to assert their agency and gain access to the teachers. As a result, teachers were able to see the parents as a knowledgeable resource. This tranformative practice aligns with research on "funds of knowledge" that exist in minority households and it debunks the idea that linguistically and culturally diverse parents lack knowledge that can contribute to their children's education (Moll et al., 2005). Parents had the opportunity to be viewed as competent participants because the context invited participation.

Another activity that embraces the three guiding principles is the parent-child journaling project. Acknowledging parents' skill, parents were free to interpret this activity the way that best suited their families. While there was one goal of finding out what children who are English Language Learners tell their parents about kindergarten, the autonomy exercised with this activity by parents resulted in a rich source of information about the parents, the students and their abilities to relate information about school to their parents, and the relationship between the parent and child. The choice of language use, Spanish or English or both, was decided by each family; thus, the Group and the parents were operating from the same additive perspective of bilingualism. From a sociocultural perspective, this writing project illustrated the dynamic nature of literacy

practices in the home in which children and their parents respond to each other and learning is situated within an activity. Through participation in this project, parents were once again viewed as knowledgeable and capable partners with the school.

II. Critically analyze participation opportunities

Linguistic access is the first step towards a participatory model that gives voice to parents *and* educators. Linguistic access in oral and written form must be consistent and readily available if opportunities for participation are to remain equitable for non-English speaking parents. A model that would contribute to a school environment that shared the responsibility of educating children with parents would include translator services that are accessible to both teachers and parents. In the existing model in many schools, only teachers have a route to access, and even that access is unreliable. As the parents in my study indicated, they find out about school from their children and school personnel. Parents are dependent upon a consistent and reliable flow of information if they are to be informed partners in the process.

As I stated earlier in the chapter, linguistic access alone does not guarantee that language-minority parents will have access to teachers and collaborative relationships with the school. The level of access relates to the level of empowerment of parents and how it legitimates and preserves the current division of status and resources. Mrs. Brown indicated in her interview in 2007 that parent opportunities to exercise agency for the sake of their children's education at Maplehurst Elementary School the year after the study was negatively impacted by educators' deficit view of the parents. The punitive and coercive nature of conditions surrounding practices within the Spanish Parent

Literacy Group denied parent participation because underlying assumptions viewed

bilingualism as an obstacle to overcome and the parents and their households as lacking

in what it takes to support their children's education.. To support long-term educational

change, there must be equity in opportunities for participation for all parents within a

school, fostering a collaborative relationship in which power is created and shared by

parents and the school.

Question 3: What can be done to transform educators' assumptions about and

expectations for students and parents who are linguistically and culturally diverse? How

can this information inform and reform school practices?

I believe the proposed educational structures in the previous section are realistic

and achievable. This aspect of educational reform is easier to accomplish than the second

aspect of educational reform which addresses the role definitions of educators that

directly affect the interactions that culturally diverse students and their families

experience in schools. These definitions are shaped by a wider society and include

assumptions, expectations and goals that educators bring to the task of educating children

and communicating with parents. If parents are viewed from a deficit stance due to

preconceived notions about one's language, culture, race or socioeconomic status, limits

are placed on the nature of micro-interactions that will occur between school and home.

As Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) theorized, parents' life contexts such as access to

specific cultural knowledge gained by participation in cultural events and practices,

impact parent involvement decision-making. Educator role definitions directly impact parents' opportunities for participation in the education of their children.

In a reflective exercise, I have considered what I would do if a school district contacted me about working with an English-dominant school to improve student achievement outcomes by improving parent involvement patterns between the school and diverse families. I have developed a plan that I could implement that would include: 1) an individual, anonymous self-assessment for school staff members that would be aimed at determining existing assumptions and expectations concerning language-minority parents, levels of access for language-minority parents, and opportunities for participation by parents; 2) a prioritization by school staff concerning what they believe the school is doing well to meet the needs of diverse parents and what represents a challenge for the school; patterns would be discussed; 3) a presentation of some of the findings from my study and how the findings relate to the local context, brainstorming collectively about resources available and resources needed; 4) proposed action steps for promoting language-minority parent engagement at school; 5) finally, at the school leadership level, a meeting with administrators, grade-level representatives, some parents and translators to discuss the results of the professional development session and some immediate and long-term goals for creating a collaborative school environment that invites parent participation in the education of their children.

As a seasoned educator, I recognize how difficult it is to change practice. Professional development that focuses on educators' perception of diverse students and parents presents a challenge. Personal redefinitions of roles is a process, not a one-shot fix. Perceptions and stereotypes are shaped over a lifetime and will only change in a safe,

nonjudgmental environment where discussion is encouraged. To build school capacity,

this process cannot be top-down but rather must be generated by the entire staff so that

reform will permeate the whole school. Hopefully, the end result will be improved

school-family relationships, a climate of partnership, and family engagement that

translates into improved student achievement. I think it is worth reiterating Nieto's

(1999) assessment of what the future holds for language-minority students and their

families:

> In the end, if teachers believe that students cannot achieve at high levels,
> that their backgrounds are riddled with deficiencies, and that multicultural
> education is a frill that cannot help them to learn, the result with be school
> reform strategies that have little hope for success. On the other hand, if
> teachers begin by challenging social inequities that inevitably place some
> students at a disadvantage over others; if they struggle against institutional
> policies and practices that are unjust; if they begin with the strengths and talents
> of students and their families; if they undergo a process of personal transformation
> based on their own identities and experiences; and finally, if they engage with
> colleagues in a collaborative and imaginative encounter to transform their own
> practices and their schools to achieve equal and high-quality education
> for all students, then the outcome is certain to be a more positive one than is
> currently the case. (p.175-176)

When I review the key elements of this research study, I reflect on the findings

and think about what was congruent with previously conducted research and what

differed. First, the Spanish-speaking parents in this study held strong aspirations and

high expectations for their children's education, similar to other studies with Latino

families (Ada & Zubizarreta, 2001; Chrispeels & Rivero , 2001; Cummins, 2007; 2001;

Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mapp,

2003; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Scribner et al.,1999. Considering the trials some of the

participants have experienced in order to be at Maplehurst Elementary School, it seems

almost unnecessary to state what seems so obvious. Yet, the parents in this study were subject to educators' negative preconceived notions about their placement of value on education. Given the marginalization of culturally and linguistically diverse members in U.S. society, these findings are critical and cannot be stated too much. Secondly, when parents were given opportunities to participate in the practices and events of their school community, they were able to demonstrate competence, exercise agency and access resources that benefited their children's education.

This study does differ from other studies in significant ways. Previous research has examined Latino students and their families and considered the roles of home practices, individual factors that affect motivation and aspirations, parent programming, characteristics of high-performing schools and the nature of relationships between parents and schools (Arzubiaga et al., (2002); Auerbach, (1995); Chrispeels & Gonzalez, (2004); Chrispeels & Rivero, (2001); Cummins, (2007; 2001;) Delgado- Gaitan, (1993); Goldenberg et al., (2001); Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, (1997); Mapp, (2003); Moll et al., (2005); Monzo, & Rueda, (2001); Nakagawa, McKinnon, & Hackett, (2001); Nieto, (1992/1996/2000); Reese et al., (1995); Scribner et al. (1999); and Valdes, (1996); however, this study looks at the interplay of these variables in the era of No Child Left Behind and how language-minority parents' perceptions of school and their role in supporting their children's education is shaped by the meshing of these factors (Norton & Toohey, 2001). By considering macro- and micro-level interactions, as defined by Cummins (2001), analysis of the data reveals relations of power that underlie routes of access for parents and how those relations impact parents' opportunities for participating and accessing resources that will advance their children's education.

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In closing, I'm reminded of the words of both Rosa and Jim Cummins. From a parent's perspective, she wants the school to know, " ... that we are here... that we come from another country... that we are the same, that we are equal" and from an educational researcher's perspective, lasting educational reform that promotes a collaborative relationship with culturally and linguistically diverse parents will be accomplished when every parent can say, " this place nurtures my spirit" (Cummins, 2007).

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APPENDICES

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE 1

(Questionnaire to be administered orally in Spanish and audiotaped)
Administration Schedule: September/October: Complete questionnaire

<u>Family Identifying Information/ Demographics</u>

Name: Married/Single:

Number of children: Ages:

Did your kindergarten child attend a preschool program?
Where?   How many years?

What language do you use most frequently to speak to your child?

What was the first language spoken by your child?

What country were you born in?

Did you live in the city or the country?

How many years did you attend school?

How many years of education did your parents have?

When did you move to the U.S.?

Why did you come to the U.S.

Were your children born in the U.S. ?

Do you have family/relatives living nearby?

What relation are they to you?

Do you work outside your home?   How many hours/week?

Does your spouse work outside your home? How many hours/week?

Parenting and Attitudes toward Education

What hopes and aspirations do you have for your children?

How do you think you can help your child achieve this?

What level of education do you want your child to reach? High School _____ College _____

What is it like raising children in the U.S. ?

Are you raising your children the way you were raised?
Similarities:

Differences:

What makes you a good parent?

What do you want the school to know about you?

Your child?

Your family?

How do you feel about your child speaking English 6 hours/day at school?

How do you feel about your child learning how to read and write in English?
   Not very important _____   Important _____   Very Important _____

How do you feel about your child learning how to read and write in Spanish?
   Not very important _____   Important _____   Very Important _____

Involvement/Support

How do you expect to support your child's learning this year? What can you do to help your child?

Do you feel the need to learn English this year?

Would you be interested in taking a class to learn how to speak English?

How many times do you expect to meet with your child's teacher this year?

Language and Literacy Beliefs and Home Practices

At what age do you think children can understand what is being read to them?

Do you think reading aloud to your child is important?

If so, at what age do you think parents should start reading to their children?

Do you read aloud to your child?   Do you read in English or Spanish?

Do you read aloud to your child at bedtime?

How many childrens' books do you have in your home?

0 _____ 1-10 _____ 10-20 _____ 20-40 _____ >50 _____

Are they mostly English, Spanish or a combination?

Do you go to the public library with your child?

Do you read religious materials?   If so, what type?

Do you sing songs or rhymes with your child?

Do you tell stories with your child?

How many hours/day does your kindergarten child watch TV or videos?

What kind of shows does he/she like?

Does he watch TV/videos in English, Spanish or a combination?

Does your child play video games?

If so, how many hours/day?

Do you have a computer in the house?   Does your kindergarten child use it?

Do you help your child learn letters?

Do you help your child learn sounds that go with letters?

Does your child know how to write his/her first name?   last name?

Does your child know how to write any other letters?   If so, how many?

How do you think your child's native language of Spanish will affect his/her ability to learn how to read and write in English?

How did you learn how to read in your native country?

What best describes the way you think you should teach your child to read? (check as many as appropriate)

_____   reading aloud with my child

_____   practicing letters and sounds

_____   talking about what words mean

_____   rereading books many times

_____   talking about how written words match what is said

_____   telling my child what a printed word says

_____   flash cards and workbooks

_____   having my child read by himself

_____   computer activities

_____   talking about the parts of the story

_____   asking questions about the book

APPENDIX B

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2

(Questionnaire to be administered orally in Spanish and audiotaped)
Administration Schedule: Spring

<u>Personal</u>

How often have you met with _____'s teacher this year?

What do you think are the important things that kids need to know in kindergarten?

How have <u>you</u> learned about what the children are expected to learn in reading, writing and language in kindergarten?

Do you learn about kindergarten from other parents?

How has your own knowledge helped you to teach your child?

Based on what your child has told you, has your child's experiences in kindergarten brought back any memories of when you learned to read and write?

How do you think your child's growth in reading/writing and Spanish/English language is progressing?

<u>Home</u>

Does _____ tell you a lot about what happens at school?

How has your child's knowledge of reading and writing become a part of home practices?   What does your child like to do now that is 'school-like' ?

Has your child played "school" at home with siblings?

How has your child's new awareness of reading and writing and English language learning become a part of daily life at home?

What do you do with _____ that you both enjoy?

<u>School</u>

Have you learned about kindergarten through your relationships with people at school?

Has the school done anything to help you with your child's learning?
If so, what? Have you received materials to work with?

Has participation in the kindergarten parent group contributed to   your learning about the school curriculum?   In what way?

What part of the school day does your child seem to show an interest in?

What do you think Charlotte's (translator) job is? What does she do?

 Do you know parents who have a kindergarten student in another   school in the district? If so, are there experiences similar/different to yours?

APPENDIX C

RUNNING TEXT OF EVOLVING THEMES

- Importance of the Spanish parent group

- Importance of having a translator available

- Role of Charlotte goes beyond just translating; idea of cultural broker is essential for understanding her role; she helps parents cope with 'life contexts' that allow them to focus on their children's education when they attend meetings; she is an vital element of the climate at Maplehurst Elementary School

- Independence observed in children

- Parents' acknowledgement of inadequate English skills

- Parents' hopes and aspirations are similar: a great motivational factor for being involved in the education of their children

- Life histories provide an important backdrop for parents' motivation to be involved; many sacrifices to get to kindergarten at Maplehurst Elementary School

- Emergent literacy beliefs: mostly consonant with mainstream thinking about the value of hearing language and stories prior to school; importance of books in the home;

- Parent brochure: an example of shared meaningfulness

- Parents reflected their understanding as a result of transforming involvement in the parent group, home practices, and activities related to the dissertation study

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- Top-down approach to family literacy programming quickly replaced by a collaborative model due to input from parents about their awareness of their children's needs, hopes and aspirations and home practices

- Practices of the school community : described what happened in terms of learning and development for the parents in this study

- Parent expectations for frequency of parent/teacher meetings

- Whose responsibility to initiate contact: parents or teachers'?

- Relationship between preschool experiences and kindergarten practices and expectations

- Role of study in illuminating forms of home practice- making the invisible, visible: homework, reading to children, sitting and attending to child, showcasing work at home, calendar work, ensuring good attendance record;

- Social organization of instruction at home goes beyond parent-child dyad; siblings and extended family often involved

- Parent understanding of the kindergarten curriculum through: storytelling, songs, Syllable tapping, role play and playing 'school', writing, journaling

- Recognition of home practice as legitimate involvement

- Parents' practices still hidden from teachers; teachers relying on assumptions; sometimes long-held perceptions of Spanish-speaking parents as a monolith;

- Teachers attributing parent involvement and success in working with their children to parent group and not to the intrinsic competence in this group of parents;

- Teachers' perceptions- example of a factor of Cummins' micro-interactions

- Parents reporting that they don't learn about kindergarten from other parents

- Parents reporting that they learn mostly from involvement with the parent group or their children

- Macro-level interactions; societal perceptions relations of power;

- NCLB: expectations for achievement trickle down to kindergarten level; academically focused vs. emphasis on communication skills, socialization, etc.

- NCLB: achivement expectations for non-English speaking kindergarteners will be same as for English-speaking peers in third grade;

- NCLB: what is the impact of focus on academic skills for children learning English? What about vocabulary development for comprehension and writing skills in later grades? What will the long-term impact be?

- NCLB: where is the differentiation? Standards-based instruction denying individual variations;

- Coercive vs collaborative relationships

- Language and academic abilities for each child varies, resulting in varying capability in relaying information home to parents about the school day

- Examples of development of a sense of efficacy: art class problem and father coming to school; grandfather seeking out help from teacher, Charlotte and me; parent asking for teacher input to help make evaluation decision;

- Longer spring interviews than fall interviews

- Parent-conferences- nature of exchange changed in spring; communication was expanded; parents' sense of efficacy was evident; parents prepared to meet with their children's teachers

- For all the energy put into report cards by teachers, seems to be little acknowledgement of report cards as an important source of information for these

- Interplay between individual variables and opportunities for participation within the context of the school;

- Linguistic access: necessary; but there is more to concept of access;

- parents; Personal communication seems to take precedence over written forms of communication; conferences are much more valuable

- Attention should be placed on how to get the most out of parent conferences

- Capability of parents to know about the skills that their children need to succeed academically

- Evidence of collaborative relationship between parents and Spanish parent group

- Generational differences in childrearing practices: more negotiation, no physical punishment, time-outs, more love and time;

- Generational similarities in childrearing practices

- Model for some seems consistent with expectations of parents in U.S.

- Children teaching their parents – negotiation of learning within activity settings;

- English acquisition by children/ parents' view of bilingualism;

- Additive view: they're young – they'll learn

- Importance of maintaining native language in addition in addition to second language, English

- Confusions between English and Spanish/ sound-based

- Parents' desire to learn English

- Parents' view of themselves as "teachers" for their children

- Idea of free/public education is different than some of their experiences

- Spanish is spoken in home of all participants

- Curriculum: examples of writing, phonemic awareness, drawing and writing words to accompany pictures, sight words, comprehension questions;

- Illumination of the school day through journals: routines, social practices, authors, reading strategies such as read alouds and independent reading, writing, math, calendar, specials, field trips, drawing;

- Broader view of education: including values and character development;

- Triangulation of findings: Mrs. G. and Ramiro's mother; teacher report aligned with what she wrote in the brochure;

- Brochure : an opportunity for parents to reflect their perspectives in a form that can be shared with incoming parents; no filter involved; broader definition of what is important about kindergarten presented;

- Parents seemed to appreciate their roles in brochure development and journal activities

- Formal opportunities to communicate with all parents is very limited

- Two parents moving into a volunteering position even though they have limited English skills

- Parents have extended participation to the whole-school PTG

- PTG leadership is three white, English-speaking parents but constituency is almost all Spanish-speaking now; Other non-English speaking minority parents, such as the African refugee families, are not represented at the school meetings at all;

- Charlotte must attend all the PTG meetings now because of the preponderance of Spanish-speaking parents in attendance

- Parents need access to information about school curriculum and practices;

- Language translation is still a major barrier to communication between home and school

- Relationship is with the translator and researcher and the group as an organization and not with each other within the group; the group as an entity is the driving source for connections and opportunities for learning;

- Context is key to learning opportunities for parents and the school; the climate is created by the personalities, policies and procedures;

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR TRANSLATOR ONE YEAR LATER

How many of the nine families in the study were still at Maplehurst Elementary School for the first grade?

Can you tell me about opportunities/invitations for Spanish-speaking parents to learn about school practices and curriculum during the first grade?

- Spanish Parent Literacy Group
- PTG
- Open House
- Parent Conferences
- Meetings with teachers at parent request
- Volunteering in the classroom

Did the nature of invitations to parents and the opportunities for engagement change from the 05-06 school year to the 06-07 school year? If so, in what way ?

Were there particular aspects of the curriculum in first grade that parents identified as difficult to understand? If so, what?

Tell me about the nature of parent-teacher communication during this year.

Did parents have a forum for communicating to teachers, what they are doing, academically, with their children at home?

How did teachers view the role of Spanish-speaking parents in the educational process? Was there a perspective of partnership with the school?

How have your services been utilized? Is there any change in procedure that you would make to improve the access for parents to the school?

In your opinion, were there missed opportunities for communication?

How did limited English skills of parents impact parent engagement during the first grade year? What forms of access were provided by the school to counter the language difference?

Were there new examples of opportunities for parent input similar to the development of the brochure or the review of the progress report by parents prior to the parent-teacher conference, the previous year?

Did current kindergarten parents meet with incoming parents again this year? Was the parent brochure distributed?

Was there any formalized school/district protocol for working with parents with limited English skills?

Tell me about any district initiatives that sought to understand the nature of engagement of Spanish speaking parents at Maplehurst Elementary School.

How do you see the role of Spanish-Speaking parents at Maplehurst Elementary School? Do you see it changing? If so, how?

Has the sociopolitical climate changed in the past year? What have parents expressed to you?

Has the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind, impacted the Spanish-speaking children and parents that you work with? If so, do you see an impact on instructional practices? Do you see a difference in tolerance/intolerance for non-English speaking families?

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of* NEW HAMPSHIRE

August 31, 2005

Phyllis Schlichter
Education, Morrill Hall
43 Hitching Post Lane
Bedford, NH 03100

IRB #:   3496
Study: How Do Spanish-Speaking Parents Understand the Language and Literacy Demands of Kindergarten?
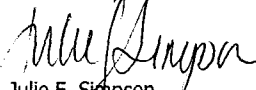**Approval Date:** 08/31/2005

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval date you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
        Judy Sharkey
        Paula Salvio

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research, Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564