There is very little known about specific types of parent involvement in ethnically diverse communities and few studies which capture the perspectives of administrators belonging to a specific minority ethnic group.

Hispanic Principals' Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Ethnically Diverse Schools

Trudy Campbell and Lori Navarrete

> "You cannot have a successful school without parent support. You can't do it. If the parents are not going to work with you, you are not going to succeed. I don't care how good or bad you are. Parents can make a bad principal pretty good. They can make a good principal great, you know. Parents should understand they have to support their school and they do. Like I said, invite them, let them participate, make them feel welcome." (Canino, et al, 1989)

A television documentary airing in the early 1990s, "Learning in America: Schools That Work", identified several characteristics which were common to schools where children really did learn. In each school, dramatic changes in behavior and test scores were attributed to the collaboration of teachers, a strong belief in schools as necessary to a democracy, independence from local districts, a commitment to children, and of most importance to the study being reported here . . . principals who shared authority and parents who were involved. Although many criticize the effective schools research literature for its superficial treatment of parental involvement (Comer, Haynes, Hamilton–Lee, 1987–88), there is a substantial amount of literature which identifies key elements in building successful school–parent partnerships (Willis, 1987). One important element is shared decision-making in areas such as curricula, school reform, discipline, student personnel, and equity issues.

Adding to the concern for parent involvement is the role ethnicity plays in how partnerships and interactions occur. U.S. demographics have indicated that the number of Spanish-speaking people is projected to increase to more than 22 million by the year 2000. (Macias, 1993). Latinos and other racial/ethnic minority groups currently comprise the majority of public school students in two of the nation's largest states. (Garcia, 1991; Valencia, 1991) This shift in demographics will heighten the need for successful strategies in working effectively with Hispanic parents.

Researchers have begun to examine the influence of culture and educational background on how families teach their children and work with schools. Studies have included African American families (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1980, 1988; McAdoo, 1981; Scott–Jones, 1987); Chinese American families (Sung, 1987; Siu, 1982); Hispanic families (Canino, Earley, & Rogler, 1989; Delgado & Humm–Delgado, 1982; Delgado–Gaitan, 1990); economically challenged families (Klimes–Dougan, Lopez, & Adelman, 1992; Lareau, 1987); and the families of special needs learners (Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, 1996; Sontag & Schacht, 1994). However, there is very little known about specific types of parent involvement in ethnically diverse communities and few studies which capture the perspectives of administrators belonging to a specific minority ethnic group.

The study which follows is an exploratory investigation of Hispanic elementary principals' perceptions of parent involvement in schools with high Hispanic student enrollments. There were two main objectives for conducting the study. The researchers first wanted to identify principals' perceptions of the types of parent involvement existing in their school. Second, the study sought to understand which personal and professional characteristics of the principals were perceived as having the most impact on successful parent involvement.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical perspectives on family-school partnerships are based on the separate, sequenced, embedded or overlapping influence of each (Epstein, 1987; Epstein, 1992). The separate influence emphasizes the importance of isolated and separate contributions that the family and school make to society. This view assumes that families and school are most efficient and effective when they work independently of each other (Parsons, 1959; Waller, 1932). The sequenced influence identifies a sequence of critical stages in which parents and teachers contribute to a child's development and education. For example, while parents impact early years of life, educators assume major responsibility for the education of the school-aged child (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). A third perspective, embedded influence, focuses on potential effects on individuals of the multiple events and environments in which they are members (i.e., developmental change and broad cultural systems). (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) A fourth model, and one which provides a foundation for this study, involves overlapping influences of family–school relationships (Epstein, 1987). Family–school relationships in this social-organizational perspective is illustrated as two overlapping spheres which can be pushed together or be pulled apart by practices and interpersonal forces in each environment. Time, ages, grade levels, and behavior impact the extent of "push" and "pull" in this relationship. Epstein (1987) later added a third sphere which represents the community to reflect family-school-community partnerships.

In an effort to define involvement, scholars and practitioners suggest that within the area of overlap of the family–school spheres of influence (fourth model), five important types of involvement help families and schools fulfill their shared responsibilities for children's learning and development (Epstein, 1987). A sixth type incorporates the community as a sphere of influence. The types are as follows:

Type 1: Basic obligations of families
Type 2: Basic obligations of schools
Type 3: Involvement at school

Trudy Campbell is an Assistant Professor in Educational Administration and Leadership at Kansas State University.

Lori Navarrete is an Assistant Professor in Special Education at Kansas State University.

Type 4: Involvement in learning activities at home
Type 5: Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy
Type 6: Collaboration and exchange with community organizations

Several studies have identified one or more types of involvement occurring in schools (Epstein, & Salinas, 1992; Kreinberg & Thompson, 1986). Other studies and projects have worked with communities to strengthen family–school partnerships by applying the six types of involvement (Davis, 1991; Epstein & Herrick, 1991; Krasnow, 1990).

Data Collection and Analysis

An exploratory study of principals' perceptions of parent involvement is phenomenological in nature. It seeks answers to the question "what is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990). In this case, what is the structure and essence of experience of parent involvement for Hispanic principals in schools with high percentages of Hispanic children? Exploratory studies are generally conducted for the purpose of investigating little understood phenomena, to identify or discover important variables, or to generate hypotheses for further research (Marshall, & Rossman, 1995). Field studies typically use data collection techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, or elite interviewing.

In this case, in-depth semi-structured interviews of elementary principals were conducted at 11 (total) school sites in both rural and urban communities in the southwest. The principals were selected on the basis of ethnicity (all were Hispanic), gender (four female and seven male), and for location (five urban, and six rural). Five sites were all located in the same urban school district with student populations ranging from 72 to 90% Hispanic. The six rural sites were located in communities near the urban school district selected for study. Schools in the rural communities had student populations ranging from 48 to 99% Hispanic. The process of determining selection units (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) is consistent with qualitative designs where researchers identify populations for investigation using whatever criteria are relevant to establishing the boundaries of the phenomena. In this case, selection of units was directed by the researchers' intent of representing a range of existing perceptions within elementary schools led by Hispanic principals (location, gender, experience).

In more conventional research designs, concerns of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are addressed. With this phenomenological investigation, the researchers sought to establish credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln, & Guba, 1990) by using the techniques of triangulation (using multiple sources of data which included additional parent interviews, journal notes, and a researcher team), peer debriefing to establish accuracy in coding, and maintenance of materials and journal entries necessary for confirmability of the data.

The interviews were tape recorded and were approximately 30–60 minutes in length. The interview guide used with principals included the questions below as well as general demographic information about the principal, school, and community.

Principal Interview Guide

1. Could you describe for me some examples of how decisions are made in your school (with respect to curriculum, school reform, discipline, equity, student personnel)?
2. What role do you see parents playing in each of the examples you just described?
3. How do you believe your formal (informal) training has helped you to establish a partnership with parents?
4. What personal characteristics do you have which help you to establish a partnership with parents?
5. Can you describe a few of the most successful strategies you have seen for working with parents as partners?

Data analysis followed processes as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). While in the field, researchers began developing analytic questions, speculating and marking the data to highlight key words, phrases, and plausible ideas. After leaving the field, transcripts of all interviews were prepared from the tape recordings to capture verbatim descriptions from the participants. These transcripts were used to develop coding categories consisting of (1) types of parent involvements (the six types described in the conceptual framework); (2) personal (language, culture, personality) and professional characteristics (formal and informal training) of the principals which were perceived as influencing involvement.

Results of the Study

The analysis of types of parent involvement reported by principals revealed use of all six types but that the most frequent types of involvement were Type 3 (involvement at school), Type 5 (involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy), and Type 6 (collaboration and exchange with community organizations). The least frequent type of involvement cited was Type 1 (basic obligations of families).

Principal	Frequency of Types of Involvement					
Code	1	2	3	4	5	6
U1	1	3	1	3	9	0
U2	0	1	8	0	10	0
U3	6	7	7	4	23	3
U4	4	6	8	1	14	9
U5	0	7	11	1	9	8
R1	4	2	14	5	5	13
R2	0	5	6	4	10	1
R3	1	7	11	1	11	10
R4	0	3	3	0	8	8
R5	0	1	2	6	31	3
R6	0	7	14	0	14	17
(Total)	16	49	85	25	144	72

It should be noted that these frequencies are being used to show patterns or trends. Each reference to a type of involvement, whether is was considered positive or negative, was coded. In some cases, an involvement activity could receive two codes (e.g. when parent training helped with both basic obligations of families to fulfill nutrition requirements and to provide activities to increase learning).

The personal characteristic considered most influential in involving parents was an understanding of the community culture by virtue of having been raised as a member of a Hispanic community. The word "respect" and "respect for one's elders" surfaced in a majority of the interviews. The second most notable characteristic had to do with "an easy going" personality. It was considered very effective if you were able to listen without reacting negatively and keep the conversation on an informal basis. Finally, the use of Spanish to communicate was viewed as a real asset in promoting parent involvement.

> "I am bilingual. I think that language is the most personal thing that a person owns. It's part of who they are. It's part of their culture. It's part of their identity. When I am able to speak Spanish to my Spanish-speaking parents, I just feel an instant bond." [U1]

When questioned about formal and informal training (professional characteristics) the principals had received on the topic of parent involvement, there was a very consistent mes-

sage. Nearly every principal noted the need for university coursework (formal training) to contain more "hands-on" experiences. The theory and "book learning" was minimally helpful and more practical experience and learning was almost nonexistent. Informal training events perceived to be useful were prior work experience in other roles, some district workshops, and primarily on the job experiences.

Implications of the Findings

The preponderance of Type 5 involvements (decision making and governance) must be interpreted in the context of the administrative role. Most of the examples were related to formal structures at the federal, state, and district level requiring parents be on advisory councils or boards. There were distinctions made as to when the decisions were really made by parents and when there was simply input by virtue of being on an advisory board or council and varied at each school.

> "If the principal feels comfortable with certain issues, especially with parents or teachers, then we do so [let them make the decisions.]" [U2]

The emergence of Type 6 involvements (collaborative exchange with community agencies) shows great promise for expanding ownership and securing support for schools. Most of the examples involved either the use of facilities for community functions or instruction or provision of resources by local businesses and government programs. Especially in the case of rural communities, the school-community-parent collaboration was seen as vital.

> "So we do a lot of sharing and the school is like the center of activity because in small communities you don't have theaters, you don't have bowling alleys, you don't have things of that nature but the school becomes a real nucleus to the whole community . . . " [R3]

Type 3 involvements (volunteering) continue to be common and yet they are not the most powerful determiners of student achievement. The most troubling finding is the lack of reporting Type 1 (basic obligations of families) given the demographics of the communities. A majority of the sites had very high percentages of low income and single parent families (and in the case of urban schools the families were living in areas with high crime rates and violence.)

> "I remember people coming from different parts of the country and saying, what's wrong with these parents? They don't care about their kids. I said, you know, they really do care about their kids, but they have other priorities. Some of them are the very basics . . . food, shelter, and clothing. From Maslow's hierarchy if you haven't gotten past those levels, you aren't going to get to any of the other levels." [U1]

> "Overall, the parent responsibility, according to my viewpoint, is that the parents assume a certain amount of responsibility for making decisions every day that involve the school. For example, whether they get the kids here on time or whether they are fed. So, there is a lot of participation that I don't think has been recognized because it has been involved more in a pseudo or intellectual description. But in a grassroots description there is a lot of involvement." [U3]

The personal and professional characteristics also have implications for furthering parent involvement in schools. An urban principal raises what may be a key to understanding his work in a predominantly Hispanic environment.

> "One of the questions asks about parent involvement [on a survey], and the majority of people said that they were involved about as much as they wanted to be. In other words, they feel they have a say in how things are done and what goes on in their child's school." "As I mentioned earlier they are Hispanic. I have heard lots and lots of comments from the, and the say that as long as you are doing a good job, I don't need to be at school checking up on you or seeing how you are doing." "I think that is a little bit of a cultural thing." "That was the way I grew up. My mom and dad never went to school unless there was a problem." [U2]

While the traditional Hispanic culture has held this respect and trust for schools, if principals want more involvement of the types found in the current literature, it will mean either recognizing and appreciating less reported types (Type 1 for example) or educating families as to the need for more participation through activities found in sharing in the learning (Type 4) and decision making (Type 5).

> "They [the parents] need to become familiar with the school from one end to the other before they can be actively involved in it. I have found that the most adamant supporters among those parents that are really actively involved, at least two or three times a day here at school, that they understand the issues of educating children, the issues of time management, the issues of materials, and then you have people that know how to make a decision, that won't have a domino effect on other parts of the school." [U5]

> "I think there are different levels of development in parents and their parenting skills." "I can see them feeling about school the same way I feel about approaching a hospital or doctor's office. You get a clammy, nervous, sick feeling." "I think those people have to be approached in a very basic way, just come and have cookies and punch." [U1]

The other personal characteristics point to an attitude, or way of viewing the world. Schools in charge of hiring administrators may wish to explore the belief systems and attitudes of prospective principals. A respect for all people involved in education is critical and becomes even more complex in diverse cultural settings.

> "We grew up with that idea that no one is a stranger, and you talk to anyone because for you to deny somebody 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' was not your right because the day was not yours. O.K. You made the day by the way that you functioned within your society and I think that's been a real help to me because it doesn't matter to me who the person is, be it Native American, Black, it doesn't matter. I make them feel at home." [R3]

This study has identified the types of involvement most prevalent in schools with large Hispanic populations. It has described the personal and professional characteristics the principals considered most useful in establishing parent involvement. It has also discovered some concerns which need further exploration. First, are the frequency and types of involvements similar to those in majority culture schools? Would the recognition of Type 1 involvements and the development of more strategies to increase their use be more culturally appropriate in Hispanic communities? Would it be more effective to study involvement based on the developmental levels of the parents rather than the types of involvement? Perhaps one urban principal [U1] has pointed the direction toward a more culturally appropriate model of investigation when she describes the developmental stages of parents and their involvement in schools.

Stage 1 Sharing in the home

> "Before the cookies and punch group, we have the parents who just don't come in. At that point, what I think we should do is go to the parents and work with them in their homes to help them."

Stage 2 Attendance at school functions

"Just come and have cookies and punch. You don't have to talk or do anything, just be there."

Stage 3 Helping (non-instructional)

"The next stage would be where they feel comfortable in helping with some planning. When you call some parents to help with a group project, it's possible they don't lead, or they don't know the answers to the very basic elementary things we are teaching their kids. They are very embarrassed to admit that. So, I think it's a good point to always ask them what they would like to do."

Stage 4 Classroom involvement

"The parents' involvement in the individual classrooms is actually better, on that small-scale, individual teacher to parent level than it is school-wide. I think possibly their comfort zone is just better. "

Stage 5 Parent leadership

"I think another step of that parent involvement would be to get parents involved in the leadership and decision making for the school."

References

1. Alper, S., Schloss, P. J., & Schloss, C. N. (1996). Families of children with disabilities in elementary and middle school: Advocacy models and strategies. *Exceptional Children, 62*(3), 261–270.
2. Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
3. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Development Psychology, 22*, 723–742.
4. Canino, I. Earley, B. & Rogler, L. (1989). *The Puerto Rican child in New York City:* Stress and mental health. (Monograph No. 4.) Bronx, NY: Hispanic Research Center.
5. Clark, R. (1983). *Family life and school achievement: Why poor black children succeed and fail.* Chicago: University Press.
6. Comer, J. P. (1980). *School power: Implications of an intervention project.* New York, NY: Free Press.
7. Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. *Scientific American, 259*(5), 42–48.
8. Comer, J. P.; Haynes, N. H.; & Hamilton–Lee, M. School power:A model for improving black student achievement. *The Urban League Review, 11*(1–2), 187–200.
9. Davies, D. (1991). Schools reaching out: Family, school and community partnerships for students success. *Phi Delta Kappan, 72*(3), 376–382.
10. Delgado, M. & Humm–Delgado, D. (1982). Natural support systems: Source of strength in Hispanic communities. *Social Work, 27*, 81–90.
11. Delgado–Gaitan, C. (1990). *Literacy for empowerment: The role of parents in children's education.* New York, NY: The Falmer Press.
12. Epstein, J. L. (1987). Toward a theory of family–school connections: Teacher practices and parents involvement. In K. Hurrelman, F. Kaufmann, & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints.* New York, NY: DeGruyter.
13. Epstein, J. L. (1992). *School and family partnerships* (Report No. R117Q00031). Washington, DC: Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning: (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343 715)
14. Epstein, J. L. & Herrick, S. C. (1990). *Implementing school and family partnerships in the middle grades: Three evaluation of summer home learning packets, school newsletter, and orientation days* (CDS Report No. 20). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students.
15. Epstein, J.L. &Salinas, K. C. (1992). *Promising programs in the middle grades.* Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
16. Garcia, J. E. (1991, September 7) Minorities in Texas' schools are majority. *Austin American-Statesman*, pp. A1, A6.
17. Klimes–Dougan, B., Lopez, J. A., Nelson, P., & Adelman, H.. (1992). Two studies of low income parents' involvement in schooling. *The Urban Review, 24*(3), 185–202.
18. Krasnow, J. (1990). Building new parent–teacher partnerships: Teacher research teams stimulate reflection. *Equity and Choice, 6*(3), 25–30.
19. Kreinberg, N. & Thompson, V. (1986). *Family math: Report of activities.* Berkeley, CA: University of California.
20. Lareau, A. (1987, April). Social class differences in family–school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education, 60*, 73–85.
21. *Learning in America. Schools that work.* (1990). Washington, DC: McNeil–Lehrer Productions & GWETA.
22. LeCompte, M. D. & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* New York, NY: Academic Press.
23. Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1991). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
24. Macias, R. F. (1993). Language and ethnic classification of language minorities: Chicano and Latino students in the 1990s. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 230–257.
25. Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
26. McAdoo, H. (1981). *Black families.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
27. Parson, T. (1959). The school class as a social system: Some of its functions in American society. *Harvard Educational Review, 29*, 297–318.
28. Patton, M. G. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
29. Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (1969). *The psychology of the child.* New York, NY: Basic Books.
30. Scott–Jones, D. (1987). Mother-as-teacher in the families of high- and low-achieving low-income Black first-graders. *Journal of Negro Education, 56*, 21–34.
31. Siu, S. (1992). *Toward an understanding of Chinese–American educational achievement: A literature review* (Report No. 2). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University on Families, Communities, School and Children's Learning.
32. Sontag, J. C. & Schacht, R. (1994). An ethnic comparison of parent participation and information needs in early intervention. *Exceptional Children, 60*(5), 422–433.

33. Sung, B. L. (1987). *Chinese immigrant children in New York City*. New York, NY: Center for Migrations Studies.
34. Valencia, R. R. (1991). The plight of Chicano students: An overview of schooling considerations and outcomes. In R. R. Valencia (Ed.), *Chicano school failure and success: Research and policy agendas for the 1990s* (Stanford Series on Education and Public Policy, pp. 3–26). Basingstoke, England: Falmer.
35. Waller, W. (1932). *The sociology of teaching*. New York, NY: Russell and Russell.
36. Willis, C. L. (1987). Strengthening the bonds between the school and the community. *Journal of Educational Public Relations, 9*, 25–31.