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An exploratory analysis of Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives on home, school, and community collaboration

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An Exploratory Analysis of Mexican-American Parental

Involvement Perspectives on Home, School,

and Community Collaboration

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An Exploratory Analysis of Mexican-American Parental

Involvement Perspectives on Home, School,

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An Exploratory Analysis of Mexican-American Parental

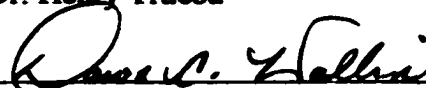Involvement Perspectives on Home, School,

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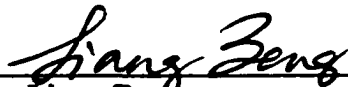
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Dr. Dawn Wallin

Dr. Liang Zeng

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Dedication

To God – Thank you for your continual presence and guidance.

To my loving husband, Sam, and my wonderful children

- Ariel and Marshall –

I thank you for your continuous prayers, support, patience and encouragement

over these past three years.

To my amazing mother –Thank you for being so involved as a parent, friend

and prayerful encourager in my life.

To my extraordinary sisters and brother, much love to you always...

I can still hear those words of yours . . . "Kick it, Lisa. Kick it!"

Acknowledgments

I Thank You, my Lord and Savior, for providing me this opportunity to fully

place my faith and trust in you. Your Love has sustained, strengthened, and held me

throughout this journey to complete . . . "A God-Sized Task." May you receive all the

Honor and Glory. Amen!

Over the past three years there have been many people who have been beside

me and lifting me with their prayers, e-mails, gentle words and kindhearted

encouragements. I would like to thank my brothers and sisters in Christ, friends, and

former students and parents for their continuous prayers. On those days when I just

needed to see and reach beyond the present, it was your prayers that carried me.

A very special thanks go to my excellent committee members who added

something extraordinary to my overall development as a scholarly doctoral student.

To Dr. Dawn Wallin – Thank you for your superb editing skills and much needed humor

on *those days*; To Dr. Henry Trueba – Thank you for your inspiration, openness to new

ideas, and dedication to my personal achievement; To Dr. Liang Zeng – Thank you for

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certainly not least, To Dr. Maricela Oliva – Thank you for making sure that I stayed the

course. Your timely suggestions, gentle direction, continuous support, and incredible

editing abilities have been crucial in helping me to achieve this goal. In this time of

reflection I find myself asking, "What would I have done without you?" Thank you,

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To my children – Ariel, my young lady, Thank you for encouraging me to accomplish my goal and taking on more responsibility within our family. I especially enjoyed the colorful love notes that reminded me of my priorities. "I Love You, too, Princess!" – To Marshall, my little man, Thank you for your sweet hugs and supportive notes. But most important Thank you for bringing me the sunshine by the roots. To my incredible husband, Sam – Thank you for your love, patience, commitment, and support throughout this "God-Sized Task." Our family has continued to remain steady and close knit because of your presence and loyalty.

Together, as a family, we have accomplished this goal, Thank You!

An Exploratory Analysis of Mexican-American Parental

Involvement Perspectives on Home, School,

and Community Collaboration

Publication No. _____

Lisa Kay Hall-Irby

The University of Texas Pan American, 2002

Supervisor: Maricela Oliva

. Abstract

When schools consider their relationship with families as a partnership wherein the home and school contribute to children's educational and social development, the results are increased levels of parental involvement. This exploratory analysis involves a study of Mexican-American parents and their perspectives on how they perceive themselves in the home, school, and community collaboration process. This study seeks to explore the traditional parental involvement model and uses existing theory that challenges the traditional model to create a new re-conceptualized model of parental involvement. Using qualitative case study methodology parental involvement data were gathered by using five focus groups and a series of three in-depth interview sessions conducted with seven parents. Additional data on parental involvement were obtained

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via observations, photographs, archival data, and other documents. The significance of this study directly relates to the shifting demographic structure within the United States and in particular along the United States-Mexico border. The findings from this study reveal that Mexican-American parental involvement perceptions are similar and differ in some ways from the school's traditional model of parental involvement. In the school sphere parents assume leadership roles through the Core Team within the school; in the home sphere the parents advocate on the children's behalf between the home, school, and community. These parents also help their children to develop and utilize their own human, social, and cultural capital in these spheres and when negotiating between the spheres; and in the community sphere these parents have successfully demonstrated their ability to build bridges, break barriers, and cross borders between the spheres. The parents and leadership at this school have developed relationships that have helped them to move toward what Martinez (1994) refers to as Interdependent Borders.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Most practitioners and researchers are in favor of increased parental involvement (Swap, 1993) however there is little consensus about what constitutes effective involvement. This lack of parental representation and participation within the educational environment prompts various stakeholders to ask the question: Does parental involvement look different for minority parents, low-income parents, as well as linguistically and culturally diverse parents (Baker & Soden, 1998; Weinstein, 1992)? Another question that surfaces is how might social class influence parental involvement patterns and in some cases present barriers that further impede parental involvement efforts between the home, school and community (Lareau, 1989)?

Interest in increased levels of parental involvement and collaboration has been spurred by the idea of inclusion as suggested by current policy and practice. Because of this, the voice and visibility of those historically marginalized communities stand to challenge existing policy as implemented by schools and other social entities. In fact, Lopez (1999) and Hatch (1998) have advocated that increased parental participation and collaboration be part of decision-making processes, pedagogical practices, and leadership positions in education.

As time progresses, educational leaders and policy makers acknowledge that the role of educating and training children is not only the public school's responsibility. It is,

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as Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes and Joyner (1996) purports, related to the fact that, "Humans are social beings who need community support and involvement to develop adequately" (p. 29). Furthermore, collaboration between homes/parents and schools benefit the community as a whole (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986; Comer, 1986; Coleman, 1991; Epstein, 1986). Research on such collaboration with parents indicates that these benefits include more positive and supportive parent-school relationships (Davies, 1987) as well as increased student achievement and self-esteem (Becher, 1984; Henderson, 1987).

Statement of the Problem

In this study I explored the Mexican-American parent/family perspective on parental involvement as it relates to home, school and community collaboration. Research clearly indicates that students achieve at higher levels when they receive support from the home environment while other research reasons that students have longer lasting success when they receive support from multiple environments (Comer, Haynes, Joyner & Ben-Avie, 1996). Through this study I examined the types of parental involvement activities in which parents participate within the school environment as well as explored the types of educational activities and support systems that parents/families provide to their children outside of the school setting. According to Comer et al. (1996), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Epstein (1986) these multiple environments help to shape the nature and intensity of collaborative relationships.

Research Questions

As this collective realization about the need for parental involvement becomes more and more pervasive throughout our nation's schools and homes, some pertinent

questions arise:

1. How do Mexican-American parents perceive themselves with respect to their participation in their children's education and development?

2. In what ways do socioeconomic, language, culture, capital and other characteristics of Mexican-American parents impact or help to construct their parental involvement?

3. How do these constructions of Mexican-American parental involvement reflect or differ from Traditional or newer Re-Conceptualized Models of parental involvement?

4. How might these constructions better inform the development of new parental involvement policy and programs that directly attend to the needs and interests of Mexican-American families?

5. What are the practice, research and policy implications of this for negotiating the borders between Mexican-American families, their schools, and communities?

These questions are not meant to be an all-inclusive exchange about parental involvement practices. However, these questions are intended to engage others in a dialogue concerning traditional and re-conceptualized models of parental involvement in order to present alternative perspectives concerning the relationships between home, school, and community.

Implications and Significance

A family's lack of participation in the "traditional" (school-centered) model (Berla & Henderson, 1994; 1995) is compounded by linguistic and cultural differences between parents and school personnel within the educational setting. As suggested by its description, in the "traditional" model of parental involvement, the majority of parental involvement activities transpire at the school. Parental participation is documented and

evidenced by the parents' physical presence on campus, wherein parents perform and carry out volunteer roles in the classroom, workroom, or hallways. Other verifying mechanisms of visible involvement include parents' attendance at scheduled conferences, P.T.O. meetings, parent training sessions, as well as sports events and special presentations provided by the school and held at the school (Epstein, 1987). Clearly, these traditional parental involvement activities are beneficial. However, through this study I sought to discover what other activities besides these help children develop and connect academically and socially beyond the school setting. This study reveals the voices of the Mexican-American parent and their perspective on parental involvement.

Furthermore, this study presumes that collaboration is what is needed in our changing and diverse society. If education is to work more effectively for all students and in particular students along the United States-Mexico border, the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be in terms of parental involvement may need to be re-conceptualized and expanded to include the perspectives of those whose voice has up until recent years remained marginalized. Most researchers who study parental involvement would agree that parents are a valuable resource in the home, school and community (Henderson & Berla, 1994, 1995). Unfortunately, "parental capital" is rarely recognized or accessed by the schools and teachers. Therefore this study sets out to explore how collaboration can help to bridge relationships by better activating parental skills, talents, and knowledge.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One is attributed to the relatively brief amount of time designated for data collection and analysis, which may have limited

the richness of data. A second limitation is that I focused on only one elementary campus along the United States-Mexico border to collect data, interview and conduct focus groups. Because of this my data will therefore reflect only the input from these parents and families. A third limitation is that this study included a select number of participates referred to me by my parent liaison contact. The names of these parent participants will primarily came from sign-in sheets for various activities. Thus the home and community-bound parents were selected based on recommendations and suggestions provided by the other parents. This is not too different from snow-ball sampling, therefore this may create a particular bias.

Organization of the Study

The following chapter provides a critical review of literature on parental involvement that reveals the more common practices associated with "traditional" parental involvement. That chapter describes the benefits of collaboration between the home, school and community and outlines the importance of human ecological systems in the collaborative process. I make the argument that we need to understand the impact of existing parental involvement policy and practice as it affects parents and families who may not reflect the "traditional" parental involvement activities as evidenced by schools. In the past, these individuals have been viewed in a limited or marginalized capacity with regard to the contributions they have and are making in their children's education and social development. Chapter 3 introduces the research questions and details the methodology of this study. More specifically, Chapter 3 outlines the research design, including the site and selection process of participants, qualitative data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents a description of the context of

the study. Chapter 5 displays the data analysis, discusses the research findings of this study, and represents the parental voice and their perspective in a narrative and pictorial format. The parents' stories illustrate their own description of what parental involvement is and depicts the types of activities and support they offer to their children through their involvement. Chapter 6 concludes this study with a summary of my research findings and conclusions, and presents several implications for practice, research, and policy.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the field of educational administration an important issue concerns how educational leaders can involve parents in producing positive educational outcomes for their children. In a recent report called <u>Standards for parent/family involvement programs</u>, The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA, 1999), touted family-school partnerships as a wise investment for communities that are truly concerned about student achievement. Other research conducted by The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 1999) revealed that when schools view their relationship with families as a partnership of shared responsibility, the levels of engaged student learning and the transfer of skills are enhanced, as are the levels and types of parental involvement activities. Schine's (1998) research concludes that although school policy and practices impact student achievement, family-school partnerships appear to offer the best means for sustaining student success and connection to the "real world."

Parental involvement in the form of home, school and community collaboration has been studied extensively (Epstein, 1986, 1994, 1996; Berla & Henderson, 1994,1995; Comer, 1994, 1996, 1999; Chavkin & Williams,1989; Rich, 1986; Walberg, 1984; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan,1990, 1991; and Lightfoot, 1978). These researchers contend that family involvement is a vital component in the student achievement equation. Other researchers like Krieder and Lopez (1999), share this view and postulate

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that principals and other school administrators are crucial players in providing support for determining the direction of parental involvement programs. Unfortunately, some parental involvement programs are based on policies that tend to discount the impact of family perspective in the educational process. This study challenges us to consider the importance of and the influence of the interaction between home, school and community cultures (Young & Helvie, 1996; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1993).

In this chapter I will establish an outline and discussion concerning the legal, policy and historical contexts as they relate to parental involvement. Next I will define parental involvement for my study and describe what the literature says about collaboration. I will then discuss and describe the "traditional" viewpoint on parental involvement and conclude with a discussion and description of recent scholarship that challenges, critiques, or redefines parental involvement.

Description of Context

This section concentrates on legal, policy, and historical aspects of parent/family involvement. Throughout the legal portion, an overview of salient court cases are described which present a foundation for the establishment of past and current parental involvement policy. The policy section delineates existing standards and regulations regarding parent/family involvement at national and state levels as set forth and mandated by policy makers. Finally, the historical segment provides a literary context that illustrates a progressive change in demographic, societal, economic, and cultural aspects in the United States as they pertain to parental involvement.

Legal Context

Parental involvement is not a new concept. References to parental involvement

date in the literature from the early 1900s and include several court cases that helped to shape the role parents would play in the education of their children. For example, in Meyer v. Nebraska (1923), parents sought to have their children educated in the language of the family (that language being German). This was an important case for future discussion of bilingual education. The Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925) court case confronted the issue of school choice and the right of the parents to select the type of education they deemed most appropriate for their children. The constitutional interpretation of both Prince v. Massachusetts (1943) and Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) fully recognized the parents' claim to authority in how their children would be raised and what parents deemed as acceptable practices in terms of their own ethical and moral standards. These (1943; 1972) decisions as set forth by the Supreme Court called parental responsibility a basic right and affirmed the necessity in our society for parents to direct the upbringing of their children. More precisely the outcome read, "It is cardinal with us that the custody, care, and nurturing of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary functions and freedom include preparations of obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder" (Wisconsin v. Yoder, 1972).

These court cases and rulings direct attention to the fact that the educational system alone is not the sole proprietor or director of how education is to be handled. Parents as a resource are instrumental in the home environment and play a vital role in both the school and community by helping to shape the educational endeavors and achievement of their children. The National Commission on Children (1991) reported:

> The family is and should remain society's primary institution for bringing children into the world and for supporting their growth and

development throughout childhood...Parents are the world's greatest

experts on their own children. They are their children's first and most

important caregivers, teachers, and providers. (p. 1)

Furthermore, the 1995 Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act introduced by

Senator Charles Grassley and Representative Steve Largent, declared that parents would

retain the right to decide what is in the best interest of their children. Grassley and

Largent (1995) state:

> [This act] would give parents the standing law to protect their rights to
>
> direct the education and to protect and form the moral character of
>
> their children. In fact, it would give them superior standing over
>
> government and its agencies in these matters: The bill declares that
>
> parents' rights to direct the upbringing of their children are
>
> fundamental rights which government can curtail only under
>
> conditions of "compelling interest" and under "strict guidelines" of
>
> judicial procedure, legal terms which guide courts in their decisions.
>
> These liberty rights are protected by the Fifth Amendment. (p. 1)

These legal cases remind educators and policy makers that parents and/or guardians are

legally entitled to be included in educational and societal discussions that directly impact

their children's educational progress and success. Such court cases as discussed above

provide a legal foundation for involving parents as partners in the educational process.

Policy Context

Just as there are legal considerations surrounding parental involvement

issues so too there exists related educational policy which affects the parents' role in the

educational process. Various education and advocacy organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association, the National Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents, the National Urban League, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Head Start Parent Association train parents to be leaders and advocates on behalf of their children. Through this training, parents are able to voice their educational on and make decisions that are in the best interest of their children. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley in his State of American Education Speech in February 1994 articulated the importance of family involvement. In September of the same year he launched the National Family Involvement Partnership Plan. This policy affirms the value of parents' perspectives and the key role that parents may play in the education of their children.

On July 11, 1994, President Clinton issued the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This act was a significant piece of legislation that emphasized strengthening partnerships between the parent, school, and community. The Goals 2000 Act also required that parents be represented on state and local panels as well as on grassroots outreach projects aimed at improving schools and student achievement. Goal Eight of the National Education Act succinctly stated that every school will promote partnerships that will encourage parental involvement and increase opportunities for parents to participate in the social, emotional, and academic development of their child.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) State Title One policy requires that each state be represented by a diverse committee including parents and others who broadly reflect the representation of Title One parents in a given state.

Parents on this committee are to be continually involved in the meaningful development of and implementation of the state plan through periodic reviews and consultations. Parental participation in state plan development entails consultation with parents, Local Education Agencies, pupil services, personnel, administrators, and other staff. According to Local Education Agencies (LEA) Parental Involvement Policy, an LEA must develop jointly, and incorporate written parent involvement policy into its LEA plan. More specifically, Section 1118 enhances the parental involvement provisions in two central ways: a) It establishes the role of the school in involving parents and clarifies the relationship between the school's role in parental participation and the role of the LEA, and; (b) This section divides the requirements into three components: 1) policy involvement; 2) shared responsibilities for high student performance; and 3) building capacity for involvement.

The aforementioned policy has been set into place and it is evident from what research reveals that parental involvement levels are not where they could be, especially for certain student and parent populations (Lopez, 1999). Therefore one question for researchers becomes whether there exist alternate parental perspectives about the definition of parental involvement?

Historical Context

Who then is responsible for helping to prepare these youth by providing the necessary education and training? This responsibility of preparation some fifty years ago fell with the family. However, today's definition of what constitutes a family is complex, overlapping with role conflict, rising cost of living, economic pressures, and changing societal attitudes.

The State of Iowa Department of Education Parental Involvement in Education Report (1998) acknowledges that the family structure in the United States is transforming more rapidly than ever before and is characterized by changing familial and structural definitions such as: traditional, blended, extended, multi-generational, migrant, minority, single-parent, divorced, dual-worker, and refugee. These structures impact the social and emotional development of children, affect childrearing practices, and influence the overall neighborhood and community makeup (Comer et. al, 1996; 1999). Research has clearly pointed out that home, school and community collaboration is essential (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Becher, 1984), and that the creation of positive relationships with parents may be the vehicle for addressing the impact of changing societal, economic and familial structures (Henderson & Wilcox, 1998).

The following societal illustrations further suggest the need for collaboration. For example the latest demographic data on minorities reported in the United States Census 2000 reveals that there is approximately a 30 percent increase in minority and ethnic populations. Of all the minority groups in the U.S. (Asians, blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans etcetera), the Hispanic group is the largest. The Census 2000 data reported the Hispanic population to be an estimated 31,360,000, and by the year 2005 the Hispanic population is projected to be 36,059,000. These recent demographic shifts throughout the United States have inclined various educators and researchers to address the impact that these growing numbers will have on the school systems that serve these students.

Another societal change as suggested by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence and by researchers like Hamburg (1998) and Laub and Lauritsen

(1998) affirms the view that there is an increasing number of youth and teens involved in criminal and violent activities. Their research findings indicate that the dramatic rise in school violence has a direct correlation with local crime rates and factors external to the school. The more that parents are involved in their children's lives providing support and vigilance the less likely their children will have the opportunity to be involved in non-productive activities like dropping out of school. This increasing dropout rate among youth and teenagers is significantly related to the potential of students to be involved with crime and violence.

Businesses, especially those thriving in today's information age, require educational systems that produce quality and excellence in their students. Such quality and excellence can help our country's economic survival. According to President George Bush (2001) economic survival is dependent on well-prepared youth with the essential tools that will enable them to succeed in higher education or entry level jobs beyond high school.

Defining and Re-defining Parental Involvement

Most studies highlight incongruent perspectives when it comes to parental and administrative perceptions of what parental involvement is. Most researchers would agree that "parental involvement" has been identified as one of several factors that helps to promote student success, however a clear an acceptable definition of what parental involvement is has not collectively been decided. Scribner (2000) stated,

> School staff (teachers, and other professional staff) and parent
> involvers (families, parent specialists, and other nonprofessional staff)
> held distinctively different views on the meaning of parent

involvement, therefore the "what" of parental involvement appears to depend on: parent involver or school staff. . . Interpretations differed on activities in which parents ought to be involved, who ought to be responsible for initiating these activities, and what roles ought to be played by professionals and parents in carrying out this responsibility. (p. 4)

Research indicates that there are at least five (5) related terms that reference parental involvement. These terms include parental engagement, parent participation, family and parental involvement, school – family partnerships and home, school, community collaboration (Booth & Dunn, 1996).

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement was one of the first terms used to define the interaction of parents with children in the home environment. This basic notion of parental engagement began in the early 1900s, however its popularity originated with the inception of Project Head Start in 1965 and Follow-Through programs in preschool and early elementary grades (Coleman, 1987). Project Head Start began as a comprehensive early childhood, family-centered intervention program. It was intended to help prepare economically disadvantaged children for school and involve members of low-income families in the planning of their children's education (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Epstein, 1994).

Parent Participation and Family and Parental Involvement

Parent participation and family parental involvement are interchangeable terms that broadened the basic concept of parental engagement to include the scope of activities and patterns of interactions beyond the home environment. Areas of participation include

home, school, church, neighborhood and other relevant settings in which parents and children find themselves (Epstein, 1994).

School-Family Partnerships

School-Family Partnerships were created to include the community. This change inspired a new term for parental involvement, Home, School and Community Collaboration (Epstein, 1994). According to Epstein (1987, 1990; 1994), the idea of partnerships simply implied that the community component adds an overlapping effect between the home, school and community. This overlap as seen by Epstein can help improve the quality of education and ultimately impact overall student achievement. The key stakeholders in this parental involvement model include: the home (including parents, guardians, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and etcetera); the school (including students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, and others); and the community (including local businesses, community members without children in school, churches, and other organizations). These stakeholders offer not only a support base for each other but also create learning environments that can be more responsive to the learners' needs.

Collaboration

In the collaborative process, recognition of changing societal, economic and familial structures are only part of the plan for developing working relationships with parents, community members, and business owners. Human and social capital theorists like James Coleman (1987; 1991) and Robert Putnam (1995) emphasize the value and importance of individual and group knowledge, skills, resources, social networks, culture, and language. Others such as Comer, (1986) and Epstein (1990) who study community

partnerships and collaborative relationships, conclude that parents and community members are essential contributors on two basic levels.

Firstly, parent and community members offer a more complete sense of neighborhood values than schools alone and provide a broader sense of community representation. Secondly, community presence throughout and within the collaborative process enriches the discussions and attends to the real issues (employment, financial, housing and basic economic needs) confronting many families, schools and communities (Comer et. al, 1996; 1999).

For well over a decade numerous reports and research studies have focused on the topic of parental involvement as one of the key components in the collaborative school restructuring effort (Rosado, 1994; Kozol, 1991). The need for collaboration has also been evidenced by the continual debates surrounding the educational process in America. The National Commission on Education in 1983 published a report called, A Nation at Risk, delineating among other things the need to have greater parental involvement. Additionally, a video called The national desk: Education – A public right gone wrong (2000) featured by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), reported the growing need for schools to collaborate with parents and involve them in the decision-making processes in schools and communities. The evidence as set forth by these documents present arguments about how to achieve greater parent participation in schools, seek to define what is meant by parental involvement, and challenge existing strategies and methods aimed at securing more parental involvement.

As defined by such reports, collaboration consists of family, school, and community structures that encourage the development of closely shared goals which are

related to children's educational and social development. Additionally, these goals are supported by a network of adults who are committed to their success in and out of school (Henderson & Wilcox, 1998; Young & Helvie, 1996). Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact of home-school partnerships and parental involvement on student achievement, thus re-emphasizing the necessity of partnerships and collaboration (Epstein, 1990; Walberg, 1984). According to The Family Involvement Partnership for Learning (1996) an estimated 40-50 percent of what a child learns occurs in a school and the remaining 50-60 percent comes from the family and community. Shields (1994) proposes the deconstruction of artificial boundaries between the classroom and home. He further asserts that schools must implement pedagogically appropriate practices that are associated and linked to relationships between the school and its community, parents, and families.

DeKanter, Ginsburg, Pederson, Peterson, and Rich (1997) promote strong community involvement in the collaborative effort between home, school and community and underscore the fact that communities are rich in untapped resources that can directly benefit all stakeholders in community. It is through the combined educational collaborative efforts between home, school and community that real educational change for all students will be accomplished. Schools cannot educate children alone; they need the support of parents (Moles, 1987; Rich, 1988).

Outcomes of Collaboration

It is apparent to researchers such as and Booth and Dunn (1991) that collaboration has produced outcomes and has far reaching outcomes for teachers, parents, schools and communities. Teacher outcomes directly impact school staff's knowledge of

the socio-cultural context of the communities they serve. Krieder and Lopez (1999) and The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993) maintain that strong relationships can be fostered as teachers come to recognize family strengths and potential rather than adhere to a deficit model concerning parent/families. Parent outcomes are represented in shared responsibility in a variety of roles, in particular, tutoring, helping in the classroom setting and serving on decision-making committees (Henderson, 1987). An increased level of collaboration thus provides both families and community members greater opportunities to participate in a wider range of activities, and to assume key positions of joint responsibility (Ballen & Moles, 1994). Finally, the community outcomes promote greater interaction among all three entities (Clark, 1983). Collaboration touches on issues far greater than those of increased math, reading, and writing scores. The mere act of collaboration helps to bridge the gap between linguistically, socially and culturally diverse families and communities while acknowledging and validating their differences (Henderson, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Young & Helvie, 1996).

Questions Concerning Collaboration

There are several questions that arise and have far-reaching implications for homes, schools and communities as they make the shift towards collaboration. These questions include the following:

1. How does collaboration develop between homes, schools and communities wherein there is mutual trust and respect in the exchange process, where there is representative goal and strategy agreement and shared vision for the all partners involved in the collaborative relationship?

2. What role will principals as leaders play in creating collaborative environments between the home, school and community members?

3. What steps should be taken to address and overcome barriers between the home, school, and community (i.e. families facing special challenges, disabilities, limited English proficiency, or other special needs)?

4. What measures might employers implement as they reconsider their own policies regarding flex and release-time for its own employees?

5. How might adult literacy classes be expanded or coupled with activities in libraries, community colleges, churches, volunteer organizations, and others entities within the community to ensure that all parents and adults become literate?

6. In what ways can schools ensure parents and community members that they will be listened to and that their involvement is essential in their children's education?

These and other questions will help to re-conceptualize and diversify what parental involvement may eventually look like and how all three entities (home, school and community) can collectively re-shape and re-connect to foster greater and more responsive community ties in the process.

Traditional Model of Parental Involvement

Findings based on more than thirty years of parental involvement research have helped researchers and educators conclude that the role parents play in the educational process is not only significant for improving children's school success but is vital in connecting the home, school, and community environments (Henderson, 1987; Walberg, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1986, 1987). In the following section I will

describe the traditional model of parental involvement; discuss the barriers and benefits of the traditional model; and critique the traditional model of parental involvement.

Description of Traditional Parental Involvement

It has been argued by some proponents of the "traditional" (school-centered) model of parental involvement that socioeconomic status and family background influence the level and nature of parental involvement (Rosado, 1994). The "traditional" model of parental involvement tends to focus on the parents' physical presence at the school itself. The expectations for parents within the traditional role is that parents will be present at open house, back to school night, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings, and will volunteer and assist with fundraising at schools (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998). The "traditional" parental involvement model supports the belief that families that are involved in their children's education in overt ways have higher achieving children who obtain higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior, graduate at higher rates, and have greater enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Becher, 1984).

According to Epstein (1996) income, parental education, marital status, family size, and other such characteristics are not the most significant factors impacting student achievement. What enhances student achievement and learning is a parent's positive participation in the learning process within the home and school. Henderson & Berla's (1994) research reveals that children do best when parents are enabled to play four key roles in their children's learning: a) parents acting as teachers and helping children at home; b) parents being supporters of students and contributing their skills to the school;

c) parents being advocates for their children and ensuring they receive fair treatment and appropriate work; and 4) parents participating in roles such as decision-makers and problem solvers at every school level.

Benefits of the "Traditional" Model of Parental Involvement

The traditional parental involvement model appears to benefit three groups in our society: the student and parent, the community, and the teachers and schools. The National Parent Information Network, 1998 claims that parental involvement has positives effects regardless of whether the level is preschool, elementary, or high school. This research additionally notes that the more parents become involved with their children's education the more positive is the child's attitude towards the school and its personnel. Epstein (1990) maintains that when parents are involved, students obtain higher levels of academic achievement and children receive instruction at more grade-appropriate levels.

The "traditional" model of parental involvement benefits the parent and community. The more parents learn about how the school and their educational programs work the better equipped they are for working with their own children. This knowledge fosters parental confidence and promotes a more positive attitude about their relationship with and in the home, school and community (Henderson, 1987; Epstein, 1992; Liontos, 1992).

The benefits of parent involvement for teachers and schools are observed in the relationships and attitudes between parents and schools (Davies, 1988; Epstein, 1992; Liontos, 1992). When parents become involved with the school they are able to learn how the school works, gain understanding of the various educational programs, receive ideas,

and be trained on how to help their children. Involvement of this sort leads to increased support for teachers and school initiatives that in turn create positive learning atmospheres at home and school (Epstein, 1992; Henderson, 1987; Liontos, 1992).

Barriers Within the "Traditional" Model of Parental Involvement

Epstein (1990) contends that schools that help families to feel welcome and show parents how to improve learning at home are likely to have more support from parents and have more motivated children. Geiger (1994) supports this belief by advocating that schools must become places where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential. Unfortunately, many schools all too often make the family feel unwanted and unwelcome in the school environment. The sad fact remains that many of today's schools do not extend themselves or even know how to positively engage parents in the parental involvement process.

There are numerous other barriers that parents encounter as they attempt to participate in their children's education. Blank and Kershaw (1998), State of Iowa Department of Education (1998) and other researchers as listed below, delineate the following reasons for parents' apprehension regarding their involvement in schools:

1. their perception that the school environment is not supportive or welcoming of them and having themselves personally experienced negative feelings concerning school in the past (Garcia, 1990; Bermudez & Marquez, 1996);

2. logistical constraints concerning transportation, child care and other resources (Henderson & Berla, 1994);

3. linguistic and cultural differences between school personnel and family contributing to a lack of communication (Inger, 1992);

4. work schedule conflicts with scheduled school meetings (Leitch & Tangri, 1988);

5. a lack of familiarity and understanding concerning the home-school partnership which leads to a sense of unclear expectations about what to do in the school setting (Garcia, 1990);

6. feelings of inadequacy, lack of preparation, and a low sense of self-worth (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996);

7. lack of mutual understanding concerning role definition of both staff and parents within the school system (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996);

8. personality differences, insensitivity, and hostility on the part of school personnel towards parents (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996);

9. dissatisfaction and pessimistic attitudes toward the school system because of unfulfilled responsibilities on the part of the school (Blank & Kershaw, 1998);

10. differing perspectives and ideas from school staff about what constitutes parental involvement, (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998), and;

11. insufficient training for teachers on how to reach out to both mothers and fathers (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998).

These barriers represents some of the reasons why parents have experienced a difficult time becoming integrated into the schools as partners in education.

Critique of the "Traditional" Model of Parental Involvement

One of the primary critiques concerning the "traditional" model of parental involvement is that it restricts what may be considered legitimate forms of involvement that may occur away from the school setting (Lopez, 1999). Critiques of the traditional model also extend to the recognition that schools do not effectively know how to go

about reaching language minority parents, culturally diverse populations and low-income parents. Many educators have misinterpreted parents' lack of participation as a lack of interest in their children's future. However, "...it is important to examine this issue from the parents' perspective" (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996, p.2).

The "traditional" parental involvement perspective confines parental involvement to the school setting and neglects to recognize the intangible aspects of learning that parents are capable of transferring to their children. These intangible lessons are transmitted through social, linguistic, and cultural interactions that transpire in the home and community environment of the child and parent.

Most schools adhere to the traditional parental involvement perspective wherein the expectation is that all parents will be active participants in the educational process of their child. This type of involvement is defined by school standards, meaning that active participation operates in accordance with the "traditional" model and primarily denotes involvement in fund raising activities, attendance at Parent Teacher Organization (P.T.O.), open house and scheduled conference meetings with teachers. These proposed meetings and expectations of all parents come from the "traditional" parental involvement framework as set forth by the schools. Unfortunately, not all parents, especially minority and low-income parents, are able to fulfill these expectations. Their non-presence at these meetings and functions is often misread as an overt disinterest in their child's education (Inger, 1992). However, studies performed by researchers who primarily study minority and low-income populations refute the "traditional" perspective of parental involvement and acknowledge the need to create models that address parental

involvement from the parent perspective (Sosa, 1997; Espinoza, 1995; Rosado, 1994; Lopez, 2001).

Within the last several decades an extensive literature base has been developed concerning parental involvement. (Coleman, 1987; Epstein, 1990; Comer 1984; National Commission on Educational Excellence in Education, 1983; Oakes & Lipton, 1990; Kagan, 1984; Ascher, 1987; Henderson, 1987). These studies indicate that efforts to increase parental participation in the school setting are relatively successful with middle-class, European American parents. Unfortunately, these same programs intent on promoting collaboration with all groups are less successful with ethnic and linguistic minority populations (Gonzalez, 1992, Clark, 1983; Laosa, 1983; Comer, 1984; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). The parental involvement situation is further complicated by the fact that few researchers have examined the prevalence and efficacy of Hispanic parental involvement. This is particularly disconcerting since Latinos are both one of the fastest growing and most educationally at risk segments of the U.S. population (Chapa & Valencia, 1993).

The "traditional" school-centered model of parental involvement is important because it recognizes and values the relationships between parents, schools, and communities while focusing on parents and their role in helping to improve their children's achievement. However, this "traditional" model is not comprehensive and for this reason has been re-conceptualized (Comer (1996; 1999), Epstein (1990, 1994), Scribner (2000), Rosado (1994), Lopez (2001). The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement takes into account broader issues and concepts that directly impact parental involvement and are not necessarily accounted for in the "traditional" school-centered

model. In the re-conceptualized parental involvement model these issues include the family's language, culture, economic, social-emotional status and other characteristics.

Parental Involvement Perceptional Discontinuities

Researchers (Delgado, 1992; Hidalgo, Siu, Bright, Swap, & Epstein, 1995; Lopez, 2001) have explored the attributes of ethically diverse populations and neighborhood communities. The conclusions from their studies point to the fact that obvious strengths do exist. These include the development of resources such as traditional values, family dreams and aspirations, cultural norms of behavior, racial pride and identity, family educational involvement of families in their children's education and schools, and organization of formal and informal family and community support systems. The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement helps to shift the perspective from that of "traditional" school-centered model to a parent-centered model that addresses the specific ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other attributes of Hispanic parents.

Ethnic Discontinuity

Gonzalez (1992) and Rosado (1994) assert that there is a need to identify appropriate ways to reach and involve parents and students from non-European cultural backgrounds. On the ethnic level minority parents have often been stereotyped as uninterested, unconcerned, and uneducated enough to be involved in their children's education (Epstein, 1990; Lightfoot, 1978; Moles, 1987; Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbusch, 1993). The most unfortunate aspect of this assumption according to Gonzalez (1992) is that the educational system fails to accept, integrate, and communicate the values shared by minority cultures. The tendency therefore is to omit or simply discount what minority parents and communities offer to their children in the way of social and

other developmental experiences.

Cultural and Linguistic Discontinuity

Rosado (1994) states that school culture plays a key role in establishing effective partnerships between the home, school and community. The culture of the school must successfully take into consideration the norms, values, and beliefs of those students and parents from diverse populations. Nieto (2000) and Rosado (1994) report that the curriculum in American schools tends to focus on the Euro-centric ideologies to the exclusion of valuing other ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Parental Discontinuity

The research of Velez-Ibanez (1988) and Moll (1992) reveal that parents possess and can provide a rich foundation for building a community of learners. A parental "discontinuity" exists with respect to the "traditional" model because the parental contributions are not readily acknowledged as important. Moll (1992) believes that parents possess "funds of knowledge" which are particular skills, insights, cultural values, socialization practices, and talents that they pass onto their children. The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement acknowledges that these funds of knowledge play a vital role in helping to link the home, school and community environments.

Hispanic Discontinuity

Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) maintain that Mexican American families want their children to succeed in school and they encourage educators to fully take on the responsibility of working with these students and their families. This responsibility means attending to the social and cultural aspects of what energizes the family structure

and dynamics. Researchers including Chavkin and Williams (1989), Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993), Moles (1993), and Pena (2000) have specifically stated that Mexican American parents often face personal, cultural and/or structural barriers that keep them from actively participating in their children's education. Schools must therefore be concerned with the issues confronting students from diverse backgrounds. To reach these students and families, the interactions between all entities (the home, school and community) must be family-centered and purposeful.

Re-Conceptualized Model of Parental Involvement

In the re-conceptualized model of parental involvement, parental strengths, skills and connections are valued and utilized as building blocks for organizing, re-constructing and expanding relationships and learning experiences. Coleman (1987) refers to the personal skills, knowledge, and intelligence possessed by individuals as "Human Capital." All parents have capital in varying amounts ranging from high to low levels. This human capital provides value or worth to the person who in turn is able to share their ability and experience with other people. Putnam (1995) extends Coleman's notion of human capital. Putnam's idea of "Social Capital" has its foundational strength the social networks and relationships that all people (parents included) possess. These parental social relationships are a naturally occurring part of the family, home and community environment and are transferable to children. Finally, Bourdieu (1991) personalizes the capital issue when he points out the significance of what he terms "Cultural Capital" which includes particular customs, language(s), traditions, foods, dress and so forth of the child's family. The cultural capital as mentioned here is more than dress and mannerisms it also encompasses a general awareness of the entire cultural

community and how things get done in that particular home, school, or community environment.

Human, social and cultural capitals are key elements that impact and contribute to a child's overall development. Researchers like Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) have concluded that for students to benefit and develop mentally, emotionally, and socially educators must debunk the deficit approach when interacting with linguistically, culturally and socially diverse families. What these researchers have proposed instead is operating school from a value added perspective based primarily on what parents are able to contribute to the collaborative dynamic. Once educators learn to recognize and accept parents as resources in the learning process the working relationship will not only evidence the diversity that parents bring with them but help to shape education with the total child in mind including their linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic and other defining characteristics.

Re-conceptualized Parental Involvement Outcomes

This re-conceptualized model of parental involvement implies acknowledging parents as beings with their own particular forms of human, social and cultural capital. Each of those can be activated for the purpose of supporting their children's educational success. Parental involvement is not solely limited to the promotion of children's academic and socioeconomic development. The Re-Conceptualized Model encourages the establishment of relationships based on the acceptance and use of capital that parents and families bring with them. Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996) assert that there are at least four implications for parents acting as full partners in the education of their children.

These implications extend to and connect with the human, social and cultural capitals of

the families. Haynes and Ben-Avie's assertions include:

1. the creation of more successful relationships between the home and teaching

environments that effectively contribute to an improved learning environment;

2. improvement in children's motivational levels;

3. empowerment of parents in becoming advocates for their children so as to sustain

educational changes;

4. collaborative development of homes and schools, as primary institutions,

in a child's life will help to make home-school relationships a formidable force in the

community.

However for homes, schools and communities to reach these levels of collective action

schools in particular, "must become more flexible, responsive, child-centered, culturally

sensitive, community linked and family connected" (Haynes, Gebreyesus, & Comer,

1993, p.165).

The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement partially values

what the "traditional" (school-centered) model offers to parents, while

simultaneously acknowledging that the "traditional" model is not a one-size fits

all approach. In essence, the re-conceptualized model of parental involvement

expands the "traditional" model to include other parental involvement practices

that may be occurring outside of the school setting. The re-conceptualized model

of parental involvement embraces the cultural and linguistic differences that exist

within the family/home and the community. Those who work with parents in the

re-conceptualized model aim to tap the "parental capital" which is a collective

manifestation of human, social and cultural capitals. These capitals in the re-conceptualized model of parental involvement facilitate the building of partnerships and bridge the fissures between the home, school and community.

The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement encourages mutual support and exchange between the various stakeholders who, in the course of time, experience the long-term benefits of collaboration. Children most notably perceive a genuine sense of commitment and support from important adults in their homes, schools, and communities (Epstein, 1986; Violand-Sanchez, Sutton & Ware, 1991). All parents, in particular minority parents, benefit from the re-conceptualized model of parent involvement . Through this model an evolving realization emerges regarding the impact that parents play in shaping the type of education that their child receives.

For example, Ascher (1987) and Sosa (1997) have noted that parents can participate at various levels in their child's education, including an advocacy role; sitting on councils and committees, participating in decisions affecting school operation and initiating learning activities at home. Both Rodd (1996) and Henderson (1994) have stated that home, school and community are essential components in forming partnerships intent on impacting student achievement. Through well-planned collaboration all stakeholders are able to see the importance of education as mirrored by their parents, teachers and community leaders. The re-conceptualized model of parental involvement is intent on connecting with and developing available resources that enhance the home, school and community relationship while improving student learning and success.

However, the issue of collaboration for minority, linguistically and culturally

diverse parents presents a challenge for those who work towards linking the various home, school and community entities. Lightfoot (1978) writes a critical script on the situation confronting minority populations.

> The insensitive, paternalistic policies of the school system encourage parents to develop an unresponsive, apathetic attitude toward participating in the educational process. The myths and stereotypes of parent groups will be nurtured and sustained by researchers and [educators] as long as we do not begin to comprehensively describe their attitudes and behaviors in relation to the education of their children and their perspectives on the school as a social and economic institution. In order to understand the complex narrative of family school relationships we must recognize the interaction of forces and consider the voices, perspectives, and actions of the excluded and ignored groups. It is only when we view the asymmetric relationship between families and schools as a dynamic process of negotiation and interaction that we will gain an authentic picture of the nature of conflict and the potentials for resolution. (p.37)

This conflict spoken of by Lightfoot brings to the forefront the significance of homes and schools exacting the value of parents in the educational process. Lightfoot's perspective on collaboration emphasizes cooperation and appreciation for diverse views that don't necessarily fit the "traditional" idea of parental involvement.

Hispanic Parental Involvement

> The "traditional" model of parental involvement is grounded in school policy

that tends to exclude the voice and perspectives of parents. Lightfoot (1978), Clark (1983), and Lueder (1998) have commented that the family structure and social economic conditions in fact have a direct impact on a child's social and educational development. Coleman's (1987) research urges schools to make use of what he calls social capital. Still others like Walberg (1986), Rich (1985) and Clark (1983) encourage the effective use of strategies other than those provided by the policies which energize the "traditional" models of parental involvement. Not only do schools see the positive effects of home, school, and community collaboration other entities including juvenile delinquent and detention centers, government agencies, and community organizations call to question what is currently termed acceptable forms of parental involvement.

The urgency to connect government agencies, community organizations and other entities has become a salient and critically important factor for educators seeking new ways to work with Mexican-American families (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). Some parental involvement studies on Mexican-American parents in the schools have erroneously interpreted their minimal participation at schools as a lack of interest. However, Montecel (1993) reports that Mexican-American parents do care about how their children are educated. Research conducted by Nicolau and Ramos (1990) communicates that Mexican-American parents perceive their role of involvement as one aimed at instilling respect and proper behavior while the role of the school is perceived as imparting knowledge.

The development of parental involvement strategies and policy between the home, school and community is significant especially when addressing the concerns of

Mexican-American parents and how they are involved. Clark (1983) and Lueder (1998)

have noted that family structure and socio-economic conditions directly impact a child's

social and educational development. Therefore the way that schools have structurally

organized themselves may be decisive in determining which parents are involved on the

school campus. But then again perhaps the discussion is not where parents are involved,

but how might they already be involved. Lopez (2001) reminds us that,

> Marginalized parents and family members are involved to a significant
>
> extent in the educational lives of their children, yet much of their
>
> involvement remains outside discursive/academic interpretations of
>
> involvement. In other words, "involvement" can consist of a number
>
> of different activities, but only a few of these activities are privileged
>
> in the educational arena. (p. 3)

Other researchers such as Rosado (1994), Gonzalez (1992), Sosa (1997) and Espinoza

(1995) problematize the discussion surrounding parental involvement by asking: "Does

parental involvement look the same for all populations especially the marginalized, low-

income, linguistically and culturally diverse populations?"

Various educational reports over the past decade have shown that minority

populations have consistently demonstrated increases in academic achievement and

decreases in dropout rates. However, Hispanic school performance remains below that of

most other racial and ethnic groups with rising dropout rates (Texas Education Agency

(TEA) Snapshot Report, 2000).

Educators have an educational imperative to look for new ways to work with

Mexican-American families due to the increasing number of Hispanics within the

educational system (Chavkin, Gonzalez, & Dora Lara, 1995). Unfortunately, family members of Hispanic families do not always extend their familial influence and support into the school environment. Research conducted by Nicolau and Ramos (1990) reports a reluctance, on the part of poor Hispanic parents, to establish interactions with schools. In some instances these interactions range from low to nonexistent.

Espinoza (1995), Ascher (1988), and Walberg's (1984) research indicates the need to link with marginalized groups within and outside of the educational setting. Educators need to collaborate with Hispanic parents, understand the cultural factors that may present barriers to Hispanic parental involvement, and devise approaches that enable educational programs to connect with and form positive partnerships with linguistically and culturally diverse students in these home environments.

Ascher (1988) points out that recent research on low-income and minority parental involvement in home learning differs from mainstream expectations; therefore new means for relating home and school are essential. Walberg (1984) and Grau, Weinstein, and Walberg (1983), on the other hand, emphasize changing what goes on in the low income or minority homes in order to create learning situations that are more consistent with school learning. In establishing a beneficial home, school, and community relationship a certain level of sensitivity is essential in order to comprehend and appreciate the "natural" learning that goes on in homes including low-income home. Brice-Heath's (1983) research emphasizes and focuses on how teachers are being trained. Continuing with this line of thinking Ascher (1988) encourages educators to keep in mind that every activity a child engages in can be enriching. The time children spend at home with parents and extended family can be as educational and beneficial as the time they

spend in school. Within these "Natural Support Systems" (Ascher, 1988) emphasis is placed on the extended family, which includes aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, godparents, friends, and others who play important roles in a child's development (Delgado, 1992; Davies, 1987, 1991; Epstein, 1994, 1996; Cochran, 1987). Effectively reaching Hispanic school children and other marginalized, linguistically and culturally diverse students means that these natural support systems will need to be accessed since the family is the primary resource.

The following research questions emerge as a result of the literature and the issues described herein:

1. How do Mexican-American parents perceive themselves with respect to their participation in children's education and development?

2. In what ways do socioeconomic status, language, culture, capital and other characteristics of Mexican-American parents impact or help to construct parental involvement?

3. How do these constructions of Mexican-American parental involvement reflect or differ from "traditional" or newer "re-conceptualized" models of parental involvement?

4. How might these constructions better inform the development of new parental involvement policy and programs that directly attend to the needs and interests of Mexican-American families?

5. What are the practice, research, and policy implications for negotiating the borders between Mexican-American families, homes and communities?

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Proposed Re-Conceptualized Parental Involvement

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Why is this re-conceptualized model important and what does it contribute?

This re-conceptualized model of parental/family involvement is important for schools that serve a diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, cultural population. The more readily used "traditional" model of parental involvement tends to exclude and marginalize students and families that do not match the mainstream culture. I propose an alternative model of parental/family involvement that is more inclusive and takes into consideration the family's socio-cultural, psychological and personal lifestyles, all of which contribute to interpersonal interactions and collaborative dynamics.

My model is grounded in the existing research of Joyce Esptein's (1987) Six Level Typology (including her model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence of family involvement); James Comer's (1984) School Development Program (based on his Three Mechanisms and Six Developmental Pathways); Kurt Lewin's (1936) Field Theory (Social Psychological Theory); Kelly's (1966) Human Ecological Systems Theory, Reiff's (1966) Social Action Model; Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecology of Human Development; Karl Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's (1948) General Systems Theory; and Oscar Martinez's (1994) Typology of Border Phenomena.

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein's (1987) Overlapping Spheres of Influence as noted in (Figure 1) is based on her six level typology which takes into consideration parental and family involvement on multiple levels. The following parental involvement practices demonstrate her conception of effective parental involvement programs.

Level one - Basic obligations of families: This section includes the provision of food, clothing, shelter, ensuring that children are healthy and safe and building positive home conditions for learning. Other family obligations according to Epstein's model

include obtaining the necessary school supplies as well as having a place set aside for

children to do school work.

Level two - Basic obligations of the school: This includes informing parents

about the school policy and related information. Schools are also obligated to maintain

open channels of two-way communication between the home and school especially with

regard to school procedures and access to information and records concerning their

children.

Figure 1. Epstein's Home, School and Community Spheres

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Epstein (1987)	Six Level Typology	Level 1: Basic Obligations of Families
		Level 2: Basic Obligations of Schools
		Level 3: Volunteers and Audiences at the School
		Level 4: Involvement of Families in Learning Activities at Home
		Level 5: Participation by families in decision-making, governance, and advocacy
		Level 6: Collaboration with community groups and agencies
	Overlapping Spheres of Influence	• Home • School • Community

Level three - Volunteers and Audiences at the School: Includes activities where

parents or family members assist teachers and other school personnel on the school

campus. This assistance may take the form of attending sports events, student

performances and plays, and Parent Teacher Association or Parent Teacher Organization meetings.

Level four - Involvement of Families in Learning Activities at Home: This section encompasses having parents facilitate learning by extending or initiating learning activities, such as reading to children, playing games that provoke and encourage critical thinking, checking homework, and reinforcing school subjects in a variety of ways.

Level five - Participation by Families in Decision-making, Governance, and Advocacy: This section includes having parents actively take part in roles that influence the direction of school policy, curriculum and campus climate.

Level six - Collaborations with Community Groups and Agencies: This section involves establishing networks and utilizing the resources afforded by the various connections in the community, family and school.

This overlap within the various levels of exemplifies that there are areas of intersection that form supportive relationships and interconnections amongst the levels and between the individuals that interact within these levels. Epstein's model in essence illustrates the potential for exchange and collaboration between the home, school, and community.

Comer's School Development Program (SDP)

James Comer has written extensively about the value of parent involvement in children's education (Comer, 1986; Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Joyner, 1996). Along with the Yale Child Study Center staff (social worker, psychologist, special education teacher, and child psychiatrist); Comer worked collectively to develop a model that took

into consideration child development as impacted by external forces within their home, school and community as indicated by Figure 2.

According to Comer, Haynes, Joyner, and Ben-Avie (1996), the "School Development Program's (SDP's) approach with parents and families [are] at the center of change, [which] is a critical missing link in education reform." (p. 9) The SDP is a participatory and collaborative model aimed at addressing the interactionary processes that occur between the school staff and stakeholders which are organized into three critical teams: The School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), the Parent Team (PT), and the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST). In the SDP Model these teams are

Figure 2. Comer's School Development Program model

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Comer (1984) (1996)	School Development Program (SDP)	Three Critical Teams (Mechanisms): 1) School Planning Management Team (SPMT) 2) Parent Team (PT) 3) Student Staff Support Team (SSST)
	Three Guiding Principles	Relationships of Respect and Valuing: 1) Consensus 2) Collaboration 3) No Fault
	Six Developmental Pathways	Individual Human Development: 1) Psychological 2) Cognitive 3) Social 4) Ethical 5) Language 6) Physical

known as the three mechanisms (In my model these three mechanisms are referred to as

spheres.) The three mechanisms are driven by three guiding principles: "Consensus," "Collaboration," and "No Fault" which help all stakeholders to feel valued, respected and inclined to participate. These three guiding principles establish the standard that all involved in the collaboration must accept the responsibility for changing the learning/ developmental environment for children.

The "Six Developmental Pathways". The SDP Model takes into account the three mechanisms (spheres) that overlap and help to shape the child's development. Comer et. al., (1996) expressed, "All children can learn and develop well. Children are social beings who need the support and involvement of caring adults . . . for some children, the home, school, social networks, and society nurture and facilitate [that] development." (p. 15)

Another component that addresses the child's individual developmental needs are what Comer calls "The Six Developmental Pathways." These pathways represent another set of overlapping spheres that contribute to a child's psychological, social, cognitive, ethical, language, and physical development. Comer further rationalizes that these Six Developmental Pathways are influenced by the dynamics that transpire between the three mechanisms (spheres). Since SPD focuses on the human development and educational needs of students one can see the importance of establishing positive exchanges between the three mechanisms (spheres).

Parent Team. Comer's concept of the importance of parental involvement reiterates what other researchers say about the positive benefits of parent involvement. His research shows that the Parent Team contains recommendations that greatly impact school reform and student achievement and development. The Parent Team contains

three levels of involvement:

Level one: Includes parents who participate in the School Planning and Management Teams who work closely with and present the perspective, decisions and voice of the school and community officials.

Level two: Involves parents helping in the library or schools as tutors. On other occasions parents may carry out the duties of hallway, cafeteria or classroom monitors or even act as supporters or participants in Parent Teacher Organizations/Parent Teacher Associations (P.T.O/P.T.A.) at the school.

Level three: Includes parental presence at school activities, special programs, or school sporting events.

Comer has stressed that because school is a system, change in any part will affect the entire school. Thus, entities like home, school, and community that appear to exist external to the learning individual in actuality have tremendous impact on individual human development and the establishment of essential connective ties. In these overlapping relationships the child needs a supportive climate that facilitates their development. Comer et. al., (1996) states, "Children must see positive images of significant adults in their lives who feel empowered and who are empowered by having some say in the events that affect their lives" (p.30). Home, school and community ties that foster positive adult modeling help to provide role models who are present and interact with the child in his/her life spheres.

Lewin's Field Theory

Lewin's (1936,1966) Field Theory, also known as Social Psychological Theory as shown in Figure 3, explains that individuals function within a certain psychological

environment or life space that affects behavior (Lewin, 1951). This life space contains

situations or regions, sub-regions, positive or negative valences, barriers and paths

(Lewin, 1938). The situations or regions include self-perceptions, feelings and activities;

sub-regions are goal areas; positive and negative valences draw people away from or

toward objects and activities; barriers are boundaries or hindrances that prevent achieving

one's goals. An important component of Lewin's model is that the reality of the so-called

objective world is perceived through a subjective lens. Lewin contends that to

understand and influence someone's behavior, it is essential to also understand their life

space. According to Comer et. al., (1996):

> Because the size of the freedom of movement within a region is a
>
> decisive factor in an individual's behavior, it is important to introduce
>
> into the person's life space those experiences that will broaden the
>
> range of possible behaviors available to that person. (p. 33)

Figure 3. Lewin's Field Theory

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Lewin (1936,1966)	Field Theory or Social Psychological Theory	Human Perception of the Lived Experience • Everything an individual knows, feels, and perceives is done in a subjective reality. • This subjective reality is known as a person's psychological field or life space; only those things present in the life space influence behavior.

In the case of home, school and community partnerships Lewin's Field Theory may mean

giving parents the opportunity to interact within different settings without discounting

what they have to contribute in the process. This valuing of parental perspectives including parent's lived experiences and subjective realities may in fact enrich and strengthen opportunities for collaboration.

Kelly's Human Ecological Systems Theory

Figure 4 demonstrates Kelly's (1966) Human Ecological Systems theory is based on the study of the individual within the context of the environment. Primarily this theory describes the behavior of the individual, their psychological presence and their tendency to adapt naturally in a given sphere. The Human Ecological Systems is an offshoot of the human ecological theory and organizational systems theory.

Figure 4. Kelly's Human Ecological Systems Theory

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Kelly (1966)	Human Ecological Systems Theory	Interaction of Humans within Ecological Spheres • Behavior is the interaction of human beings with the physical, social, and psychological environments, making behavior adaptive.

Reiff's Social Action Model

The Social Action Model, as displayed in Figure 5, is a model for changing social systems through the collaborative efforts of professionals and other community entities (including schools, agencies and homes). Reiff (1966) argues that for a smaller system (individual) within a larger system to be changed the larger system which contains that smaller system must be connected to and interactive with the smaller

system. Additionally, Reiff purports that if people are intent on entering the domain of

institutional change they must be willing to confront issues of power. The Social Action

Figure 5. Reiff's Social Action Model

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Reiff (1966)	Social Action Model	Collaboration Based on Integral Knowledge of Community • Program planning should be a collaborative effort between professionals and community members. • Professionals should have an integral knowledge of the community in which they are working.

Model conveys that schools need to work in conjunction with families to change the

system of education. Schools are thus required to know and understand with sensitivity

the issues confronting the community and the families they serve while the parents

engage in educating and helping to change this process of interaction between the

existing spheres of home, school and community.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Human Systems

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model on the ecology of human development is based

on his conceptual understanding that an individual is not born with a tabula rasa or a

blank slate on which the environment sets out to make its imprint. Rather, the developing

individual interacts with his/her environment in a reciprocal relationship. The

environment in which an individual develops is not limited to his/her immediate

surroundings. It is the broader and differentiated environment that fosters this ecological

human development. The ecological environment is topologically envisioned as an

embedded arrangement of concentric spheres, each contained within the next. These structures are referred to as the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Figure 6 and the following section provides an outline of Bronfenbrenner's model and its relationship and impact on human development.

Figure 6. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Human Systems

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Bronfenbrenner (1979)	Ecological Human Systems	Interdependence Between Living Organisms and Their Surroundings and Their Affect on Human Development 1) Microsystem 2) Mesosystem 3) Exosystem 4) Macrosystem
	Spheres	• Home • School • Peers

Bronfenbrenner's phenomenological conception of environment is based in part on the work of Kurt Lewin (1931) who discusses the psychological field as situations as perceived by the individuals who participate in them. Every situation is viewed as "ongoing activity" wherein in the individual sees their own level of engagement. The other aspect of the psychological field is perceived as interconnections between the individual and their setting.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) "The microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics." (p.22) The idea of the microsystem is closely akin to a parent tapping and utilizing their own capital to successfully

maneuver within their own life space. As a parent works within this notion of microsystem he/she is continually influenced by the position or role that he/she performs during this interaction process with other individuals in the home, school, and community spheres.

"The mesosystem [on the other hand] comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for the child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for the adult, among family, work and social life)." (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25)   The mesosystem on a more basic level is contingent on three interactions: a) Which particular spheres meet and create an overlap between the home-school; school-community; or community-home? b) Also, to what degree do these overlapping spheres impede or encourage parental movement and the fluid exchange of ideas and/or interactions? Finally, c) What types of, knowledge, skills, and experiences do parents draw on as he/she moves back and forth between these overlapping spheres?

"The exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person." (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.25)   This is to say that the parent is influenced by external factors created from the interactionary processes and dynamics between the home-school, school-community, community-home or home-school-community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that,

> The macrosystem refers to constituencies, in the form and content of
>
> lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could

exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along

with any belief systems or ideology underlying consistencies. (p. 26)

As referenced earlier the macrosystem is the entire blending of the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem thus creating the parents' environments. Successful and non-successful macrosystems would therefore be determined by the exchange between and among these systems and the parents' ability or the inability to use their skills and knowledge in a continually changing set of circumstances.

The perception of one's reality impacts the ecological transitions that transpire between the various spheres. These interactions determine (in the case of parents) to what extent the various capitals will be accessed in accordance with a particular setting. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that, "active engagement in, or even mere exposure to, what others are doing often inspires the person to undertake similar activities on [his/her] own" (p.6). In other words, the modeling that parents provide for their children helps to determine their children's potential for similar future interactions.

Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory

Karl Ludwig Bertalanffy's (1968) notion of General Systems Theory (Figure 7) of organizations allows for an examination of the nature of the interaction of individuals between themselves and in connection with larger systems. Through the parental involvement lens the home, school, and community are all interdependent systems. Because each system relies on the other the overall organization is referred to as being open. In an open system there is a free flow and exchange of information, knowledge, skills, talents and connections. In parental involvement, this interplay between systems allows or impedes for the continual flow and exchange between the home, school and

community. As a child learns to interact with his/her environment his/her development is influenced by a productive exchange and interdependence between the home, school, and community. As with all systems, this interdependency is mutually reinforcing or mutually destructive, either hindering or helping children to achieve within the social,

Figure 7. Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Bertalanffy (1968)	General Systems Theory (GST)	Human Level: Open dynamic, self-regulating, adaptive Social Level: More complex than the individual More open to environmental Influence More adaptive to circumstances because of collective experience and diverse resources

cultural, and intellectual realms.

Following this, a child's self-concept is shaped by his/her parents' active or passive role within these systems. The more involved the parent is, the higher the likelihood that the child will see him/herself as being as able to address the imbalances and inequities within and between these systems.

Oscar Martinez's Border Crossing

The idea of border crossings is a viable contribution to this work for two reasons. This study of Mexican-American parental involvement involves Mexican-Americans as my participant population, and the research I conducted transpired along United States–Mexico border region.

The borderland region that Martinez (1994) refers to is unique because of the imposed limitations to those who reside on either or both sides of the border. There are legal physical points of entry as set forth by the two federal governments as well as illegal points of entry. The physical boundary of legal bridges and illegal crossings set up interesting areas of exchange between those who have the power and the desire to traverse back and forth and those who have the power to allow or impede this exchange. This physical and dialogic negotiation and exchange clearly explains what Martinez calls a Typology of Border Phenomena. As indicated in Figure 8 Martinez sets forth four models of borderland interaction: alienated borderlands; coexistent borderlands; interdependent borderlands and integrated borderlands.

Figure 8. Martinez's Typology of Border Phenomena

Researcher	Model	Conceptual Description
Martinez (1994)	Typology of Border Phenomena	Four models of borderlands interaction • Alienated Borderlands • Coexistent Borderlands • Interdependent Borderlands • Integrated Borderlands

These models of interaction are essential for understanding the deeper issues and types of interaction that often take place in collaboration efforts between the home, school and community. *Alienated Borderlands* represent borders or dividing lines where tension is prevalent. In such a borderland or boundary the border is closed and interaction is nonexistent. *Coexistent borderlands* demonstrate an on and off type of stability, however the dividing line between the spheres (the border) is slightly open with limited interaction. The *Interdependent Borderlands* are marked by stability, and there is

cross-border interaction along with friendly cooperative relationships. Finally, the *Integrated Borderlands* is characterized by strong and permanent stability. The borders have functionally merged and there is unrestricted movement in either direction across the line/border dividing the spheres. The borderlanders, those that reside in these integrated spheres see themselves as members of one social system.

This Rio Grande Valley (RGV) area along the border presents a unique opportunity for those such as myself who research educational issues such as parental involvement. Negotiating the borders between the spheres of collaborative interaction, may be a challenge for many parents/families, schools, and communities as they learn to interact in the same environments. These differentiated ideologies, as well as, diverse cultural and linguistic differences influence the types of interactions that home, school, and communities establish. Unfortunately, the "traditional" model of parent involvement has often viewed these parental differences of culture, language and perspective as negative factors. As a result, the school system which shares the children with the home and community has in essence created barriers that discount and de-legitimize what these families contribute to common educational objectives. The goal of re-conceptualized parental involvement and a re-conceptualized boundary between the spheres is to help parents/homes, schools, and communities learn how to most effectively traverse these spheres with the fewest amount of roadblocks.

This research on parental involvement along the border is important for two reasons. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in the United States. Educational statistics as reported by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Academic Excellence Indicator Systems (AEIS) reflect that Hispanic students are not achieving at

their potential and that many students are dropping out of school. This lack of success could be indicative of the fact that the type and level of instruction is not appropriate for this population. Another explanation using this negotiating borders is that educators, policy makers, and parents/families need to come to the joint realization that real collaborative efforts to help solve these problems involve developing relationships and interactions between the three spheres. In other words, approaches to connect the spheres must reflect Martinez's (1994) Integrated Borderland model of interaction.

ECHO-Sphere Model of Parental Involvement

The re-conceptualized model offered as an alternative is an eclectic approach to parental involvement that utilizes theoretical concepts discussed in the previous section. The model is called the ECHO-Sphere Model of parental involvement.

Building Blocks

The new model utilizes the basic and central elements of each theory. By using these models in conjunction with each other I began to see how each adds to, supports, bridges, or clarifies an aspect of the parental involvement model as it has been previously constructed. I not only extracted the key meanings from these models, I have also credited the other theorists for their theoretical contributions to the development and naming of my new model. In the case of Epstein's model (1987), the first letter of her last name and entire word "sphere" were used to create the name for my re-conceptualized model of parental involvement called, "Echo-Sphere." More explicitly the "E" represents Ecological Human Systems, the "C" represents two sets of theoretical ideas Captial and Border Crossings, "H" Human Ecological Systems and Human Development Theory, and the "O" and "spheres" come from Overlapping Spheres of

Influence.

Epstein's theoretical contributions contribute to the making of this new model in the

following ways. She has conceptualized the idea of overlapping spheres including the

home, school and community. Her model is parent/family-centered with the primary

individual being the adult (parent/family member) being present in all the various

ecological spheres. Figure 9 illustrates this overlapping interaction.

Figure 9. Overlapping Sphere Model of Parental Involvement
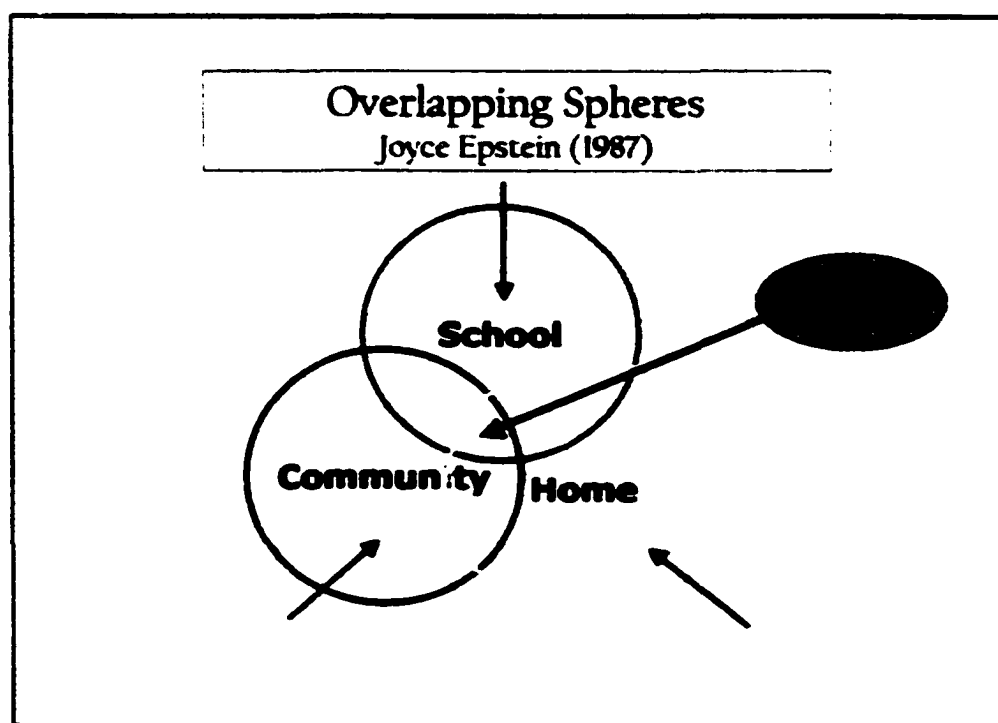
Comer (1986, 1996) also uses the idea of home, school and community. His

perspective is centered more on child development. However, he stresses the importance

of key adults who are able to foster a child's six developmental pathways: psychological,

cognitive, social, ethical, language and physical. According to Comer it is the

parent/family who is able to provide these most basic and fundamental pathways. What

the parents expose the child to through example or experience is what helps to determine

that child's particular propensity towards positive human development. In other words, if

the parents' physical presence in the home, school and community (the three mechanisms

or spheres) send appropriate and positive messages to the child about their own

individual value, this enhances a child's development. The role modeling provided by

the parent is important as are the standards of expectation as expressed by the parent in

the various ecological spheres. Comer's Six Developmental Pathways and School

Development Program are represented in Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10. Comer's interaction of developmental areas of child development.
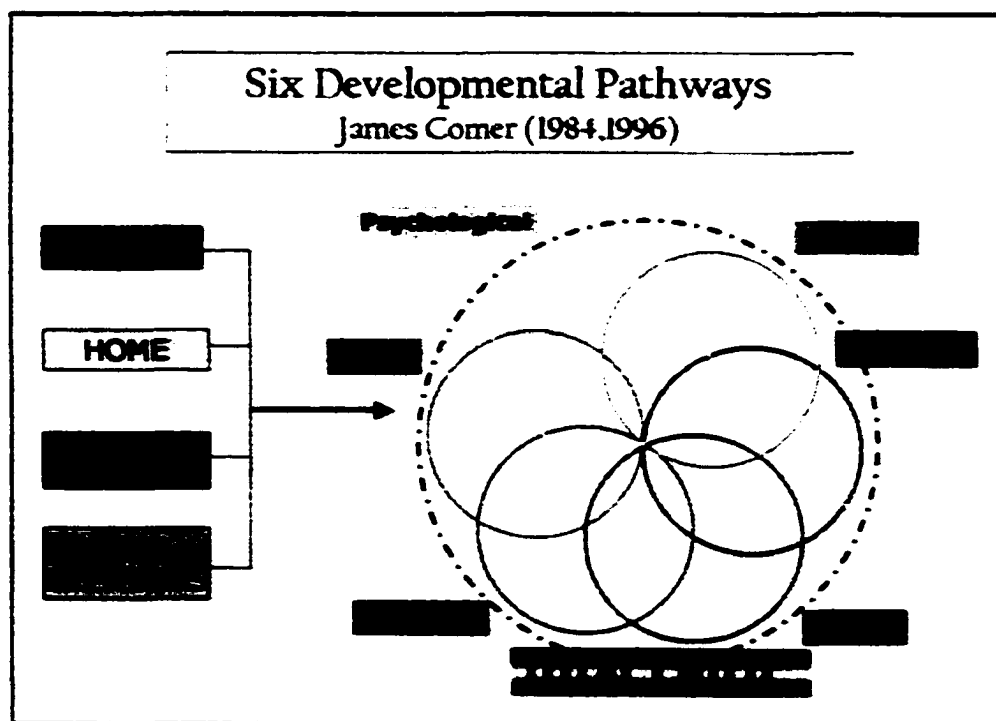
Figure 11. Comer's School Development Program overlapping effect of spheres

School Development Program (SPD)
James Comer, 1984

School Planning Management Team

School Planning Management Team

HOME

Student Staff Support Team

Parent Team
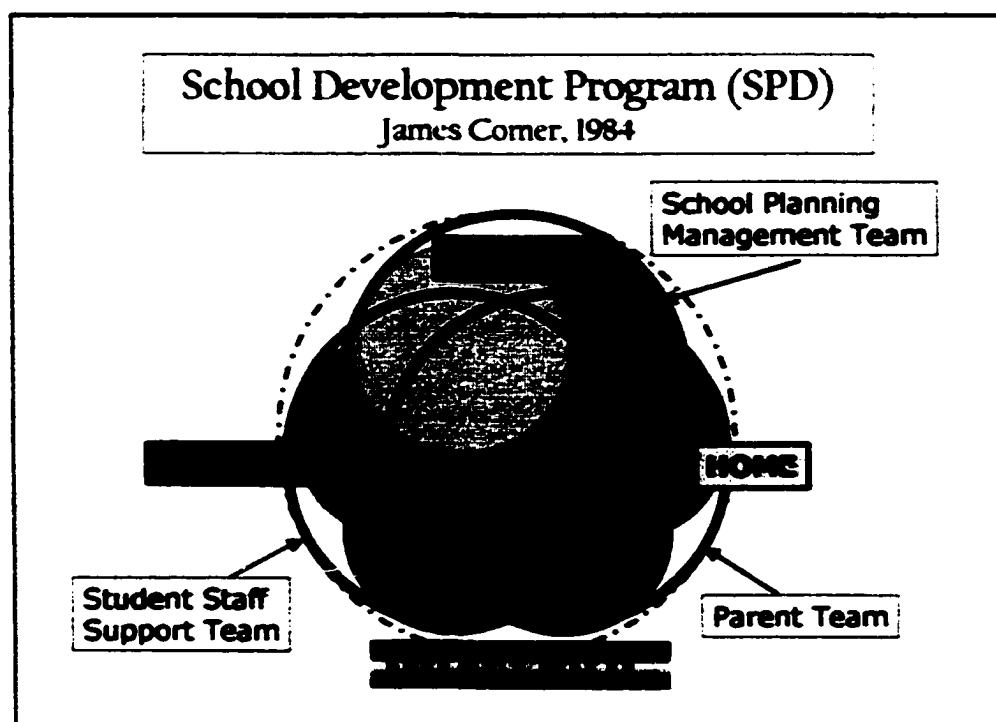
Environmental interconnectedness is evidenced by how well an individual

perceives him or herself in a given environment. As Kelly (1966) has stated behavior is

based on the interaction of the individual with their physical, social and psychological

environments. (See Figure 4.) Lewin (1936) reminds us, however that everything an

individual knows, feels, and perceives is done in a subjective reality. (See Figure 3.) This

is to say then that the way that a parent perceives him or herself in a given ecological

sphere determines how well they may be equipped to perceive and address the various

ecological borders. The collaboration that takes place between these spheres is expressed

in Reiff's Social Action Model (1966). (See Figure 5.) However, it is through the use of

capital that parents effectively traverse the borders and establish productive interactions within and between the various spheres. Additionally, this "capital" as possessed by parents is transferred to their children and helps to provide their children with core knowledge, skills, and experiences that can possibly impact their children's future competence and success in negotiating the borders between the home, school, and community. The capital theories (Figure 12) contribute to this re-conceptualized model of parental involvement in the following way.

Figure 12. "Capital" used by parents to negotiate borders
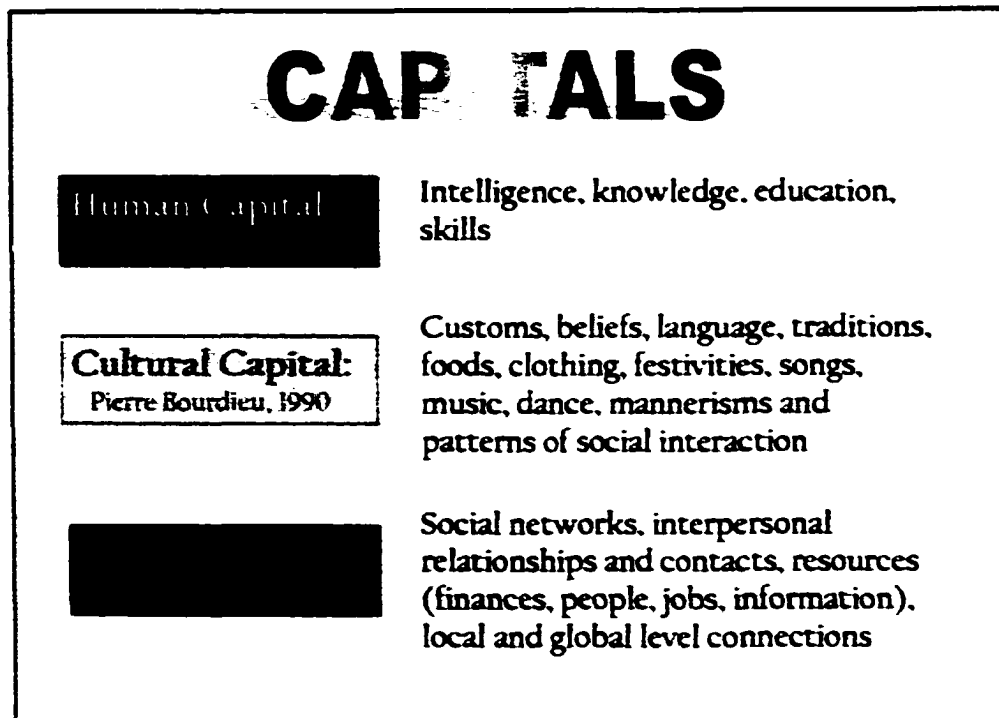
The overlapping spheres are very similar to Comer's three mechanisms of home, school and community. The main difference between these two models is that Epstein's presents a parent/family-centered perspective and Comer's model focuses on the child at the center. The home and school share one common and very important

feature, the child. Because the child is the pivotal point of convergence it is necessary

that the parent negotiate these ecological spheres by accessing and crossing the border

regions that result from the overlapping of the home, school and community. To cross

the borders parents must avail themselves of their own "Capital."

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) contribution to this model involves the overlap

between home, school and peers. His model is also child-centered and is based on the

interaction and development of children within human ecological systems. See Figure 13

that references Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Systems. A child receives his or her

Figure 13. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Human Systems
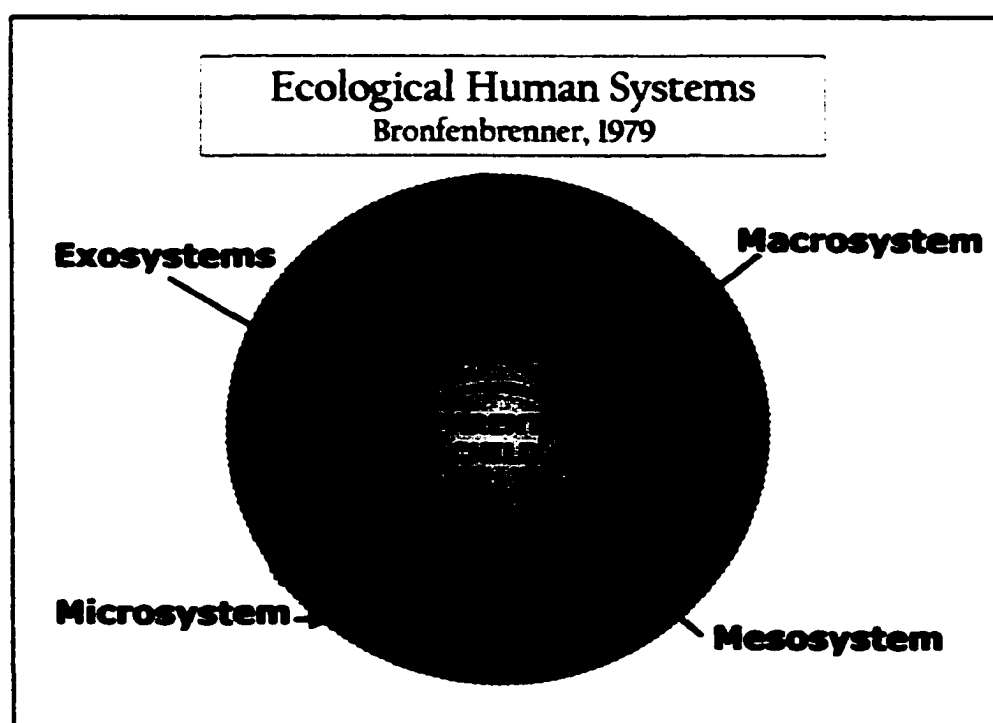
primary nurturing and development most often from the parent and family, therefore this

model envisions the child as being embedded in the various ecological spheres of

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The idea of border crossing as shared earlier is a necessary component in the child's development for a child's development is impacted by and in the three spheres of home, school, and community. However, the degree of proficiency with which a parent is able to demonstrate their ability to cross these ecological borders provides the basis for true collaboration between the home, school and community and for the child's healthy educational development.

Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (1968) also contributes to the basic conception of the model. The home, school and community are all subsystems that happen to be a part of a larger system. If home, school and community collaboration are to take place, the interaction within and between the system-subsystem relationship needs to be open. (See Figure 7.) The exchange is interactive, very much like Martinez's Integrated Borderlands (1994) with permeable boundaries. When applying the General Systems Theory to education we understand that the interaction of these subsystems (home, school, and community) exist together for the sole purpose of fostering the development of children. As each ecological sphere understands its relevance in child development, the system as a whole improves. When subsystems collectively strive to reach this objective the result is greater student achievement and social development. This point of interaction and success is what Bertalanffy (1968) refers to as "equifinality" where the contributions of the home, school and community are equally valued and balanced in their points of intersection and exchange.

Conclusion

This new re-conceptualized model called, ECHO-Sphere (Figure 14.) communicates an alternative perspective or understanding of parental involvement. This

framework imparts the notion that parental involvement can and does transpire in

environments other than the school setting. My hope is that this framework will be a

platform for restructuring relationships between home, school and community, and

provide a voice and representation for marginalized parents. Educators must come to

realize that our school population especially along the border, is changing.

Figure 14. ECHO-Sphere framework of parental involvement
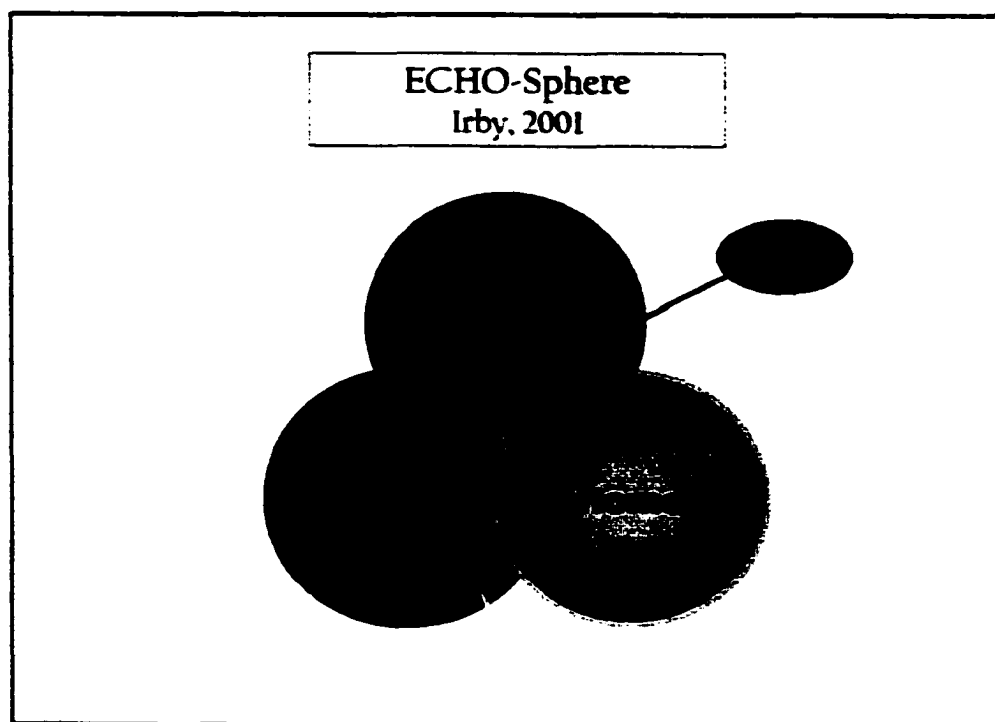
This study opens the discussion arena and challenges policy makers and

implementers of policy to re-examine their own attitudes towards parents who comprise

linguistically, culturally, ethnically, and socially diverse groups. Research findings from

parental involvement researchers have clearly indicated that parents are key in helping to

shape their children's development. However, society as a whole benefits the most when

all three entities: the home, school, and community, work in collaboration and contribute

to the making of our next generation of leaders.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Delgado-Gaitan (1990), Gandara (1995), and Valdez's (1996) qualitative research findings have suggested that the process by which Latino parents impact their children's academic achievement may differ from their White, middle-class counterparts. Self-report measures of parental involvement such as closed-ended surveys cannot fully capture the dynamic nature of parents' involvement in their child's education. Surveys alone do not sufficiently convey the interactions that occur when parents visit schools, meet with teachers, read to their school-aged children, and assist their children with homework. The process of gaining more in-depth understanding could be better explored through open-ended and observational techniques, which would produce rich data, shed light on multi-faceted interactions and relationships over time, and generate new hypotheses about the role of parent involvement (Baker & Soden, 1998).

The education of Hispanics needs to be analyzed at the macro and micro level in a comprehensive manner since education is the primary means for escaping poverty amongst Hispanic and other groups. It is particularly important to obtain qualitative, not just quantitative, perspectives of Hispanic students and their families, to determine why they succeed or do not succeed in the American educational system (Trueba, 1989; Seda & Bixler-Marquez, 1994).

Qualitative Methodology

I have elected to use a qualitative method of inquiry because the research itself stresses the essence of examining a socially constructed view of reality based on experience. In addition, qualitative methodology seeks to establish an intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied in light of the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This method of inquiry aligns with my own model in that social experience shapes the development and formation of relationships. Additionally, because I sought to gain the parents' perspective and point of view, qualitative research allowed me as a participant observer to move into the world of these parents in order to interview, observe, and capture their subjective reality.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative research provided me the opportunity to co-construct meaning from what had been recorded, photographed and observed during the interview and interaction process. Stake (1995) has revealed that most contemporary qualitative researchers delight in the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. Since the traditional model of parental involvement imposes an idea of what parental involvement should look like, this study allowed me to understand the complex world of the parents from both the emic [insider] and etic [outsider] perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). As a participant observer I was one of the social actors in the making of meaning. This afforded me the opportunity to undertake a process called "member checking" (Denzin, 1984; Stake, 1995). In doing a "member check" the social actors were asked to help triangulate the researcher's (my) observations and interpretations.

Case Study

This study was an exploratory analysis of the meaning and perspectives about parental involvement as co-constructed with Mexican-American parents at an elementary school and surrounding community along the United States-Mexico border. Through this study I sought to explore the educator and other roles that Mexican-American parents assign to themselves and the ways in which they become involved in the school. To carry out this exploration I utilized a case study procedure.

The collection of data through case studies can provide relevant information on Mexican-American parents' involvement. I have therefore selected as my case one elementary school and worked collaboratively with the parent coordinator and principal to identify various parents who participated in focus groups and individual interviews. Cochran (1988) and Seda and Bixler-Marquez (1994) provide a reasonable argument for the use of case studies and contend that case studies enable researchers and practitioners to better understand how Hispanic families and individual family members interact with the larger society.

Stake (1978) points out that the case study approach has often used by anthropologists, psychoanalysts, historians and others to delve deeper into all areas of human existence. Through this study I desired to dig beyond the surface of what most parental involvement programs visibly evidence and set forth as prescribed activities of parental involvement. Therefore in this study I participated as a moderate participant observer. Spradley (1980) had defined the

moderate participant observer's role as a balancing act between participant and observer as well as the insider (parent) and outsider (researcher). Embarking in this research endeavor as a participant observer allowed me the flexibility of engaging in appropriate activities relevant to parental involvement, such as observing, communicating and establishing relationships with parents, teachers and administrators within the various physical settings of home, school and community.

Study Site and Participants

For my case study on Mexican-American parents I chose an elementary school with a demographic make up of approximately 639 Mexican-American students. These students and their families are recent immigrants from Mexico as well as first, second and third generation families that reside in a nearby neighborhoods and colonias. These colonias are normally situated in the country in sub-divisions that are characterized by poverty, lack of paved roads, and proper irrigation and sewage. The school itself is located within 12 miles of the United States – Mexico border and services students in grade levels Pre-kindergarten through fifth. The selection of participants for the study was purposeful and on a voluntary basis including parents, teachers, parent liaison, principal and assistant principal / facilitator. The individuals who chose to volunteer for the study were required to sign an informed consent paper that indicated their agreement to participate in this research and/or be photographed.

Data Collection Method

Prior to gaining access to the field of study I spoke with the assistant principal/ facilitator who had formerly held the position of parent coordinator at this same school

for the past four years. Her knowledge of the program and enthusiasm about the program's success presented an open opportunity to visit the site and eventually secure this site as a study location. At the central office level I spoke with the research department and later wrote a letter and attached my Institutional Review Board (IRB) form from the university stating that this research was permissible. These letters have been signed and filed with my IRB information.

Focus Groups

I asked that the parent liaison and other parents to help generate a possible list of parents and teachers who would be able potential participates in this study. Because this study sought to gain rich data on the parent perspective regarding what they perceived to be parental involvement I selected 25 to 35 participants from this list and separated them into focus groups. One focus group consisted of teachers, parent coordinator, principal and the assistant principal. This group provided data on how these individuals view parent involvement at their school as well as what they understand to be happening in the home and community environment (Morgan, 1998).

I conducted four parent centered focus groups and one teacher-administrator focus group. The focus groups consisted of five to 10 members each. These groups were formed based on the activities that parents found themselves involved in at the school, home and community settings. Home Focus Group embodied the home and community-based parents that were not necessarily involved at the campus, but rather displayed parental involvement strategies that were not consistent with what the school characterized as typical parental involvement activities. Class Focus Group was comprised of parents who participated in training and parenting programs offered by the

school. Volunteer Focus Group was characterized by parent volunteers that assisted in the parental involvement workroom, classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and so forth.

Advocate Focus Group consisted of parent representatives and advocates who were responsible for meeting with the principal and other school officials on behalf of the students and entire school. Finally, the Volunteer Focus Group was made of teachers who had parents directly involved with their own and other children's learning and instruction.

In-depth Interviews

I selected two parents from each parent group and conducted a series of three in-depth interviews. As a part of these in-depth interviews I utilized open-ended interview questions, audio-tape recorder, notepad and pen, as well as a camera to collect data. These in-depth interviews occurred over a series of three separate visits with parents in their home, school and/or community environment. The first of the home series visits served to familiarize both the parent/family and myself with one another and taking photographs of the parents and their families. During the second visit I capture the family interaction through more concentrated dialogue while making photographic images of parents and children in the household setting. Finally, the last visit served as a purposeful data gathering procedure wherein I conducted more in depth interviewing through a process called photo elicitation (Collier, 1967). Photo elicitation provided an opportunity for the parent to reflect on what they had said, view the photographs, and extend the conversation about their parental involvement role. Additionally, this third interview served as a member checking opportunity where the parents were able to review and clarify any questions and/or responses.

Photographic Data

An important means for collecting data was photographing the parents in various settings in the school, home and community. Bourdieu (1990) has conveyed that of all the means of expression, photography [in particular] captures a precise moment, stilling that given moment as a point of reference for future reflection and memory. The photograph therefore represents a tangible and visual documentation of whatever has transpired.

The unique benefit of using photographs as a source of documentation was that at least three lenses – that of the camera, photographer/researcher, and parent – were able to recreate the moment. Serving as a tangible and visual catalyst the photograph became a medium for exciting free-flowing dialogue between the parent and researcher allowing for discussion to penetrate below the surface imagery presented. The photograph therefore was a tool that served to elicit responses and feedback on multiple levels. Collier (1967) points out,

> The [researcher] can take a picture of something he does not fully, or sometimes even partially understand, something that he can record for later understanding. And the explanation can come not only from his own accumulating insight but from a [parent] informant as well. Most significantly the photograph can be used in interviewing to elicit responses that serve to unlock the real content of the photograph. No better way has yet been devised to record a "slice of reality"... The photograph when explained by the [parent] becomes psychological reality. (p. xi)

The parent, the researcher, and the camera simultaneously constructed reality and created data that contributed to the understanding of what parental involvement is as voiced through multiple lenses. The photograph became not only a visual form of representation but data awaiting the opportunity to be elicited verbally from the parents' perspective.

By using photographs as a means of observation and data gathering the studies of visual sociologists were enriched. Photographs provided tangible documents that captured the moment and the "lived experience" of the participants. Through photo-elicitation researchers gained the "emic" perspective of the participant, who further provided rich, thick description about the moment and the cultural setting. The integration of image and text thus serve to mutually inform one another and enhance the observational process (Bateson & Mead, 1942; Harper, (2001). The silent language concealed in every photograph emerges as the researcher weaves photographs and text to create a visual narrative of the moment.

Photography is a legitimate abstracting process in observation. It is one of the first steps in evidence refinement that turns raw circumstances into data that is manageable in research analysis. Photographs are precise records of material reality. They are also documents that can be filed and cross-filed as can verbal statements. Photographic evidence can be endlessly duplicated, enlarged, or reduced in visual dimension, and fitted into many schemes of diagrams, and by scientific reading, into may statistical designs (Collier, 1967).

Photographs convey a visual language that represents communication between the photographer, subject and viewer. The "power of the photograph" sensitizes not only

the visual field but the affective-emotional side of the constructor and viewer alike. Each

photograph contains a story awaiting the opportunity to reveal itself. Collier (1967) notes

that, "What you photograph is their image and the nonverbal image often tends to be

more emotionally charged than the one they express verbally and intellectually." Harper

(2001) adds, "... Images allow us to make kinds of statements that cannot be made by

words; thus images enlarge our consciousness and the possibilities for our sociology" (p.

411). Furthermore, photography allows the researcher to be a visual transcriber of the

external world: thus photography has a natural place in research. The images are

primarily a reflection of what was photographed.

<u>Archival Data</u>

In addition to photographs, other documents were used to obtain data. Such

documentation may include but not be limited to sign in sheets, school memos and

agendas, planning records, pre-existing photographs and other related forms regarding

parental functions and activities.

Transcription and Analysis of Audio-Tapes and other Documents

Throughout the process of data collection I journaled my reflections about the

overall interview and observation process as it related to the school's parental

involvement program as well as the parents' input and perspectives. After conducting the

interviews I transcribed and analyzed the audio-tapes, personal notes and coded the

transcripts through the use of the computer. The coding and analysis process occurred by

reading the transcripts through once without analyzing the data in order to understand the

general flow and meaning of the interview. With the second reading of the transcribed

interviews I began the coding process by identifying and labeling emergent themes and

related statements. Once this procedure had been done for all the transcribed tapes I did a cross-analysis of the data, looking for overlapping ideas and concepts. Additionally, I conducted a member-check with the participants on the initial interpretations and analysis of the data.

Performing a member check was a significant part of this study since the interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. Specifically with the Spanish interviews I consulted with my committee chair who is a native speaker of Spanish as well as a degreed Spanish language major. My committee chairs qualifications ensured that the translations were accurate and representative of what the parents had voiced during the focus and in-depth interviews. During the transcription process I encountered areas on the tapes that were difficult to hear, thus making the translation process more difficult. On these occasions I also consulted with the parents and my committee chair to clarify the meaning of the transcript. Through a member check the parents offered feedback and suggestions concerning the text and its interpretation. My committee chair additionally previewed, edited, and made suggestions to the final text version as is presented in this document.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the type of qualitative research I conducted during this study and my role as a researcher. I outlined the selection of the study site and participants, as well as my method for collecting data. My data collection methods included tape recording focus groups, in-depth interviews, producing photographic data, as well as the using archival data in the form of sign-in sheets, school memos and agendas, planning records, pre-existing photographs, magazines and newspaper articles.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the area and context in which my study on Mexican-American parental involvement transpired. I will start with a description of the border region and my initial visit to the school site itself. I will then describe my entrance into the site and provide a description of the school site. I will discuss my school site and its leadership. Next, I will discuss my data collection process and represent in detail three of the more salient events in which I observed and participated. Finally, I will exhibit profiles and photographs of my parent participants from my in-depth interviews.

Learning the Context

This section contains background information on the study site and geographic region are provided. Additionally a description of the school setting and leadership help to contextualize this study on Mexican-American parental involvement.

Developing Background to Research Area

Deep in South Texas, commonly referred to as the Rio Grande Valley, is a very unique area of the United States separated from northern Mexico by the Rio Grande River. Approximately 75 years ago this southern border region of Texas was in its infancy of development and populated primarily by Mexican-Americans and Anglos. The population, however from the 1900 to 2002, has drastically shifted demographically and economically since about the mid 1990s. This is due in large part to the North American

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Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that has helped create opportunities for both sides in negotiating and helping to develop businesses along the border. Arguably, NAFTA is a way of re-conceptualizing the border that moves it further along the continuum form "Alienated Borderlands" to "Integrated Borderlands" (Martinez, 1994). This movement has fostered stability between the two countries while providing Mexicans and Americans with minimally restricted avenues for crossing cultural, linguistic and economic bridges.

NAFTA has not only stimulated economic growth in this South Texas border region; it has contributed to the diversification of ethnic groups, cultures and languages and provided new educational and research opportunities in this region of the United States. However, even with this varied influx of people the majority of individuals who reside in South Texas along the border region are principally of Mexican decent and speak English, Spanish, or in some cases both languages.

Initial Encounter with the School

In unison excitement, fear and enthusiasm grasped me as I considered meeting the leadership, school, and parents of the school, all of whom would be such an intricate part of my life for the next 3 months. I exited the expressway and drove rather timidly down the main street in search of the side street that housed two schools. I reminded myself of the warning given to me in a telephone conversation just yesterday with Ms. Cano, the assistant principal: She said,

> Don't forget that *Border Road* has two schools. Pass the first
>
> school you see on the right side of the road and continue for about

a block and a half. Our school is on the left hand side of the road.

You can't miss us, Turning Point Elementary School.

So it was with this thought in mind that I drove down Border Road, and yes, on the right side of the road I saw a fairly large and modern school. I drove on knowing that this school was not my destination, so I continued to scan the distant view ahead of me searching for the school on the left side of the road. Just as Ms. Cano had stated, I couldn't miss Turning Point Elementary School. This one-story school situated just slightly off the corner was much older and smaller in appearance, but well kept and rather neat looking, nevertheless. I drove into the front parking lot and sat in my car for a few minutes gathering my thoughts and calming myself. Finally, I exited my car with purse in hand and a small black portfolio containing my note pad. As I approached the school I noticed several parents still dropping off their children at the last minute. I smiled at these parents as we passed one another in the entryway of the school building. I proceeded straight ahead and saw a bulletin board decorated with smiling photographs of the students on top of leaves cut from construction paper that read: "Turning Point's Students of the Month, We're Proud of You!" As I continued through the short corridor I turned almost instinctively to the right and surprisingly I encountered the main office. In this office space, which was rather small, I found the secretary busy at her desk answering the phone and writing something on a message pad. As she finished her conversation I took in the environment and noticed that this rather confined office space also was the work area of the data entry clerk, a high school office helper, and held a couple of chairs for visitors. There were four other doors that connected to this main office space. One led to a closet that was ajar, another had a door plate labeled "nurse" and the other two doors were not labeled. As I was about to take a seat a women exited

her office. I had not fully sat down so I stood up and smiled at her. I noticed that the secretary had just hung up the phone so I approached her and said, "Would you please direct me to Ms. Cano's office?" I have an appointment with her. The secretary not having an opportunity to respond was interrupted by Ms. Cano's greeting to me, " Hi, I am Ms. Cano. Are you the young lady I spoke with yesterday on the phone?" I replied, "Yes, I am." Extending her hand, she welcomed me into her office for a rather easy-going, and friendly visit. We spoke at great length about the actual study, and I was just beginning to share some information about myself when Principal Salinas joined us. I continued to share about my background including: my initial introduction to the valley in 1985 through the Latino Project, a cultural immersion experience provided by my Indiana University undergraduate institute; my seventeen years of living in the valley; my eleven-year teaching career in a nearby valley district; and my literature based research findings concerning parental involvement. I felt pleased that they were interested in knowing me and felt at liberty to be open and honest with them.

Principal Salinas was also interested in knowing how I found out about their school. I informed him that a colleague from our doctoral cohort had spent part of her summer internship at Turning Point Elementary. She was familiar with my dissertation topic on Mexican-American parental involvement and suggested that I consider using this site for my study because it had the necessary characteristics and was open to having doctoral students on campus.

Since my study proposed to explore Mexican-American parents' perspectives on home, school, and community collaboration I sought a school site that was relatively close to the border; provided an open door policy for parental presence in the school

setting; and embodied a school administration that openly supported engaged parents in roles other than those recognized as "traditional" activities of involved parents. My school site, Turning Point Elementary was located approximately 11 miles from the United States-Mexico border and provided school administrative leadership that embraced my presence and welcomed the study of the school and its parents.

Throughout the course of our meeting, both Principal Salinas and Ms. Cano shared their philosophy of education, their beliefs concerning the role of leadership in shaping school culture, and the importance of parents in the educational process. By the end of our almost three-hour meeting I was given permission to conduct my study on the school and its parental involvement program. I was encouraged to write a letter and return the following day to get Principal Salinas' and Ms. Cano's signatures of administrative approval.

Early the next day around 9:00 I returned to Turning Point Elementary School and gave the letters to Ms. Cano, who read and signed hers and informed me that Principal Salinas would sign his letter upon returning from making his morning classroom visits and hallway rounds.

In the meanwhile, Ms. Cano called and left a message for the parent center office helper to have Alma, the Parent Specialist come by her office when she had a chance. Within minutes Alma Hernandez was in Ms. Cano's office welcoming me to the school as a part of their team. (Apparently, Principal Salinas and Ms. Cano had already informed her about the study, and she was expecting me.)

Ms. Cano assured me that Alma Hernandez, as the Parent Specialist, had excellent relationships with the parents, she frequently visited the parents' homes, and

was well informed on the issues concerning the parents at Turning Point. Alma and I immediately began the "getting to know you" process as she shared information about the parent center and the school's parental involvement activities. After this meeting I felt that this school would provide some interesting data on the parents and how this school's leadership facilitated and encouraged parental involvement. Alma's assistance in this study would prove to be the crucial link in helping me to gain access to parents who would later be my participants. I spent the remainder of the morning with Alma discussing Turning Point's parental involvement program, touring the campus and being introduced to the various parents who were on campus (in classrooms and in the parent center).

Gaining Entrance

In two days everything seemed to be happening rapidly. I had found the site for my study; received permission to conduct my study along with letters of approval; turned in copies of this letter to the district's Central Office; met the key people in leadership at Turning Point; submitted my forms to the Internal Review Board (IRB) Committee; and was now awaiting formal approval from the IRB committee to begin my actual study. I also soon discovered that Alma, my contact person, at Turning Point Elementary School, is a trained social worker who was formerly a volunteer on the campus. Her familiarity with the parents, the various programs, and school culture as a whole proved to be a real asset throughout the entire study. Alma facilitated the identification of parents who would be likely participants for the various focus groups; set up the meeting rooms in the parent center and library conference area; and proved to be an essential contact for me gaining entrance into these parent's lived experiences.

Turning Points

This section describes the study site and discusses the critical role that campus leadership played in the creation of a welcoming school climate focused on student achievement and involved parents.

Description of Turning Point: The School

Located in a city population of approximately 33,000, Turning Point Elementary is one of 10 Pre-Kindergarten to Fifth grade campuses in its district. Turning Point Elementary was built over 50 years ago and is a relatively outdated structure in comparison to the newer school facility located just 2 blocks down and across the street from it. Turning Point's student population consists of 659 students. According to the school's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) report 650 students are Mexican-American, eight students are Anglos, and one student is labeled as "other". Additional indicators on the student population reveal that 549 students are categorized as "At Risk". Eighty students are migrant students and 76 are classified as recent immigrants. For more information on the school population, classes, and grade levels (See Appendix B: Figure 15.)

Description of Turning Point: The Leadership

For the past twenty years Turning Point Elementary has been under the leadership and direction of the same principal, Mr. Salinas. According to the parents and faculty, this long-term principal has helped the school to become the success that it is today in the areas of parental involvement on campus; increased passing rates on the state Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exam; and a positive welcoming school climate. The principal's firsthand knowledge of the surrounding neighborhood and

colonias has provided insight, stability, and familiarity with the issues confronting the school, parents, children, and the community.

Ms. Cano has been with Turning Point Elementary for eight years. During her first seven years at the school Ms. Cano was the parent liaison, the person who would coordinate activities, promote the adult education classes, and make visits to the parents' homes. In her first year in a new role as an assistant principal, she provides assistance to the teachers as an instructional facilitator. She and Mr. Salinas have worked together over eight years and have developed a genuinely positive work relationship that fosters a loving and caring environment for faculty, students, and parents.

Alma, the parent specialist, has been associated with the district for over seven years. Her experiences with Turning Point include the following: (a) parent volunteer for one year; (b) substitute teacher and parent volunteer for two years; (c) parent trainer and provider of adult education Graduate Education Diploma (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for three years; and (d) currently she is the full-time parent specialist for the past year.

In this study on Mexican-American parental involvement the Core Team is a school leadership unit that is comprised of parents, teachers and administrators. This group of campus leaders meet on a weekly basis and at other times as necessary to discuss issues of student learning and campus improvement. They have proven to be a key element in Turning Point's achievements.

Data Collection

Data collection and documentation for this study were obtained from archival data from sign-in sheets, newspaper and magazine articles, archival photos, focus group

tapes, transcripts and coded data, in-depth interview tapes, first-hand conversations,

telephone correspondences, reflective notes, visitations to parents' homes, photographs of

parents and family members, and observations and participation in functions and

activities provided by the school for parents (i.e. classes, programs, and training

sessions). However, my main sets of data came from five focus groups and seven in-

depth interview conducted with parents and school administrators (See Appendix B:

Figure 16.)

Additionally, the Parent Specialist played a key role in the focus groups by

establishing phone contact and making the invitation for them to participate in this study.

(She reasoned that the parents were already familiar with her and accustomed to her

asking for assistance with other campus activities. Parents subsequently signed informed

consent papers.) (See Appendix A.) Her invitation to participate yielded the following

focus groups and number of participants per group: Class Group – consisted of nine

parents who participated in one or more of the following class types: GED, ESL, sewing

and cake decorating; Home Group – was comprised of six parents who contributed to

their children's education and social development mainly in the home setting. These

parents were usually occupied with work and child care responsibilities and did not have

the opportunity to volunteer at the school on a regular basis; Volunteer Group – consisted

of 8 parents. These parents came to the campus on an average of 3 to 4 times a week and

helped in the parent center; the teacher/parent workroom running copies, cutting and

pasting, decorating; or in classrooms assisting the teachers; Advocate Group – had 7

parents who were a part of the Core Team and advocated on the behalf of on campus

(including teachers and parents). This Core Team was trained in research, decision-

making skills, and presentation, and often spoke with campus and district administration;
Teacher/Administrator Group – consisted of 6 teachers and administrator some of these
participants shared performed a dual role of both teacher/administrator and parent (See
Appendix B: Figures 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21.) Additionally, the parent specialist and
office helper co-partnered with me during the hour and a half focus group sessions and
helped to clarify translations or questions (in Spanish or English) that arose throughout
the interview.

My ability to use and converse in Spanish comes from my high school and
undergraduate major in Spanish and Linguistics as well as my studies abroad in Mexico
City. In addition, my teaching and work experience here in the Rio Grande Valley have
helped me to maintain and use my Spanish skills. However, there are times when I lack
appropriate vocabulary or modes of expression for free-flowing conversation. Because of
this Alma, the parent specialist, was present with me during these meetings and
facilitated in the translation process when necessary. During the focus group interview
process I conducted the interviews in Spanish and used English only when I could not
find the proper words or expressions to convey my question's meaning. At other times,
the parents themselves contributed to the translation and clarification of questions and
responses by myself or other parent participants. This group of parents had mixed
language use in that some of the parents understood English, but could not comfortably
express themselves in English, therefore they would used Spanish to respond to the
questions. Occasionally there were times during the interview process when some of the
parents who felt comfortable expressing themselves in English would choose to respond
in English. When the questions were more complex I would state the question in

English first, then translate the question into Spanish, or I would ask Alma to translate the question into Spanish for me. The parents' responses to the questions came in either English or Spanish depending on their own level of comfort and facility of language use and expression. When I conducted the in-depth interviews I used either English and Spanish depending on the parent's language preference.

Focus Group Interviews

As a means of delving deeper into the parents' lived experiences I conducted focus groups and in-depth individual interviews in Spanish and English. Through preliminary observations at Turning Point Elementary I spent over a month and a half (about three days out of the week) on the campus in order to familiarize myself with the campus leadership, physical structure, culture, and the flow of parents in and out of the school, and to determine the range of activities in which they participated. In preparing to carry out my focus groups I sought out the Parent Specialist and the Parent Center's office helper. Together the Parent Specialist and office helper assisted me in compiling a list of possible parent participants along with their phone numbers. I shared with them the five types of focus groups I intended to use for my study: Home Parents, Volunteer Parents, Class Parents, Advocate Parents, and a Teacher/ Administrative Group comprised of both teachers, the assistant principal and principal, who partnered with the Core Team.

Since the parent specialist and her helper had frequent interactions with the parents (more so than I) they were better able to gauge which parents would be most accessible and more inclined to participate in this parental involvement study. Using archival data such as sign-in sheets, activity rosters and a parent telephone list I selected

seven to nine parents per focus group, established a calendar of focus group dates, and assigned the parents to their group and scheduled date. The order of the focus groups were scheduled in the following way: Class Focus Group, Home Focus Group, Teacher/Administrator Focus Group, Advocate Focus Group and the Volunteer Focus Group.

I made the decision to conduct the Class Focus Group first because I had already participated with the parents in several of the class activities like English as a Second Language (ESL), Cake Decorating, and General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Our initial contact and experiences were positive and non-threatening; therefore I felt our limited but familiar relationship would help to alleviate some of the fear and anxiety normally associated with "insider – outsider" interactions, and facilitate the data collection process.

The second focus group I gathered data from was the Home Focus Group of parents who did not come to campus other than to drop off their children in the morning. For this reason, the preliminary data I gathered about them was extremely limited other than my observations of them picking up their children after school or mingling with them at special school events and programs. Since these parents either worked or stayed at home with smaller children I felt that their perspectives about parental involvement and activities might be different than the parents in the other focus groups.

The third focus group of Teachers and Administrators was purposefully situated in the middle of the data gathering from interview groups. The composition of this focus group consisted of parents and staff who functioned in teacher and administrator roles. Additionally, these participants were a part of Turning Point Elementary Core Team. This

Teacher and Administrative Focus group helped me to explore their perceptions concerning parental involvement from two overlapping perspectives - that of employees who were also parents.

The Advocate Group, which contained only parent members of the Core Team, was the fourth focus group I interviewed. This group as a representational unit had well-established leadership, purposeful agendas, and articulate parents who concisely expressed the parents' and students' concerns. I interviewed this group as the fourth one because of their ability to promote change and impact campus decisions.

The final focus group I conducted was the Volunteer Focus Group. I intentionally wanted to explore the ideas and perceptions of the other focus groups first. The rationale behind this decision was based on the fact that I could clarify and probe deeper with this group about any lingering questions. Additionally, I had the most familiarity with this group and wanted to explore last this group's ideas and perceptions about their levels of involvement with their children.

In-depth Interviews

In addition to conducting focus groups I also included in-depth interviews as a part of my data collection process (See Appendix B: Figure 22.) These in-depth interviews were carried out after I had completed all the focus groups. However, through my written comments and notations about some of the parents in the focus groups I began the process of singling out individuals who would be excellent participants for in-depth interviews. I selected my participants based on criteria: (a) the parents' sense of comfort with me; (b) oral communication skills and clarity of expression, perceptions and insights about their role as an involved parent; (c) and willingness to be open and permit

my entry into their homes on at least three separate occasions. The in-depth interviews were designed to transpire over a three-phase process. In the first phase of interviewing I went to the individual homes of five of the parents; and with one parent the interview was conducted at the school setting because of family member's recent hospitalization and recovery at home. As a part of this phase, I tape-recorded the mothers and family members as they contributed to the conversation, and I took photographs that helped to illustrate that family's expression of parental involvement.

Phase two of the in-depth interview was photo elicitation. This process was partially carried out during phase one through the use of a digital camera. During this phase the photographic image was reviewed and partially discussed. A second photo elicitation experience occurred when I presented the photographs to the in-depth interview parents' for review and comment. Upon seeing themselves in the photographic images of themselves and their children, the parents automatically responded, commented, and recalled details of the moment or memories from the past with their children.

Phase three of the in-depth interview process called for a member check on the parent profiles. During this member check the parents gave input as to the accuracy of their account as it had been written and represented.

<center>Involvement Events</center>

The following section describes three events that demonstrate Turning Point Elementary's commitment to involving and valuing parents in their children's education and development. These diverse activities are culturally significant and were specifically chosen by me to illustrate how purposeful and creative Turning Points' leadership is in its

attempt to involve and bridge the relationships between parents, community, and the
school.

La Posada

This was the third year that Turning Point would do perform the La Posada
(Christmas program) for the parents and surrounding community. At the time of this
year's performance, I had already been on campus for well over a month and was
somewhat familiar with many of the mothers and faculty. Since I was a participant
observer in this study I immersed myself in the various activities offered by the school.
My former days in school productions and dance drew me like a magnet to the after
school drama group primarily consisting of third, fourth and fifth grade students. Sister
Sara (from a local Catholic Church) who also came to the school on Thursday and Friday
morning to give a two-hour English as a Second Language (ESL) class was the main
instructor of the drama group. When I could go to rehearsal I merely observed, provided
assistance with the music, and gave encouraging feedback to Sister Sara and the students.

Two days before *La Posada*, he excitement on campus was electric with
anticipation as preparations were being made for the annual celebration. The school
gymnasium, a multi-purpose sports and activity building, was transformed into a
makeshift theatre by volunteer parents and staff members. The following day was dress
rehearsal day. Parents who had been working behind the scenes suddenly appeared in
droves carrying homemade costumes and stage props. I was literally amazed at the
quality intricate detail and work that the parents had taken in sewing the king's robes,
shepherd outfits, and angel costumes. I could clearly see that the parents had spent much
time in planning, designing and sewing the costumes. I felt extremely pleased that their

efforts were not a last minute afterthought.

The day of the event was show time at Turning Point Elementary. My family and I arrived at the school at 5:45 p.m. feeling a little frazzled and hurried because of a delay caused by an untimely auto accident on the highway. We arrived 15 minutes before the performance along with a group of other parents, friends and community neighbors carrying an assortment of refreshment goodies including homemade tamales, buñuelos, cookies, and chocolate con canela (hot chocolate with cinnamon). Since the parking lot was packed I anticipated that the seating area would also be full. My suspicions were confirmed as we approached the gymnasium and discovered that all 400 seats were filled, and standing room was all that remained. Like several other parents and families without seats, we stood along the walls and made room for the remaining stragglers who entered late.

The *La Posada* performance began with the principal offering the families, friends, and community members a wholesome welcome to *their* school. After his welcome the soft music filled the room and the children's choir sang a couple of Christmas songs. Following the choir's performance, Joseph and Mary entered the stage area going from inn to inn in search of lodging. Joseph and Mary's attempts to find shelter ended with them going to the last inn, which offered them sleeping arrangements in the stable with the animals. At the birth of Christ Jesus, a host of angelically dressed 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders danced a graceful contemporary ballet performance across the stage. Soon after their dance the three kings graced the stage with their gifts from afar. The play culminated with Joseph, Mary, the three kings, and the host of angels looking at the baby Jesus (a real 2 month old baby allowed to participate especially in this

performance) held tenderly by Mary in her arms. The grande finale song <u>He is the King</u>

filled the air as parents and others wiped tears of joy from their eyes and rejoiced in the

moment. Figure 23 shows Mary and Joseph along with Sister Sara holding a porcelain

baby Jesus.

After the performance we mingled with the crowd of parents, had refreshments,

talked about the evening's event. The parents who had the time to participate in this

production were thanked time and again by the campus leadership (including the

principal, parent specialist, staff and other parents). Once again, for 3rd year Turning

Point Elementary's *La Posada* was a success.

Figure 23. La Posada presentation
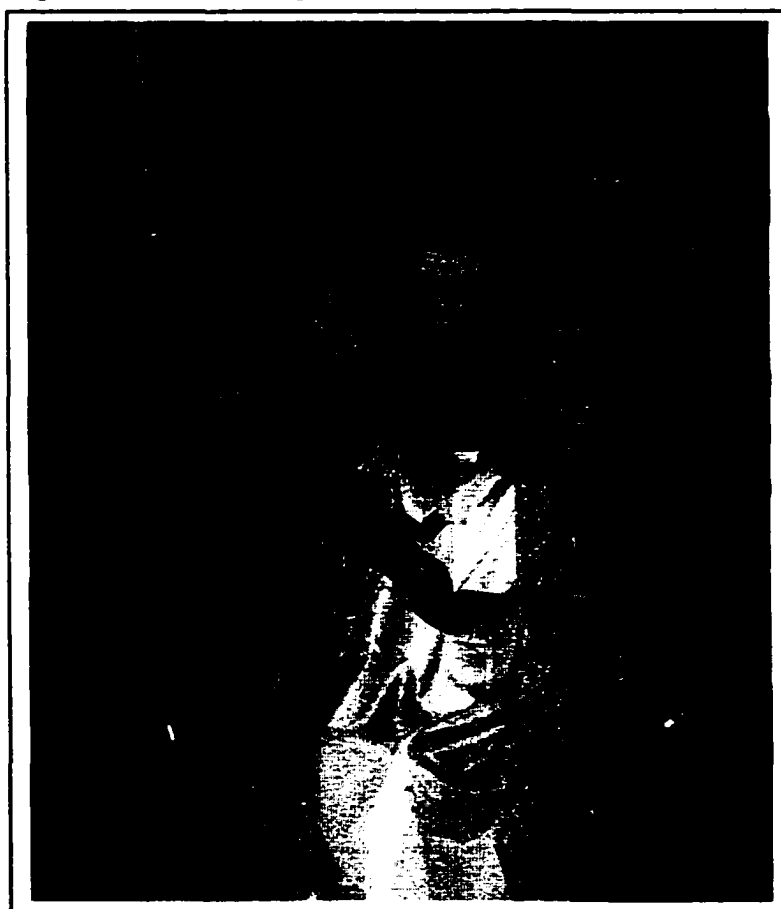
Donuts for Dad

7:45 AM the Turning Point cafeteria is filled with proud dads and content children (Figure 24). The school's annual Donuts for Dad event this year brought out a record number of 213 dads taking time from their morning work schedules and daily routines to come to the school to spend some quality time with their children. The principal welcomed the parents, the parent specialist thanked the fathers and encouraged them to return when they have the time, and the school choir provided the morning's entertainment. In seeing the number of fathers and the happiness in their children's eyes I could not help but think that someone here is doing something right. All of these fathers were making certain that they are going to be present for their children's education. Figure 24 pictures some of fathers who were present at this 5th annual meeting of Donuts for Dad.

Figure 24. Early morning Donuts for Dad at Turning Point Elementary cafeteria

I later found out as I roamed the room talking with the dads and children that

some of the men were uncles, grandfathers, brothers, or friends of a child whose father

could not make it to the Donuts for Dad event. So that the child would not feel left out

and lonely on this very special day the father or mother had made arrangements to have a

significant male present for the child. Figure 25 shows a long line of fathers (some

friends and mothers) to the children waiting to get a donut and juice or coffee.

Figure 25. Parents and children in donut and juice line

Core Team Meeting

The Core Team is a very unique part of the leadership at Turning Point

Elementary. This group of parents, teachers, and administrators meet weekly to discuss

the needs of the campus from academics to physical facilities. The Core Team meets

with the school board members as well as the superintendent with the sole purpose of promoting changes for their students. Turning Point Elementary has learned to effectively implement Site Based Decision Making [through the Core Team]. The parents involved with the Core Team demonstrate their leadership skills and speak out on behalf of their children.

The parents hold the administration at the campus and district level accountable through a scheduled plan of action and follow up. Figure 26 provides an example of one of the meetings that these parents hold with Central Office Administration.

Figure 26. Parents and teachers' discussion following Core Team meeting
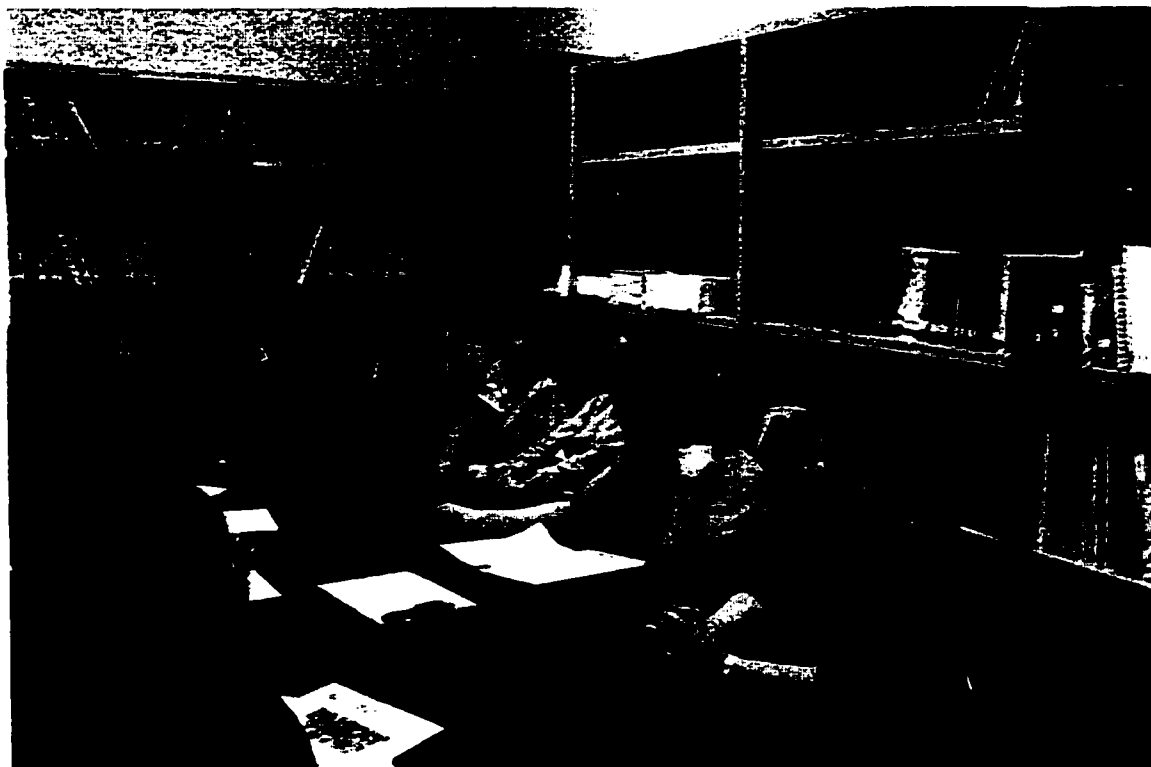
In-depth Interview Parent Profiles

This section contains profile information on the seven parents from my in-depth interviews. With the permission of these parents I have included photographs of them and, in some cases, their family members' photographs. The study as it is written, however, uses pseudonyms for their names. These profiles encompass some of the parents' quotes and perspectives on how they view themselves as an involved parent. The way in which I have written these profiles in part provides a preliminary analysis and interpretation of some of the thematic data that emerged from the focus groups and in-depth interviews. The seven in-depth interviews include the following participants: Alma "The Loving Lighthouse," Edna "The Discerning Problem Solver," Carmen "The Forward Thinking Visionary," Marta "The Faithful Supporter," Teresa "The Sewer of Love," Estella "The Baker's Dozen," and Rosa "The Tenacious Persister." These profiles as a whole allow the reader an opportunity to get a glimpse of these parents as they live out their lives in their homes, schools, and communities.

Alma, "The Loving Lighthouse"

Alma (Figure 27) is married to a local businessman, and is the mother of an eight-year old third grader and a ten-year old fifth grader who attend Turning Point Elementary. Alma's affiliation with and interest in Turning Point Elementary has a long history. Prior to her current position as Parent Specialist at Turning Point Elementary, she was a former parent volunteer like many of the mothers in this study. Her personality is warm, friendly, welcoming, energetic, and open to parents, visitors, and school staff. In her role as a parent volunteer she frequently participated in the "traditional" activities of school volunteers and recalls,

Figure 27. Alma, the Parent Specialist, pictured in the parent center
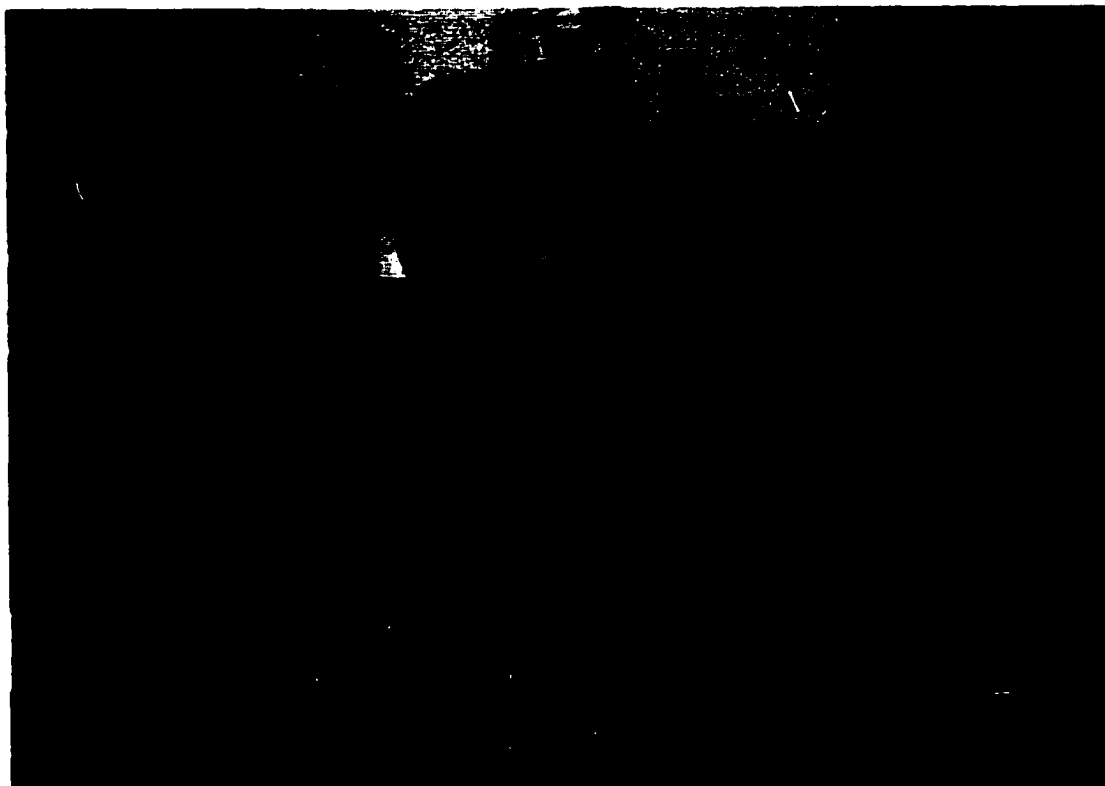
I was one of them [the parents] . . . I had my children and decided to

stay at home. So in the time that I stayed home I would bring

Kimberly to school, and I had Nicole in diapers. The facilitator would

be asking me, 'Please stay, please stay...' And I did not feel

comfortable because I had Nicole, and I said well, you know...when

she gets a little older I'll start staying. Well...she went into Pre-K and

I did not have any more excuses. So . . . so I started staying. I was a

volunteer. I volunteered, and I did all the activities with the mothers.

So I was one of them.

Her real immersion into Turning Point Elementary School transpired

when one of the teachers went on maternity leave for six weeks. Alma was asked

to take over the class and from that point forward Alma recalls, "Almost every day, on a daily basis I was called in. And it was just . . . God. I didn't want to work, I was happy subbing." However with the encouragement of the facilitator she was offered the opportunity to apply for the position of Parent Trainer wherein she conducted classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) for parents and community members for two and a half years. Over the past three and a half years Alma has used her Bachelors of Arts and Science, Social Work, degree successfully in the role of Parent Specialist, a unique position that the district created just for Turning Point Elementary School. The position was possible because of the school's connection with Valley Interfaith, a grassroots advocacy organization, and its Alliance School program. In her capacity as Parent Specialist Alma works even more directly then before with a broader spectrum of individuals both on and off campus. She coordinates parent training sessions, classes, and activities for parents and volunteers, establishes and coordinates Core Team and other group meetings with school and district personnel, and manages the parent center where regular attending (veteran) and newcomer parents come on a daily basis. Alma comments, "[This job of mine] is essential. It is a vital part of this school and this school would not be where we are without our department." This new position of Parent Specialist, the school leadership, parents, and Alma have helped to re-conceptualize what parent involvement for the educational benefit of children means in and outside of the school setting.

Alma was raised in a small town near San Antonio and later moved to the Rio

Grande Valley around the age of 8. Although her parents were fluent in both Spanish and English she was reproved for speaking Spanish; she therefore acquired English as her dominant language. Alma recalls the admonition she received from her father about speaking Spanish and how a school experience discouraged him [her father] from using his Spanish. When this incident occurred, the community where he lived was racially divided due to segregation. Alma recalls,

> My father went to a segregated school when he was younger until he got into high school when the desegregation came in." She commented, "My dad was traumatized...and he always told my Mom: 'Don't let them. I don't want them [Alma and her sister] to speak Spanish. Don't teach them Spanish...It's going to ruin their life. It's going to ruin their future.'" Reflecting on these words and teachings of her parents she says, "So here we are thirty years later and everything is like bilingual... And I don't know how to speak Spanish [well].

On several occasions Alma noted the irony of this earlier advice given about speaking Spanish and at present being proficient in two languages is truly an asset and not a disadvantage. Alma says that she is grateful because even though, "My Spanish is broken...[the parents] don't care...they appreciate the fact that I don't speak it well, but I still speak it to accommodate them." From her own lived experience she sees the value in having her own children in a dual language program such as the one offered by Turning Point Elementary. Alma plainly expressed, "Spanish is going to help them [her children] to get a job. And they will be able to use Spanish in whatever they do."

Even though Alma, is continually busy arranging meetings and parent involvement activities she makes a conscious effort to spend time daily with the parents who drop by the parent center after leaving children in their classrooms. Many parents look forward to this time of coming together and uniting in what I have termed the "Lighthouse" on campus. On a daily basis mothers seek refuge in this safe harbor on campus, to catch up on the latest information, share a cup of coffee or two, and to partake of the sweet bread and other goodies brought in by the parents themselves. It is precisely in these moments that these mothers find an occasion to bond with one another, and it is because of Alma's genuine love and caring that other parents are drawn daily into this familial setting. These mothers come searching for a place to belong (for acceptance and respect), a home away from home, and for the chance to developmentally spread their wings and fly to the next plateau. Alma stands strong, in their midst - shining as a beckoning tower calling forth parents by her loving example, beautiful smile, and open arms. As the Loving Lighthouse, Alma exhorts and guides the parents in their journey of involvement and growth. She offers a place of refuge along the way, identifies with their struggles, shares in their triumphs and amplifies their voice and concerns.

Alma's main goal as a Parent Specialist is to be present for the parents, to bridge the relationship between the home, school, and community, and to strive to remove the vertical barriers that exist between the school and parents.

Edna, "The Discerning Problem Solver"

Edna, the married mother of three children (Monica, age 12 and grade six; Angela, age 10 and grade four; and Gabriel, age 9 and grade three) has been associated with the Turning Point Elementary School for at least 6 years. (See Figures 28 and 29.)

When she and her family arrived from California Edna immediately became involved with the school and assisted in her children's classrooms as a parent volunteer. Once Turning Point Elementary School discovered that this seemingly reticent mother was a degreed professional teacher from Mexico with several years of teaching, she was hired by the school to become a Parent Tutor. In this role she works with small groups of students who are struggling and need extra assistance. Additionally, Edna provides Adult Education Classes at the school for parents and community members who wish to get their high school General Equivalency Diploma (GED). In the truest since Edna, "The Discerning Problem Solver" is an advocate at heart and cares deeply about educational equity, student achievement, and parental involvement.

Figure 28. Edna pictured in her home with her family members.
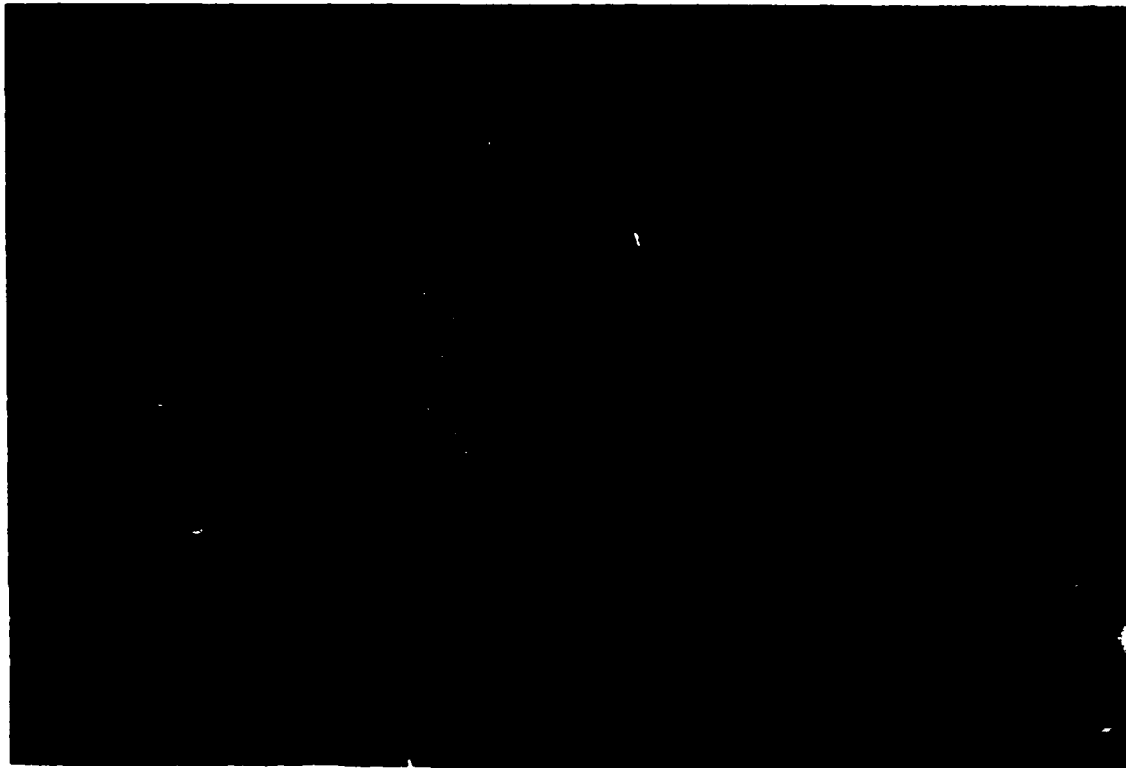
According to Edna's husband David,

Ella lucha por toda la comunidad. Ella lucha por todos los niños y por

la gente. Ni importa raza, ni color, ni sexo. Ella lucha por todo. No

hay distinción. Ella fue a muchos lugares por lo bien, por la escuela.

<< She fights for the community. She fights for all the children and

the people. Neither race, color, nor gender matter to her. She fights

for all. There is no distinction. She's been everywhere on behalf of

what's right, for the good of the school. >>

Figure 29. Edna holds music as daughter.

Edna is one of many mothers and teachers on campus who demonstrates her

leadership skills via a successful well-established Core Team. This Core Team meets

often with the district superintendent and with board members in an effort to promote make educational changes that will benefit the students who attend Turning Point Elementary. As a member of the Core Team, Edna uses her training in the art of diplomacy, research, and presentation to express the unified voice of parents and staff at the school.

Edna is a stable and tenacious role model for her own children. She is a mother who fosters a home environment that is steeped in faith, high aspirations, and optimistic thinking about what the future holds for them. Both she and her husband cherish the time they spend with their children and enjoy imparting their knowledge through real life stories or fables. Most of these tales emphasize the value of hard work, honesty, respect and concern for others, regardless of whether people are poor or rich. These stories are told with passion and these stories are received and cherished in the minds of her children with love. The kernels of wisdom imparted in the stories provide stepping-stones into the future for her children. Edna recounts one story that her husband shared with their son.

> There was a little baby chick that needed to use the bathroom, and the
> only place for the chick to use the bathroom was there on top of the
> grass.
>
> But…the grass didn't want the baby chick to use the bathroom on top
> of it.
>
> So the baby chick went to the fire and asked the fire, "Fire, would you
> please burn the grass? You see, the grass does not want me to use the
> bathroom on top of it, and I have nowhere else to go to the bathroom."
> But…the fire said, "No!"

Then the baby chick went to the water and asked, "Water, would you please put out the fire? You see, the fire doesn't want to burn the grass, and the grass won't let me use the bathroom on top of it."

But...the water said, "No!"

Then the baby chick went to the bull and asked,

"Bull, would you please drink all of the water? You see, the water doesn't want to put out the fire, the fire doesn't want to burn the grass and the grass won't let me go to the bathroom on top of it."

But...the bull said, "No!"

Then the baby chick went to the butcher and asked, "Butcher, would you please cut up the bull for me? You see, the bull doesn't want to drink the water, the water doesn't want to put out the fire, the fire doesn't want to burn the grass and the grass won't let me go to the bathroom on top of it."

But...the butcher said, "No!"

So then the baby chick went to the skeleton and asked, "Skeleton, would you please scare the butcher for me? You see, the butcher doesn't want to cut up the bull, the bull doesn't want to drink the water, the water doesn't want to put out the fire, the fire doesn't want to burn the grass and the grass won't let me go to the bathroom on top of it."

And the skeleton said, "Yes!"

Upon hearing the skeleton's answer and fearing that each night the

skeleton would come to scare him the butcher immediately change his

answer and said, "Okay, yes! I'll do it. I'll cut up the bull."

The bull in turn said, "Okay, wait. I'll do it. I'll drink all the water."

The water fearing that it would be drank replied, "Okay, I'll do it. I

will put out the fire."

The fire also afraid said, "Now, wait a minute... I can do it!

The grass clearly fearing for its own life replied, "I am sure that you

misunderstood me. Go ahead and use the bathroom. It's no problem."

These and other stories are helping Edna's children to realize that they are a part

of the bigger picture; connected to a world beyond the comforts and safety of their home;

that they can seek something that seems difficult; and succeed through effort. Through

Edna's example and stories she has shown her children the importance of looking beyond

themselves. Edna and David's parental involvement in and observation of the card trick

activity (Figure 30) demonstrate the transfer and application of these lessons in that their

children are effective communicators and seekers of alternative solutions to sometimes

"tricky" and challenging situations.

Edna expressed that if their family has the means (money, time, or whatever) to

help someone in need, it is not advisable to stand in their way. With this belief in mind

Edna's family tends to reach out, lend a helping hand, and share whatever they have.

Edna's lessons clearly illustrate to her children that they can either be part of the problem

or solution in someone's life. With her strong problem solving abilities, Edna has chosen

to be a solution, a bridge that helps others, especially their children, to overcome

obstacles and to cross borders.

Figure 30. Children experiment with a card trick
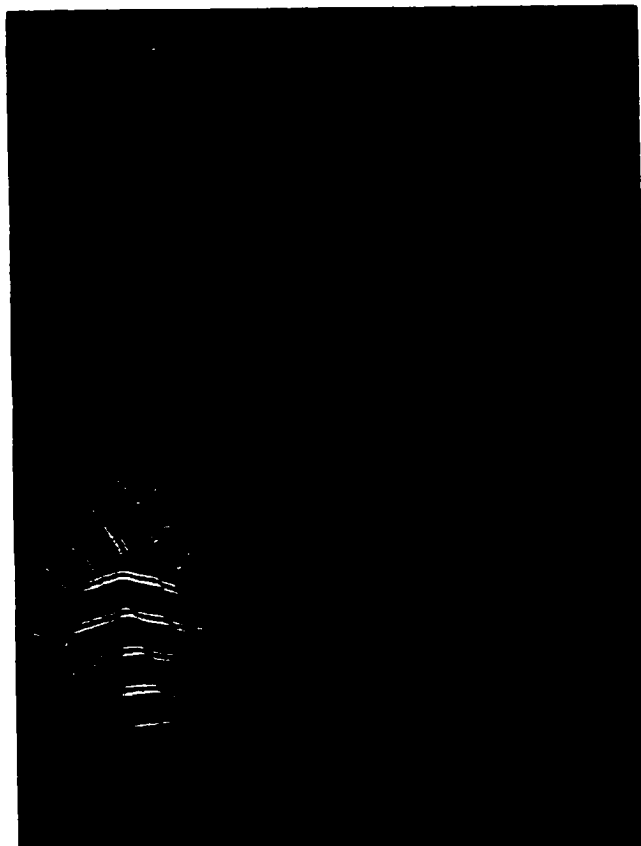
Carmen, "The Forward Thinking Visionary"

Carmen's household consists of her husband, Pablo, and their three children.

Denise, the oldest, is a 13 year-old seventh grader; Matthew, in the middle, is a 12 year-old sixth grader; and Yolanda, the youngest, is a 9 year-old third grader. Carmen believes strongly in the closeness of the family unit and is quite demonstrative with her children (Figure 31.)

Carmen says,

> Hay niños que los agarras se asustan. O sea, se hacen para atrás. Los míos, no. Estamos

Figure 31. Carmen pictured with her two younger children at Turning Point Elementary.
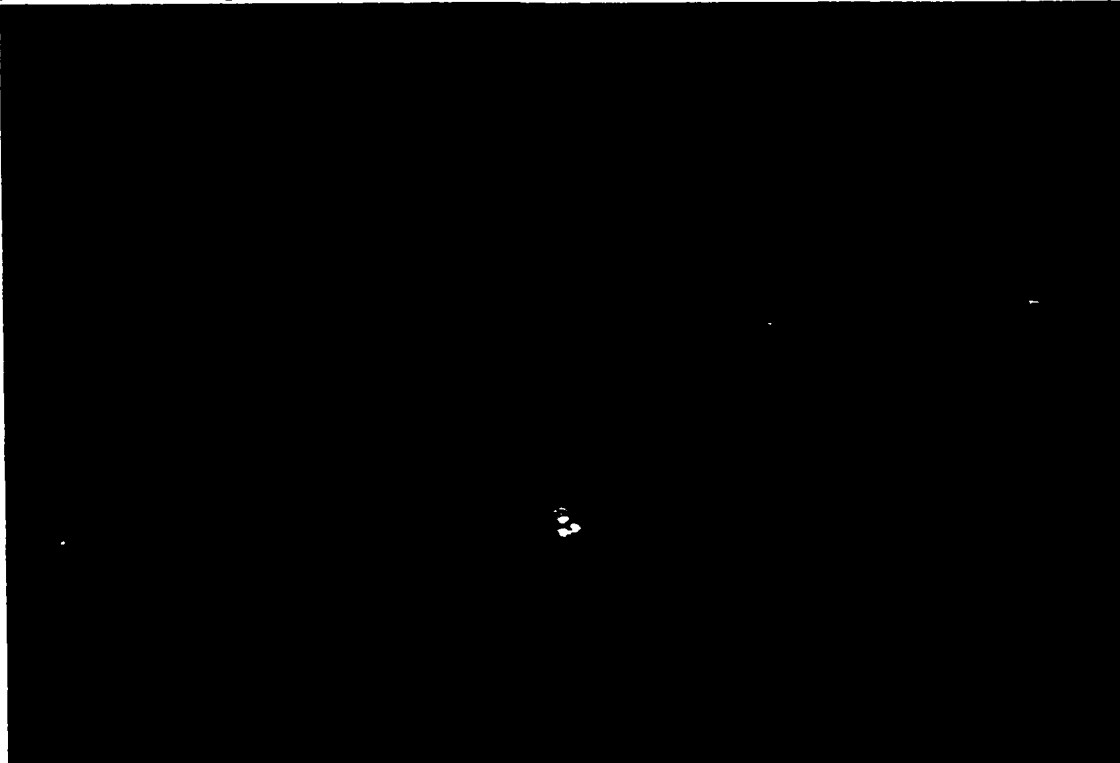
acostumbrados a tocarlos. ¿Si? Abrazarlos. Los momentos más bonitos

antes. ¿Cuando era? Contabamos todo en una cama. Todos. Acostados

uno a medio, otra aca, otra alla y todos viendo a la televisión o viendo

películas. Ah, pero estos eran los momentos que más compartíamos.

<< There are children that when you grab to hold them that are afraid

and move back out of fear. Mine, they are used to us touching and

holding them. The most beautiful moments are when we are all in the

same bed, one sprawled this way, the other that way watching

television or some movies. These are the most precious moments. >>

Carmen's sense of self-determination and perseverance amount to a basic belief that,

"No hay barreras." << "There are no barriers.">> According to

Carmen, "The Forward Thinking Visionary", "Tú pones tus propia

barreras. Tú dices, 'Yo no puedo ir', o 'Yo no quiero ir.'" << " You

create your own barriers. You are the one that says, 'I cannot go', or 'I

don't want to go.'" >> Regarding her own children, Carmen tells them

that the way to become successful is through their education. She

reminds them, "Les dije, apúrense porque pueden hacer más." << "I

tell them, apply yourself because you are able to do more." >>

Carmen believes in rewarding her children for concentrating on doing well in education

and helping out around the house when they can. Carmen states,

Yo a ellos, cuando sacan buenas calificaciones yo trato de darles algo

más, si, porque estan haciendo mucho esfuerzo. El unico esfuerzo que

ellos tienen que hacer es estudiar.

<< When the kids have made good grades I try to give them something

because they are putting forth the effort. The only responsibility they

have is to study. >>

Even though Carmen's first language is Spanish, she has taught herself to read

English so that she may help with her children's homework. Carmen has learned the

value of overcoming (i.e. crossing) barriers so that her own children will benefit and have

a better life. Even with her three room home, which is somewhat confining for a family

of five, she has learned to make the most of life, and she has even developed a small

business out of her home that helps to supplement the family's income. However,

Carmen's family goals do not necessarily include having more things. Rather, her goal is to have her children build lasting family relationships. Carmen confides,

> Yo estoy aquí para cuidarlos, a los tres [los niños]. Pero tu envuelve a
>
> el...tu no vas a tener otro hermano. El es el único. Necesitas que
>
> cuidarlo. Tu hermano es primero.
>
> << I am here to take care of the three of them [my children]. But you
>
> [sisters] are also involved with your brother. He is the only one you
>
> have, and you have to take care of him. Your brother is first. >>

As a parent volunteer she is actively involved in cake decorating classes, volunteering at school and serving on the Core Team. In reference to her presence on campus Carmen states,

> Pos [sic], participamos en todas las juntas que tienen aquí o que
>
> necesitan de nuestra presencia. Apoyamos al director en todo lo que
>
> se necesita para la escuela, en la escuela . . . O sea, yo este año no he
>
> estado en salon de clases de mi hija, pero años pasado he estado
>
> adentro y yo veo que la niña se siente muy bien de que este uno allí.
>
> Los niños los empiezan a conocer a los padres de familia que circulan
>
> más por la escuela a pesar de que no somos trabajadores de la escuela.
>
> Somos voluntarias, y como voluntarias, se van concociendo las
>
> personas que vienen.
>
> << Well, we participate in all the meetings they have here, or when
>
> they need our presence. We support the principal in all that he needs
>
> for the school. Like this year I have not been able to be in my

daughter's classroom so much as I have in years past. The children,

they begin to know you as a parent and that you are associated with

the school. We volunteer, and like volunteers, we get to know the

people that come to the school. >>

Aside from Carmen being involved on the home front with her children she

utilizes her creative skills in a cake decorating class offered at Turning Point Elementary

(Figure 32). Carmen and several other parents spend every Tuesday in the school

cafeteria learning how to perfect their existing cake decorating skills or new ways to

create tasty birthday and wedding delights. Carmen is an experienced cake decorator

who works part time in a bakery as well as out of her home. With her well developed

talent she uses the money earned from her hobby to bring in extra money for her family.

Figure 32. Carmen participates in a cake decorating class at Turning Point
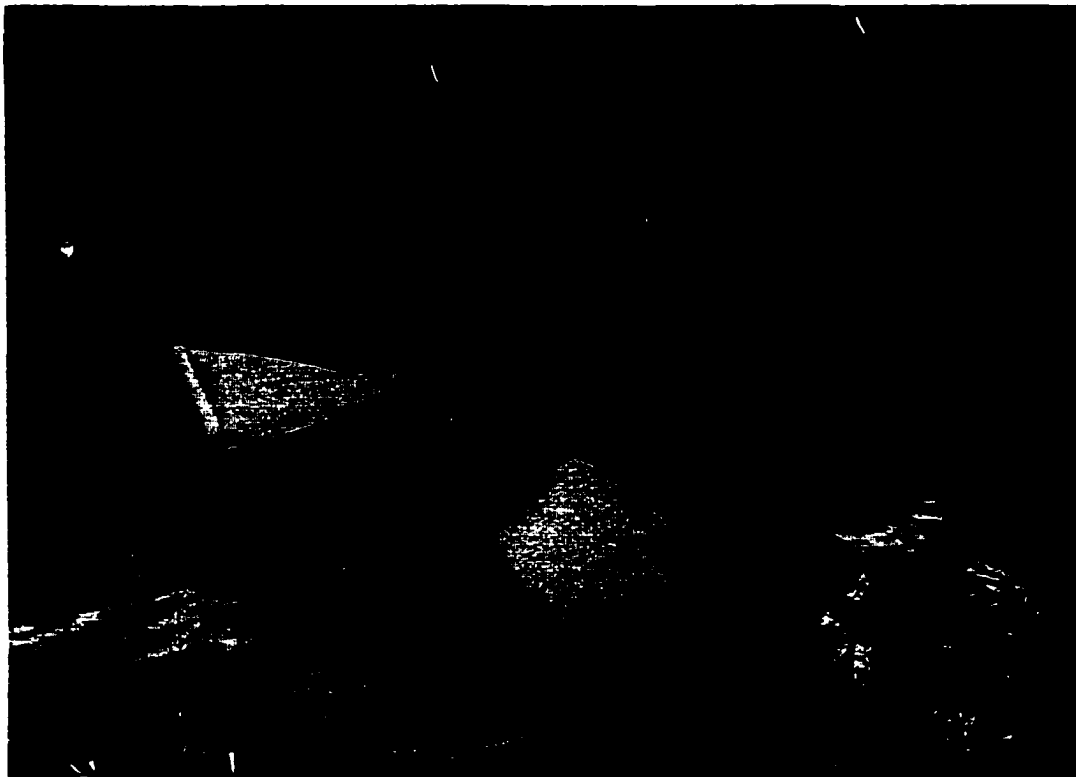
In a Core Team meeting (Figure 33) held in the Turning Point school library

Carmen, Edna and other Core Team parents meet with the assistant to the superintendent,

Mr. Ramos, to discuss issues and concerns involving the school facilities and student

achievement. Carmen's interpersonal skills and speaking ability are an asset which she

successfully uses to advocate for changes and concerns at Turning Point Elementary. The

Core Team recognizes and welcomes Carmen's her ability to verbalize and voice the

principal's, teaching staff's, and other parents' opinions and suggestions at Turning Point

Elementary. She has helped to "re-conceptualize" the school's vision of parental

involvement and continues to cross borders in the struggle to obtain educational equity

for her children and the other students in Turning Point Elementary.

Figure 33. Core Team meeting with, Mr. Ramos, assistant to the school superintendent

Marta, "The Faithful Supporter"

Marta, the married mother of two boys: Fernando, a 12 year old sixth grader, and Geraldo, a 10 year old fourth grader (Figure 34), is one of the loving parents who willingly accommodates and welcomes all the newcomers into the school. Her warm personality and friendly demeanor have made Marta, "The Faithful Supporter" at Turning Point Elementary as well as in her children's other educational programs. Marta takes her calling as parent very seriously and enjoys being a mom. She remarks, "I had my kids, and I thought, and I still think . . . I am blessed. My kids are my pride and joy." With that thought in mind she recounts the privilege of being able to be a part of her children's life at home and in the school environment. Her husband, Jorge commented, "Every since they were in Head Start she has been there everyday, all day. And they got out of Head Start and they came over here (Turning Point Elementary) and she follows them around."

Marta not only encourages her children to do well and be successful in school; but she brings that attitude of support and caring into the Parent Center at Turning Point Elementary. Her openness and concern for the children of the campus has helped her to establish multiple social networks with the various other parents. Marta commented that when one of the parents at Turning Point has something to do like a doctor's appointment, or if someone needs to run a last minute errand before school ends and cannot make it back before the end of the school day, she or one of the other parent volunteers will assist with child care. The social network and support that Marta offers helps the parents to feel comfortable and valued. She stated, "We always keep track of one another's kids."

Figure 34. Marta and family pose together on the living room couch.
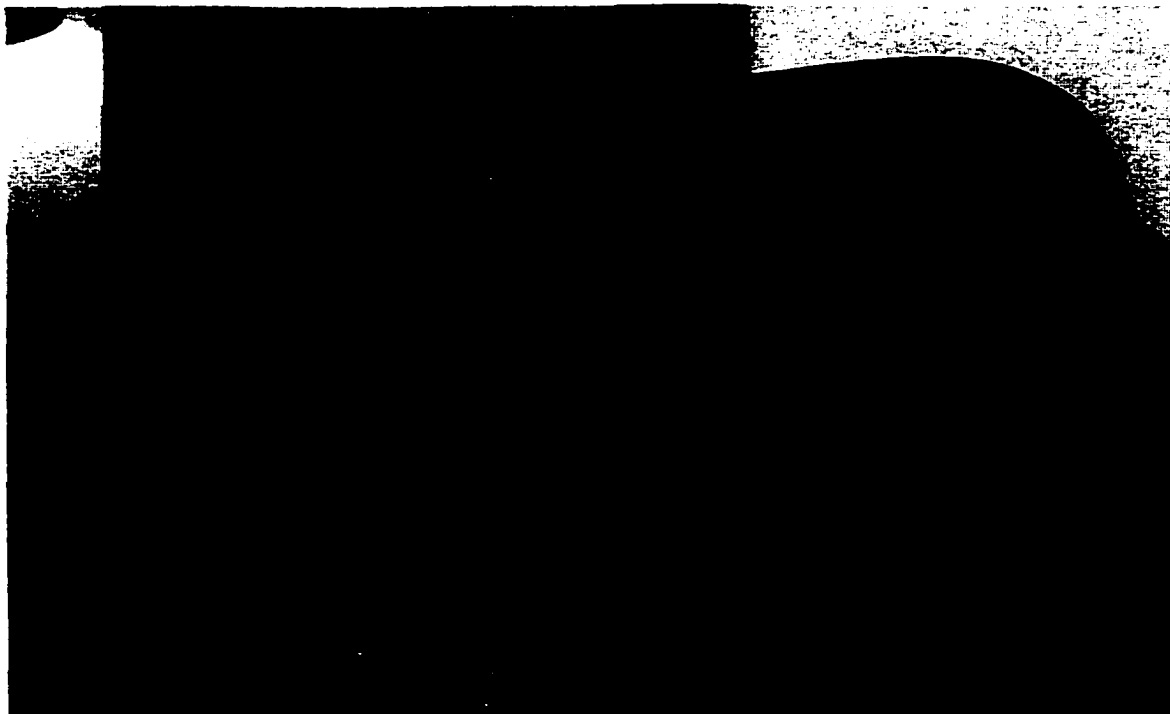
Marta derives great satisfaction from being on campus because she can help her children to become even more successful in school and be available in the event that either the teacher or her child needs her. Marta shared, "Ah...sometimes I go into the classroom. I am doing some work for the teacher, and I will be watching him [her son] also. And every time I go in there he knows." Her being on campus has made her fairly well known around the campus and outside of the school, too. At the local food store, for example, she will often hear little voices calling out her name and saying "Hi!" Marta recalled, "Oh yes...Anywhere I go...I go to H.E.B. and sometimes I don't see them [the students] and they see me...and I come to school in the morning and they say, 'Ms...I saw you, Ms.' Where did you see me? 'I saw you at H.E.B., but you didn't see me.'" Both Marta and her husband feel strongly about being available for their children (Figure 35.) She encourages parents to be present for their children, suggesting that,

Even if they [the parents] would be working, try to help your kids with

their homework ... in their homes. To try to be close to their child.

Right now is the best time to get close to their kids, right now when

they are small. Time goes so fast that it won't turn back. It will not

turn back. And this is the best thing, to be close to your kids to help

them as much as you [the parent] can.

At Turning Point Elementary many parents like Marta wear multiple hats. She

is both a volunteer parent and a Core Team member who strives to improve the school

environment.

Figure 35. Marta and Fernando do homework immediately after school

Her encouragement and willingness to support others through kind words, assistance, or

cooperative presence helps to strengthen the campus parental involvement program. This

parental involvement program's success is made possible because of dedicated people

like Marta who make the commitment to put their children first. Marta reveals the

following sentiments, "I feel very...how should I say it? I feel good. I feel very

helpful...I don't know how to express it...I think I am seeing my kids grow right there

with my own eyes, and I'm not missing anything. And I feel good about it...I don't have

a negative conscience right now. I have watched them [my children] grow day by day."

In the school environment and community Marta can be found assisting her children,

other students, and parents with information related to the Core Team or other parental

involvement activities offered at Turning Point Elementary. When necessary she will

help other parents to run errands to the local store or doctor's office. During the after

school program Marta assists with monitoring and distributing after school snacks to the

students at Turning Point. This love, dedication, and presence in the home, school, and

community environment is what precisely makes Marta, "The Faithful Supporter"

(Figure 36.)

Figure 36. Marta and son, Geraldo, enjoy an after school pizza break activity
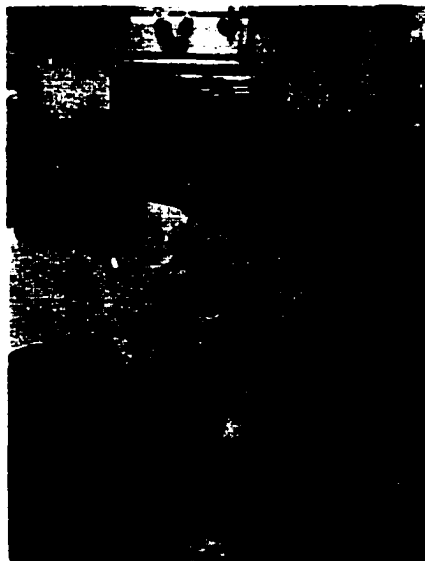
Teresa, "The Sewer of Love"

Teresa, (Figure 37.) a married, lovingly warm and soft-spoken mother/ grandmother has the great honor and privilege of raising her five year-old grand-daughter, Bonita The nature of their relationship is complementary and filled with special Mommy – Daughter times. Teresa keeps very active with by Bonita doing exercises, walking, playing together, making things, cooking tortillas, and by spending time in

Figure 37. Teresa poses for a portrait during our interview session.
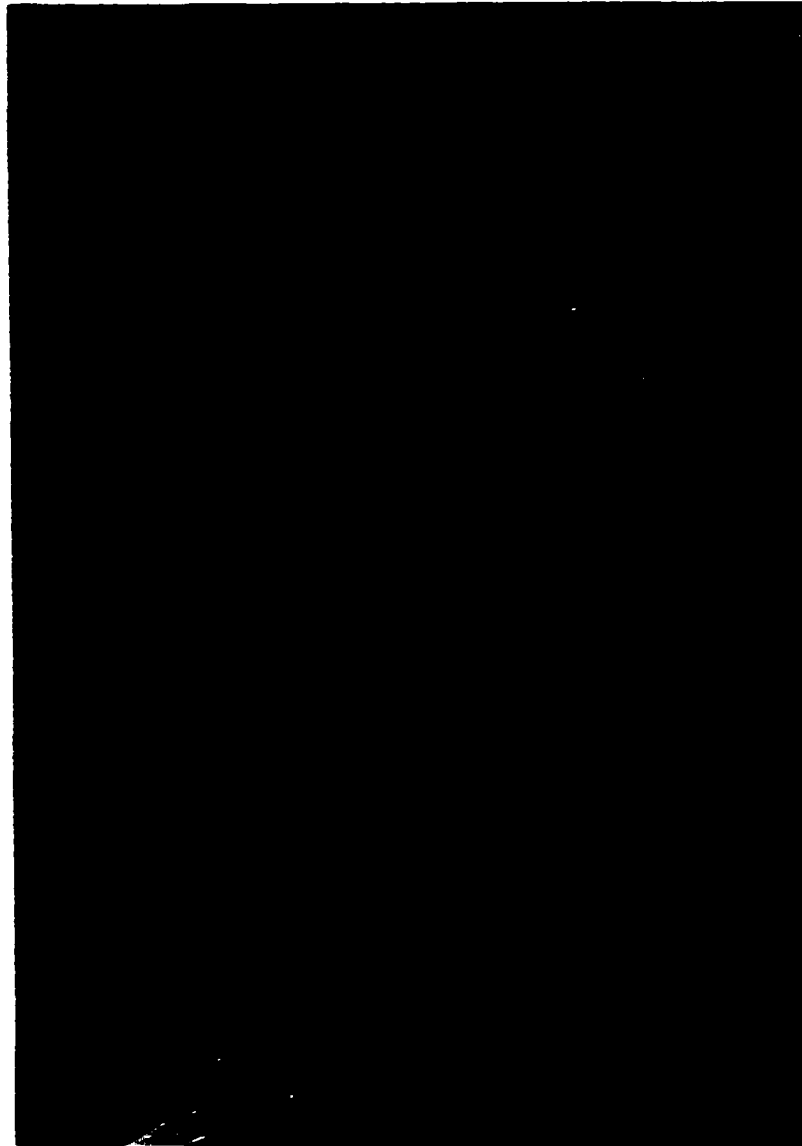
conversation in either Spanish and English. According to Teresa, "Le dejamos todo el

dia platicando, porque le encanta a platicar." << We spend all the day talking, because

she likes to talk.>> (Figure 38.)

Figure 38. Teresa and Bonita doing what they both love best: talking the day away

On school days Teresa brings Bonita to school and walks her into her

classroom, greets the teacher, and asks if she may assist her today. Teresa commented,

Bueno se miró que necesita ayuda que proyectos de las maestros

piden. . . de cortada, o dibujar, pegar. Nos sentamos y vemos si

alguien más necesita ayuda, pos [sic] ayudamos. Y si no, nos tomamos

un refresquito y relajamos y nos vamos. Si no hay trabajo, pos [sic]

cada quien va a ir hacer cosas dependiente de lo que tienen que hacer,

personales. ¿Verdad? Pero siempre acostumbro a dejarla a la escuela.

Paso por cuarto veinte-dos. Al ver que hay algo en que puedo ayudar, me quedo un rato. Si no, pues, voy y hago mis mandados.

<< Well, I look to see if there are any projects that the teacher needs help with...like cutting things out, drawing, or gluing. If we don't feel that we are needed there we ask to help other teachers. If not, we take a little break, have a soft drink, and relax. If there is no work we go and take care of personal matters that we have for the day. But I always drop her off at school. I drop by Room # 22 [Parent Center] at the school. And I see if I can help out there for a little while. If not I go and do what I have to do for the day. >>

After taking care of her plans for the day, Teresa returns to the school to help.

En la hora de lonches voy a ayudar a la maestra con los niños. Si no tiene ayuda, siempre estoy allí casi por regular viendo que los niños coman. Porque muchas veces por estar platicando los niños no comen...Que es el primer año en que muchas veces no comen por nerviosos, les duele el estómago, o porque uno se siente que va a vomitar y no quiere comer. Poco extrañan sus casas, sus papas y sus alimientos.

<< During lunch I go to help the teacher with the children. If she doesn't have help, I go there to monitor and watch to see if the children are eating because many times the children are talking and don't eat. After all, it is their [the children's] first year in school and many times they do not eat because of nervousness, stomach pains, or

because they feel like vomiting, and they don't want to eat. Some of

the children miss their homes, their parents, and the food they usually

eat. >>

Aside from helping out in the cafeteria with her granddaughter's class Teresa

goes to the school to be a stand-in Mommy for the boys and girls who need one. Teresa

shared,

Mis atenciones...es por haber que...que los niños traigan sus zapatos

abrochados. Porque muchas maestras no se toman el tiempo para

abrochar los tenis. O hacer el boton déspues del baño. Yo me meto al

baño y me aseguro que las niñas se laven los maños.

<< My efforts. . . are to see to it that. . . that the children come with

laced shoes. Because often the teachers don't take the time to lace

sneakers, or to secure buttons after they go to the bathroom. I go into

the bathroom to make sure they wash their hands. >>

Teresa finds sheer pleasure in being able to volunteer at Turning Point

Elementary (Figure 39.) She clarifies, "Estoy gozando bastante este...este tiempo que

estoy ahorita. Gracias a Dios que me permite estar envuelto en todo esto." << I am

enjoying this time right now. I thank God that I am able to be involved in all of this." >>

Aside from helping the teachers with their duties as a classroom or cafeteria

volunteer, Teresa is a Core Team member and gives Sewing Classes to mothers and

community members from the local school neighborhood and Turning Point Elementary.

In this school, it is easy for Teresa to be, "The Sewer of Love." She and the other women

have threaded together bits and pieces from the fabrics of their lives including personal

experiences, skills, talents, wisdom, and motherly care. They have sewn those together into a kind of quilted tapestry, which represents a home away from home for the parents and for their children at Turning Point Elementary.

Figure 39. Teresa and Minnie, another parent volunteer help in the parent center

Teresa remarked about this school in comparison to other schools in the area, "En esta escuela me siento muy diferente, como una parte de la familia. Yo me he sentido muy cómoda con las amistades que hay allí. Gracias a Dios. Son muy buenas personas. . . Y todos tenemos talentos." << "In this school I feel very different, like a part of the family. I feel very comfortable with my friends there. I thank God. They are very good people with a lot of talent." Teresa recognizes that as a parent she is valued particularly because of what she is able to offer to the school and its children. Despite being

primarily a Spanish-speaking parent, she too, has learned to cross the border between

home and school and has positively impacted the school culture with her loving presence.

Estella, "The Baker's Dozen"

Estella and her husband have four children: Julian, a ten year old fifth grader;

Cesar, a nine year old fourth grader; Gabriela, a five year old kindergartener; and

Deandra, a year and a half old toddler (Figure 40.)

Figure 40. Estella and children pictured here with her mother (left) who is visiting
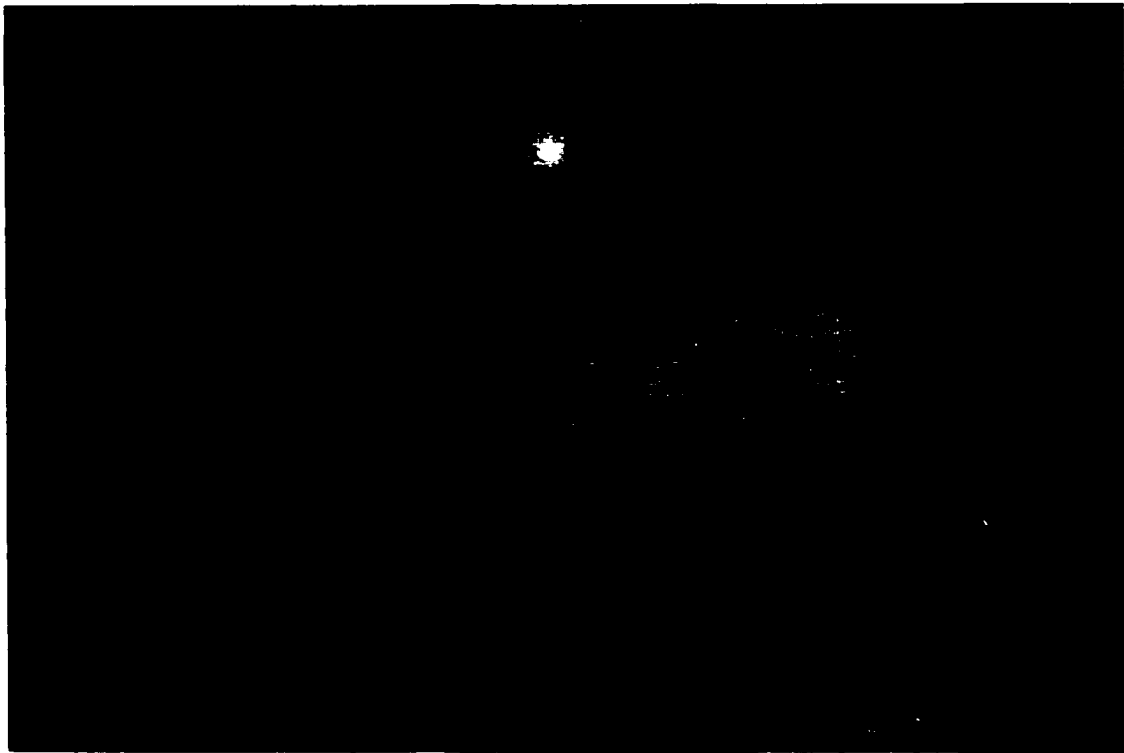
A day in the life of Estella is far from sitting quietly and waiting until the

children arrive back from school. Her early morning hours consist of her preparing the

morning meal, and making sure that her children are dressed appropriately and have their

backpacks, homework, and school projects in hand. She drives the children to school,

and when the opportunity presents itself she drops into the Parent Center to spend a few

minutes with the other mothers who have gathered. Because of the cake decorating business that she runs out of her home, she does not always have the time to go daily into the school setting. However, when the school needs refreshments or classroom treats Estella gladly provides them.

Estella's work ethic comes from the instruction that she received from her own parents. She imparts the value of honesty and sincerity in the following illustration. Estella states,

> Siempre tenemos que ganarnos nuestras cosas. Y si nos vamos por un camino, vamos a terminar mal, ¿verdad? Tiene que ganárselo. Nada es gratis . . . Yo he le visto y lo sigo viendo. Que toda la vida he trabajado. Hay muchas maneras de ganar dinero fácil. Hay trabajos facil de vender cosas.

> << We always have to earn the things that we have. And if we go down the wrong path we are going to end up in bad way. One has to earn one's own way. Nothing is free. I have seen that, and I continue to see it. I have worked all of my live. There are lots of ways to earn easy money. There are easy jobs like selling things. >>

Estella's children have made her very proud because they have taken her words of encouragement and hard work to heart and have applied them. Estella recounts the following story as an example of her lesson. She shared,

> Algo que me pasa con mis niños es que...este por ejemplo. La vecina es una persona mayor y está sola . . . Hace poco que sus hijos se fueron de la casa. Entonces habla a mis niños para que le ayuden en

sacar unas cosas del solar. Y entonces, ella les dio para un obsequio una bolsita de dulces y unas pesetas como dos, tres dolares a cada quien. Y entonces ellos se sentian como, . . . Oh, . . . fui a trabajar. ¿Verdad? O sea, allí está de que saben que trabajando vas a obtener. Entonces, estan de qué . . . qué compro, ¿Verdad? Estan pensando, verdad, pues si compro comida se me acaba. Los tres hicieron de equipos. Vamos a juntar, verdad, y vamos a comprar un balón de fútbol. Yo no se mucho a explicar, pero me sentí como valoraron. Ya tienen y lo usaron.

<< I want to describe something that happened with my children. For example . . . the lady neighbor is an older women whose children just left the house not too long ago, therefore she is alone. My children asked her if they could help her clean around the house outside with her lawn furniture and yard. To show her appreciation she gave each of them a small bag of candy and two to three dollars each. They were happy and felt, 'I worked and earned this.' Then they began to think, 'What do I buy? If I buy food my money will be gone.' So all three discussed what they would do and they decided to put their money together and they decided to buy a football. I don't know how to explain it, but seeing this made me feel very proud of them. >>

Estella exudes pride because she knows that her presence in her children's lives is important. The values she holds near and dear have successfully been transmitted to her own children. Her hope is that they will share with their own children what she has given to them (Figure 41.)

Figure 41. Estella takes care of her children during our interview session

Border crossings between the home, school, and community are not the real obstacle. Estella recalls her father's encouraging advice. Estella commented,

Dice mi papa...o sea la imaginacion de el que yo podria hacer

cualquer cosa. Dice mi papa su mente es que tu puedes hacer todo. O

sea, se puede hacer lo que se puede hacer. Si se puede!" << My father

says...whatever you [a person] imagines you are able to do. Whatever

is in your mind you are able to do. Or you do what you can. Yes, you

can!' >>

With these encouraging words from her father she has become a remarkable

women with multiple skills and talents. Just as a baker, she combines various

ingredients to make a delightful cake, Estella has learned the perfect combination for

blending together several personality traits. Her husband, commented that as a person,

Estella she mixes in, "amorosa, luchista, alegre, y trabajodora" << "loving affection,

advocacy, happiness, and diligence" >>. The children say their mom adds in: "cariñosa,

complaciente, chistosa, jugetona, y optimista" << "love, understanding, humor,

playfulness, and optimism" >>. Estella says of herself that she adds the finishing touches

of "sentimiento, platicadora, servicial, y amabilidad" << "sentimentality, talkativeness, a

service orientation, and friendliness" >>. The home environment that Estella has created

for her family is one that provides the right circumstances for developing the best in her

children. Estella, The Baker's Dozen mixes time for family, friends, and commitment to

parental involvement (Figure 42.)

Figure 42. Constantly busy, Estella is pictured with her parents and children

Rosa, "The Tenacious Persister"

Rosa and her husband, Joshua, have three children: Jason, a ten year-old fourth grader; Regina, a seven year-old first grader; and Carlos, a four year-old Pre-K student. Rosa, a parent volunteer and office helper at the Parent Center at Turning Point Elementary provides assistance to parents and teachers by gathering supplemental enrichment materials that could be used in the classroom setting or the home environment She is also a part of the Core Team on campus (Figure 43.)

Figure 43. Rosa and her children Carlos, Regina, and Jason

Rosa knows the importance of the encouragement and support that she gives to her children. She stated,

Yo pienso que un niño que tiene el apoyo de sus papas que le prestas

la atención que le ayudas con su tarea, y estas allí para cuando necesita

vas a tener un niño que se sienta éxito de si mismo.

<< I think that a child that has the support of his parents and that is

given the attention with his homework, and the parents are there when

they need you. You are going to have a successful child that feels good

about himself. >>

The timing of our meeting was actually at a period of transition for Rosa as she

prepared emotionally to re-enter the university. The world as she had known it at

Turning Point Elementary and especially in the Parent Center would take on a new

meaning as would the relationships she had nurtured with these women over the years.

Rosa stated,

Everybody gets to know one another and it is more like a family

thing…I am here because it brings me joy and pleasure to be with my

kids in that they know I am here. They don't have to pay me.

Even amidst the criticism that she has occasionally received from her own parents Rosa

continues to be involved and giving her children the time they deserve (Figure 44.)

She confided,

A veces mi mami dice, 'Tu siempre hagas con los niños.' Es más mi

papa. Siempre me critica las nuestras yardas. Dice, "Mire a la hierba

que tienes." Pero en… veces estan sacando la hierba de sacate…La

hierba va a quedar. Mis niños van a crecer y quien me va a decir algo.

<< My children are growing and I need to be there for them now. The

yard will continue, but my children are changing and I need to be there

with them. >> La hierba va a crecer y va, pero quien va a estar con

mis niños. Nadie.

<< Sometimes my mother says to me, 'You always are doing for your

kids. It is more my father though. He always criticizes the yard. He

says, 'Look at your yard.' Sometimes the yard looks as though it is

drying out. The grass will be there. My children are growing and I

need to be there for them now. The yard will continue, but my

children are changing and I need to be there with them. The yard will

continue to grow, and who will be there for my children? No one. >>

Figure 44. Rosa and children at snack time before going to afternoon baseball practice
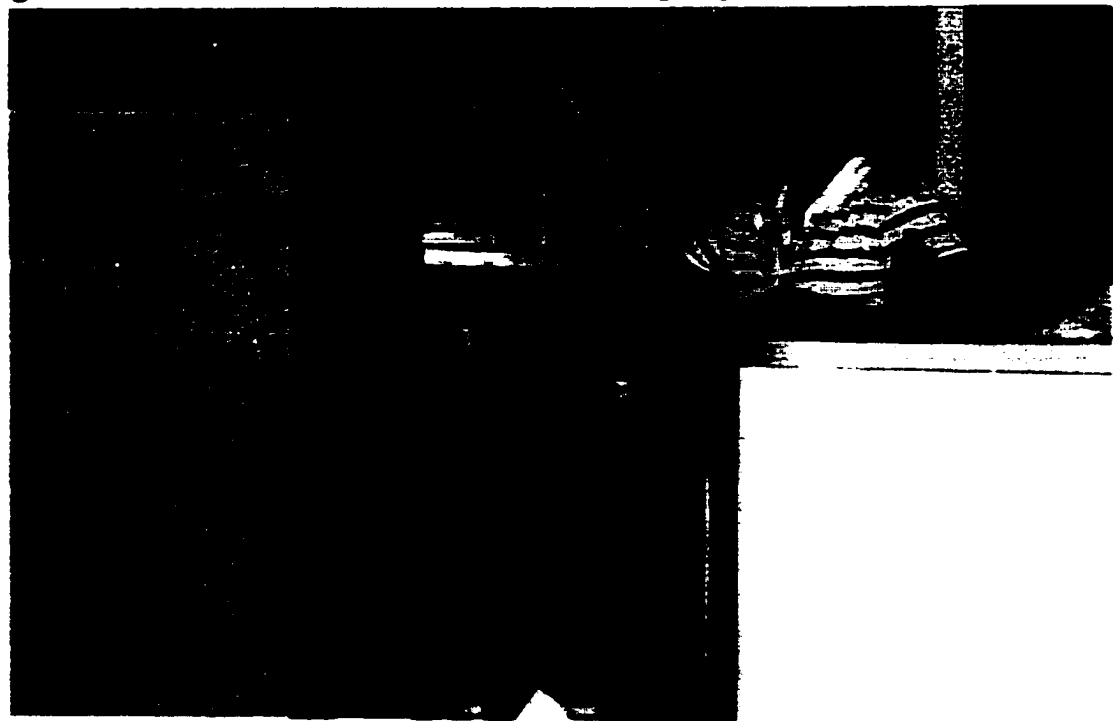
Fortunately her children see the value in her going back to school and the oldest

especially has offered the same support and encouragement he has seen so skillfully

modeled for him by his mother and father. Joshua has told her, "Mom, go back to school. Mom, you can do it!" (See Figure 45.)

Figure 45. Rosa smiles now that she has returned to school and is achieving her dream.

Rosa's anxious and uncertain feelings about returning to school have also been calmed by the social network of friends – family at the Turning Point Elementary. Rosa shared, If I'm away [from school]...like the volunteer thing lets you become friends with the parents, and you get to trust them. Like for instance. If I need my child to be cared

for like now...I am gonna start full-time school. And I tell them...I tell my children. I am not gonna be there everyday anymore, only on Tuesdays and Thursdays or when I can. But...there's Marta and Alma here. If you ever need anything you can go to them, and I know that they will be there for you. I can count on them.

With this assurance of her children's well – being and the emotional support Rosa receives from the mothers in the Parent Center she has chosen to move forward and obtain her teaching certificate. This decision to cross the border has shown Rosa that it pays to be "The Tenacious Persister." Perhaps her decision will help other parents to make the choice to cross other borders and achieve their goals too!

Summary

In this chapter I have provided a descriptive background of the study on Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives. I began by giving an explanation of my initial encounter with the school. Next I described my entrance to the research site and shared about the assistance that I received from the leadership. Then I described the data collection process; provided examples of the types of activities in which parents participated; and profiled the parents from my in-depth interviews. In the following chapter I will analyze the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze the data I collected from my five focus groups, seven in-depth interviews, and observations. I provide my rationale for conducting qualitative research and give a concise overview of my procedure for data analysis. I discuss the notion of crossing borders and the ECHO-Sphere framework and how it relates to the research data analysis. Next, I remind the reader of my five research questions and provide an analysis and interpretation of the first three questions. Through emergent focus and in-depth individual interview themes I provide examples of the parents' own constructions of their parental involvement activities in the home, school and community. I conclude this analysis and interpretation with a comparison of the types of activities generally considered "traditional" parental involvement activities and "re-conceptualized" parental involvement activities as set forth by the parent leadership at Turning Point Elementary.

Rational for Conducting Qualitative Research

In an effort to obtain the responses for the research I conducted a qualitative research study in which I was a participant observer. As a participant observer I gained a first-hand account of the lived reality of these Mexican-American parents. Furthermore, this immersion process into the parents' lives allowed me to observe the various cultures

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of the home, school, and community; and gave me the opportunity to explore their familial expectations, work ethics, beliefs, values, and traditions.

Data Analysis Procedure

In the following section I provide analysis of the data and give an interpretation of the data using thematic coding.

Crossing Borders and the ECHO-Sphere Framework

As I carried out my research I continually reflected on the ECHO-Sphere Framework (Figure 14) that emphasizes the need for collaboration between the home, school, and community; as well as Martinez's (1994) Border Types and Crossings (Figure 8). Through the use of the ECHO-Sphere and Border Types and Crossings, this study: (a) explores the perceptions that Mexican-American parents have about themselves; (b) represents their voice through illustrative text and photographic images; (c) renders a realistic portrayal of the parents' lived experiences, types of involvement practices and activities; and (d) underscores the significant impact that parents have in shaping not only their children's individual development, but also the valuable role parents have in restructuring the learning environment in and out of school for their children.

The ECHO-Sphere framework serves as a conceptual model that acknowledges the vital role parents, play in helping themselves and their children further develop their capital. The framework presents the argument that this capital translates to a form of power. Thus this capital whether it is human, social, and/or cultural equips and enables parents and their children to utilize their skills, knowledge, language, social networks, and experiences to negotiate the spheres and cross the borders. These "borders" as

referenced in the ECHO-Sphere framework exist relationally between and within the home, school, and community spheres in two ways: (a) since the spheres are overlapping there is a horizontal dynamic movement across the borders between the home-school, school-community, and community-school, and (b) there is a vertical movement within each individual sphere (home, school, and community). This vertical movement is the result of each sphere's abstract internal hierarchy wherein the movement flows up and down. The horizontal and vertical movements taken together illustrate a dynamic multi-dimensional interaction of exchange at intersections points or border crossings within and across the spheres. The complexity of exchange is further compounded by the types of capitals parents utilize to negotiate and cross the borders.

Once again to determine the relationships that exist amongst the three spheres my research set out to obtain feedback on five research questions. They are as follows:

1. How do Mexican-American parents at an elementary school in the Rio Grande Valley perceive themselves with respect to their participation in their children's education and development?

2. In what ways do socioeconomic status, language, culture, capital and other characteristics of Mexican-American parents impact or help to construct their parental involvement?

3. How do these constructions of Mexican-American parental involvement reflect or differ from "traditional" or "re-conceptualized" models of parental involvement?

4. How might these constructions better inform the development of new parental involvement policy and programs that directly attend to the needs and interests of Mexican-American families?

5. What are the practice, research, and policy implications for negotiating the borders

between Mexican-American homes, schools, and communities?

<div align="center">Data Coding Process</div>

After I had conducted all five focus groups and seven in-depth interviews I

performed the same procedure for each set of transcribed data. The following steps

delineate how I collected, transformed, and managed data and applied my coding

methodology.

During the interview process I used a tape cassette to record the conversation of

both 5 focus groups ranging from (5 – 9 participants) and 7 in-depth interview

participants (Kvale, 1996.) In the in-depth interviews I also used a camera to capture the

parents in their various roles of involvement (Bateson & Mead, 1942; Bourdieu, 1990;

Collier, 1967.)

Before I could begin the coding procedure I listened to and transcribed the five

focus groups and seven in-depth interview tapes. This was a rather time consuming

process, however it allowed me the opportunity to re-immerse myself into the

conversations that had transpired .

Using the transcripts I skimmed the content of each transcribed interview and

began to formulate some general ideas about the emerging themes. These possible

thematic ideas were noted in my reflective journal.

With a general notion of some of the emergent categories in mind I transferred

these possible thematic ideas and their sub-sections onto the computer. Using the

computerized version of each transcript, I re-read, color-coded, copied and pasted

speakers and their quotes below the appropriate categorical themes.

These preliminary categorical themes were saved and then printed as a hard copy version. Using this tangible print version of the categorized themes I re-read the content, highlighted the most significant parts of the quotations and made brief descriptive comments in the margins. These themes were later used to do a cross analysis within and across the focus groups, and the in-depth interviews.

I performed a cross analysis of the themes and pulled together the most salient ideas that occurred or perhaps were significant, and those which occurred one or two times in the interviews. Using the preliminary thematic categories and side notes from the color-coded quotes as a guide I began to re-group and re-configure the data into sets that revealed emergent themes.

Focus Group Emergent Themes

The coding process for the five focus groups revealed some interesting codes that were synthesized to create the five following overarching themes: "Crossing Borders", "Barriers", "Leadership", "School Culture", and "Mamas on a Mission." In the Class, Home, Teacher/Administrator, Advocate, Volunteer focus groups, five interesting themes emerged in varying degrees throughout these groups. These salient themes included: "Crossing Borders", "Barriers", "Leadership", "School Culture", and "Mamas on a Mission". To help the reader gain a glimpse of the parents' perspective and insight on their perception and participation in their children's education and development I will discuss these themes separately and provide some illustrative examples that use both photographs and parent conversations.

Crossing Borders

The metaphor of "Crossing Borders" was a significant and pervasive issue

reflected in the types of activities that the parents' performed with and for their children on a daily basis. Crossing borders not only required parental presence; it involved the willingness to risk-take and negotiate difficult situations on their children's behalf.

Partnership effort. The numerous opportunities for formal and informal interactions between the school personnel and parents have helped to create a welcoming school culture marked by openness, acceptance and the acknowledgement of parental contributions. These Mexican-American parents who participated in this study agree that their success with the school is primarily due to how well they have been received and are valued by Turning Point Elementary staff and administration. Because the parents are key stakeholders in the educational process they have helped the school to cross many borders. For example, in a concerted partnership, both parents and staff of the Core Team have accomplished many things together. Carmen of the Advocate Group recalls,

> Tres años si, o sea que se han logrado muchas cosas. Primero fue la
>
> cerca. Déspues de este se pideron unos portables para las maestras.
>
> Varias maestras estaban con tantos niños y faltaban salones. Pedimos
>
> una biblioteca y nos dijeron que no, que no había dinero, pero la
>
> volvíamos a pedir por la biblioteca y el año pasado. Ahora hay una
>
> biblioteca.
>
> << In three years or more we have obtained many things. First was the
>
> fence. Then after that we asked for portable buildings for the teachers.
>
> Some of the teachers are with so many children. We asked for a
>
> library and they told us no, that they did not have enough money, but

we returned to ask for the building the following year and last year we
got it. >>

The "Crossing Borders" theme resulted from these Mexican-American parents'
strong educational convictions and desire for their children to achieve better careers and
living circumstances than they themselves had attained. For to these parents' "Crossing
Borders" meant standing as an advocate in the gap between the home and school, being
present and understood, remaining informed, and addressing the "real" issues concerning
their children's education. This type of parental presence and vocal opposition
occasionally placed these parents in conflict with the district school administration.
However, such oppositional discourses were used to clarify each group's perspectives on
particular issues and ultimately to strengthen the existing partnership. Turning Point
Elementary has proven through a spirit of friendly cooperation and openness that
Interdependent Borderlands (Martinez, 1994) are achievable.

Leadership development and training. Turning Point Elementary through the
Core Team provided leadership training that helped parents and school personnel to
collectively formulate an educational agenda focused on student academic needs within a
safe and secure learning environment. This training essentially equipped parents with
research and public speaking skills to help them advocate for their children in organized
public forums. The collective decision making process between the Core Team and
school personnel has proven successful because accountability tops their agenda. In
other words, once the various stakeholders have made a collective decision "to do
something" the Core Team secures its success through a regulated system of
accountability. This procedure requires that the Core Team set a start and completion

date related to their decision, make follow-up phone calls to check on the decision's status, and schedule follow-up meetings to discuss any problems or possible changes associated with the original decision.

Principal Salinas shared that Valley Interfaith, which is associated with Alliance Schools throughout Texas, represents and lobbies for certain political issues including education and housing. The Valley Interfaith representatives are trained advocates who promote the causes of individuals living in impoverished areas such as the Rio Grande Valley. In addition to advocating Alliance School concerns at the state legislative level, the Valley Interfaith organization at the regional level trains parents and staff members from Turning Point Elementary's Core Team to become activists on behalf of their children. According to Principal Salinas, "I have learned that you cannot sit back and let people run over you. You have to be an 'agitator.' That I have learned through Valley Interfaith. It's about accountability." The parents appear to have grasped this belief exceptionally well reflects Salinas. He commented,

> "One thing I have noticed since we have started the Alliance School. The
> parents are more open. They question us more. They want to know... for
> example: ' Why are there two classroom in the library? Or why is the
> librarian not letting my child go into the Accelerated Reader
> Program?'...We are getting more of those kinds of parents. They are
> more open, they question us more and I like that."

Bridging home, school and community relationships. The Mexican-American parents in this study continuously articulated a sense of satisfaction that resulted from being involved in their children's education and being key stakeholders capable of

impacting the learning and cultural environment of the school. Juan Gomez, Turning

Point Elementary School's Core Team trainer from Valley Interfaith, expressed that

many of these Mexican-American parents have experienced what being on the opposite

end of power is like. That is to say, they (the parents) know what it is like to be without

resources, voice, knowledge, information, skills, opportunities, and social networks.

These parents also have recognized that successfully activating these attributes has the

potential to produce change. However, the Core Team training has helped them to see the

value in pooling their assets in order to promote the needed change, impact decisions and

affect living circumstances. Alma shared that this Core Team concept works because,

"We all share our input before we consider a meeting face to face with Central Office."

Carmen expressed the value of meeting and organizing as one solid unit, "El (el director)

esta usando el deseo de la escuela y los talentos de los padres." << "He (the principal) is

using the school's desires and the talents of the parents." >>

The parents are happy to be included in the early stages of the decisions that are

made at Turning Point Elementary. Such involvement according to the parents has

increased their own self-esteem and value within the school setting.

Re-Conceptualizing the notion of parental involvement. Bridging the

relationships between the home, school and community, as well as crossing borders has

required that these parents in this study challenge authority through a collective and

unified voice. This strong collective voice is based on research, knowledge and

information. Principal Salinas spoke of an occasion when the parents and various staff

members presented an informative educational skit for the parents during a Core Team

training session. Salinas shared,

"Two parents and myself did something on financing the schools. We
wanted to find out how much money was being spent for this and that.
So they [the parents] went to Central Office to the Business Office...
and they [the parents] did the research. They came back and said, 'Mr.
Salinas this is how much basic money they get per child for Title One,
for Migrant, for Bilingual Education...So these parents know what is
happening because they [the parents] are taught how to do research
and ask the right questions."

When the parents were allowed to get information they did not use it to advance
their own agendas for personal gain; rather this information was communicated to other
parents. In doing so they were informing the masses of their peers to challenge the
oppositional leadership patterns in hopes of establishing a two-sided perspective on
education.

The Core Team taught these parents one valuable lesson: "If you don't ask for
whatever it is that you want, you don't stand a chance of getting it." In confronting
alienated borders between the home and school and within the school itself parents used
their social networks. Specifically social networks were employed as a means of
bridging knowledge from the home to school and school to home. The volunteer and
advocate parents helped to inform those parents in either Spanish or English about
current school news and issues in the school that directly impacted their children. This
social network helped to strengthen parental cohesiveness on an off campus and nurtured
a spirit of unity.

As the parents in this study set out to make a lasting difference in the school culture of Turning Point Elementary they quickly learned that their efforts did benefit the students' educational success and campus environment. The parents' ability to utilize their capital to cross the borders between home and school, make decisions and advocate for their children has made a lasting impression with the district's leadership. The success of the Core Team at Turning Point Elementary has helped to re-create the role parents now play and will continue to play in the future educational endeavors of their children and interactions with the school.

Barriers

Barriers are any hindrance or stumbling block that does not (a) promote open communication; (b) permit the free-flow of information; (c) allow access to certain people and opportunities; (d) facilitate the overall functioning and interaction between relationships; or (e) support the progress of any organization, individual or group of individuals.

As stated earlier, this study makes use of Martinez's Borderland Typology (1994) which includes four border types: Alienated Borderlands, Co-existent Borderlands, Interdependent Borderlands, and Integrated Borderlands. The data that these Mexican-American parents successfully crossed or at least made the attempt to cross all four borderlands. Analysis on these border crossings begins with a discussion on Alienated Borderlands.

Alienated borderlands. The data revealed that the parents in this study had many obstacles to contend with as they made their attempts to cross the borders between the home, school and community. Difficulties ranged from negotiating their own sense

of belonging and feelings of isolation to having a fear of school administration and teachers. Parents were asked, "How might the school encourage more parents to be actively involved in their children's educational life at school and in the home?" Parents responded that the parents who can be involved will be involved as time permits. However, there are some parents whose concerns deal intensely with their family's daily survival. Many went on to say that not all parents have the luxury of taking time off from work whenever he or she would like. Others said that it is not that their children are unimportant, but rather that they have many people to feed. There is rent to pay, and if they miss work, those hours are not accounted for and that means that money is lost. Others commented that not many bosses are capable or willing to give their employees release time to attend school functions. In brief, these parents' sentiments explained that many were fearful of losing the family's sole source of income if they spent more time away form work in order to be at school. A few parents still adhered to the belief that the sacrifice of school before work was an obligation that they could not afford. Such a sacrifice was too burdensome and costly for the family's well-being, therefore their sense of obligation to provide for the family was far greater than that of coming to the school to participate in some school activity, especially if it meant taking time out from work.

Some parents did, however, refute this basic economic survival claim and retorted that parents are obligated to make the necessary time to spend with their children at home, in the school, and in the community. They argued that the parents' presence in their children's lives was essential, in order for children learn to value education and excel? These parents concluded that the attitude that parents have towards education and school in general does shape and influence the child's academic development and love of

learning. They strongly emphasized that all parents must learn to balance what is important and make the necessary sacrifices. The principal and parents shared this same perspective on why the partnership between home and school should exist. Edna of the Advocate Group stated, "Y pues ellas han dicho siempre, ¿Verdad? Para él [el director] es la educación de los niños, déspues es la educación de los niños, y al final es la educación de los niños. Siempre, los niños estan primeros." <<Like the other parents have said, right? For him (the principal) is the education of the children, next is the education of the children, and finally it is still the education of the children." This shared ideology between the home and school clarify the purpose of home and school collaborating and working as partners in education.

When these same parents from the study were asked to discuss any other obstacles that had been voiced to them by the non-school participating parents they confided that many of their very own friends did not feel comfortable approaching the school because of their own lack of educational achievement. Some of these parents only had a high school diploma, some had not even finished high school, and others had attended school in Mexico and felt ill-at-ease in relating in this new educational environment. For these parents, coming to the school was an unpleasant reminder of their failure in the educational environment.

Alienated Borderlands have been found to be present not only between spheres, but also within the school sphere. The parents and school administration discussed the problems of trying to accomplish campus objectives and having to undergo rigorous steps to finally receive approval for projects from the central office administrative personnel. Based on what the parents have shared, the Core Group at Turning Point Elementary has

received most of what they have sought. According to Marta, "Right now, the only thing that Central Offices refuses to give us is a security guard." Rosa added, "Well, actually their [Central Office's] main thing is, if we get a security guard, then the other schools will also want a security guard. Central Office says that they cannot afford for every school to have a security guard. That is the main answer they [Central Office] have given to us." Their overall success, however comes from the diligent, repetitious, and constant presence of informed parents in the district who are there to speak out for their children.

Co-existent borderlands. These Alienated Borderlands between home and school have become more permeable with the help of the Principal Salinas and the Parent Specialist, both of whom intentionally and thoughtfully reach out to include parents in the school day. The Parent Specialist in particular has helped to bridge the gap between spheres by encouraging and valuing all parents and whatever skills and talents they bring with them. In addition, she has tenaciously helped the parents to confront their own insecurities and attitudes towards education, the school and its teachers/administrators.

The Parent Specialist has helped Turning Point Elementary to bring in some of the very parents who formerly could not afford to make the time for their child throughout the school day. For example, one morning from 7:45 to 8:45 a.m. in the early spring of this year Turning Point Elementary hosted a breakfast for fathers called "Donuts for Dad."

The turn out for this morning event was approximately 213 dads out of a student population of 659. This participation reflected the positive transformation in the parents' attitudes that has begun to move the relationship between home and school from an Alienated Borderland to a Co-existent and in some cases an Interdependent Borderland.

The success seems to lie in open communication, loving persistence, and a willingness on the part of school administrators to work cooperatively with the parents. The parents that used to feel embarrassed, un-welcomed, or inferior to the teaching staff are learning that teachers don't have all the answers just because of they have a college degree and teaching certificate. They have learned through the role modeling of Principal Salinas, the Parent Specialist, and teachers that all who enter or are associated with Turning Point Elementary are valuable and important regardless of what paper credentials they may hold. Principal Salinas reminds everyone how to interact with parents and recalls his own background, "Eres pobrecito, pero tienes tu dignidad y te damos respeto." << "You are poor, but you have your dignity, and we will respect you." >> Salinas continued,

> And I think that most of us come form that background. We have not
>
> forgotten. If we forget, if you forget, then we are going to look down
>
> on those people, that is, if you forget. So…I try not to. And…I try to
>
> model that in my office and in the hallways with my staff. I always
>
> tell the parents, 'Thank you for coming, don't forget that we are still
>
> here working with your child, and you are welcome to come anytime.'

Interdependent borderlands. The idea that "they are us, and we are they" is enveloped in Martinez's (1994) Interdependent Borderlands. The line that divides one sphere from the next is barely visible and passage between the two is possible because both spheres have intentionally decided to become relationally entwined in the other's lived reality. Prior to the Core Team's existence many of the non-present parents were fearful of the unknown which was for them the world of education beyond the front gate of the school. It was easier to just drop off their child and leave the educational process

up to the school. After all, the teachers were paid to give instruction to the children.

According to Teacher Gonzalez,

"My father would drop me there at school. He did not participate, but

he did drop me at school. Then he would go to his job. He felt that

the school knows it all and the teacher knows it all. This was the "old

school mentality" that the school knows what is best.

Teacher Gonzalez explained that she is trying to undo this type of thinking that

the school has all the knowledge. Gonzalez stated, "I want the parents to use their

resources." Turning Point has made tremendous strides to ensure a school culture of

acceptance and mutual support with parents. The school's leadership has re-defined

parental involvement by making their program and school activities more inclusive of the

parent's skills, knowledge, and presence.

Integrated borderlands. To some individuals, Integrated Borderlands between

the home, school, and community relationships may seem beyond realization. However,

as Martinez (1994) professes, Integrated Borderlands are characterized as unrestricted

borders that are strong, permanent, and stable. The relational dynamics between the

home, school, and community are borderless in that the interactions create and perpetuate

one social system. The exchange transpires between spheres benefits the entire system in

which no one particular sphere dominates or oppresses the other spheres and their

individuals. Principal Salinas at Turning Point Elementary has demonstrated this concept

of moving towards "borderless" spheres through the establishment of the Core Team.

However, the school at this time remains in a period of immature development as it

contends with outside resistance, political obstructions, and power plays caused by

vertical layering within the school (campus) to school (district) relationship. According to the leadership this outside resistance seems to occur because many principals or others in positions of authority fear sharing power and control with the parents. Principal Salinas shared what others have indirectly said of him, "He [Salinas] brings parents to the school board meetings, and they (other principals, administrators and Central Office staff) are going to say that the school is being run by the parents." The parents shared Edna's perspective about the importance of valuing and supporting the principal when trying to negotiate the borders between and within spheres. Edna confided:

> "Bueno muchos nos han dicho que han escuchado y ellos piensan que
>
> aquí el director ha dejado que los padres manejen la escuela. Pero no
>
> es eso realmente. El [el director] es el que dice sí o no, ¿Verdad? Si
>
> nosotros juntamos y vamos a hablar con él y él dice que no, se puede
>
> hacer esto, o sí, se puede hacer esto. Pero siempre estamos en contacto
>
> con él (el director). Lo que . . . como él ha logrado tanto con el apoya
>
> de nuestro director. Porque si no te apoya la cabeza el principal de una
>
> escuela, aunque tu quieres, no te puedes hacer nada. Verdad.
>
> << Well, many have said that they have heard and they think that the
>
> director here has allowed the parents to control the school. But this is
>
> not the case. He [the principal] is the one that says yes or no. Right.
>
> If we come together to talk with him and he says, 'No, you cannot do
>
> that,' or 'Yes, you can do that.' Regardless, we always have contact
>
> with him (the principal). Because if the head, the principal of the

school does not support you, no matter what you want, you can't
accomplish anything. Right. >>

Nonetheless, the leadership of this school maintains the vision, challenges higher authority, and combats the system when it thwarts their pursuit of borderless crossings.

Leadership

Leadership at Turning Point is a critical component in this school's partnership success with the parents. The following examples explain the leadership dynamics.

Principal. Principal Salinas has served as principal of Turning Point Elementary for over 20 years. As the instructional and campus leader, he has developed a leadership style that invites parents to become immersed and involved with the school. As well, he has turned the table for educators in providing opportunities for them to become familiar with families. Each year at the beginning of the school year Principal Salinas provides release time so that the teachers may take time to go and visit the families in their homes during the school day. He has found that this is welcomed occurrence and the parents look forward to seeing who will be instructing their children and working with them (the parents) during the school year. Many parents have commented that starting the school year in this way is a positive thing. According to Estella, "The teachers are not meeting with us to report what bad or negative things instead they are coming to introduce themselves to us." Principal Salinas added,

We tore down the barriers for parents coming to school. We had very few parents coming. It used to be like even in the office they (the parents) were not welcome. The feeling...the feeling was you could sense that it was very cold, a very cold atmosphere.

To change this the family unit became a priority in Principal Salinas'
perspective. He feels that the teachers must at least attempt to understand the child's
background. He believes that as educators are exposed to the child's home environment
they will be better equipped to handle and understand why 'Juanito' doesn't have his
homework or why his clothes are not clean. He [Principal Salinas] tells his staff that they
must realize that not all children come from the same type of neighborhoods that they
themselves may live. Some students live in deep poverty. He comments that educators
must not expect less of these students, but must understand their circumstances and work
with parents in helping their child.

As has been illustrated above Principal Salinas is committed to working with
the students, parents, and faculty /staff at Turning Point Elementary. Principal Salinas
mingles with the parents in the early morning drop off hours, makes home visits, and
encourages and participates in cultural festivities (Diez y seis de septiembre, Cinco de
mayo, and La Posada) held at the school. Through these cultural festivities he strives to
sustain a friendly, nurturing, and welcoming environment that mimics the cultural and
traditional customs of the Mexican-American people it primarily serves. Acting as a
transformational leader (Burns, 1978) Salinas seeks to empower these parents by
including them in the decision-making process and providing a venue via the Core Team
for voicing their suggestions and concerns.

Parent Specialist. Aside from the principal, the Parent Specialist is probably the
most instrumental in helping to create person who has helped to create a successful
parental involvement program at Turning Point Elementary. Principal Salinas conveyed,
" The concept, the idea was one person, a professional person working only for Palmer.

We opened the position under Title One funding, and it [the position] was approved. We are the only school in the district that has this position, Parent Specialist." In carrying out her responsibilities as a liaison between the home and school she has helped many ambivalent parents to cross the physical borders by providing a personalized invitation to become apart of the learning environment. Additionally, she has helped numerous other parents through her parental training sessions to overcome their insecurities and feelings of inferiority when it comes to parent teacher interactions. The parental training she has offered emphasizes the importance and necessity of parents being in the middle of their child's education.

  Parents. The parents in my focus groups and in-depth interviews seemed to have crossed the "feelings of inferiority" border in some time past. Their leadership skills were evidenced on a daily basis. They were well aware of their contributions to their children in the home, school, and community environments. The most salient findings I uncovered with regard to their leadership concerned the parents' ability to transmit knowledge, beliefs, determination, and the idea of success on to their children as well as other parents. The parents in this study modeled by example giving the less engaged parents a glimpse of what their participation could yield in their own child's life. Rosa provided some beautiful and motherly insight regarding this when she stated,

> I have been getting involved personally with my children in school
> and at home. I talk to them about the being their friend, and you [my
> children] can come to me and trust me. I am building a relationship
> with my children. Rather than just being a parent, I have an open
> relationship with them.

Resistance to Core Team Leadership. The examples of principal, parent specialist, and parent leadership are key in developing a positive and successful parental involvement program at Turning Point Elementary. However, seven years ago prior to Turning Point Elementary becoming an Alliance School there was some opposition concerning parental involvement vocalized by the staff. Principal Salinas recalls,

> Before we became an Alliance School the teachers continually asked,
>
> "'Is Valley Interfaith going to tell us what to do?'" Others in the
>
> school would ask, "Who is going to run the show?" "Are the parents
>
> going to be running the show?"

Since Turning Point Elementary has become an Alliance School, very few teachers or staff personnel have expressed dissatisfaction with parental presence on campus. Salinas stated, "That is one of the conditions that they [Valley Interfaith] gave us when we became an Alliance School. So make sure that what they are seeing and hearing is true Site-Base Management. Like the way it should be."

The opposition to the Core Team at Turning Point Elementary primarily came from the Central Office staff and their fear that other parents throughout the district would also pay unexpected information – gathering visits to their offices. Principal Salinas shared,

> They [Central Office] staff would get very, very angry when Turning
>
> Point Elementary would have three to four parents asking questions of
>
> them and taking notes. They [The parents] found out for example that
>
> one Central Office person had four people working for them. (What
>
> were they doing?)... And...what does Central Office do every time

there is a shortage of monies? What do they do to teachers' aides?

Those are the first ones to go. A teacher has 16 kids and another has

15 let's combine them, put them together in one room.

In other words, these parents had been empowered and they used this power to obtain essential information that would most certainly impact the educational conditions for their children. The school administration at the district level felt as though their solid Alienated Border had been crossed and too, closely invaded their own [Central Office's] comfort zone. The Mexican-American parents in this study had crossed the border successfully and were now positioned to negotiate more border crossings.

School Culture

Turning Point Elementary has a unique school culture for several reasons: (a) the leadership styles of Principal Salinas and the Parent Specialists, (b) the Dual Language (Spanish – English) curriculum, (c) the decision-making role of the Core Team, (d) the implementation of the Alliance School concept, and (e) the wide array of committed parents who were intent on holding the school accountable for their children's education.

The Mexican-American parents in this study have embraced the idea of home – school collaboration and work diligently alongside school personnel and administration to maintain relationships that are, as Martinez (1994) explains, Interdependent Borderlands. In this relationship the parents are equal stakeholders and full partners with the school. The administration has demonstrated that the parents are appreciated and valued for what they offer to the school- home mix. Amiable, trusting, and respectful relationships have been the goal of Turning Point Elementary and these relationships

continue to provide a foundation that allows for the sharing of knowledge, information and human, social, and cultural capitals from within both the home and school spheres. This school culture has structured into existence the belief that children are first, and it is the relationships between the home, school, and community that make all the difference to a child's academic and social development.

"Mamas on a Mission"

The following section provides examples of purposeful parental involvement and commitment to their children in the home, school and community spheres.

Parental Example. In this study the parents, who happened to be all mothers, were involved in several activities in both the school and home environment. The various activities and school functions the parents participated in included: Donuts for Dad, Molletes for Mom; Dr. Seuss Library Read Day; La Posada (Christmas Program); Campus Picnic Day; Orientation Night (meant to establish initial contact between teachers and parents); parent training sessions (including various topics on education, parenting skills, and interpersonal communication skills); Adult Education Classes (including cake decorating, sewing, ESL, GED, and Leadership Development); and parent volunteer roles (including cutting and pasting, creating game folders, decorating bulletin boards, running dittos and photocopying worksheets and handouts, being Room Mother, library helper, and cafeteria monitor). The parents at Turning Point performed both "traditional" and "non-traditional" parental involvement activities and were on the campus as much as their home obligations and work schedules permitted.

In the home environment parental involvement occurred in numerous ways. For instance, the majority of the mothers stressed the importance of just being with their

children such as: to share time; play together; fix dinner; talk about the importance of education; do homework; discuss their future goals for the family and their children's own personal goals (including college and careers); and discuss love of family (including commitment, loyalty and responsibility). The simple pleasures in life which the families enjoyed were walking in the park, riding bikes, playing board games, watching television, reading to their children, watching a child's sporting event, going to the grocery store, visiting friends and relatives, listening to their children's stories and being a friend, as well as being a parent. These activities and the many more not mentioned provided the parents an opportunity to help shape their children's growth and development. Because these mothers have consciously decided to be present when possible for helping their children whether in the home, school, or community expressed confidence that their children will never be able to say to them, 'But, Mom, you were never there for me,' because they have been and will continue to be.

Selection of Parental Leadership. The parents who were initially involved in the educational decisions at Turning Point Elementary had a reputation of presence throughout the district. One parent named Samantha shared a comment made to her by another parent from one of the other elementary schools in the district. Samantha had been discussing some of the activities and meetings in which theTurning Point Elementary parental involvement program had recently been engaged. Samantha recalls this parent's response, "Oh...You're a parent from Turning Point Elementary. (As though to say I suppose it is true what some have said about your school.)" The parents at Turning Point Elementary were known through out the district as parents who research

issues related to their children's education and frequently advocated on their children's behalf.

When I asked some of the parents, "How are parents selected to be representatives on the Core Team?" The answers varied tremendously. For example Lynda, the mother of two children attending Turning Point Elementary had been a parent volunteer for several years and was hired three years ago by the school to perform the duties as a paid parent tutor. Lynda said,

> Why did she [the facilitator] pick me? She [the facilitator] was the
>
> one who chose me from everybody else. So…I guess she [the
>
> facilitator] saw something that I could do. She [the facilitator] saw
>
> something in me. And that's … that's a like a compliment.

Samantha, also a former parent volunteer, who was hired as a parent tutor) commented:

> Well … I think … I consider myself as very outspoken. I am always
>
> real talkative. I don't sit back and just stay there. I like to get
>
> involved. I guess that is why the facilitator, who was at the time the
>
> parental involvement coordinator, … She was, like, the one pushing
>
> me. Like … Do this. She said, 'I think you can do this.'

Carmen, who had participated off and on as a volunteer when her work schedule permitted, shared,

> Bueno, a nosotros, cuando hace varios años mi compañera estaba
>
> envolucrado en … como en las juntas de Concilio. Y alguien no pudo
>
> continuar y entré yo a ir a las juntas de Concilio. Y por eso me he
>
> envolucrado poco más porque yo estaba como voluntaria.

<< Well, it had been some time that a friend of mine had been

involved in the Core Team meetings. And someone was not able to

continue and I entered and went to the Core Team meetings. Because

of this, I started to get involved a little more because I had been a

parent volunteer already. >>

Another parent Edna, who was a former teacher in Mexico but new to volunteering at the

school, remarked: Bueno...La persona que vio en mi esto fue una vecina mia. Ella fue la

primera que me invitó a venir aquí a la escuela porque no venia como voluntaria.

<< Well...the person that saw something in me was my neighbor. She was the first one to

invite me to come to the school because I had not yet come as a parent volunteer. >>

Every parent who became involved as a volunteer, parent tutor, or Core Team

representative had a social network in the neighborhood, with friends or school personnel

who helped to link them to the educational environment of their children. Administrators

watched and observed to see what capitals these parents possessed. Other parents invited

their friends into the educational circle and encouraged them to help make a difference in

the school and in the lives of their children. These mothers stepped up to the challenge

and decided to cross the border.

Purpose of Presence. Aside from faculty, neighbors, and friends inviting the

parents to become active in the school setting there were four other main reasons why the

parents in this study chose to be involved in their children's home, school and community

lives. Many of the parents expressed that the team concept of unity and working together

drew the parents into the school's vision of home, school, and community collaboration.

The parents' social networks were an asset used to connect them with a vision that encompassed individuals and entities much larger than themselves and their families. A second reason was that these parents believed their efforts would make a difference in promoting educational changes in the relationship between the school and home sphere. They wholeheartedly knew their effort to make progress were not in vain when they were working collectively to benefit the learning needs of their children. The third reason for their presence at the school in the capacity of Core Team representative was that the parents were elated with the fact that their individual voice would be collectively united with that of parents who had similar concerns. In the parents' struggles to make a difference they soon realized that an 'integrated' voice, spoke as one on the same issues, demanded lasting rather than fleeting change, and appealed more to existing powers of Central Office for lasting transformation. Through their collective efforts these parents became empowered to remove or overcome barriers and to negotiate spheres that had once been considered out of reach or off limits.

The fourth and final reason for parental involvement is the practical example that their efforts provided for other parents in other schools to be advocates and promoters of change. The achievements of these Mexican-American parents are the direct result of parents acting in agreement with the school to establish genuine collaborative relationships within and between the home, school, and community spheres. Furthermore, the collective skills, knowledge and awareness gained from this parental involvement experience at Turning Point Elementary had become a part of these parents' human, social and cultural capital. The accomplishments of these Mexican-American "Mamas on a Mission" as border crossing role models enabled other parents to gain the

courage and confidence to confront uncertainty, build new bridges, and negotiate borders. Through their example and the commitment to their children, these parents re-created their understanding of parental involvement, and they clarified their perceptions of what parental involvement means to them. The parents unwavering commitment to educational progress allowed them [parents] to move beyond the "traditional" model of parental involvement. Their first steps in crossing over into uncharted territory challenged borders between spheres and the rigid political hierarchical structure within the spheres in the existing system. The empowerment of these parents created new bridges and in-roads based on mutual respect, open communication, and a shared sense of purpose. That purpose was their children and Turning Point Elementary students' educational and social development.

This section on focus group themes discussed the crossing borders, barriers, leadership and school culture. In the following section I will present the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews. Because the in-depth interviews came from the focus groups the themes are similar.

<p align="center">In-depth Interview Emergent Themes</p>

I conducted seven in-depth interviews with Mexican-American parents who lived along the United States – Mexico border. These interviews revealed three principle themes: "Crossing Borders", "Means for Crossing Borders" and "Mamas on a Mission".

Crossing Borders

The crossing borders concept draws on the work of Oscar Martinez (1994) who described the various borderlands that exist as people attempt to cross from one region to the next. In my study, I have applied Oscar Martinez's border crossing concept as it

relates to the home, school, and community. This research on Mexican-American parental involvement reveals that parents are in a struggle but have had reasonable success in crossing some Alienated Borderlands, Coexistent Borderlands, and Interdependent Borderlands. However, the movement to establish Integrated Borderlands between home, school, and community for these Mexican American Parents tends to be a much more arduous process due in large part to the existing power structures in the "political" society impacting schools. In other words, school politics and power plays within the school and district often impede the establishment of Integrated Borderlands between parent spheres of activity. The achievement of Integrated Borderlands requires that each sphere (the home, school, and community) reach a consensus concerning the other's legitimacy in the educational process. This legitimacy is only acquired as the individuals within the three spheres investigate, acknowledge, understand, and finally legitimize the impact of the contributions each makes in the child's social and academic development. As Martinez has stated, Integrated Borderlands are marked by strong stability and functionally merged relationships characterized by unrestricted movement that in turn acts as one social system. As of yet that kind of borderland crossings has not yet fully been realized in the relationship between the parents at Turning Point Elementary School and the school's district.

In crossing borders parents perceived themselves to be highly instrumental and relatively effective. The Alienated Borders that confronted the parents in my study were mainly of a structural nature in the political sense. The border crossings appeared to be achievable across spheres, that is to say between the home and school, the school and community and the community and home. The factors of socioeconomic status,

language, culture, capital or other characteristics did not appear to thwart the parents' ability to traverse the borders in a horizontal fashion. This ability to move between the spheres of the home and school may be due to Turning Point's leadership and willingness to accept parents' suggestions and capitals as evidenced in parent tutor and Core Team positions.

However, when the parents attempted to move along vertical lines within the school sphere, political power plays by central office personnel frustrated the efforts of the parents and school principal. This layered school management system of hierarchy thwarted the parents' efforts to achieve the needed changes on campus for their children. As mentioned earlier, the border crossing were both horizontal and vertical. The vertical borders tended to present more a problem for the parents than did the horizontal crossings. The obstructions in the school sphere mainly occurred as parents attempted to cross boundaries between the campus and district. For example, policy implementation and information dissemination were not always applied equally among with the elementary campuses throughout the district. Because Turning Point parents had a positive working relationship with the principal they were able to obtain critical policy information that affected their school and children. A preliminary conclusion of this study is that the border crossings between the spheres of home, school, and community is not the primary or ultimate impediment of parental involvement. Rather it is the crossings that do or do not transpire vertically within the individual spheres that create barriers or passages, thus making the relationships between home, school, and communities Alienated Borderlands, Coexistent Borderlands, Interdependent Borderlands or Integrated Borderlands.

<u>Means for Crossing Borders</u>

The parents at Turning Point Elementary perceived themselves as capable of crossing and negotiating borders for these reasons: (a) they were affiliated with a representative group of parents and teachers who comprised the Core Team, (b) they had a Parent Specialist who helped to bridge the relationships between the three spheres, (c) and they utilized their own capitals in making the necessary changes in the home, school, and community.

<u>Core Team.</u> Turning Point Elementary School is an Alliance school that is associated with the Valley Interfaith the Rio Grande Valley subsection of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organization. In describing this organization, Ernesto Cortes states:

> The central role of the IAF organizations is to build the competence
>
> and confidence of ordinary citizens and taxpayers so that they can then
>
> reorganize the relationships of power and politics in their
>
> communities, thereby reshaping the physical and cultural face of their
>
> neighborhoods. (p. 1)

The Core Team, comprised mainly of parents, as well as some children, teachers, and administrators, represents the vehicle for collective action. This Core Team actively initiates presentations, conversations, and meetings with the appropriate stakeholders in the various spheres. Through these dialogic conversations the Core Team expresses in a unified voice its issues and concerns in hopes of stimulating movement towards consensus, providing the opportunity for negotiation of the spheres, and

eventually creating circumstances that enable border crossing between the home, school, and community.

The Core Team at Turning Point Elementary has been quite influential and successful in helping parents to collectively break down the barriers and cross the borders mainly between home and school relationships, as well as school within school (parent-administrative and administrative-administrative) relationships. One important barrier that the parents broke down involved their presence on the campus and in the classrooms. The main barriers, however, that the Core Team confronts are structural, political, and administrative obstacles from Central Office. The resistance experienced by the Core Team from the Central Office is the lack of acceptance of parental inquiries. However, Turning Point Elementary is an alliance school which requires parental involvement in all levels of their children's education. Because the parents hold leadership positions and decision-making roles at Turning Point Elementary school via the Core Team parents are able to successfully negotiate this parent-administrative barrier. These parents are present and vocal at district level forums/meetings and effectively voice parental concerns, suggestions, and opinions ranging from student academic needs to school safety and equitable educational facilities .

Leadership Principal: Home and School Cultural Connect. The leadership at Turning Point Elementary utilizes the commonalities of both the school and home cultures to establish intersecting channels of communication and a spirit of cooperation. Several of the involved parents have explicitly expressed that the school leadership's style, flexibility and openness to parents is what makes this school successful. Parents have noted, "El [el director] es una persona que lo encuentra más afuera que adentro de la

oficina." << "The principal is a person that one more finds outside of his office than in the office." >> The principal's long tenure at Turning Point Elementary and the surrounding community is an asset that he uses to link the school with the spheres of home and community. For example, the principal utilizes his knowledge about the home culture (including linguistic and familial customs) along with his knowledge concerning the school's geographic locality and proximity to the United States – Mexico border. In the beginning of each school year the principal employs an orientation day that differs from the "traditional" school orientation. Carmen states,

> Una de las cosas que hace el director también y que a veces este trata
>
> de establecer un puente de comunicación con las personas que no
>
> vienen. Se hace una visita a las casas. Las maestras hacen más visitas
>
> a ver cómo vive el niño para comprender...Ir a conocer a la familia. Ir
>
> a la casa de los padres y tener una hora de platica. Mientras, los niños
>
> estan cuidados aquí en la escuela por las "substitutes." Ellas van, las
>
> maestras, siempre van dos maestras.

> << One of the things that the principal also does is that he tries to
>
> establish a bridge of communication with the people [parents] who do
>
> not come. He makes visits to their homes. The teachers more often
>
> make the visits to see and understand the lifestyle of the child. They
>
> [teachers] go to get to know the family. They go to the parent's house
>
> and spend an hour talking. Meanwhile, the children are being cared
>
> for in the school by substitute teachers. The teachers always go in two
>
> when visiting. >>

This orientation immediately conveys to the parents that the educational process requires a joint effort on the part of both the home and school. Parents who were interviewed articulated that the principal's hallway greetings, conversations, or conferences included his expression of gratitude for their presence at the school and appreciation for the work as educational partners.

The principal's friendly nature also helped to bridge the gap between home and school relationships as he modeled, by example, what an effective school culture could be. Parents at Turning Point Elementary felt welcomed and were committed to being a part of the school's cultural dynamics. Their enthusiasm and exuberance is evidenced by the numerous parents, grandparents and community members who participate in special events organized by the school or the Parent Center.

Leadership: Parent Specialist Home and School Culture Connect. Turning Point Elementary is the only school in the district that has a full-time professional person who works solely with parents. The Parent Specialist manages the parent center, helps to disseminate information, and organizes the various classes and activities that are scheduled on campus and in the community. Many parents have expressed that the Parent Specialist is key to their success and admit that her efforts and commitment greatly impact the school culture and the success of the parental involvement program. Though some of the "traditional" parental involvement activities are still in place, the Parent Specialist, Core Team, and principal have challenged the "traditional" idea of what parental involvement should be. The parents at Turning Point Elementary know they are valued and are included in leadership, decision-making and advocacy roles that

have helped them to break down the barriers that formerly existed under the "traditional" model of parental involvement.

The principal's and the parent specialist's leadership style and mannerisms have achieved a school culture akin to what Martinez (1994) has described as "Integrated Borderlands" with respect to parent involvement. In this school culture the parents have the freedom to enter the school premises and participate alongside school staff and administration to make education what it should be for their children. The school leadership acknowledges, accepts, and understands the array of problems that confront parents of poverty because they have lived and shared similar experiences. The leadership knows that parents provide the first learning foundations for these students and they fully recognize that collectively the home, school and community all contribute to the making of the total child/student.

Parental Capital. Regardless of the parents' socioeconomic background, the mothers in this study successfully crossed the borders and negotiated the home, school, and community spheres using their own human, cultural and social capital. Human Capital, according to Coleman (1984) includes intelligence, knowledge, education, and skills. In this study the parents demonstrated excellent communication skills and organizational abilities. At least four of the parents had attended institutions of higher learning: one was a former law student in Mexico, one was a former teacher in Mexico, one was a social worker, and one was returning to receive her teaching degree. The other parents developed their creative talents and worked as entrepreneurs in the home setting in activities such as selling cakes and clothing to earn extra money. Their human capital helped them to make in-roads and to establish links with the various stakeholders in the

other spheres.

Bourdieu (1990) spoke of Cultural Capital, including customs, beliefs, language, traditions, festivities, foods, mannerisms and social interactions. The leadership at Turning Point capitalized on the cultural capital brought by the parents and successfully incorporated traditions and language into the parental involvement milieu. Their mutual respect for a shared culture created circumstances that facilitated entry and parental involvement in the school and community, whether the dominant language was Spanish or English.

Social Capital as Putnam (1995) explains, encompasses the social networks, interpersonal relationships, contacts, and resources that a person uses to connect with other people. In this study parents successfully utilized their Social Capital to carry out their activities in their daily lives as to advance the issues and concerns of the school community. For example, when last minute responsibilities or personal crises occurred the parents stood in for one another and carried each other's roles within the school leadership or home leadership spheres. At a deeper level these parents become entwined in each other's lives of the other parents. They were familiar with one another's families and provided a home-like culture within the school environment in which each person was intricately linked and committed to collective well-being and success.

"Mamas on a Mission"

The Mexican-American parents in this study were all mothers who genuinely devoted their lives to their children. These mothers knew that their involvement at Turning Point Elementary was important and valued by the campus administrative leadership. As competent leaders and role models in the home, school, and community

these mothers rose to the challenge and decisively worked to bring about lasting change for their children as well as the parents and students who would eventually take their places. As "Mamas on a Mission" their leadership roles helped to pave new in-roads for impacting change. The mother's decision and responsibility to lead in the various spheres meant that they would have to make sacrifices, research, gather information, and factual data on a given topic(s), and advocate with diplomacy and forthrightness before the superintendent and board members. These mothers discovered that their solo voice by itself is valuable and important. However as a "Mama on a Mission" these mothers quickly learned that their individual voices and concerns were less effective than a powerful, knowledgeable, and unified voice of several mothers. Through careful listening, cooperation, and compromise amongst themselves these mothers learned important skills that helped them to present a united front and cross Alienated Borders between the home and school.

Connecting the Study to Border Crossings and the ECHO-Sphere Framework

The collaborative efforts between these Mexican-American parents and Turning Point Elementary leadership incorporated the Echo-Sphere framework of parental involvement. In the Echo-Sphere framework the child is always at the center of the picture. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) purports there are Ecological Human Systems of interdependent interactions that influence a child's development. These systems of interacting (Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem) help the child to negotiate within and between the home, school, and peer spheres. The parent /child become one in this Echo-Sphere framework in that the parent encircles the child acting as a shield of protection or advocate on their child's behalf. Bertalanffy's (1973) notion of

the human interaction incorporates the notion of open systems in that living organisms are in continuous interaction with larger systems. In the Echo-Sphere model the home, school, and community spheres each interact, exchange information, and demonstrate dependence upon each other. The continued and successful existence of all three spheres depends on how open the flow is back and forth between and within these spheres. Bronfenbrenner and Bertalanffy's models connect with Martinez's (1994) Integrated Borderlands which asserts that borders exist between home, school, and community spheres. In the parental involvement at Turning Point Elementary, the borders between these spheres are permeable, allowing unrestricted movement across boundaries to eventually make home, school, and community one social system of interdependence. However, as evidenced in this study on Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives, some of the border crossings between the home, school, and community are still Alienated, Co-existent, or just beginning to move towards Interdependent Borderlands (Martinez, 1994) at Turning Point Elementary School. Furthermore, barriers as borders also exist within spheres, such that parents must negotiate borders along constantly shifting horizontal and vertical planes.

The parents in Turning Point Elementary's Core Team recognize their part in helping their children to be successful, therefore their actions help to re-shape and re-construct the border crossings between the home, school, and community. The Core Team of which they are an intricate part has affirmed their value as a parent who can and does impact their child's educational and social development. The Core Team additionally taps the human, social, and cultural capitals that help these parents to successfully negotiate the border crossings. These Mexican-American parents, with the

support of campus administration have pioneered a new re-conceptualized model of what parental involvement can be. The parents have taken the risks and made the sacrifices for the betterment of education but not at the expense of their child. The success at this elementary school may very well be a "Turning Point" for how homes, schools, and communities develop collaborative networks and progress towards borderless collaborative interactions.

These mothers partnered with the school to help in the education of their children. They recognized that time was rapidly passing and that their children would only be small once. For this reason parents set out to bridge the gap and link the home and school environments. After all, they were the children's first teachers, who understood their children's idiosyncrasies, potential and aptitudes. Thus without intending to do so, these Mexican-American mothers formed a cohesive group that I have denoted as "Mamas on a Mission."

Children First

The family unit in the Mexican-American culture places a high value and importance on nurturing and valuing children as part of the family unit (Sosa, 1997). The parents in my study possess this same authenticity of thought and choose to make the necessary sacrifices so that their children will experience successful development in their home and school settings. Teresa sums up her thoughts as she speaks to her children about her involvement,

Remember at least you [her children] have got something to remember about us. That this is what we thought. You [her children] will say,

'Remember when my Mom used to volunteer at our school and make things for us?'

As indicated by Figure 46, parental involvement as perceived by the parents shares some of the same activities as that of the Traditional model. However, in the Re-Conceptualized Model parents exercise their human, social, and cultural capitals in moving across and within the spheres. Additionally, the Mexican-American parents in this study were given opportunities to become involved in activities at Turning Point Elementary that required effective leadership and communication skills.

The Re-Conceptualized Model of parental involvement demonstrates that the school sphere has an effective Core Team wherein they negotiate Alienated Borders and Co-Existent Borders. In the home sphere the parents role model is providing advice to their children wherein they may successfully cross difficult barriers. Finally, in the Re-Conceptualized Model the community sphere recognizes the parents as active participants in building bridges between the home, school, and community. By being proactive these parents are breaking down barriers and crossing borders in the hopes of achieving what Martinez (1994) defines as Interdependent and Integrated Borders.

Comparison of Traditional and Re-Conceptualized Models of Parental Involvement

Figure 46. Side-by-side comparison of parent involvement roles

Traditional Model (School)	Re-Conceptualized Model (School)
• Cutting and Pasting • Running photocopies • Making bulletin boards • Monitoring hallways and cafeterias • Assisting in the library • Room Mother/ Helper • Participation in P.T.O. meetings • Participation as audience members in sports, Open House, special programs	• Cutting and Pasting • Running photocopies • Making bulletin boards • Monitoring hallways and cafeterias • Assisting in the library • Room Mother/ Helper • Participation in P.T.O. meetings • Participation as audience members in sports, Open House, special programs • Core Team
Traditional Model (Home)	**Re-Conceptualized Model (Home)**
• Homework Helpers • Supplier of daily provisions (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, love, attention and etcetera) • Supporter of schools and teachers	• Homework Helpers • Supplier of daily provisions (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, love, attention and etcetera) • Supporter of schools and teachers as co-partners • Role model • Advisor
Traditional Model (Community)	**Re-Conceptualized Model (Community)**
• Link to outside world	• Bridge builder between home and outside world (i.e. neighborhood, school, church, businesses, agencies and etcetera) • Barrier Breaker • Border Crosser

Summary

In this chapter I have provided an analysis and interpretation of coded themes from focus groups and individual in-depth interviews. I have related Martinez's Border Typology and the ECHO-Sphere framework in this interpretation. Finally, I compared the "Traditional" and "Re-Conceptualized" Models of parental involvement. Chapter 6 summarizes my exploration of Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives and suggests implications for practice, research and policy.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives on home, school, and community collaboration. As discussed in Chapter 2 the existing literature describes the benefits of collaboration between the home, school, and community (Lightfoot, 1978; Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Joyner, 1999; Epstein, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Chavkin, Williams, and Henderson, 1987). I provided a description of the legal, historical and policy contexts as they relate to current research on parental involvement. Through this study I have attempted to address the barriers as seen by Mexican-American parents and examined the role that leadership plays in facilitating collaboration. Additionally, I have examined the various models of parental involvement and have developed the ECHO-Sphere framework which utilizes Martinez's (1994) Border Typology as a means for re-conceptualizing parental involvement and crossing the spheres of home, school, and community.

The research methodology and design of this study are qualitative in that I examined one school in the Lower Rio Grande Valley located 11 miles from the United States-Mexico border. The data from this study were obtained from focus groups, individual in-depth interviews, and participant observations and photographs. Collectively these were used to triangulate the data and create a socially co-constructed

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view of reality as seen by the parents and myself (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Denzin, 1984; Stake, 1995).

Field Procedures

The time frame of study included a month of observations at the site prior to beginning the actual study. The data gathering process occurred over a three- month period (mid-November to mid-February 2001-2002). The five focus groups lasting 1 hour to an hour and fifteen minutes each included a total of 28 participants and were conducted during the third week in November. As well seven, one-hour long in-depth interviews that were conducted at the homes (with the exception of one parent at the school) in three phases in the second, third and fourths weeks of January. Throughout the whole month of February I continued to gather informal data through observations, classes, school activities and parent conversations in the hallways or the parent center.

Findings

Certain thematic categories emerged from the data. The focus group themes included: Crossing Borders; Barriers; Leadership; School Culture, and Mamas on a Mission. The in-depth interview themes included: Crossing Borders; Means for Crossing Borders, and Mamas on a Mission. Since I used my focus groups to obtain participants for my individual in-depth interviews it is not surprising that there was a significant overlap of themes. However this overlap was used to triangulate the data generated from the focus groups, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and photographs.

Response to Question One

How do Mexican-American parents at an elementary school in the Rio Grande Valley perceive themselves with respect to their participation in their children's

education and development? The study reveals that the types of activities parents participate in with their children do not necessarily align with the school's view of parental involvement. In the "traditional" model of parental involvement at the school the parents participate in cutting and pasting, running copies, monitoring the cafeteria, and assisting the teacher occasionally in the classroom. Mexican-American parents also participate in these types of activities in the re-conceptualized model of parental involvement. However, the other activities that differentiate the "traditional" model from the re-conceptualized model are the parent's ability to occupy positions of leadership and decision-making through the Core Team. In this sense the parents are able to use their own human, social, and cultural capitals to interact in the school sphere. The parents in this interaction between the home and school exhibit what Martinez (1994) refers to as crossing interdependent borders.

The Mexican-American parents in this study do positively contribute to their children's academic and social development. In the home environment the parents contribute to their children's development by being available for their children. In the physical sense presence focuses on actual proximity and visibility in child-parent and parent-child relationships in the home, school, and community environments. Emotional presence in these parents' perceptions emphasizes nurturing, loving, and demonstrating closeness and affection in parent-child relationships. This notion of physical and emotional presence is evidenced by parents sitting with their children, doing homework, or talking to their children about their lives and daily activities. As well, these parents are able to pass on cultural and linguistic traditions of value. These parent-child experiences provide an opportunity for parents to share their own experiences and transfer their

parental capital (human, social, and cultural) to their children. This "new" capital in turn may be accessed by their children and utilized to cross borders between the home, school, and community.

A second finding related to question one: The parents in this study knew of their value and importance prior to becoming a part of the Core Team/ Decision-making body on this campus. However, through the Core Team these parents were able to increase their own capital and self-worth by participating in leadership and decision-making processes at the campus level. This participation in the Core Team generated greater respect towards these parents in the home, school, and community. For example, in the home the children valued their parents' presence on campus especially positions of leadership. The children directly experienced the benefits (the building of the library, the fence, the playground equipment, and new classrooms) as a result of their parents' participation at the leadership level. The school and community as a whole were improved as a result of leadership. Other parents were encouraged and inspired to join the Core Team in a supportive role as informants to other parents about the Core Team's initiatives and goals. The Core Team provided to parents a link to information and knowledge about the school and community. This open communication helped to bridge the borders between the home, school, and community. This type of parental involvement, witnessed y the children, helped to bolster the parents' own children's confidence in them as parents. As a collective unit these parents utilized their own social capital to stand in the spherical gaps and cross borders as they successfully advocated for their children's educational, emotional, and physical well-being.

Response to Question Two

In what ways do socioeconomic, language, culture, capital and other characteristics of Mexican-American parents impact parental involvement? Turning Point Elementary is a dual language school of instruction which valued the language of the home whether it was Spanish or English. The parents that were dominant Spanish speakers felt a certain ease in crossing the borders because the language was not a barrier that would prevent them from interacting in the school or community spheres. The dual language school status helped parents to deconstruct the common linguistic barriers that confront parents with diverse language skills. Participation was greatly enhanced because parents felt the school environment welcomed them and did not discount the human and cultural capital they embodied. The communication within the classrooms between teachers and parents occurred in both Spanish and English. Hallway conversations depended on the parent an his or her language preference. Additionally, Mr. Salinas, the principal, demonstrated through role modeling the importance of valuing the family and their home language. He was often seen intermingling with both Spanish and English dominant speakers throughout the day and welcomed all parents' input, ideas, comments, and suggestions for improving their children's educational success and learning environment. The borders at Turning Point Elementary were negotiable because language was not an impediment but rather a vehicle for traversing the home and school borders. This school and its leadership tapped into and built upon the parents' human, social, and cultural capitals' assets.

The impact of socioeconomic status on parental involvement was more difficult to discern. Some families that were relatively destitute according to American poverty

standards were found to be the most present and involved in their children's lives and education. The Mexican-American parents in this study did not all have higher-level educational training in the school sense. However, the skills, knowledge and experience that each parent possessed supplied him/her with the necessary capital for negotiating the borders. For instance, the home-bound mothers involved themselves in ways like making sure that their children were prepared and ready to learn n the school setting. These parents may not have been present on a daily basis on the school campus, yet in the home environment these parents were intent on ensuring their children's success. These parents attended to the daily nurturing, feeding, and care-taking responsibilities of the home and children. They additionally encouraged an attitude of respect for the school and its teachers and reminded their children of the importance of obtaining a good education. These home contributions of preparing their child both physically and mentally helped children to be more successful in crossing back and forth between the home and school borders.

Response to Question Three

How do these constructions of Mexican-American parental involvement reflect or differ from "traditional" or "re-conceptualized" models of parental involvement? *Finding*: The findings partially reflect some of the traditional parental involvement activities. However the roles that these parents also play in the school environment reflect a "re-conceptualized" model of parental involvement in that they have become informed researcher and decision-makers who understand the organizational dynamics of the school in its relationship to the home and student achievement. In the traditional sense the parents are gated from certain information and not allow access to particular school

knowledge. The organizational structure is based upon hierarchy and leveling where the principal or school leaders possess knowledge and sparingly disseminate it to the teachers and parents. However, through Turning Point's Core Team the principal has reorganized the power structure and flattened the hierarchy to include the voice of the parent. The principal invites and encourages parental advice and opinions and takes the school climate's pulse through this open communication with the parents. The border crossings are reflective of the integrated border wherein the principal as instructional and campus leader has created a school culture that appreciates the parent's human, social, and cultural capitals. The parents recognizes and accept this new role in the re-conceptualized model and contribute their skills and talents to the school community. The parents' first obligation to their children is translated into a collective orientation in the social sense that of helping all children to be successful in this school environment. The social networks that result from this re-conceptualized model of parental involvement add value to the parents and create opportunities for crossing like borders in the future.

Response to Question Four

How might these constructions better inform the development of new parental involvement policy and programs that directly attend to the needs and interests of Mexican-American families? *Finding:* This study has revealed the importance of effective school leadership in the implementation of current parental involvement policy and programs. Therefore "re-conceptualized" constructions of parental involvement activities remind policy makers of the diverse ways in which parents are successfully involved in the educational and developmental aspects of their children's lives. For

example, the Core Team approached the Turning Point and the district office with concerns about educational facilities (library, play equipment, and more classrooms). Through advocacy training and research these parents were able to impact and change the school environment. The policy implications for this success on these parents' part may help to re-shape local policy at the campus and district levels. The parents' success is attributed to their utilization of "old" and "new" capital received through the Core Team. As leaders and advocates for their children they were able to make informed judgments and decisions about the needs and interests concerning their children and their school.

A second finding for this question is that parental involvement programs may consider valuing and alternative perspective of community as seen by the parents. The idea of community as purported in the ECHO-Sphere framework incorporates particular entities such as local businesses, stores, agencies, banks, churches, and etcetera. The parents, on the other hand, have reconfigured "community" to include a narrower pattern of supportive and caring interaction amongst themselves. Community as seen through the parents' lenses generally reflect their own cultural and linguistic worlds and include their immediate surroundings, social networks of family, friends, and school, and local organizations such as churches. The parents utilize narrowed (smaller) community networks to access capitals that may promote the crossing of borders within the larger community. In the broader sense of community (that is to say the world beyond the parents' immediate surroundings), these parents utilize their social networks and other capitals to cross borders of necessity (i.e. going to the hospital, doing business with banks or larger retail stores). Understanding these patterns of community interaction may facilitate how successfully schools are able to implement parental involvement policy and

programs. The more in tune the policy makers are with the home environment and cultural and linguistic capitals of parents from diverse populations, the greater the possibility of having successful and effective parental policy. Regardless of whether the patterns of community interaction transpire within the narrowed social networks as evidenced with these parents or within the border scope of "community," new policy must be sensitive to diverse understandings of parental involvement.

<u>Response to Question Five</u>

What are the practice, research, and policy implications for negotiating the borders between Mexican-American homes, schools, and communities? The findings for this particular question are addressed in the following implication sections: Implications for Practice, Implications for Research, and Implications for Policy. I begin this discussion with Implications for Practice.

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

Based on this study and its findings there are three implications for practice. First, school administrators may consider participating in collaborative training sessions that focus on how they may best engage parents in the educational process. Such leadership training that focuses on the development of interpersonal skills and cooperative techniques can enhance administrative leader's ability to successfully co-partner with parents to bridge the gap between home, school, and community. These training sessions may also focus on identifying parent capitals and tapping into these capitals in order to improve home-school relationships. A second implication for practice relates to employing a qualified person whose responsibility is to interact with and build partnerships between the home, school, and community. Success at Turning Point

Elementary was attributed to the successful incorporation of a Parent Specialist whose responsibility was to link the home, school, and community. The third implication for practice relates to restructuring parental involvement programs so that parents, staff, and other school personnel are utilizing their talents, knowledge, and skills to their fullest potential for the benefit of the students and learning environment. This relates to the question of capital in that parents embody certain skills, ability, and potential. When parents are allowed to use their capitals in the school setting the interaction exemplifies Bertalanffy's (1948) open system concept of exchange. This exchange facilitates border crossing and enhances the dynamics of the school culture.

Implications for Research

Three implications for research can be concluded from the study. Because ther has been limited research on Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives, similar studies may need to be conducted in other area throughout the Rio Grande Valley. In addition to replicating this study along the United States-Mexico border it may be interesting to conduct this study in areas where the Mexican-American population reveal high numbers demographically. Research such as this may ultimately help to: (a) address the needs and interest of Mexican-American families; (b) influence practice and policy regarding parental involvement; and (c) promote relationships between the home, school, and community that encourage the possibilities of interdependent and eventually integrated border crossings. Such studies would serve to inform the school's leadership about what makes effective parental involvement programs successful with Mexican-American parents. Second, it is necessary to explore the role school leadership plays in the implementation of successful parental involvement programs. For example, in this

study the school principal welcomed parent involvement and sought out parents to become leaders on the Core Team. Third, it may be necessary to apply the ECHO-Sphere framework to existing parental involvement programs to investigate and explore how well these programs currently utilize parents in diverse roles and activities.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study conclude with five implications for educational policy. The first policy implication focuses on hiring qualified individuals for leadership positions. In Turning Point Elementary the school specifically hired a Parent Specialist who is familiar with and respectful of the Mexican-American's culture, language, and social environments. A second policy implication speaks to the issue of leadership preparation programs. It may be suggested that mandatory coursework that concentrates on effective practices for building home, school, and community relations be incorporated into the mid-management, as well as teacher preparation curriculum. A third policy implication may consider mandating dual language programs for all schools wherein parents from diverse backgrounds have an avenue for establishing open communication between the home and school spheres. The fourth policy implication suggested is making parental involvement a part of the accountability system for each school. This accountability would focus on viewing parental involvement as reflected in the re-conceptualized understanding of parental involvement. The fifth and last policy implication emphasizes the movement towards interdependent borders wherein parents are valued and accepted as an intricate part of the home, school, and community environments. This policy would actually mean restructuring the organizational design of schools so that parents would be co-partners in the educational process.

Conclusion

In an effort to understand the contributions and impact Mexican-American parents make to their own children's academic and social development I set out to study Mexican-American parental involvement perspectives. The conclusions of this study indicate that Mexican-American parents provide a particular richness to their children's lives in the way of leadership, moral, and ethical examples, and parental encouragement that facilitates educational and social development. The Mexican-American parents in this study developed new capital and utilized their previous human, social, and cultural capital to develop their own children's capitals. In addition to these positive contributions, the parents in my study created a safe world for their children wherein their cultural, linguistic and traditional legacies were kept in tact and valued in all three spheres.

This study provided an opportunity for Mexican-American parents at Turning Point Elementary to voice their own perspectives concerning their role as an involved parent. Perhaps this study and others like it will help parents to become fully utilized by schools, recognized as leaders, and valued for their contributions to their children's development. These Mexican-American parents' perceptions of themselves reveal that they realize that they are advocates for their children and that they must cross difficult barriers between the home, school, and community spheres.

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APPENDIX A:

CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____ have been asked to participate in
research being conducted by Lisa Irby. I am one of approximately 25-35 participants that
have been asked to volunteer for this research on Mexican-American Parental Involvement
Perspectives on Home, School, and Community Collaboration" [45 CFR Part 46.117].
This research is designed to investigate the perspectives of Mexican-American parents in
regards to their perceptions of their own participation in the home, school, and community
[45 CFR 46.116]. As a participant I will be instructed to answer openly and honestly
questions about my perceptions of parental involvement as I participate in focus groups
and individual interviews.

I understand that there are minimal risks associated with my participation in this
research investigation, [45 CFR 46.116]. There are no direct benefits to participants but
indirect benefits may result as better parental involvement programs and collaborations are
developed that address parental involvement [45 CFR 46.116].

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Pan
American Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects In Research and by the equivalent
body at the district. For research related problems or questions regarding subject's rights,
the Human Subject's Committee may be contacted through Dr. Juan Gonzalez, Chair, at
(956) 381-2880, [45 CFR 46.116]. Additionally, you may contact me, Lisa Irby at
(956) 345-1092 if you have questions concerning this research.

I have read and understand the explanations provided to me and voluntarily agree
to participate in this study. If at any point during the research I would like to withdraw
from this study I may do so. A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to
me.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____ Date _____

CONSENTIMIENTO

Yo_____ he sido informado(a) por Lisa Irby que soy uno(a)de aproximadamente 25-35 participantes padres Mexico-Americanos(as) que han sido escojidos(as) voluntariamente para este proyecto. Este estudio está designado para investigar las perspectivas de los padres Mexico-Americanos(as) en relación con la percepción de su propia participación en hogar, en su escuela y en su comunidad (45CFR Parte 46.117). Como participante yo recibiré instrucciones de cómo contestar abiertamente y honestemente acerca a mi propia percepción de su participación en entrevistas de grupo o individual.

No habrá riezgo mínimo asociado con mi participación en este estudio de investigación (45CFR 46.116). No habrá beneficios directos por participar, pero sí beneficios indirectos que resultarán de mi participación, tal vez como programas que envuelvan a padres a colaborar en el desarollo de una mejor sociedad.

Este estudio ha sido revisado y aprovado por el Institutional Review Board de la Universidad de Texas - Pan American que traducido es Mesa Directiva Instituto de Repaso de estudios con sujetos humanos. Por cualquier problema o pregunta que tiene que ver con los derechos humanos puede ponerse en contacto con el Dr. Juan Gonzales, Presidente, en (956) 381-2880 (45CFR.116).

Yo he leido y entiendo las explicaciones que se me han dado y deseo participar voluntariamente en este estudio. En cualquier momento que no quiero participar yo tengo el derecho a rehusar participación en este estudio. También se me ha proveisto una copia de este forma de consentimiento.

Firma del Participante _____   Fecha _____

Firma del Testigo _____   Fecha _____

EXAMPLES OF VIDEO/AUDIO TAPE/ PHOTOGRAPHIC RELEASE FORM

I voluntarily agree to be photographed and audio taped during the research being conducted by _____. I understand that the photographs and audio tapes will be used only for research purposes and Lisa Irby will have access to them. These photographs and tapes will be identified by pseudonyms and numbers. The photographs and audio tapes will be kept for five years and will be stored in a locked file at the researcher's residence. After data is collected the photographs and audio tapes will be destroyed.

_____   _____
Signature of the Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

REFUSAL TO BE VIDEO/ AUDIO TAPED OR PHOTOGRAPHED

I do not agree to be audio taped or photographed during this research conducted by _____, but I may still be observed. I understand I will not receive compensation. By refusing to be audio taped or photographed, I understand that I may continue to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

FORMA DE SOLTAR

Yo voluntariamente estoy de acuerdo con ser retratado(a) y grabado(a) durante la investigación conducida por Lisa Hall-Irby. Yo entiendo que las fotografias y grabaciones se usarán solamente para los propósitos de la investigación y Lisa Hall-Irby tendrá acceso a ellos.

Estas fotografias y grabaciones se identificarán por nombres códigos. Las fotografias y grabaciones se mantendrán y permanecerán en un archivo cerrado en la residencia de la investigadora.

_____   _____
Firma de Participante   Fecha

_____   _____
Firma de Investigadora   Fecha

REHUSAR CON SER FOTOGRAFÍA O GRABADO(A)

No estoy de acuerdo con ser retratado(a) ni grabado(a) durante la investigación conducida por Lisa Hall-Irby; pero si puedo ser observado(a). Yo entiendo que no recibiré compensación. Al rehusar ser fotografia o grabado(a) yo entiendo que aun puedo participar en el estudio.

_____   _____
Firma de Participante   Fecha

_____   _____
Firma de Investigadora   Fecha

APPENDIX B:

FOCUS GROUP AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

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Figure 15. Turning Point Elementary Demographic Breakdown by Grades, Population and Classes

Grade Level	Number of Classes	Total Number of Students	Average Number of Students Per Classroom and Grade Level
Pre-Kindergarten	4	99	24.75
Kindergarten	5	102	20.4
First	4	92	23
Second	4	90	22.5
Third	5	109	21.8
Fourth	4	89	22.25
Fifth	3	78	26
Total Grades Served: 7	Total Number of Classes: 29	Total Number of Students: 659	Combined Average: 22.95

Figure 16. Table Parental Involvement Participants Involved in Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

Parents; Teachers;* Administrators **	Home Focus Group	Class Focus Group	Teacher and Administrator Focus Group	Advocate Focus Group	Volunteer Focus Group	In-depth Interview Individuals
Karla		Yes				
Minnie		Yes		Yes		
Carmen		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Lilly		Yes		Yes	Yes	
Rachel		Yes		Yes	Yes	
Estella	Yes	Yes				Yes
Lydia		Yes				
Esmer		Yes				
Jessica		Yes				
Beatrice					Yes	
Norma					Yes	
Rosa				Yes	Yes	Yes
Marta				Yes	Yes	Yes
Sara				Yes	Yes	
Karin				Yes		
Samantha				Yes		
Edna				Yes		Yes
Linda	Yes					
Natalie	Yes					
Connie	Yes					
Delia	Yes					
Teresa	Yes			Yes		Yes
Ms. Cano **			Yes			
Mr. Salinas **			Yes			
Ms. Cavazos *			Yes			
Ms. Fuentes *			Yes			
Ms. Gonzalez *			Yes			
Alma **	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 17. Parents Taking Part in the Class Focus Group at Turning Point Elementary

Parents	Number of Years in City	Number of Children in This School	Grades of Children	Educated in the United States or Mexico	Home Language
Karla	5 yrs	1	4th	Mexico	Spanish
Minnie	1.6 yrs	1	Pre-Kinder	Mexico	Spanish
Carmen	10 yrs	1	4th	Mexico	Spanish
Lilly	3 yrs	3	Pre-Kinder 1st 5th	Mexico	Spanish
Rachel	3 yrs	3	Pre-Kinder 3rd 3rd	Mexico	Spanish
Estella	3 yrs	3	Kinder 4th 5th	Mexico	Both
Lydia	2 yrs	2	2nd 3rd	Mexico	Spanish
Esmer	1 yr	1	2nd	Mexico	Spanish
Jessica	-	-	-	Mexico	Both
Alma	21 yrs	2	3rd 5th	United States	English
Mean:	6.26	1.8			

Figure 18. Parents Taking Part in the Home Focus Group at Turning Point Elementary

Parents	Number of Years in District	Number of Children in This School	Grades of Children	Educated in the United States or Mexico	Home Language
Linda	-	1	Pre Kinder	Mexico	Spanish
Natalie	35 yrs	2	3rd 4th	Both	Both
Connie	6 yrs	2	Pre Kinder 4th	Mexico	Spanish
Delia	6 months	1	3rd	Mexico	Spanish
Teresa	3 yrs	1	Pre Kinder	Both	Spanish
Estella	8 yrs	2	2nd 4th	Both	Both
Alma	21 yrs	2	3rd 5th	United States	English
Mean:	12.25	1.6			

Figure 19: Participants Taking Part in Teacher / Administrator Focus Group at Turning Point Elementary

Participants	Number of Years Working in District	Number of Children in This School	Grades of Children	Educated in the United States or Mexico	Home Language
Mr. Salinas **	25 yrs	0	-	United States	Both
Ms. Cano **	15 yrs	0	6th 7th	United States	Both
Ms. Cavazos *	14 yrs	1	1st	United States	Both
Ms. Fuentes *	12 yrs	1	3rd	Mexico and United States	Both
Ms. Gonzalez *	19 yrs	1	2nd	United States	Both
Alma	7 yrs	2	3rd 4th	United States	Both
Mean:	15.33	.833	3.25		

Footnote: * Teacher Participant
　　　　** Administrator Participant

Figure 20. Parents Taking Part in the Advocate Focus Group at Turning Point Elementary

Parents	Number of Years in District	Number of Children in This School	Grades of Children	Educated in the United States or Mexico	Home Language
Karin	25 yrs	1	3rd	United States	Both
Samantha	31 yrs	1	3rd	United States	Both
Carmen	10 yrs	1	4th	Mexico	Spanish
Edna	6yrs	2	3rd 4th	Mexico	Both
Rosa	37 yrs	2	2nd 4th	United States	English
Marta	42 yrs	1	4th	United States	Both
Alma	21 yrs	2	3rd 5th	United States	English
Mean:	24.6 yrs	1.4			

Figure 21. Parents Taking Part in the Volunteer Focus Group at Turning Point Elementary

Parents	Number of Years in District	Number of Children in This School	Grades of Children	Educated in the United States or Mexico	Home Language
Beatrice	7 yrs	2	Pre-Kinder 2nd	Mexico	Spanish
Minnie	1.6 yrs	1	Pre-Kinder	Mexico	Spanish
Carmen	10 yrs	1	4th	Mexico	Spanish
Lilly	3 yrs	3	Pre-Kinder	Mexico	Spanish
Rachel	3 yrs	3	Pre-Kinder	Mexico	Spanish
Rosa	37 yrs	2	2nd 4th	United States	English
Marta	42 yrs	1	4th	United States	Both
Sara	25 yrs	-	-	United States	English
Alma	21 yrs	2	3rd 4th	United States	English
Mean:	16.6 yrs	1.8			

Figure 22. Parents Taking Part in In-depth Interviews at Turning Point Elementary School

Parents	Married	Age	Number of Years of Schooling	Number of Kids	Grades / Age of Kids	Language (English or Spanish)	Advocacy / Volunteer Group	Classes			
								G.E.D.	E.S.L.	Cake Decorating	Sewing
Edna	Yes	40	16 years (Mexico)	3	3rd/ 9 yrs 4th/10 yrs 6th/12 yrs	Both	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Rosa	Yes	37	14 years (United States)	3	PK/ 4 yrs 1st/ 7 yrs 4th/10 yrs	English	Yes	No	No	No	No
Carmen	Yes	38	14 years (Mexico)	3	3rd/ 9 yrs 6th/12 yrs 7th/13 yrs	Spanish	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Alma	Yes	38	16 years (United States)	2	3rd/ 8 yrs 5th/10 yrs	English	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Marta	Yes	42	12 years (United States)	2	4th/ 9 yrs 6th/12 yrs	English	Yes	No	No	No	No
Teresa	Yes	47	12 years (United States)	1	K / 5 yrs	Both	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Estella	Yes	32	12 years (Mexico)	4	PK/15mo K / 5 yrs 4th/ 9 yrs 5th/10 yrs	Spanish	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Mean:		39.1	13.7	3							

Footnote: Pseudonyms have been used in place of the parents' actual names.

APPENDIX C:

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PHOTOGRAPHS

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Figure 47. Minnie and her son, Gustavo share a moment of laughter on school playground.

Figure 48. Alma and daughters enjoy a book in the library reading area.

Figure 49. Parents (Rachel and Lilly) provide an after school snack for their boys.

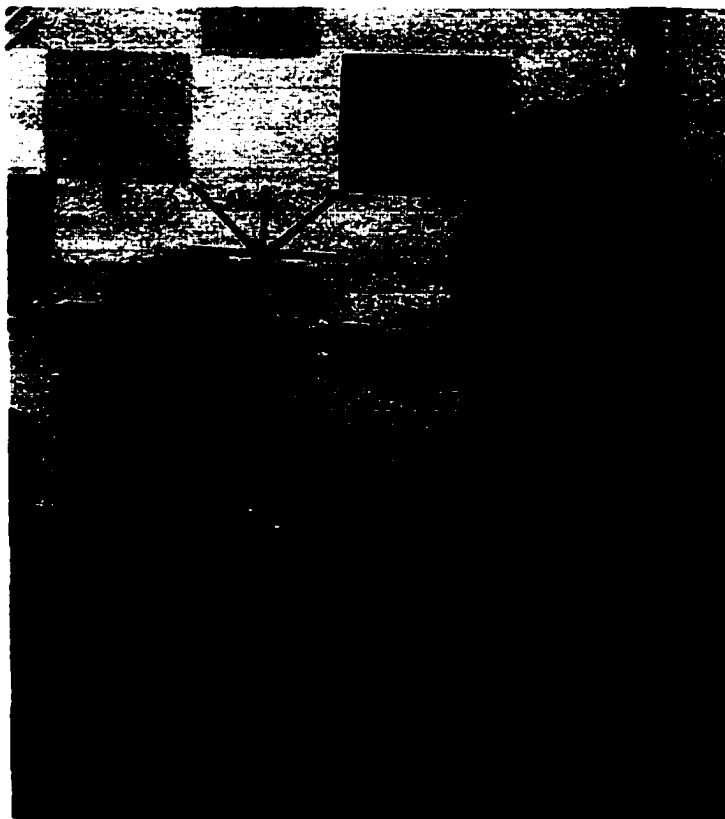Figure 50. Karin and daughter, Shauna, during after school break

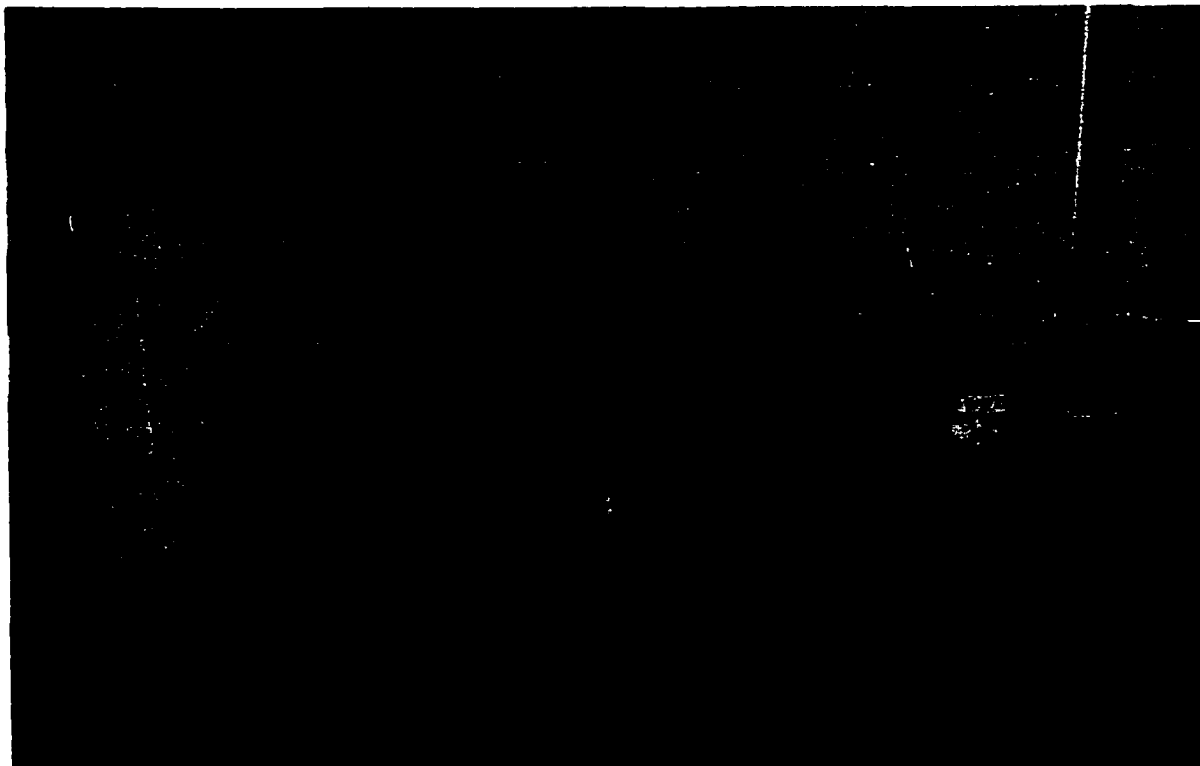Figure 51. Teresa and Bonita prepare to go outside to collect more rocks at home

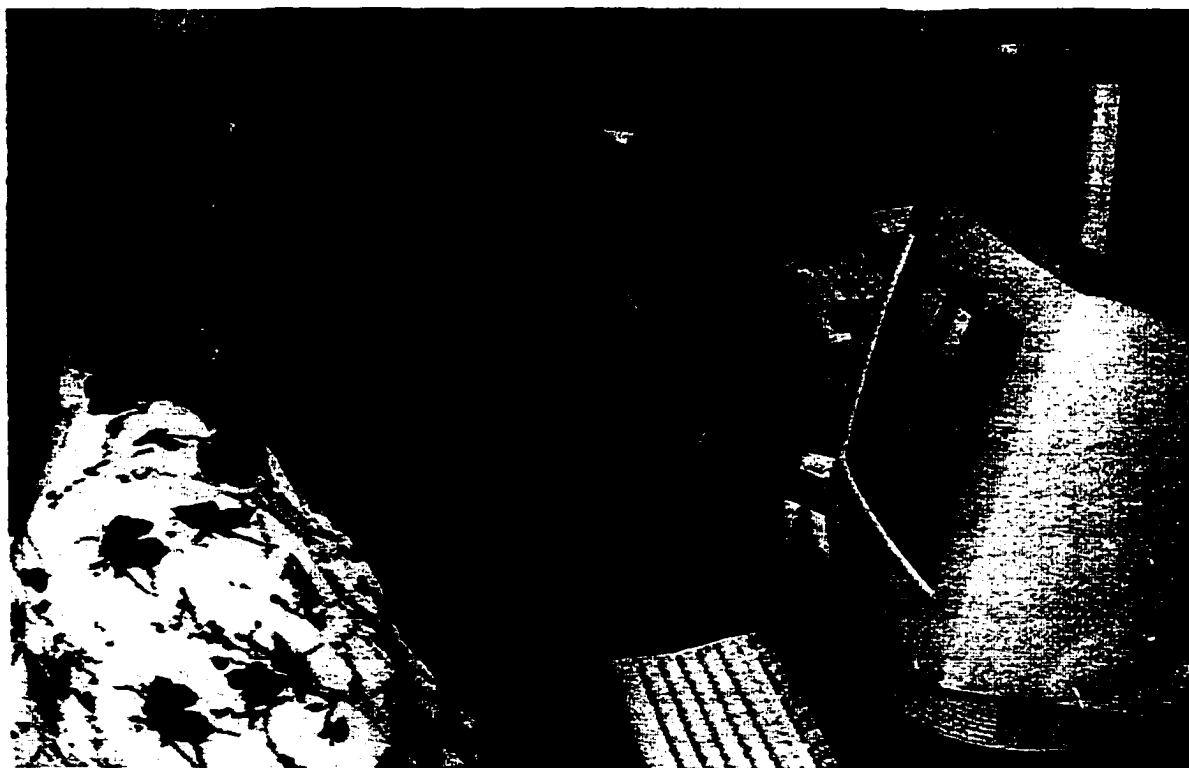Figure 52. Rachel with daughter, Jasmine enjoy a game of computer solitaire

Figure 53. Parents participating in traditional parental involvement activities

Figure 54. Attentive parents listen and participate during Core Team meeting

Figure 55. Principal Salinas meets with parents in Parent Center

Figure 56. Parent Tutor, Beatrice works one to one with a student

APPENDIX D:

VITA

Vita

Lisa Kay Hall – Irby was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and moved to Rushville,

Indiana. In 1980 she graduated as a National Honor Society student from Rushville

Consolidated High School. She attended The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale in Fort

Lauderdale, Florida and studied photography for a year. From 1981-1985 she pursued

and graduated with a double major in Spanish and Linguistics from Indiana University in

Bloomington, Indiana. In the course of her undergraduate career she studied in the 1984

Summer Overseas Project as an exchange student at La Universidad Iberoamericana in

Mexico City. Also during her last year at Indiana University she participated in a four

month cultural immersion experience in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas called the Latino

Project. After her graduation in 1985 from Indiana University she returned to the Rio

Grande Valley and attended Pan American University where she obtained her Masters

Degree in Guidance and Counseling in 1987. During this period she worked as a

substitute teacher and later acquired her teaching certificate. From 1987 – 1999 she

taught elementary students in the Texas school system for 11 years, and in this course of

time she was a two time recipient of Who's Who Among America's Teachers.

In 1999-2002 she was selected to be a full time doctoral Kellogg Fellow with

the Hispanic Border Leadership Institute at The University of Texas - Pan American in

Edinburg, Texas. Her interests focus on bridging the gaps between the home, school, and

community spheres as well as training educational leaders, parents, and community

members to successfully engage in effective collaboration practices.