A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN CULTURALLY AND

LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE HOMES OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

by

David Gilmer Barber

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of

Education

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ABSTRACT

I examined the home environment and the amount of academic support non-English speaking parents are able to provide for their English Language Learner (ELL) children in the United States school system. In particular, the focus is on the families of children who struggle academically in the state of Georgia, where non-English speaking children are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms with limited support. Although there has been a great deal of research on how ELLs learn and what type of program can be used to best facilitate mastery of academics as they are learning the English language, the focal point of this study is the ELL parents' perspective on what the staff of the school system can do in order to assist them as they seek to help their children succeed in school. The parents interviewed in this study had children who attended a Title I Distinguished School in a small, rural town in Georgia. Selection was based on the academic status of the children, specifically targeting students who: (a) did not read on grade level, (b) struggled in mathematics and language arts, and (c) generally did not experience success in school. Through the use of focus groups, interviews were conducted with individual parents and teachers, and students' academic records were examined. From the collected data, five major themes were identified, which addressed the key issue of the study: how to assist non-English speaking parents help their children achieve academic success in school.

Descriptors: Hispanic parental involvement, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners, CLD achievement gap, Second Language Acquisition Theory, English language learners (ELL)

Dedication

In my educational career, there have been three teachers who have, through their example and influence, changed the course of my life. My high school Bible teacher, Miss Catherine Brazell, had an amazing impact on my life. It was through her teaching of the Word of God that I came to realize my need for a Savior and give my heart and life to Christ. "Miss B" took me "under her wing" and challenged me to "live godly in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:12). Not only did she help me as a fledgling Christian get established in the Word of God, she consistently encouraged me to develop and use my gifts to educate young people. She was instrumental in my decision to attend Columbia Bible College, now Columbia International University, where I met the second teacher who made an indelible mark on my life. G. William Supplee, director of the music department at CIU for many years, not only imparted to me a rich, biblically sound preparation in music and worship, but also modeled a life of godly, selfless obedience to the Lord. "Mr." and "Mrs." consistently lived the Gospel in our presence, challenging me to build every aspect of my life on scriptural principles. The third individual who has had a tremendous impact on my life is my pastor/teacher of over a quarter century, Dr. Howard Dial. His pastoral care, sound, expository preaching and teaching, and wise, godly counsel have been instrumental in helping me stay on track spiritually and maintain my walk with God.

This most significant achievement of my journey of life-long learning is dedicated to the glory of God in a spirit of deep gratefulness for these individuals have been used by God to impact my life for the Gospel. "I thank my God for every remembrance of you." (Philippians 1:3)

Acknowledgements

I realize that I have not accomplished this study and dissertation on my own. I have done the work, wrestled with the data, written, edited, and re-written many times. But I have not done it alone. I am deeply appreciative of many who have played a vital role in this major accomplishment.

First of all, I want to thank my wonderful wife, Nancy, for all her support, encouragement, and help along the way. It has not been easy for her. She drove many miles while I read books and wrote papers. She has been the constant in my life that has kept me on track and focused. She is the epitome of the excellent wife in Scripture. "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." (Proverbs 31:29, NIV) Thanks, too, to my children who have never known their dad without a paper to write or a project to complete. You are the reason I keep on "pressing on." (Philippians 3:12-14)

My colleague and friend, Dr. Debbie Collins, has also been a special help along the way. She encouraged me, helped me think things through, and was totally supportive of this endeavor. I appreciate her example of godly, servant-leadership and her heart for children of our school.

Dr. Joan Fitzpatrick, my chair, has been a rock for me to lean on. Her advice, encouragement, and guidance have helped me stay the course. I truly appreciate my pastor, Dr. Howard Dial, and Dr. Jose Puga for serving on my committee.

Ms. Maggie Centis, my interpreter, was absolutely amazing through this entire project. Her rapport with the parents, her expertise with the culture, and her skillful translation were key elements of the success of this project. Dr. Russell Yocum, research consultant, and Dr. Sharon Sweet, editor, were also valuable members of this team.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In schools today, there are more students who did not grow up speaking English in their homes than at any other time (Araujo, 2009). In classrooms today, there are numerous students, who were born and raised in another country. In addition, many neighborhoods are comprised of a variety of households where both the language and culture of those homes are different from those of the larger school community (Ortiz and Pagan, 2009). These students are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and present the faculty of the schools in the United States with a unique set of challenges.

Regardless of their previous educational experiences, academic proficiency, or possible learning challenges, these students have entered the U.S. educational system with two potential barriers: limited proficiency in the English language and a home culture that is not familiar with the U.S. system of education. Both of these challenges were addressed in this study, although the primary emphasis was on the culture of the home and the support that parents were able to provide for their CLD students.

Statement of the Problem

The number of CLD students in U.S. public schools has increased exponentially, nearly 95%, over the past 10 years (NCELA, 2004). Of those non-English speaking students in U.S. schools, 80% are Spanish speakers (Teale, 2009). Also, as urban centers become overcrowded, more and more CLD families move to rural communities. The community members of the target school in this study have experienced this rapid increase in non-English-speaking families. The faculty of nearly every school in the district is faced with the growing challenge to ensure academic success for students who bring a variety of cultural differences to the school setting. The CLD students in these

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classrooms struggle with both English language acquisition and learning to read and write.

The gap in achievement between middle-class, white, monolingual English-speaking children and CLD children in the academic areas continues, as demonstrated in the results from state-mandated testing, such as the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (GADOE, 2005-2008). The CRCT is administered each spring to students in Grades 1-8 to assess their progress in meeting or exceeding the knowledge and skills prescribed in the performance standards of the rigorous state curriculum (GADOE, 2005-2008). Because of this on-going achievement gap, even with the implementation of strategies based on best practices by qualified teachers in the classrooms, this study was developed to examine the element of the CLD student's support system at home. The main objective was to take into account the perspective of the parents in regard to their expectations of how school staff can help them support their children in school.

The members of this growing population, who do not fit the status quo, present a challenge I believe can be viewed by school leaders in various ways. Some may view this change as a challenge; for others, it is perceived as an insurmountable problem. To a large degree, the way in which educators view these students, who have entered their ranks, depends on the mindset of the leadership. In some schools or school systems, there may be a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity to the specific needs of students from other cultures. Even the terminology used to describe students from homes where English is not spoken as their primary language is indicative of the perspective, which many school personnel hold toward these learners.

Important Terminology Used in This Study

The use of certain terminology can influence one's perception of people and events. Through participation in educational workshops and leadership seminars, this author has observed that the tenor of a discussion is often colored by the terminology employed, whether positive or negative. Terms used to describe these learners who have migrated to U.S. schools from all over the globe include: (a) Limited English Proficient (LEP), (b) English Learners (EL), (c) Second Language Learners (SLL), (d) English Language Learners (ELL), and (e) Culturally Linguistically Diverse (CLD). Because a teacher's perception of a student greatly influences his or her expectations for that student, and labeling a student can notably bias one's opinion of the student's abilities, the use of labels can affect outcomes (Pagan, 2009). The terms, LEP, EL, SLL, and ELL, suggest that the main task of education is to develop an infrastructure that will facilitate the acquisition of English for these students. This kind of thinking perpetuates the myth that, if students would just learn English, everything else would fall into place academically (Pagan). English language deficiency becomes the focus of instruction, when students are labeled with one of these acronyms, because teachers tend to equate the inability to speak a language with cognitive ability. Only one term is appropriate for these students, who are culturally and linguistically different from those in the mainstream of U.S. schools. Reference to learners as CLD suggests that, whereas acquisition of the English language is certainly important, the focus is on the learner, his or her background, and the necessity to develop literacy and provide instruction in academic content. The widespread use of the term, ELL, in education necessitates its usage at times in this study. In deference to my motivation and desire to build positive

relationships with families in the system, who have diverse practices culturally and linguistically, the term CLD will be used predominantly in this dissertation.

Typically, in U.S. education, there is a widespread use of acronyms for programs, organizations, methodologies, assessments, strategies, and even classification of students. The following terms are used commonly in educational contexts and are important for the understanding of various perceptions of students with cultural and linguistic differences:

CLD: Culturally and linguistically diverse, denotes diversity in both culture and language from that of the larger community (Pagan, 2009).

ELL: English language learner, a minority student who is limited in English language proficiency. It is considered a more positive term than Limited English Proficient (LEP) (OCR, n.d.).

ESL: English as a Second Language, a program designed to teach ELL students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. Typically, ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of the native language (OCR, n.d.).

ESOL: English to speakers of other languages is the name of the ESL program in the state of Georgia (OCR, n.d.).

FEP: Fluent, or fully, English proficient (OCR, n.d.).

LEP: Limited-English-proficient, a somewhat negative term used to describe those who do not have a functional command of the English language (OCR, n.d.).

NEP: Non-English-proficient, a term used to classify those individuals who have little or no working knowledge of the English language (OCR, n.d.).

Acronyms for important programs and major pieces of legislation that have an impact on the instruction of CLD students include the following:

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress, the measure by which schools are judged to determine their effectiveness in reduction of the achievement gaps that exist between various subgroups. It is part of the accountability established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

CRCT: Criterion Referenced Competency Test, a battery of tests administered to students in the state of Georgia annually to determine if adequate progress has been made academically (GADOE, 2005-2008).

NCLB: No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, legislation enacted during the Bush administration that places various levels of accountability on schools and school systems to ensure that students are making adequate academic progress (NCLB, 2001).

In addition to the acronyms that pervade the educational world, there are several programs and legislative acts**,** not already identified, that warrant definition in order for the reader to understand the importance of this study. The following list is not all inclusive, but contains many of the most pertinent programs:

Dual Language Program, a program in which students receive instruction in English and another language in a mixed classroom of native English speakers and speakers of the other language (OCR, n.d.).

Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974, this federal statute prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunity by the failure of a school or district to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that hinder equal participation by its students in its educational programs (OCR, n.d.).

Structured English Immersion Program, all instruction in an immersion strategy program is in English so the student will be able to be successful in an English-only mainstream classroom. Teachers have either a bilingual education or an ESL teaching credential as well as strong receptive skills in the students' primary language (OCR, n.d.).

Submersion Program, ELL students are placed in a regular English-only program with little or no support services**;** the assumption is that they will pick up English naturally. This program does not provide the support found in a structured English immersion program (OCR, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

At the beginning of kindergarten, it becomes evident quickly that many students from non-English speaking homes arrive with a deficit in preparedness for the kindergarten curriculum. I have observed this lack of preparation over a number of years as I worked closely with kindergarten teachers who screen incoming students. The disparity in achievement and lack of preparedness for learning the basics of kindergarten appears to be symptomatic of CLD students at other grade levels, as well. Possibly, due to a lack in their acquisition of the English language, many CLD learners struggle with the academic rigors of the U.S. school system. A limited understanding of the second language can create a barrier, which may greatly hinder student achievement**.** It was this author's desire to better understand the parents' perspective about how they could help their children in a U.S. school in order to examine the background of CLD students and the level of academic support provided in their homes.

Many CLD children come from homes where there is no viable means of academic support for them, and they are at a notable disadvantage when they attend

school. Guerrero (2004) reported that CLD students enter school with varying levels of proficiency in their first language, and this directly affects, either positively or negatively, the process of second-language acquisition. The language barrier impacts CLD students' achievement and maintains the academic gap between them and their native English-speaking peers.

Whereas most parents of CLD students wish for their children to be academically successful and are highly motivated to help their children (Goldenberg, 2006), there are barriers. Often, these barriers are related to a negative school environment and a deficit perspective with which teachers and administrators address the education of CLD students. Combined with a lack of proficiency in English, low education levels of the parents, logistical challenges of work and child care, there is an apparent disconnect between the CLD home and the school (Azzam, 2009). Educational leaders need to develop and implement strategies that will support the CLD home in order to enable parents to provide the academic support needed by their children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project was to discover, from the perspective of CLD parents, how school staff can best support them as they seek to help their children succeed academically in U.S. schools and determine appropriate strategies they can use to help their students be successful academically. The elimination of school-based barriers and an understanding of the culture of CLD homes will enable educators to develop successful strategies to assist parents in support of their children academically.

In the U.S. school system, and specifically in Georgia, the accepted approach for instruction is structured immersion, in which non-English speaking children are placed in

the mainstream classroom and given academic support by a certified English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher. Although there are many factors that impact a child's ability to learn, Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) found that parental involvement increases student achievement. They examined the impact of parental involvement in several high-achieving schools, which were heavily populated with migrant Hispanic families and determined that there was a correlation between parental involvement and students' academic performance. As a result of this study, school personnel at the target school may be able to develop effective strategies that will enable parents to better support their children as they learn to read and write in English. Ultimately, the findings may positively impact the level of support CLD parents are able to provide for their children at home.

Summary

In U.S. schools, educators are responsive to the trends of demography within their districts. The growth of the Hispanic population in the district in which the target school is located has prompted examination of the achievement gap that exists between the Hispanic and Caucasian subgroups. Educators realize the important role parents play in overall student achievement, and want to develop a partnership with parents that will ensure success for each student. Barriers to that process need to be addressed.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover from the perspective of the CLD parents, how educators can support them as they seek to help their children achieve success in school. A review of literature addressing the challenges faced by CLD families as they seek to assimilate into the U.S. educational system will examine the achievement gap experienced by CLD students, best practices in literacy for these students, and what

role parents can take in supporting their children at home. The hindrances to parental

involvement on the part of CLD parents will also be investigated as it relates to providing

academic support in the home.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of academic support in the homes of students, who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). In many of these homes, parents have limited resources due to: (a) the confines of their own educational experience, (b) the boundaries of their socioeconomic status, and (c) their inability to speak English. The focus of much of the literature is on the CLD students' learning in the classroom (Brown, 2004). The purpose of this study was to ascertain how teachers and administrators in schools can support parents and provide the resources they need in order to help their children be more successful in school.

Learning to Read

Learning to read and then reading to learn is a foundational aspect of the United States educational system, but before a growing percentage of students in the public school system can learn to read, they need to learn to speak English. Researchers at the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA, 2004) found that, from 1995-2005, the population of CLD students in the U.S. public schools increased by 95%. With close to 5 million students in the U.S., who learn English as a second language, while they learn academic content, the staff of nearly every school are challenged with the need to meet the particular academic needs of CLDs. Given the trend to mainstreaming and pull-out programs in many schools, teachers can now expect to have CLD students in their classrooms during most of the school day (Christian & Bloome, 2004).

There is a need to understand the development of reading and language acquisition for CLD students and the factors that influence this development, especially the influence of the home. Also, there is a need to understand the influence of the community and peer culture on the motivation of CLD students to develop proficiency in literacy. In addition to the challenges of the school system itself, immigrant parents may not understand there are academic standards of accountability imposed by federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) which have an impact on their child's learning. Educators have not fully been able to grasp and implement NCLB nearly 10 years after the ratification of those sweeping directives. These challenges for CLD parents are clearly compounded by the language barrier.

Collier and Thomas (1997) found that for students for whom English is a second language, if they were reading on grade level in their native language, it would take 4-7 years for them to achieve the 50th percentile in reading in English. This finding was supported by the later findings of Collier (1999) and Cummins (2001), who observed that it takes a person 1-3 years to develop conversational fluency in English and 5-7 years to develop academic English. Educators must focus on the community and the home in order to emphasize the importance of providing a language-rich and literacy-rich environment for CLD students in the home during those critical preschool years. If students do not have a foundation of literacy experiences, they begin school at a disadvantage compared to students who have been exposed to books and reading in those early years. Cummins (1979), a leading authority on bilingual education and second language acquisition (SLA), coined two terms to distinguish between two different kinds of language acquisition. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) refers to the

social dimension of language acquisition, which involves context-embedded language typically experienced in face-to-face conversations in a social setting. Essentially, this is how one learn**s** a second language in order to function in day-to-day life. Whereas cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to the more abstract side of language acquisition that equips students to handle the academic demands placed on them in the school environment. This particular set of skills involves master**y** of vocabulary and understanding of the concepts necessary to be successful in school. Many children develop BICS within 2 years of immersion in the target language **(**Cummins**,** 1991**)**, whereas the achievement of CALP and ability to operate on a comparable level with native language speakers academically requires from 5-7 years (Cummins, 2001).

Recognition of this disparity between everyday language and academic language acquisition raises questions in regard to best practices in teaching students whose first language is not English, as well as the kind of academic support needed at home. In Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence Theory**,** the importance of developing literacy and learning skills in a student's first language is established. These concepts and skills are transferred to the acquired language; thus, proficiency in the primary language provides the student with a foundation for learning in the second language. This concept of the transfer of learning is present in the taxonomy of learning developed by Bloom in the mid 1950s (Atherton, 2009). Atherton suggested that the taxonomy shows a progression from simply knowing facts, the lowest level of the continuum, to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and finally, evaluation. The ability to transfer learning in a second language is preceded by efficacy in transferring learning in one's native language. With this understanding of how students transfer learning in mind,

it would seem logical that there would be a notable correlation between student achievement in CLD students, who receive support at home from parents who speak only their native language, as opposed to those who are already fluent in the second language. This disparity in how educators prepare CLD children academically raises a question in regard to how best the school staff can support CLD parents, since there is no preliminary instruction in the native language, which would help students progress on the continuum of cognitive contextualization of ideas as suggested by Bloom (Atherton, 2009). This could account for the gaps in learning, which have been documented in various nationally recognized reports (NCLEA, 2004).

There seems to be an abundance of articles and websites, whose authors suggest the most effective strategies to teach non-English speaking children to read in the classroom. Many studies are based on the topic of the regular education classroom teacher and his or her lack of training to teach CLD students. I have identified some initial research studies (Chamberlain, 2005; Rolon, 2005) in regard to resources for Hispanic families, but few address the CLD parents' perspective, nor do they present the most effective ways for school personnel to assist parents to help their own children. Hyslop (2000) suggested that, often, Hispanic parents are unfamiliar with strategies to help their children succeed in school. Barone (2011), however, not only suggested strategies for helping Hispanic students learning, but also focused on helping parents help their own children. Some of the hurdles these non-English proficient (NEP) parents must overcome include: (a) cultural differences, (b) misunderstandings regarding their expectations of the school, (c) feelings of inadequacy or anxiety because of their own experiences in school, as well as (d) the language barrier. Other factors, such as low

socioeconomic status, limited literacy resources, and lack of educational advantage (Rivera, 2009), create barriers for Hispanic children's academic success in the U.S. educational system.

The CLD Achievement Gap

According to "The Nation's Report Card" provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2009), consistently, Hispanic students perform below the national average, in fact, a full 26% points below Whites (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2007). The achievement gap between Hispanic and White students as they progress through elementary school indicates that a lower percentage of Hispanic children have sufficient reading comprehension skills**,** which are required to do well in upper elementary school and to succeed in secondary school. Garcia and Gonzalez (2006) maintained that the most important brain development takes place by age 5. A key factor for language-minority students is to be able to construct meaning from what they read. In order to accomplish meaning construction**,** they must have strong background knowledge, normally attained through life experiences. For the CLD child from a low socioeconomic background, these experiences could be limited or almost non-existent. School **s**upport for the CLD home could have a definite impact on this limitation.

There is disagreement among educators (Cummins, 2001) as to how best to serve CLD students in the population. In many school districts, including the district of the target school, CLD students are taught with a total immersion or submersion (OCR, n.d.) philosophy. These CLD students are mainstreamed in the classroom where all instruction is in English. At some point, in the target school district, services are provided for CLD students via "pull-out" (i.e., small group instruction out of the main classroom) or "push-

in" (i.e., collaborative instruction in the regular class). However, Garcia and Gonzalez (2006) suggested students should be provided with programs, which support the initial language and culture of the minority children, as well as engage the parent in the early (2000). Although Cummins maintained that there should be a strong emphasis on maintaining and developing literacy in the CLD student's primary language (L1), there are data that show Spanish speaking students can learn to read in English first or in both languages simultaneously. His review of data over a span of two decades revealed no definitive advantage to introducing literacy in the first language (L1) in contrast to introducing it in the second language (L2). Although one may not be able to maintain that L1 reading instruction is superior to immersion in L2 or a combination of L1 and L2 literacy instruction, it seems that literacy should be developed in L1, so that learning can be transferred to the L2.

Whereas Cummins (2001), regarded as a leading authority on second language acquisition, suggested a balance in regard to L1 and L2 literacy instruction, Costantino (1999) insisted that that literacy instruction for language-minority children should be conducted in their native language whenever possible. Also, Costantino concluded the correlation of the CLD child's reading ability and his or her second-language proficiency is so strong that educators must address the development of the CLD student's oral language proficiency before beginning formal reading instruction. Almost at the other end of the spectrum, Jobe (2005) took a different view and insisted that CLD students should not be taught literacy in isolation, but it should be included in every subject. She asserted that CLD students do not want to be sent to another room to learn words they

can learn from watching television. Instead, CLD students want to learn, and will learn if given the opportunity.

In addition, Costantino (1999) maintained that pre-literacy training, which includes building vocabulary and developing an awareness of the new culture, should begin early. A huge responsibility for pre-literacy training falls on the shoulders of the parents, and it is critical that school staff gather information from the parents of CLD students regarding their backgrounds in order to support their education (Hill & Flynn, 2006).

The authors of most of the studies reviewed by this writer suggested the: (a) benefits of early intervention, (b) incorporation of a literacy-rich environment in the Latino home before the child comes to school, and (c) advantages of attending a quality prekindergarten program. These researchers suggested that reading books and telling stories to children, which are foundational for future literacy skills, are rarely characteristic of home where parents are undereducated. Poverty also plays a key role, as resources for lower socioeconomic families are limited. Garcia and Gonzalez (2006) found that maternal education is one of the best predictors of the level of literacy in the home and educational success for their children, as did Rivera (2009). Understanding that either by education, preference, or lack of financial resources, most Latino families do not place their children in preschool programs, it seems imperative to address the needs of the parents in order to create a home environment that is conducive to learning English. I have noted that, much of the research in teaching CLD students to read is focused only on classroom strategies, which overlooks a critical piece in the literacy puzzle: parents. Interestingly, Hispanic parents may not view themselves as their child's

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primary teacher, and they may feel that they should relegate the responsibility of literacy education to the classroom teacher as an expectation in the U.S. educational system. It is vital to help parents understand the importance of their role in the foundational years of their child's education and view themselves as their child's primary the teacher in order for the child to experience future academic success.

Gersten, Baker, Marks, and Smith (1999) synthesized the relevant research on effective instruction for English language learners. From the nine empirical studies reviewed and their own analyses of discussions from five professional work groups, they concluded that the best practices for teaching CLD students included a number of strategies, the use of: (a) visuals to reinforce concepts and vocabulary, (b) cooperative learning, and (c) peer tutoring. In addition, the use of other effective strategies include: (a) the use of the students' native language when the student is struggling, (b) opportunities for the CLD student to practice speaking English in both formal and informal contexts, and (c) a focus on meaningful, rich vocabulary for teaching literary concepts.

Factors Influencing Achievement

The majority of CLD students come from a low socioeconomic background (HCS, 2012), which compounds the disadvantages of not knowing the language with limited exposure to the kinds of activities and influences that impact a child's readiness to learn to read. Cummins (2007) suggested that low-income students must be engaged in the processes of exploring and questioning their surroundings if they are to learn to read and read well. This exploring, even more than intensive instruction, will help them overcome the disadvantages of their low socioeconomic situation. Lee (2006) reported

that there is no evidence there has been any impact on closing the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). This would seem to indicate the focus is not on socioeconomic status, but rather on understanding the culture of students and the role the family plays in the educational process. In academic circles, there are few areas upon which everyone will agree, but most recognize the profound importance of parental support to a child's academic success. Sohn and Wang (2006) found that parental involvement in their children's schooling is beneficial not only to the students, but also to the parents and teachers. When teachers gain an understanding of the stereotyping of students and their families, which often occurs, they will be better equipped to meet the needs of their students and have an unambiguous understanding of the families' cultural perspective on education. It is important for teachers to understand the inner workings of families with diverse cultural backgrounds. They need to be able to answer such questions as: Who is responsible for the children's education? What is the role of the father in the educational process? How does the presence of an extended family impact a child's schooling experience? This understanding not only crosses ethnic and cultural lines, but also speaks to the need for educators to be familiar with the perception of CLD parents in regard to U.S. schooling and their overall attitude toward education for their children.

Perhaps nothing speaks more loudly and clearly to the parents of CLD students than a teacher's apparent insensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences. Sohn and Wang (2006) discovered that some CLD parents felt that the teachers regarded non-English speakers as unintelligent. A teacher could easily and unknowingly relate this message through his or her impatience with a non-English speaking student. Teachers'

failure to communicate with CLD parents, because of the language barrier, can send a message that the parent's involvement in their child's schooling is not necessary (Sohn & Wang). A lack of opportunity to communicate with teachers regarding their children's academic progress and a feeling of inferiority due to their lack of proficiency in English can hamper an educator's ability to work closely with parent. Because CLD parents may experience discrimination themselves, teachers should be aware of their increased sensitivity to potential discrimination in the classroom. Unintentional discrimination, based on a teacher's preconceived notions regarding a student, can be damaging in terms of the relationship building that must occur in order for school staff and home to work together effectively. Making a parent feel welcome and at ease in the school environment is a teacher's first priority. The adage about no one caring how much one knows until they know how much one cares certainly applies in dealing with non-English speaking parents and their children.

Parental Involvement for CLD Parents

Turney and Kao (2009) researched the barriers that hinder the involvement of non-English speaking parents in school activities and found that the advantages of parental involvement cross racial barriers and are key to their children's academic success. Their findings stated that parental involvement sends a message to their children that education is important. As parents become familiar with teachers, administrators, and other parents, they have opportunities to discuss their own children's performance and are in a better position to intervene when their children struggle.

Parental involvement can take on many different forms. I personally view parental management of a child's time and activities, assistance with difficult assignments, and the

encouragement they provide as key elements of a parent's contribution to his or her child's success.

Often, parental participation is influenced by a child's academic performance. Turney and Kao (2009) cited an earlier study conducted by Muller and Kerbow (1993), who reported that the factors of race and ethnicity have a notable impact on parental involvement. Also, they found that students, who have academic challenges, experience a greater degree of support from their parents regardless of those particular societal factors. Another important factor in the involvement of parents in their child's academic pursuits appeared to be whether the parents were native or foreign-born. Kao (2004) examined the practices of foreign cultures and found that parents were less likely to discuss college plans with their children than were native-born U.S. parents regardless of their ethnic background. In addition, this was consistent with the levels of parental involvement in their children's schooling, which suggested that many immigrant parents may not be aware of the expectation of parental involvement in U.S. schools. Turney and Kao (2009) observed that few authors have critically examined parental involvement among immigrant parents; this lends validity to the pursuit of this research project.

Not surprisingly, the socioeconomic status of families is associated with parental involvement in school activities. According to Muller and Kerbow (1993), parents in higher income and educational levels are more involved with their children's schooling than those parents in more disadvantaged circumstances. Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2007) conducted a 3 year study of research-based supplemental instruction for at-risk students who were primarily children of low-income and minority background. Their study found that low-income children enter school significantly behind their more affluent peers and

are not equipped to learn to read. Their data indicated the Hispanic learners are nearly 70 percent deficient in reading. One effort, which was taken to address this problem, was to provide help to low-income parents and parents of CLDs in regard to how to reinforce their children's learning. The outcome of program showed significant results**;** 40% of the at-risk students**,** who were given supplemental instruction reading at an age-appropriate level in the second year of the study improved (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, in press).

Parental involvement can be a *mixed bag* of sorts**,** as it may have both positive and negative impact on student achievement (Turney and Kao (2009). In two-parent families and multi-generational households, generally, parents have more time to devout to their children's schooling. The presence of another adult in the home, who can work with a struggling student, is a plus, whereas the presence of siblings in the home can greatly diminish available time for one-on-one involvement. Also, Turney and Kao noted other studies, which spanned more than over a decade, in which it was found that parents tended to be more involved with their daughters' schooling than with their sons' schooling (Carter & Wojkiewicz, 2000)**,** and they become less involved as their children grew older (Crosnoe, 2001; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Just as in the classroom, teachers tend to give more attention to those who have difficulties, so parents tend to base their involvement in their children's schooling based on academic or social needs (Crosnoe; Englund et al**.**, 2004; Muller, 1995). For immigrant families for whom there is an additional barrier of a language deficit and unfamiliarity with the educational system as a whole, these impediments may be exponentially magnified.

According to Hyslop (2000), the provision of parental involvement programs do reach Hispanic parents and enable them to overcome some of the cultural barriers that exist. Even with newcomer programs, school support, and other opportunities for Hispanic families to acclimate themselves to the U.S. culture, there are still those students who continue to fail. Because every family has its unique qualities, particularly in regard to its appreciation for and acclimation into a new culture, this author will investigate the world of Hispanic families in the target school to gain their perspective on how the school can help them help their children succeed academically.

Summary

The review of literature provided a sweep of several important areas related to working with CLD families, and in particular, addressing the needs of CLD students who are struggling academically. Understanding the interrelated relationship in literacy of both L1 and L2 was important, as this study will investigate academic support in homes where students have attained BICS but their parents have not acquired L2 at all. Looking at the achievement gap between Hispanic and Caucasian subgroups emphasized the need to address supporting these CLD parents in their efforts to help their children. While some of the factors influencing student achievement are within the scope of the educators control, such as unintentional discrimination or a lack of communication, the negative impact of poverty, an early environment devoid of literacy-rich stimuli, and cultural differences, often impact CLD student achievement. Chapter Three will explain the methodology of the study and how the data will be collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In a quantitative study, typically, the researcher has a predetermined hypothesis, for which there is an attempt to find support. This is not the case in qualitative research. In this study there were no inevitable suppositions that I as the researcher sought to substantiate. It was simply an effort to hear the voice of parents, who wanted to help their children become academically successful in spite of: (a) a deficiency in the English language, (b) the limitations due to cultural differences, and (c) the challenges presented by a misunderstood system of education. Although this study may not be ground breaking, there is little research, in which the main focus of the proposed research addressed this topic: "How school personnel can assist Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents in promoting their children's readiness and progress in literacy development from the parents' perspective."

As in all qualitative research, in this study I sought to examine phenomena in their natural surroundings and acknowledge that human behavior is always bound to the context in which it occurs (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The data collected to accomplish this study are rich in descriptions of people, places, and conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I examined all aspects of the involvement of the participants in the process of their children learning to read. It was necessary to maintain contact with the participants in the study over a period of time and in the places where they spend their time or their *context*. For many of the parents, the most comfortable environment for the interviews was the school. It was a *common ground* that seemed to eliminate the discomfort of having a guest in one's home. Utilizing the qualitative method allowed me to exercise spontaneity and flexibility when necessary in the collection data for this study.

I used a number of research strategies including the following: (a) home visits, (b) interviews, (c) observations, (d) focus groups, and (e) examination of various demographic and academic data.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is second language acquisition theory. One of the foremost authorities on bilingual education and second language acquisition, Cummins' (1979) theory is that in order for individuals to become proficient in a second language (L2), maintaining and developing literacy in his or her primary language (L1) is essential. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the theoretical framework.

Parental perception factors. My goal in this study was to ascertain from the parents themselves their suggestions as to how educators could help them be more involved in supporting their children academically. This is the overarching research question for the parental perception factors in this study. This inquiry led to the development of several open-ended research questions related to how the parents perceived certain aspects of the educational environment, including their understanding of their child's academic needs, and their perception of the academic climate at the school.

Second language acquisition theory and its impact on the academic accomplishments of CLD students provides an element of consideration as I research the CLD parents believe educators can do to enable them to help their children academically, their own acquisition of the L2 may factor into how to provide academic support.

Overarching Research Question
What can teachers and administrators at the school do to better support you in helping your child at home?

Second Language Acquisition Theory
To become proficient is a second language one must maintain and develop literacy in one's primary language (Cummins, 1979).

Parental Perception Factors
What is the parents' understanding of the academic climate and the current level of support for the academic needs of their academically struggling child?

Parent/Teacher Communication Factors
What is the parents' perception of how effective the communication is between the parent and classroom teacher?

Figure 1. This figure represents the theoretical framework for the study.

perceptions and concerns of parents who do not speak English, even though their children

are functioning in an English-based school system. Since my goal is to understand what

-Parent/Teacher communication factors. The overarching research question for

the parent-teacher communication factors in this study is: What can teachers and

administrators at the school do to better support parents in helping their academically

struggling child at home? Open-ended questions were developed to ascertain the parents'

perception of the effectiveness of their communication between themselves and the

classroom teacher. This would be a critical factor in the teacher being able to provide additional support so the parents are better equipped to help their children with assignments and projects they have been assigned.

According to Cummins' (2001) second language acquisition theory, as individuals acquire a new language (L2), they need to continue to strengthen their primary language (L1) skills. This would include communication skills. While the majority of the CLD students have already achieved a functional level of BICS, none of the parents can speak or read English. Parent-teacher communication is vital for student success for all students. Sohn and Wang (2006) stress the importance of teachers communicating with CLD parents and being careful not to unintentionally demonstrate insensitivity to their cultural and linguistic differences. This inquiry will seek to determine the effectiveness of parent-teacher communication and its impact on the teacher's ability to support the parents in helping their child who is struggling academically.

Design

Based on the assumption of qualitative inquiry that human behavior is always bound to the context in which it occurs, the focus of this study was on the home environment and family life dynamics of the participants. For the purpose of this study, it was critical to understand the attitudes and actions of the participants from their own perspective and understand what hindrances, if any, they experienced in helping their children to be more academically successful in the U.S. American public school system. There are a variety of research approaches, in regard to emphasis, for qualitative studies. There must be an understanding of the *big picture*, which surround the participants: such as: (a) an appreciation of the relationships of those in the home, (b) an understanding of

the complexities of the social setting of the families, and (c) a grasp of how this all fits together in the context of non-English speaking parents with children in an U.S. public school.

Ethnography is a research methodology, in which one studies and describes culture or aspects of culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Since the focus is on an entire cultural group (Creswell, 2007), it can be used to understand the way people behave based on their cultural similarities. The participants in this study were all from a Latino or Hispanic background, but the primary goal in my study was to examine a common phenomenon that would be experienced by families of any culture, who seek to assimilate into the U.S. educational system. My concern was centered on the barriers to the support and assistance those parents need from teachers in order to help their children who struggle academically. I am confident cultural differences have an impact on how individuals face particular challenges, but the central focus for this study was on non- English speaking parents from any culture, who attempt to work within the framework of the U.S. schools.

I chose the qualitative research method in order to conduct a phenomenological study (Ary et al., 2006). A phenomenological study is an examination of human experiences through detailed descriptions of the people being studied (Binderman, 2004). This type of study has two distinct facets in regard to data collection, coding, evaluating, and interpreting: (a) personal or group interviews and (b) observations of any available academic student data and the types of academic resources in the home. Even though I was the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Ary et al.), the focus in phenomenological research was to understand the meaning, which individuals gave to

events in the context of their particular situations. I was careful not to be influenced in this investigation by imposing preconceived ideas upon these events and to shape those conclusions into generalizations that may not even apply outside their context.

In this study, the goal was to obtain as clear a picture as possible of what the CLD parents believe that school staff should do in order to provide them with the tools necessary to help their children be successful in learning to read and do mathematics at grade level. A phenomenological study is designed to describe and interpret experience based on the perception of those, who have participated in the study (Ary et al., 2006). At the heart of the inquiry for this approach was the subjective experience of each participant. As each individual was interviewed, his or her own personal perceptions and determination of the meaning of the experience in its context determined his or her sense of reality. In order to gain an understanding of how school staff can better assist LEP parents in work with their CLD children, I investigated the parents' understanding of several key aspects of education. I probed their awareness of the curriculum required by the state and the academic policies and procedures of the school. I also explored their expectations and procedures and practices regarding homework and helping their children. I also examined the climate of the school in terms of their teachers' own sense of efficacy in working with the parents.

Site

The target school in this study is located in a largely rural county in Georgia. The school is a Title I Distinguished School, having earned that honor for the past consecutive 8 years based on its performance on the state-mandated Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) administered each spring. Approximately 72% of the 395

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students at the school receive free or reduced price lunch. The rapid influx of Hispanic families into the community over the past few years has impacted the ethnic diversity of the school. According to demographic information provided by the school district (Henry County Schools, 2012), approximately 23% of the student population is Hispanic, 42% is African-American, 33% is Caucasian, and nearly 2% is categorized as Other. Approximately one-half of the students live within a 1 mile radius of the school. Of the 29 elementary schools in the system, the target school is one of the smallest.

The community in which the school is located is the quintessential "Small Town, USA." The local police department is a visible presence at the school with patrol units present each morning to supervise the one-way traffic and crosswalks. The town mayor often attends school functions, and local merchants regularly support school activities. Several local churches participate with the school as "Partners in Education," and civic groups such as Boys Scouts, Girl Scouts, and the county recreation league teams utilize the school facility on a regular basis. The school also hosts a "Good News Club" sponsored by a local church. The atmosphere of the school reflects a rich history of over 100 years, meaningful traditions, hospitality and commitment to the community, and an ambitious vision for the future, all set in a framework of academic excellence.

Participants

Participants for the study were selected through a process of purposeful sampling. Kraha (2012) identified the 16 types of sampling utilized in various methods of qualitative inquiry. Criterion sampling suggests that participants are selected based on an established set of criteria. For the purpose of this study, the primary criteria used to select participants included non-English speaking parents of elementary students who struggled

academically. A list of all students in the target school, who were classified as English Language Learners (ELL), was used to initiate contact with prospective participants. Upon examination of this list, the investigator determined which students struggled academically by talking with classroom teachers and the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher. The primary participants in the study were the parents of ELLs, who struggled in at least one area academically, primarily in reading or English/ language arts. The children's families in the study were all identified as coming from homes in which English was not the primary language. Thus, the focus of the study was on a number of families of students, who did not succeed academically based on classroom assessments, teacher evaluation, and state-mandated assessments, as available. The ESOL teacher at the target school provided valuable assessments of the students whose families were considered for the study. All the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students served through the district ESOL program in the target school are Hispanic. The CLD families, who participated in the study were Hispanic and, primarily, they immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico; one family came from Honduras.

I invited each family, including parents, grandparents, or other relatives living in the home, to participate in the study. The initial invitation was in the form of a letter translated into Spanish in to personally invite them to participate (Appendix H). The letter was sent home via their child. The letter was followed up by a phone call from the interpreter who introduced herself as working with me on this project. She explained the significance of the research and the importance of their participation so the school can learn how to better assist them in supporting their child in school. Each participant was provided with specific information, which outlines my expectations in regard to: (a)

interviews, (b) the kind of information this author sought to obtain, and (c) a general idea of the time required for the interviews. Initial verbal consent was obtained from each participant, and the appropriate forms were provided to secure necessary permission for the use of data collected in the interviews and focus groups for the final project (Appendix B).

At the beginning of each interview, I collected basic demographic information about each participant through a brief survey (Appendix K). The background and family situations of the participants varied a great deal and brought to light experiences, perspectives, and insights that have augmented the foundational basis of the study. One of my most important goals was to build trust and acceptance from each participant in order to gain the most insightful and beneficial information. My established career and positive reputation at the target school was helpful in breaking down initial hesitations on the part of parents to participate in the study. The interpreter, who is Hispanic and serves as a receptionist and clerk at the target school, has a good relationship with the Hispanic parents. Her warm personality and empathetic nature, due to her own experience as a parent of a child who struggles academically, made her a tremendous asset to the study.

Researcher's Perspective

Many existing studies (Azzam, 2009; Gerena, 2011; Panfernov, 2010) are focused on parent involvement and barriers, which non-English speaking parents encounter as they maneuver their children through the U.S. educational system (Turney & Kao, 2009). The challenges they experience: (a) language, (b) work schedules, (c) child-care issues, (d) not feeling welcome at the school, (e) a lack of transportation, (f) inconvenient meeting times, and (g) not being informed of involvement opportunities. These studies

provide valuable information regarding cultural factors that impact CLD family

involvement in typical educational activities such as parent-teacher organization meetings

and other school functions. However, missing from these studies (Turney & Kao) are the

ways in which these families adapt to the educational system in the U.S. and the unique

challenges of unfamiliarity with the English language and U.S. culture (Zhou, 1997).

Appreciation of this aspect of the struggle, which CLD parents experience as they try to

understand and meet their children's needs academically is important to this study. After

many years of working in the target school for this study, I have realized the need to hear

the parents' voice regarding how school personnel can assist them to support their

children academically.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and

analyzing the data (Ary et al**.**, 2006). The role of the researcher is critical to the collection

of accurate, valid data from the participants in the study. I have served as an

administrator in the target school for over 14 years. My age (50+), gender (male), and

ethnicity (Caucasian) may play some role in my status in the school community, but I have

consistently sought to reach out to all the families in our diverse, community- oriented

school. I have worked closely with both students and families, though I have not had a

direct personal relationship with any of the participants in the study other than the warm,

caring rapport I seek to maintain with all the students in our school. Because of the

longstanding relationship with the school community and the cordial, open-door policy of

the administrators of the school, I have experienced positive contacts with CLD parents.

I do not speak Spanish**;** thus**,** there was a notable barrier between myself and the

participants. The non-English speaking parents appreciated the fact that I was willing to

reach out to them in spite of this perceived barrier. Through the use of an interpreter, I was able to conduct parent conferences and counsel parents regarding the academic and behavioral needs of their students. My longstanding reputation in the school and community was crucial to bridging that potential gap and building the relationships necessary to gain valid data. My heart for the school community and desire to see every student reach his or her full potential motivated me to pursue this important study.

Data Collection

The focus of this study was to hear the parents' voice regarding what school personnel can do to support them in working with their children academically. Obtaining the parents' perspective was accomplished through a series of loosely structured, though in-depth interviews to elicit information about their: (a) background, (b) educational experiences, (c) resources, and (d) current practices to assist their children with homework and school projects. Because qualitative research is descriptive in nature, the approach of the investigator is to assume nothing is trivial and treat everything the participants report as potential clues to unlocking a deeper understanding of their responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, inquiry was made in regard to ideas the parents had about what the teachers and administrators of the school could do to assist them in their endeavor to help their children. The researcher is the primary instrument in this type of inquiry. With this understanding in mind, I used a similar format of basic questions for each subject. Because of the open-ended nature of the questioning technique, interviews sometimes took different turns. It was my task to alter questions and adjust follow-up interviews with other participants in order to address issues that arose from one of the other participants.

An examination of prior research presented in Chapter 2 in the area of literacy development in the CLD home was conducted to locate instruments with a high degree of validity and reliability to utilize in the interview process. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the CLD parents to ascertain the level of: (a) their involvement in their child's learning, (b) their perceived differences between U.S. school education and their own educational background, (c) the support they receive from their child's teacher, and (d) what they perceive are their needs in order to better help their child succeed. Some demographic and background information was important to contextualize the parents' responses and evaluate their insights regarding their children's education. Classroom observations were conducted, which are a normal part of my responsibilities at the school, as well a review of students' progress reports and other academic data. These materials were important in the data collection process.

Focus Groups

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) characterized focus groups as group interviews structured to encourage dialogue regarding particular issues among the participants. In this study, the use of focus groups also served as a way to break down possible barriers and to initiate the positive lines of communication that I desired to pursue with the participants in the study. In some sense, the first focus group could be considered an *ice-breaker*. The design of the focus groups was simply a question-and-answer format to allow participants to perceive my openness and help me gain insight into the receptivity of the participants to the individual interviews. I followed a simple outline which included the following:

1.	Welcome

2.	Description and purpose of my study

3.	Requirements for those who choose to participate in the study

4.	Anticipated outcomes of the study

5.	Discussion regarding the relationship between school personnel and

	parents

	a.	What is your general opinion of the environment of our school?

	b.	Describe your biggest struggle(s) regarding your child's education.

	c.	What do you see as the greatest barriers to helping your child in

		school?

	d.	How involved are you in school activities such as PTO meetings,

		programs, conferences? Why?

One goal of the focus group was to encourage participants to open up and share honestly in regard to: (a) their backgrounds and limitations, (b) their concerns about their children's academic progress, and (c) their ideas and suggestions as to how the school can better support them in their role as the primary educators for their children. The final focus group, which was held after all the individual interviews were completed, provided an opportunity for parents to be briefed on the initial findings of the study and check the validity of the study. Participants were asked if they agreed with my findings and the conclusions I had drawn as a result of their responses in the interviews. This served as a check of the accuracy and the relevance of my findings and also provided participants with an opportunity to contribute anything further that would augment those findings.

Individual Interviews

It is important in a phenomenological study to understand the context of the participants. While the ideal location for the conduct of the individual interviews of the participants was their home, I was sensitive to each individual's wishes. Sometimes, cultural or socioeconomic dissimilarities may cause apprehension on the part of individuals regarding someone coming into their home to interview them. The participant's home was the optimum location to conduct the interview to allow me an opportunity to gain an appreciation for the ambiance of the home atmosphere and observe first-hand the resources available to the children in the home.

Because it was more important that the interviewees be comfortable and secure enough to respond openly, honestly, and thoughtfully to the questions, a more neutral location was used for most. Participants felt more comfortable coming to the target school for the interview. The focus of the interview questions was on the: (a) backgrounds, (b) educational experiences, (c) beliefs regarding education, and (d) the kinds of current support the participants felt they had. The questions progressed to include inquiry into how the participants believed school personnel, including both teachers and administrators, could better support them in their quest to provide an excellent education for their children.

Generally, the questions for the interviews were developed to guide the discussions. A series of open-ended questions were used to allow participants in the study to answer in their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The structure of the interviews was casual enough to allow for additional questions to be asked in response to information obtained from participants during the interview. The open-ended

nature of the intended questions sometimes led to opportunities to further probe into more specific areas of concern as they were raised by the participants. I could not predict the outcomes of such imprecise questioning, and in the quest for true qualitative inquiry, I was willing to *go with the flow* and attempted to follow the whatever direction the questioning took. I also used some flexibility in questioning in order to make sure I clearly understood the meaning of what the participant sought to articulate.

Observations

I conducted classroom observations of the students whose families participated in the study to understand the academic needs of the child. In addition to observing instructional time, I examined student-created work, teacher evaluation and commentary on the student's work, as well as data from standardized assessments of the student's work. Since the majority of the students selected were being served in the ESOL program, the evaluations and observations of the ESOL teacher were most helpful. The families of CLD students, who had already been identified by their teachers as having academic challenges and had been screened by the school student support specialist to determine the nature of their learning problems**,** were selected for this study. In addition to the assessments from the classroom teachers (e.g., including benchmarks or running records, CRCT scores, and daily performance-based tasks), results from the various screenings were available to assist in determining the child's academic needs and qualification for the study. Also, teacher recommendation of the students was considered.

Some of the most important observations were those I made in the course of the home visits and interviews. Qualitative research is value bound, and these values can be expressed by the environment of the participants (Ary et al., 2006). An important part of

the participant's context was the home environment and the values that were evidenced by its appearance and accessories. These observations included the types of literature observed in the home such as books and magazines; the pictures, plaques, posters, or paintings displayed on the walls; the types of media available in the home including computers, television, sound systems, video games, CD or MP3 players, and the level of importance placed on these items. Most of the interviews were conducted at the school per the request of the participant, but two interviews were conducted in the participant's home, giving some insight into the typical home environments of the participants.

Surveys

Survey research uses instruments such as questionnaires, polls, and feedback forms to efficiently gather information from groups and individuals (Ary et al**.**, 2006). The limited English proficiency and general illiteracy, in both English and Spanish, of the majority of those parents, who were candidates to participate in this study, made the use of surveys complicated. For the purposes of this study, surveys were utilized in a limited fashion. At the beginning of the individual interviews, a brief questionnaire was used to establish a general understanding of the demographics of the families in the study, and a feedback form was provided to give parents a method to report their opinions in a non-threatening manner. The key difference between the questions in the questionnaire and other questions in the interview was they were more easily answered with specific background or demographic information. The other questions in the interviews were open-ended, which allowed the participant to express his or her own unique ideas. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested that, even though there are no rules that can be

applied across all interview situations, it is important to listen carefully, clarify without

challenging, and when you still do not understand, blame yourself and not the participant.

Document Analysis

In qualitative research, documents related to the participants may be beneficial in

order to corroborate the information obtained in interviews and substantiate observations

made by the researcher (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Documents that pertained to the type of

inquiry in this study included a family tree or genealogy handwritten in the front of a

family Bible, letters from relatives, yearbooks, or other forms of literature passed on from

one family member to another. While such items would have been useful in

understanding the participant's context from a broader perspective, I never felt the liberty

to inquire at that personal a level. The interview process was conducted in a proper

method but in a personable manner. My desire was to create an environment that was

comfortable for the participants and, at the same time, maintain a high level of propriety.

Treating the person being interviewed as an expert and showing genuine interest in his or

her perspective is an effective way to conduct open-ended interviewing (Bogdan &

Biklen).

The interplay of both my values and beliefs and those of the participants made it

possible to develop a meaningful understanding of the participants' world (Ary et al**.,**

2006). The utilization of the methods of data collection described above provided a

backdrop for this interplay. I was able to analyze and evaluate the data obtained in the

inquiry, as well as determine, from the parents' perspective, what the school officials can

do to assist parents in helping their children be successful in school.

Data Analysis

Managing and processing data effectively is essential in order for the researcher to present to others what he or she has learned during the course of the inquiry. Throughout this study, I recorded not only the details of what the participants said in the interviews and focus groups, but also noted my own impressions regarding those statements, and expounded on his observations of the: (a) environment, (b) performance, and (c) interaction of the participants. Qualitative inquiry is never value-free, and thus this study reflects the values of the participants and the researcher. The sorting, organizing, categorizing, coding and re-coding, interpretation, and summarizing of the data obtained provided the framework to draw conclusions and offer an explanation of the phenomena observed in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Coding. Open coding is a process of breaking down and categorizing data into manageable segments (Ary et al**.**, 2006). After transcription of the interviews, general themes were identified, and data were categorized according to those themes. Using this open-coding process, I organized the data into the five or six general themes and categories as they emerged in review of the information obtained in the course of the inquiry. Categories anticipated in the initial analysis of the data included: (a) information related to the setting or context of the families, (b) the roles of the participants, and (c)how the participants viewed their particular roles. Additionally, the perspectives of the participants about: (a) their situation, (b) the status of their children in school and their teachers, and (c) the responsiveness of the school administrators to their students' needs were valid categories. Information received from parents in focus groups or individual interviews was grouped according to its source and then on the basis of the questions

asked, similar to an item analysis for a test. The next step was to attempt to fit together all the pieces of information in the correct categories in order to make sense of the data.

Axial coding was used to reassemble the data and determine connections between and across categories (Ary et al., 2006). In the relation of data across different categories, I was able to obtain a clearer focus and to draw more accurate conclusions regarding the data. This repetition of the coding process from a different perspective lends credibility to the process. The constant comparative method of coding was used to determine the characteristics of concepts obtained from the words and actions of the participants and then compare them with similar categories. The data remained somewhat fluid, because it was constantly being filtered based on its similarities to other categories. Categories changed, were merged, or omitted as these comparisons yielded different relationships. The overall goal in this process of coding is to construct meaning from the data that was supported by the data.

In addition to the categories of setting and context, the definition of the situation, perspectives held by participants were important in sorting the date. The process, activities, events, strategies, relationships and social structure, and methods used were appropriate to help sort the data in this study (Ary et al., 2006). From this analysis, I sought to gain understanding of the parents' perspective and make generalizations based on the similarities and even differences of their responses. One of the desired outcomes of the study was to determine ways in which school staff could assist the CLD parents to help their children become more successful academically from the parents' perspective.

Dependability/Credibility

In most research, reliability, or consistency of behavior is desired. Variability can be expected in qualitative inquiry because of the uniqueness of the individual participants and the seemingly insignificant differences in what appear to be similar contexts. The dependability or trustworthiness of a study in qualitative research is based upon the extent to which these variations can be tracked or explained. To guarantee a high degree of dependability and credibility in this study, triangulation of methods was utilized, which employed multiple data sources to gather and compare data. The concept of triangulation is borrowed from the disciplines of navigation and surveying in which multiple data points are required to accurately determine one's position or bearings. In qualitative research, it has come to mean that many sources of data lead to a more complete understanding of the phenomena being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I employed: (a) individual interviews, (b) focus groups, (c) surveys, (d) the two home visits, (e) multiple classroom observations, and (f) review of documents. Additionally, member checks (i.e., participant feedback), memoing (i.e., note-taking), and the creation of an audit trail (i.e., documentation of what, when, how and why things were done in the study) were utilized to ensure dependability and credibility in the study.

Member checks. Individual interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed in order to gain accuracy in data collection. Member checks provided critical feedback from participants. A member check is participant feedback to verify that they agreed with what I had said about them (Ary et al., 2006). Participants were offered the opportunity to review transcriptions for accuracy and clarify comments they felt might be misunderstood. During the second focus group, I presented my current findings in a

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simple PowerPoint presentation. In addition to sharing the combined demographic and

family information they had shared with me, I also presented my conclusions as to the

ways in which we at the school could help them as they try to help their children. I

solicited specific feedback regarding the findings in the study that cleared up any

inaccuracies and sought to obtain supplementary data that were useful in order to draw

accurate conclusions from the study. To ensure correctness and suitability of data

obtained in the study, the transcripts and recordings from the focus groups and interviews

were reviewed at least three times.

Memoing. An important element of the data collection process to aid me in

gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the participants and their unique context

was note-taking or memoing. I recorded impressions and reactions to both the physical

environment of the participant's context and posture during interviews or focus groups,

thus, the data were augmented with an additional perspective. These notes were somewhat

analytic or self-reflective in nature and enriched the data collection process, made

thoughts implicit, and expanded the data set (Creswell, 2007). Not only were these

memos comprised of thoughts and impressions, but also suppositions regarding the data

that were relevent in drawing conclusions from the findings of the study. Observer bias is

a consideration in qualitative inquiry. Memoing helped to prevent any bias I might have

had from creating a detrimental influence on the data collected.

Audit trail. I implemented an audit trail in this study to serve as a type of road

map for the study. The audit trail documented the direction taken in: (a) developing the

rationale for the study, (b) the selection of participants, and (c) the development of

interview and focus group questions. Also, this guiding tool detailed the limited use of

surveys and the parameters, which pertained to my observations. This audit trail described how each facet of the study was conducted, including the collection, organization, and interpretation of data, as well as my underlying thought processes in developing the path taken. It is possible to apply the findings from this study to other people, settings, and times to the extent that they are similar to those same elements in this current study (Ary et al., 2006). The audit trail allowed for the replication of the study in similar settings in order to expand the applicability of the study findings in other contexts. I sought to provide answers to the problem of providing academic support for students in non-English speaking homes from the parents' perspective. Also, use of the audit trail validated the findings of the study and corroborated the dependability and credibility of the process used to ascertain those findings.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation in executing this study is my inability to speak Spanish and all of the participants were non-English speakers. My dependence upon a translator might be seen as somewhat of a hindrance, but I found the input and support given by the translator invaluable. Not only did she understand the language and give excellent support in that way, also, she understood the plight of these parents as she herself has an elementary age child who struggles academically. In addition, she is a single parent, who raises three children on her own. She had a close relationship with most of the Hispanic parents at the school, and she facilitated a level of trust and acceptance I could not have accomplished using an outsider to translate. Her insight into what the parents experienced was most helpful as we worked through the interview

process. When I had questions regarding the transcriptions of the interviews, her input was beneficial.

In order to manage the volume of data to be organized, sorted, and analyzed, I focused on a limited number of non-English speaking or CLD families whose students struggled academically, thus limiting the depth of the study. The target school has demographics that may be dissimilar to a majority of schools, making its broad applicability somewhat limited. Those demographics include the fact that all participants in the study were Hispanic and most came from a low socioeconomic home environment. Hearing the voice of the parents has been extremely valuable; however, in this type of inquiry, I sought to contextualize findings, interpret behaviors, and understand perspectives (Ary et al., 2006) rather than generalize findings and make application to other situations. I believe there is a high degree of generalizability and applicability of the findings to other similar academic settings. Although each family and participant had unique situations and experiences, the data specific to their individual context were analyzed and then synthesized to fashion strategies from the parents' point of view that will ultimately benefit CLD families and promote academic success for their children.

Summary

From my perspective, the design of a qualitative study provides the researcher enough flexibility to be personable and relaxed with the individuals being interviewed, while at the same time providing a degree of professionalism and consistency necessary to gain meaningful data. Each component of the process factors into the analysis of the data collected. The results of the study are analyzed and examined in Chapter Four. In addition to connecting with the families in a positive way through the interview process, I

will present data that reflect the perspective of the parents in regard to how educators can support them as they help their children at home.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to discover how educators can best support culturally linguistically diverse CLD parents. I wanted to gain the parents' perspective on how to help them help their children be successful in United States schools. My intent was to discover the problems faced by these parents and thus be able to develop appropriate strategies they could use to help their academically struggling students. Four overarching research questions directed this investigation. Each research question encompassed several of the open-ended interview questions which increased the depth of understanding regarding the participants' perspectives on the support they need in their homes. The four research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the parents' understanding of and current level of support for the academic needs of their child who is struggling in school?

Research Question 2: What is the parents' perception of the academic and social climate of the school?

Research Question 3: How effective is communication between the parents and classroom teachers?

Research Question 4: What can teachers and administrators at the school do to better support you in helping your child at home?

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, I included two focus groups (i.e., one at the beginning of the process and one at the end), a general information and background questionnaire, and interviews with at least one individual from eight Hispanic families in which the primary language

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spoken in the home was Spanish. In addition, I conducted interviews with teachers of the children in the target families and reviewed pertinent academic data which proved helpful in understanding the concerns of the parents who were interviewed in the study.

Background Information

Because I do not speak Spanish, I depended on the services of a translator who was an employee of the school. She was fluent in both English and Spanish and translated questions and responses. She was compensated for the time she spent translating the interview and for any transcription work performed. The translator was part of the school staff which established a high level of trust for her with the parents. Because of her own personal experience with a child who struggles academically, she was able to connect with parents. Her insight and input, as well as her translation services, were invaluable during the interviews. I did not want to begin the focus group interview with any preconceived ideas regarding the outcomes of the study. A noteworthy element became apparent. Although the participants had varied experiences, I also noted many commonalities. The information provided by the initial focus group participants provided a degree of direction as I began my investigation. The heart of this study was the interview process.

Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. I personally transcribed the contents of the recordings to assure credibility. To ensure anonymity, the participants in the study were assigned numbers. In Chapter Three, a detailed explanation of this process was described. I examined the transcripts from each interview to discern emerging themes, or similarities in the responses of the participants. During both the interview process and transcription of the recordings, I jotted down personal impressions

regarding responses or the situation as they came to mind. Because it was important to me to understand the context from which each participant answered and to determine if there were similarities between the responses of the participants, I also compared the demographic and personal background questions.

My intent in conducting this study was to genuinely hear the parents' voice about how the school staff could support them in their efforts to assist their children who were struggling academically. Taking into consideration the context of each family helped me understand the parents' perspectives.

Family structure. I began each interview with an open-ended question to elicit general information about the family, including: (a) their native homeland; (b) family members who live in the home; (c) household dynamics (e.g., employment for mother and father); and (d) day-to-day routines and practices. All of the participating individuals were of Hispanic descent. Displayed in Tables 1 and 2 are the similarities of the families who participated in the study.

Although most parents agreed that it would be best for their children to speak both languages fluently, Alona said her husband cut off all Spanish TV channels so the children would have to learn English. Conversely, Estela said that her husband was insistent that the children maintain their Spanish, in addition to learning English. With the exception of some of the older siblings, who initially learned to read in Spanish, few of the children can read much Spanish.

The daily routines of the eight families were similar. With few variations, the mothers were the first ones up in the mornings and were responsible for getting the children ready for school. Five of the mothers stayed at home to raise the children and

Table 1

Family Similarities and Differences

Participant	How many adults live in the home?	Adults who live in the home	Number of children under age 12 live in the home?	How many children over age 12 live in the home?
Alona	2	Mother/Father	3	0
Benita	2	Mother/Father	3	0
Coleta	2	Mother/Father	1	4
Destina	2	Mother/Father	4	1
Estela	3	Mother/Father Grandmother	3	0
Floria	2	Mother/Father	3	1
Gitana	1	Mother	6	0
Helena	2	Mother/Father	3	0

Note: All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect participant privacy**.**

Table 2

Educational Similarities and Differences of Participants

Participant	Who normally helps children with their homework?	Educational level of the parents		What is the primary language spoken in the home?	Do you feel your child is receiving a quality education?	Is the school staff providing you enough support?
		Father	Mother			
Alona	Mother	College	College	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Benita	Father	HS grad	Grade 6	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Coleta	Older Sibling	Grade 3	Grade 4	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Destina	Mother	Grade 6	Grade 11	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Estela	Both Parents	College	Grade 8	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Floria	Older Sibling	Grade 7	Grade 6	Spanish	Yes	Yes
Gitana	Mother	--	Grade 9	Spanish	Yes	No
Helena	Mother	Grade 2	Grade 6	Spanish	Yes	Yes

Note: All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect participant privacy.

care for the home. Two worked outside the home cleaning hotels, and one worked with her husband in his landscaping business. Except for the one single mother, the fathers were the main bread-winners in the homes. Most fathers worked long hours in construction related jobs, although one father owned and ran his own landscaping business. Several of the fathers were trained in specialty areas, such as heating and air conditioning or electrical engineering; however, none worked directly in those fields due to differences in certification requirements in the U.S. Several worked in areas close to their training, but most were employed in hard, labor-intensive jobs. One father was employed as an automobile mechanic, while the others were primarily in construction-related occupations.

Parental educational levels. The second question in each interview was also open-ended to determine the educational background of the parents. The educational levels of the parents in the study varied notably. For the fathers, the educational level ranged from a second grade education to college graduate. Mothers, for the most part, only attended elementary school; however, two attended high school and one attended college but did not earn a degree.

Some parents were educated in urban schools and others in rural schools. The responses indicated differences between the education offered in rural schools as opposed to that offered in the big, city schools in their home countries. As they shared information about their educational experience, several parents compared their education and the education their children are currently receiving. They reported their children experience a much higher level of instruction and at earlier grade levels than they did in their home countries.

As a child, Destina commented that she went to school, came home, and promptly

forgot about school. The teachers never asked for homework, and no one at home or at

school motivated her to do well in school. As a result, she really did not care for school.

Floria, who really liked school, reported that she went to school in the afternoons from

1:00-5:00 p.m., and her favorite activity was recess. Her husband also liked school, but

once he entered the higher grade levels, he had to study too much. The increased

academic workload caused him to become discouraged and quit school. Several parents

mentioned the difference in school hours in their native country. Particularly in middle

and high schools, the schedules were split. Benita' husband said his high school had

academic studies for 4 hours in the mornings followed by vocational studies in the

afternoons where he learned the skills to become an electrician.

One of the most glaring contrasts between school systems in their native lands and

the United States was that there were no mandatory school attendance laws in their

countries as there are in the U.S. The parents in this study indicated that it was their

parents who decided whether or not they attended school. In some of their homes, the

parents allowed the child to decide whether or not they went to school. One father told his

parents he did not like school when he was only in second grade and was allowed to stay

home and work. Basically, he worked to help support the family from that young age.

Only two parents indicated that either they or their spouse had to drop out of school to

help provide for the family. Even though school was optional in their countries, and some

were less motivated than others to finish, all the parents in the study acknowledged

the importance of a good education for their children in the U.S. All of them reported that

they wanted their students to be successful in school so they can be successful in life.

Helena commented that she wanted her children to realize how good they have it here in this country. Everything is close, and they are able to ride a bus to school. She was not able to attend high school, because it was located a long distance away in the city, and her parents, fearful for her safety, did not allow her to attend.

Parents' perception of school performance. The next topic we discussed in the interview was the parents' perception of how their children were doing in school academically. The parents realized that their children were struggling in school. They noted that they felt their children were making progress, but according to the assessments of their teachers, the children still had not attained the degree of proficiency expected. None of the parents felt the language barrier was a challenge for their children, as they spoke English most of the time, and the children seemed to have no problem understanding English. Several parents mentioned they could not help their children with the correct pronunciation of words, as they did not know how to speak English. The parents seemed to indicate that their children spoke and understood enough English to function socially, but when it came to the more challenging academic requirements of school, they struggled with the English language. Parents were not aware of the research by Collier (1999) and Cummins (2001) that distinguished between those two levels of English language competency. The students were competent in Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS); however, they struggled with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is necessary for school success (Cummins), as it requires a higher level of English proficiency.

When asked if there were any serious communication problems due to their inability to read and speak English, the parents indicated that, even though they could not

speak English, they understood and read enough English to grasp basic concepts. In general, the parents were able to decipher notes sent home by the teacher and took advantage of translators provided by the school when they had conferences with their child's teacher.

The parents were asked for other reasons for their child's academic challenges, Alona, Benita, and Gitana indicated that their children have attention problems and cannot focus on their work. Estela thinks her child's mischievous behavior prevents academic success. Last school year was difficult for him, but the beginning of this year, there was marked progress in academics and his ability to focus. However, during the past few months, the parent reported she had seen signs of regression back to behaviors characteristic of his academic performance last year.

Based on the evaluation of the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher, the majority of the students in this group have not)able challenges in four areas related to reading: (a) identification of words, (b) correct use of words in context, (c) determine the main idea of a passage, and (d) find details to support the main idea within the story (see Table 3).

I interviewed the homeroom teachers of the students in order to gain a better understanding of their academic challenges. I also observed work samples of the students, and ascertained that all but three children were low in most areas of reading and writing. One child was steadily progressing, one was slow but accurate, and one was an excellent student in every area but had a sibling who was struggling (see Table 4). Of those students, 34 students, from families who have been classified as English Language Learners (ELL), are served by the ESOL teacher at the school (see Table 3).

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Table 3

Summary of ELL Student Performance

Skill/Standard	Alejandro	Gabriella	Gregorio	Gabriella	Gracia	Lorenzo	Rodrigo	Timo	Bria
Understands basic, functional English	P	A	A	P	A	A	A	A	A
Comprehends oral discussion in context	P	A	A	P	A	A	A	A	A
Pronounces sounds in words accurately	A	A	P	A	A	A	A	A	A
Uses words correctly in context	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P
Expresses ideas in complete sentences	P	A	P	P	A	P	A	A	A
Communicates with the teacher	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Word identification skills	P	P	P	P	P	n/a	P	n/a	A
Identifies main idea and supporting details	P	P	P	P	A	n/a	P	P	A
Uses correct spelling/punctuation	P	A	A	P	A	n/a	A	A	A
Uses correct grammatical structure	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Writes short paragraphs	P	A	P	P	n/a	A	A	A	A
Willingness to participate	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Completes work on time	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A	P

Key: E – Excellent; A – Adequate; P – Poor; n/a – Not Assessed
Note: All names have been changed to pseudonyms to ensure participant anonymity

Table 4

Teachers' Assessment of Students Participating in Study

Name	Program	Grade	HR Teacher Comment
Adan	none[a]	Kdg	very low-all areas
Alano	SPED	1	little progress, behind
Alejandro	ELL	3	low in all areas
Gabriella	ELL	5	low in math
Gregorio	ELL	1	below grade level/ speech
Gustavo	ELL	1	low in ELA[c]
Gracia	ELL	3	low in reading/math
Lorenzo	SPED	5	low in reading
Mia	none[a]	1	average student
Rosalee	none[b]	4	excellent student
Rodrigo	ELL	5	low in reading /writing
Sabrina	none[a]	Kdg	slow but accurate
Timo	ELL	2	progressing
Teresa	none[a]	Kdg	low in ELA
Bria	ELL	3	low in reading/writing

Note: [a]not evaluated for any programs, [b]tested out of ESOL services, [c]English/ Language Arts*/*Hispanic.

Overwhelmingly, the parents interviewed in the study were pleased with the school personnel and the education that was being provided for their children. Only one parent felt their child's teacher did not provide her with enough support in order to help her child. In regard to resources available to help them with their children, all the parents were aware of the Family Resource Center (FRC) located near the front lobby of the school. Most parents had at least visited the FRC to check out materials to support their children in the classroom. Several had attended parent workshops sponsored by the FRC or participated in the English language classes that are offered.

With the exception of the one parent, all the participants commented that they felt welcome at the school. The one parent, who did not feel welcome, was upset over challenges she experienced with her youngest child's teacher. She did not The parent thought it was taking an inordinate amount of time to obtain the appropriate placement of her child in the special education program and begin the services she believed he needed. seem to understand the time required for the steps involved in the process for special education placement and blamed the teacher. She also felt the teacher was being overly concerned in regard to matters that did not directly relate to her child's education. This parent admitted that the office staff and administrators had been cordial and helpful to her; however, she felt the teacher expected too much from her child and did not work effectively with her as a parent. The mother did not seem to comprehend the expectations of school officials and representatives of social agencies, such as the Department of Family and Child Services (DFACS), and the concerns they have for her child's physical welfare, as well as his educational success.

Student portraits. Of the 15 students involved in this study, 8 were served by the ESOL teacher, and 2 received special education services. Based on the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS; cite--place in Refs) testing administered to students identified as from non-English speaking homes, 2 students did not qualify for ELL services. They both read and spoke English well. Three students were in kindergarten or first grade and had not been evaluated for ELL. One kindergarten student was in the process of being evaluated for special education placement. The ESOL teacher's comments supported the parents' viewpoints in regard to their children's ability to understand and use English. Based on her evaluations, it was

clear that a majority of the students: (a) understood basic, functional English; (b) comprehended oral discussions in content areas; and (c) pronounced sounds in words accurately. Most used correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word spacing, and letter formation. A majority of the students were able to communicate with their teacher and demonstrated a willingness to participate in class. The weak areas exhibited by the majority of the students included: (a) correct use of words in context, (b) the ability to use word identification skills, (c) ability to identify the main idea and supporting details, and (d) correct use of grammatical structures (see Table 2).

The comments from the homeroom teachers indicated that most of the students struggled in the area of reading. One student in the study was described by her teacher as an excellent student in all areas. Her parents were included in the study because she had a younger sibling who struggled academically. This background information helped to substantiate the needs of the parents in regard to being able to assist their academically challenged children. An understanding of the parents' experiences and circumstances provided a useful backdrop for acquiring their suggestions regarding their needs. It was also helpful for properly analyzing their responses and translating them into steps for future action.

The data collected from the focus groups, questionnaire, and interviews were analyzed following the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, modified by Moustakas (1994) and simplified by Creswell (2007). This structured method of analysis was detailed in Chapter 3, and it included: (a) the development of themes from the important parental comments in regard to helping their children with their schoolwork; as well as (b) their involvement in school activities such as parent-teacher conferences, student programs,

and parent meetings. Textually and structurally, the experiences of the participants were similar, although there were differences in the backgrounds of the families who participated.

The interviews with participants were reviewed to identify the core ideas relate to the focus of the study, that is, the provision of support for the parents as they attempt to help their children academically. Typically, each parent suggested five to seven important ideas or domains. Review of the domains revealed a number of common ideas among the participants. This list of domains was then consolidated into a listing of 22 core ideas categorized under five major themes. Displayed in Table 5 are the results from this study. The core ideas are categorized under the five pervading themes in Column 1. The frequency in Column 2 indicates the number of participants, who that mentioned that particular theme. The procedure for labeling the theme types in Column 3 represents the protocol used by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) in their discussion of the components of consensual qualitative research (CQR). In this study, there were eight participants. The themes were designated as general if they appeared in the responses of six or more participants. If at least four, but fewer than six participants, responded similarly, the theme was defined as typical. A variant theme was one for which two or three participants responded analogously. If a theme occurred in only one participant's response, it was noted as rare.

Parent Perspective on Support from School Personnel

The primary objective for the conduct of this research was to better understand the perspective of the CLD parents of students who were struggling academically. I wanted insight into what help and resources they believed were needed in order to be able

Table 5

Parents' Perspectives on Academic Support at Home and at School

Theme	Frequency [a]	Theme Type
Perception of Academic Performance	7	*General*
Understood child was struggling	7	*General*
Language barrier was problem	6	*General*
Accommodations at School	7	*General*
English language classes [b]	6	*General*
Translator at school	6	*General*
Documents translated	4	*Typical*
Documents not translated	2	*Variant*
Live ESOL teacher	1	*Rare*
Homework Support	7	*General*
Older siblings help	3	*Variant*
Teach the parents first	2	*Variant*
Mother helps	2	*Variant*
Need more homework	2	*Variant*
No assistance	1	*Rare*
No routine	1	*Rare*
School Climate	6	*General*
Communication is good	4	*Typical*
Love the School	2	*Variant*
Communication not clear	1	*Rare*
Not happy with school	1	*Rare*
School expects too much	1	*Rare*
Parental Involvement	5	*Typical*
Schedule (due to work)	3	*Variant*
Transportation (no car)	2	*Variant*
Fear of arrest	3	*Variant*
Child care	1	*Rare*
Help with English Language [c]	4	*Typical*
Hand-held translation device	2	*Variant*
Internet	2	Variant
Dictionary	1	Rare

Notes:
[a] There were eight families who participated in this study.
[b] The target school offered a computerized program for non-English speakers.
[c] This theme refers to the types of language resources parents currently utilized.

to encourage and support their children in school. The key themes that surfaced as I

reviewed the parents' input became the basis for these findings.

Accommodations at school. Overall, the parents, who participated in this study, were satisfied with the education their children received and were pleased with the attempts teachers and administrators made to involve them in their child's education. The school is a Title I school, and as such, it receives special funding for a parent involvement paraprofessional who coordinates translation and childcare for school events. The school receptionist/office clerk, who is fluent in English and Spanish, serves as the translator for most teacher conferences and Individual Education Plan (IEP) committee meetings, though the cafeteria manager and one of the clinic aids are bilingual and sometimes assist with translation for parents whose native language is Spanish. These translation services are underwritten through Title I funding, as well. To determine how the participants perceived these services, I asked the parents how they communicated with their child's teacher and how he or she communicated with them. These parents reported that teachers used the agendas (assignment notebooks used as an organizational tool for all students) and sent home classroom or grade level newsletters regularly. Most documents sent home were not translated into Spanish, although official communications from the County Office usually were. The parents appreciated the translator provided for teacher conferences and school meetings.

Even though some parents considered communications from the school as opportunities to improve their English reading skills, most commented that they would prefer more documents be translated into Spanish. With the exception of Gitana, who had an issue with the teacher of her youngest school-age child, the parents felt communication from the teachers and other school personnel to the home was good. They agreed that more translated documents would be good but many could read enough

English to minimally understand the content or have one of their children assist with any words they did not know. Helena observed that, even though there was some small frustration because she did not always understand the events that were taking place when she visited the classroom, she still enjoyed being involved in her child's education. It made her happy to know that she was there and able to be a part of the activities in the classroom. Her children were always excited to see her on campus and wanted her to be there. Helena also suggested the use of listening aids for the parents who need translation. The translator explained that some schools use an assistive listening translation system with a transmitter for the translator and wireless receivers for each listener. This would allow parents to participate in meetings without the restriction of being confined to a small group, who must strain to hear the translator. I perceived this as an excellent idea and within the scope of our discretion in regard to resources. Therefore, I indicated that I would research various options and present this idea to the principal when it came time to create the next annual parent involvement budget. The parents reinforced my perception that the school staff had been successful in their efforts to effectively communicate with parents who experience a language barrier, but that there was room for improvement in their efforts.

Another recurring concern expressed by parents was in regard to written communications. Although parents were satisfied with the communication from the teachers and felt they were genuinely trying to accommodate them, Benita reinforced the idea that more translation of school newsletters and other communications from the teachers would be helpful. Several other participants articulated the same recommendation. Even for those parents, who felt that communications in English helped

them to learn English themselves, in light of the everyday pressures of parenting, the expediency of having documents translated into their native tongue was clear.

Another suggestion to improve communication was to send home a course syllabus or set of course objectives prior to introducing them to the students. Alona suggested that one of the most helpful things the teachers could do to help would be to send home specific topics or learning targets so the parents could look up the material and be prepared for assignments as they start to come home. This concern was also raised in the second focus group. I explained that "curriculum nights" in which teachers went over what would be covered in the upcoming term were sparsely attended. Also, I related that most teachers did send home an overview of what they would do at the beginning of each grading period. Her real concern was specific help for the parents about how to assist the children with those specific topics, for example, how to add and subtract fractions.

Several parents articulated the need for English classes for parents so they could learn to speak and read English. Resoundingly, parents wanted to be better able to help their children with homework assignments and be more involved in the activities at school. The parent involvement paraprofessional has provided English language classes once a week at the school with use of a computerized program of language instruction. Estela reported that these classes should be held more often to help them learn English. She appreciated that the current once a week schedule of classes was good, but she would like to learn more. With the current method of instruction, parents, who are enrolled in the course, can also access the program at home via the internet for further instruction and additional practice. However, she did not have internet access at home, so she could

not do additional assignments on her own. My initial thought was that the limited access most parents had to the internet would be the most negative aspect for the use of this instructional program provided by our district. Even though some parents would prefer a live instructor, rather than the computer-based instructional program currently being used at the school, the method of delivery was not the primary concern.

A clear theme that surfaced in the initial focus group, the individual interviews, and again in the final focus group was the continued emphasis on the parents' desire to learn English so they could better help their children. What may have been obvious to some was made crystal clear to me in our discussion as I continued to push for specific ways in which school personnel could better address the needs of parents. The provision of English language classes for the parents was clearly the most important concern of this group of parents. They clearly communicated that the best way for them to help their children was to be able to read and understand English. These parents reported that the current English language classes being offered at the school were good, but only a limited number of parents could participate. Due to the work schedule maintained by the fathers and some of the mothers, classes offered during the school day were not feasible. Classes in the evenings or on the weekend were suggested as a better alternative. Also, access to childcare for preschool children and toddlers and supervision of homework for older children were concerns. I explained to the parents that, because of the Title I status of the school we do have resources, including the FRC and the paraprofessional who coordinates parental involvement activities and manages the resources made available to parents. The paraprofessional's primary task is to reach out to parents and help them to access the resources in the FRC. One parent suggested that it would be good to have

directions for homework assignments translated into Spanish so they could provide more help to their children. In addition, the parents indicated they are literate in Spanish and able to read translated documents.

From the parents' perspective, learning to speak and read English is one of the most important things they can do to be able to assist their children with their academics. Estela specifically asked that classes be made available more than once per week, as did Benita. Coleta would prefer a live instructor rather than the computer instruction model, as did Helena. Estela and Floria were concerned whether there would be child care and homework help for the children during the time parents were in class. This was important so parents could participate in the classes without unnecessary pressure on their family routine.

The participants in this study clearly saw learning English themselves as one of the best ways to provide more support for their children at home. They realized that it was important for them to be able to read and comprehend assignments in order to assist their children in locating the resources to enable them to successfully complete their homework and long-term projects.

Homework support. Parents unfamiliar with the school system and the expectations of a rigorous curriculum become just as frustrated as their children who struggled academically. In regard to their role in the education of their children, the parents indicated it was their responsibility to transport them to school, and then give them all the help they need at home. When asked what they felt was the biggest barrier in helping their children, they reaffirmed it was their lack of English language skills which,

in turn, prevented them from helping with their children's homework. Specifically, often, they did not understand what was expected. These parents observed that it was hard to make their children do homework when the children did not understand how to complete the assignments. That was compounded, they said, by the fact that they also did not know how to do the assignment. In the afternoons, homework was a priority; however, some mothers felt the children needed to play for a brief time, eat supper, then do homework. Other mothers made the children begin any assignments immediately upon their return home from school. Only one parent, the single mother, had a babysitter who would sometimes help the children with homework before she got home. The kitchen table was the location of choice for the completion of homework in most of the families.

There is an established, school-wide homework policy to guide teachers and standardize the maximum amount of time students should spend on assignments at home. Primarily, teachers assign homework to reinforce concepts that have been introduced in class and provide additional practice in areas where students need remediation. The next question I asked parents was about how they actually supervised or assisted with their children's homework. All parents agreed that homework was important, and they checked to make certain their children completed the assignments. At the beginning of the school year, the members of the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) provided all students with agendas in which they could write down homework assignments. Parents were aware of the use of agendas and knew to look in the agendas for daily homework assignments and long term projects. Also, the parents understood that teachers used these agendas or notebook planners for regular communication with parents and wrote notes in regard to: (a) daily behaviors, (b) missing assignments, (c) upcoming projects, or even a

(d) request for a conference. Parents were expected to sign this form of two-way communication each night as a way to ensure that teachers knew parents were well-informed regarding their child's progress.

The responsibility for overseeing homework fell on the mothers, for the most part, though Estela indicated that, when her husband arrived home from work, he always checked to see if homework was done or if anyone needed help with homework. Coleta stated that her 19 year old son felt he was the best qualified to help the younger siblings with their homework assignments.

As previously mentioned, most homework was done at the kitchen table according to the parents. Often, children often did not have their own space in the home, due to the need to share bedrooms and somewhat cramped quarters. In addition, the mother wanted to be able to supervise them as she attended to other matters, such as cooking the family meal and overseeing the other children. Most parents acknowledged that they really could not help their children when it came to reading, although most of the parents could read some English. They were limited by the inability to pronounce words properly for their children. In these situations an older sibling, who has been relatively successful in middle or high school often helped out his or her younger sibling. Overall, homework and long-term assignments were taken seriously by the parents, and based on their understanding of the assignments, they helped the children as much as they were able.

The primary reason parents wanted to learn to read and speak English was to be able to help their children with homework. Help with homework was reported more than once in my interviews with parents. Several programs were already in place at the school

to address this issue, to a degree, but Estela suggested that there is a need for something more in-depth. The Success Club, held in the mornings before school, provided an opportunity for students who had problems in mathematics and reading to: (a) obtain assistance, (b) have homework checked, (c) agendas signed, and (d) review concepts being taught on their grade level. The School Instructional Extension Program (SIEP), which is conducted after school two afternoons per week, was an academic support program that addressed the specific needs of students who performed below grade level expectations in mathematics and reading. Enrollment in SIEP is based on scores on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and assessments from the classroom teacher for each participant. However, there is limited homework assistance available during this program. Estela provided information about a homework help program that was available, previously, in a local church in her neighborhood. Students were able to meet with tutors who assisted them with their assignments. She thought it would be beneficial to have a similar program like this at the school so students would be able to have someone explain assignments. She reported that, as her daughter's assignments have become more difficult, she has had to tell her she does not understand and cannot help her.

The parents turned their attention from more external concerns to things within the parameters of the school, which they felt should be addressed. The members of the group discussed the possibility of having curriculum nights to instruct the parents in mathematics and reading strategies. Parents said they wanted to know what is coming up, and they wanted to participate in these types of meetings. I explained that the staff had previously planned and held such parent curriculum nights. The teachers were frustrated,

because they put so much effort into such events, yet they experienced extremely low participation. The only after-school events, in which there have been notable significant parent involvement in the past, were those activities in which the children were involved.

Another source of support for parents at the school was the Family Resource Center (FRC), funded through the Title I budget and operated by the paraprofessional parent liaison. In talking about the resources available in the FRC, I mentioned some of the self-improvement literature available. When I inquired about interest in completion of a course that would lead to obtaining a high school equivalency degree, several parents expressed interest. I mentioned that the study manuals for a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) were in the FRC and accessible to all of our parents. Also, these parents mentioned a desire to participate in classes to help them prepare for the GED examination. They suggested that the availability of computer classes, such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, would not only help them help their children, but would be of benefit to them and enhance their professional skills for workplace advancement or pursuit of future job opportunities. Parents, who had older children in the home, commented that, often, the older ones were better able to help the younger children.

School climate. The presence of a classroom environment that is positive and conducive to learning is important (Wong & Wong, 2009). The parents in the study were pleased with the warm, caring atmosphere that was characteristic of the classrooms at school. They believed their children's teachers genuinely wanted each child to be successful. The consensus of these participants was that communication between the home and school was basically good. All of the families in this current study had migrated to the U.S. in order to seek a better life, not only for themselves, but also for

their children. Georgia was the desired location because of job opportunities. The parents maintained that the education their children received was more advanced than the schooling they had obtained in their native country. Destina noted that the caliber of education her children received at the target public school was comparable to a private school education back in her home country. The teachers of the children, whose parents participated in the study, commented that they truly valued the communication and connection between the parent and teacher. Several teachers expressed concern that they were not able to meet the expectations of the parents in regard to effective communication in order to help their children. The parents, on the other hand, felt good about the communication between school and home, but felt they were not able to adequately help their children in the areas in which they were struggling.

Unlike other participants in the study, Gitana did not see the relevance of some homework assignments. She has four children, who are served through the special education department, and she had strong opinions about the types of homework. She believed that the most important thing was that the children learn to read and write. In talking with Gitana, I discerned that many of the challenges that existed between her and school personnel were a result of miscommunication and a lack of understanding on her part in regard to the concerns teachers had for the well-being of her children. She did not seem to appreciate the teachers' interest in non-academic matters regarding her children.

The goal of educators is to create a learning environment in which students can thrive emotionally, physically, and academically (Wong & Wong, 2009). I felt it was important to understand the participants' perspective on how school personnel treated them personally. Most of all, I wanted to know if they, as parents, felt welcome when

they came on campus or if they felt as though they were treated as *second class citizens*.

The next questions addressed this issue: "How do you view the school?" and "Do you feel welcome there?" Overwhelmingly, the parents communicated satisfaction with the interactions they had with staff members at the school and reported that they always felt welcome when they came on campus. The majority of parents were pleased with the quality of instruction their children received, and how their children were treated by the teachers. The parents were appreciative of the care they believed their children received from their teachers and the staff. They were gratified that their children were happy at the school and expressed a desire to remain within the boundaries of the school attendance district. Coleta reported that she felt more welcome at this school than at any other her child had attended and declared that the school was "the best!"

Only one parent expressed a divergent opinion. Gitana expressed dissatisfaction with the school, based on her experience with her youngest child's teacher. Because of observable concerns, the school counselor made several referrals to the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) on behalf of the youngest school-age child. The mother blamed the teacher and thought that she should be concerned about academics not how the child was dressed. She was also frustrated by the constant complaints from the teacher that the child: (a) did not submit completed homework, (b) would not stay in his seat, or that (c) spoke out inappropriately. She felt like the teacher was just trying to remove the child from her class because she did not want to be bothered with him. The mother commented that the child "was not right in the head." I mentioned to her the various types of strategies the teacher used in class to help her child, which I had actually

observed in class, but the mother insisted the teacher just wanted to remove her child from the class.

One of the purposes of this study was to hear the parents' voice in regard to how school personnel could better help them help their children be successful in school. Because of the child-centered and caring focus of the administrators and instructional staff of the school, the parents were not critical of the school staff, with the exception of Gitana. Many felt the teachers were helping them already. In that regard, it was difficult for me to encourage parents to suggest ways for the school staff to improve its communication or improve assistance to parents. For the most part, the parents were aware of the efforts being made by the staff and were appreciative of them. With some probing, several issues surfaced that the leadership team of the school could address.

To close each interview I asked participants an open-ended question about their impressions of school personnel and programs. The parents reaffirmed their love for the school staff and their appreciation for the sense of welcome and inclusion they feel. Parents reiterated previously stated concerns. Always having someone available at the school to translate, when parents who do not speak English come in for meetings or programs, was an important concern, as was making the English language course for parents more accessible and effective. Floria underscored the challenge that was presented by after school activities for her and her children due to a lack of transportation. Parents made it clear that they felt the school staff were effective in the education of their children and work with them as parents.

Focus groups. The two focus groups conducted during the study provided participants with an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and mutual support. Parents

engaged in a beneficial conversation in which they openly discussed their perceptions of the school and some real concerns. To begin with, parents shared how they perceived the school. In regard to the ways in which the educators helped their students, parents noted teacher enthusiasm. The parents genuinely appreciated the high expectations and positive attitude toward their children that the teachers consistently displayed. Also, they were grateful because the teachers taught their children how to be responsible. The rigorous curriculum at the school was a *mixed bag* of sorts. The parents recognized that their children have learned things beyond what they learned at the same grade level when they were in school in their native land; however, they are frustrated that they cannot help them more. They acknowledged that academic support provided through the Success Club and SIEP program have been a help to their children.

In regard to communication between the school and home, most of the parents reported satisfaction with the efforts of the school staff. They appreciated having translators for conferences and school meetings and that many of the school letters and notices were translated into Spanish. When asked if they would have a problem with possible inaccuracies in the translation of documents if teachers utilized internet translation websites, the parents said it was not a big concern. They were just appreciative of the efforts the teachers made to communicate with them and help them feel a part of the school community.

The parents were grateful that I wanted to obtain their input and to hear their opinions about the education of their children. This level of involvement in their child's education was a new experience for them. From talking with the parents and even my interpreter, I sensed that in Mexico and other Latino countries, parents are not directly

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involved in their children's education. This opportunity for these parents to provide feedback and input was rewarding and motivating to them.

Parental involvement. The leaders of the school have actively sought ways to build parental involvement at every level. Based on the recognition of the importance of parents being involved in their children's education, and understanding that this is not typical of school systems in other countries based on what parents related, I wanted to investigate that facet of their thinking. One parent arrived late to the focus group because of the lack of transportation. The focus of the conversation became the lack of transportation in order to attend school functions. Often, there was only one car in the family and, typically, fathers needed it for transportation to work. Some mothers indicated they did not drive, which made attendance at after-school conferences and evening school events difficult.

As I learned in the final focus group, one of the biggest issues with the English language classes was the scheduling. Having them during the school day worked well for the stay-at-home mothers. Childcare was provided free of charge, and the environment for the mothers was welcoming, but many were unable to attend. The parents suggested that, for the working parents, classes in the evenings or on the weekend would make them more accessible. In addition to childcare for the toddlers and infants, parents stated they would need homework help for the older, school-age children if classes were scheduled on a school night.

Somewhat related to the issue of scheduling of English classes was another matter in regard to transportation. As mentioned, for some mothers it was not possible to attend the English language classes because there was only one family car, and the husband

needed it to drive to work. Lack of transportation was also behind Destina's concern that her child could not attend reading and mathematics remediation classes, which were held after school each week. She had no way to pick up her child after school, and she could not walk to the school with a toddler and infant. She felt the Success Club, that meets at school each morning 30 minutes before the first bell, was a better alternative since it was held after students arrived on the bus. Being able to utilize county transportation eliminated the need for the mother to make arrangements to pick up the child. During Success Club, students had the opportunity to go over homework assignments, receive extra help in either reading or math, and even have their agendas signed if the parents forgot to sign them the night before. In regard to their participation in the English language classes, parents asked that the schedule be adjusted so that working fathers and mothers could attend.

In regard to the language barrier and its impact on the parents' school involvement, parents made it clear that a larger concern that prohibits participation in school events is an imminent fear of being arrested by the local police. Parents were hesitant to ask neighbors or friends to drive them to school. There was no issue with neighbors being friendly or helpful; however, they had a real fear that the local police might stop them and detain their friend who might be in the country illegally. Several parents shared personal experiences in which they or their friends were targeted by local law enforcement officers. Several parents indicated that they try not to leave their homes any more than necessary to avoid confrontations with the police officers. From their perspective, they are being discriminated against unjustly and their activities curtailed purely out of apprehensiveness. When I asked about steps they had taken to address this

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concern, several parents reported that they had talked with public officials, including the local chief of police. They indicated that he was receptive to their concerns. Still, the uneasiness was evident.

In addition, the participants voiced another concern that hampered their attendance at school functions. They discussed a rumor one parent had heard about school officials and government agents, who checked on the immigration status of families. The fear was that school officials would report undocumented families to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and their children would be taken away from them. From that conversation, I immediately knew that building trust was a major issue. It was imperative that the parents knew the school staff respected them as families, valued their children, and was not an informant arm of the INS. Parents were assured that school staff was not interested in the immigration status of its families, and the whole legal/illegal debate had nothing to do with providing their children with a quality education.

Help with English language. Coping with another culture and an unfamiliar language has its challenges. Living in the 21st Century places at the disposal of parents who are LEP a wide range of technology to assist in language translation. Even though the socioeconomic status of the school is low and nearly 76% of students receive free or reduced lunch, in some homes, students do have access to various forms of technology to help with homework assignments. Parents 1 and 8 reported that they had computers and internet access, which they utilized to help their children with homework. Estela had a translation device she used when she did not understand something in English. The attitude of the parents was encouraging to me. They did not allow the language barrier to

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prevent them from being involved in their children's education and had taken steps to provide assistance for them through technology.

Final Focus Group

The final focus group was held after all the individual interviews had been completed. The focus group was held at the school in the evening and included a light meal and childcare. In an effort to thank the parents for their participation in the study and to enable them to participate in this final focus group, I provided pizza and salad for them and pizza, cookies, and a movie for the children. Volunteers made it possible for the children to enjoy their pizza and movie on the big screen in the school cafeteria during the time I met with their parents in the media center. I was able to share with the parents what I had learned from the individual interviews.

With use of a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix N), I confidentially summarized what I had learned. I included demographics of the participants in the study, and the main concerns they reported in regard to barriers to their children's academic success. In addition, I told them that several of the suggestions, which they made, will help administrators and teachers at the school be more responsive to the needs of families who are CLD.

Summary

In reviewing all the interviews with the families in this study, several recurring themes surfaced. The overriding theme was that parents clearly understood that, in order for them to be able to help their children succeed in school, they wanted to become more proficient in English. One of the biggest barriers parents related to me was their inability to understand the assignments and not knowing what was expected of their children.

Even though this was not a surprise, I had mistaken the motives of these parents. I assumed that because these parents had been in the U.S. for many years and had not already learned English, they did not want to let go of their Hispanic culture. I had surmised that they did not want to become a part of the U.S. culture. Instead, I found that, for the majority of these parents, survival was their primary concern. They worked long, hard hours to be able to provide for their families. There were roadblocks that stood in the way of them being able to afford themselves the opportunity to learn English. They wanted to attend, but because of daytime scheduling, transportation issues, and fear of the police, the parents felt English classes were not possible. The discussions I had with the parents in both the individual interviews and the focus groups brought to the surface again that the parents really do want to learn English but feel as though they are prisoners to their daily schedules, fear of arrest, and family responsibilities.

Also, the impact of a family's socioeconomic status resonated in the findings of this study. Even though there was a degree of fear to leave their homes because of potential harassment by the police, also, there was the stark reality that participation in school events was often curtailed due to a lack of transportation. If the family owned a vehicle, it was required for the parent who worked to drive to work in order to support the family. Most of the families in the study lived in a mobile home park, although some had modest homes in subdivisions close to the school. All of the parents interviewed indicated that they struggled to keep ahead of their bills. It was also noted during the interview phase that in two of the homes which were visited, the prominent feature was a television, not a bookshelf. Literacy materials observed included magazines and

newspapers. Also, children had hand-held video games, which they played, as the translator and I interviewed the parent.

Another theme, as unpleasant as it was to hear, was the oppression and discrimination parents have experienced from the local law enforcement officials. Even though I assured parents that the staff of the school did not share nor condone the kinds of attitudes and harassment they were experienced, I felt it was difficult for them to separate one government institution from another. Because school personnel are mandated reporters and required by law to report any legitimate suspicion of child neglect or abuse, sometimes, parents feel intimidated. This reinforced my desire to build a strong level of trust with the families so that we could work together closely and successfully for the benefit of their children. Repeatedly, these parents remarked about the friendliness of the school staff and how welcomed they felt each time they came for a program or conference. Additionally, they appreciated that I was conducting a study of this nature and were grateful that the administrators and teachers at the school were concerned about their opinions and feelings. The relational aspect of the findings of this study cannot be overlooked. In order for parents and teachers to work closely together, there must be a high level of trust.

Due to the language barrier, I had expected there to be more of a concern over home and school communication; however, in general, the parents were satisfied with the efforts, which the personnel at the school had made. They were pleased with the provision of translators for conferences and meetings and appreciated the fact that some memos were translated into Spanish. Because most parents could read enough English to

understand basic concepts, the general feeling was that having the documents, such as newsletters, in English only encouraged them to learn more English. This attitude among the parents supported the primary request of the parents to provide more English language classes at times when they could attend, and to provide child care for toddlers and homework help for school-age children.

During the second focus group, I specifically asked if the parents had anything else they wanted to share that would enrich the findings of this study. I attempted to summarize the understandings I had gained thus far, and I encouraged more ideas or suggestions. No one provided any additional ideas at this point though I did leave them with a reminder that I am always willing to listen and urged them to let me know of any ideas they may have in the future. At the conclusion, parents expressed their appreciation for involving them in this study and for trying to hear their voice about the educational issues surrounding their children.

When I began this study, I was cognizant of the danger of imposing my own ideas on the participants in the course of our interviews. I made great efforts to avoid leading questions that would coax parents to give answers they thought I wanted to hear. Chapter Five will consider the actual findings of the study in context of the parent's sincere desire to take responsibility for helping their children succeed academically.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Children**,** who come from homes where English is not the primary language**,** often face additional challenges in their educational endeavors in United States schools (Pang, 2010). Cultural differences, lack of living experiences, and family educational background can have a notable effect on English language learners (ELLs). In addition, Pang suggested that, because many immigrant families did not receive a good education before they came to the U.S., it is difficult for them to provide a literacy-rich, educationally motivating environment for their children, who are enrolled in U.S. schools. Because of the prominent role parents play in the support of their children in school, the impact of parents not being able to read and speak English can be marked. In Chapter 5, I discuss the results of my qualitative study, which was to investigate the level of academic support in the homes of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD).

Summary of Findings

Eight parents of CLD students, who struggled academically, participated in this phenomenological qualitative study. During the study, I solicited the parents' viewpoints about: (a) the school personnel and programs, (b) the school climate, (c) communication with their children's teachers, and (d) the support they need in order to better help their children be successful. After completion of the interviews and focus groups, I reviewed the transcriptions to look for common themes. As I noted commonalities among the responses of the parents, I compiled them, and from those comments, I identified related themes.

Parents' perception of the staff and program at the school. Parents commented about some of the differences between their own schooling experience and the way their children feel about school. The majority of the parents did not have a particularly positive experience in their school career; however, their children are happy at the school. Also, they noted the level and quality of instruction appears to be higher in our school in comparison to what they experienced when they were in elementary school. The parents reported that they always felt welcome at the school, spoke highly of their children's teachers, and indicated that the staff members were always willing to help them. This was not their perception of their own school experience. They felt the children were receiving an excellent education. Even though one parent experienced some challenges with her youngest child's teacher, due to some miscommunications and misunderstandings, the majority of the parents reported that they love the school and were pleased with the education their children have been receiving.

Parents' communication with their children's teachers. The parents in the study agreed that communication between the parents and teachers was good overall. They did appreciate the receipt of newsletters and memoranda, which had been translated into Spanish, but most of the parents were able to read some English or had an older child in the home who could translate for them. Several parents indicated that, when the documents were not translated, they were encouraged to learn more English, which they perceived as a good thing. The single most important thing to the participants included in the study was having a translator for conference and school meetings. Similarly, every parent mentioned something in reference to the importance of having a translator available to them. Even the parent, who had some misunderstandings with the teacher,

acknowledged how valuable the assistance of the translator was for the many conferences she had in regard to her child. Parents genuinely appreciated teachers' attempts to have letters translated, but understood that, for the entire school, officially, there was only one person designated for translation and interpreting for conferences. Parents were resolute in their determination to be involved at school in spite of the communication barrier.

Parental help with the children's homework. The parents were especially resourceful in terms of how they addressed the issue of homework and long-term assignments. The mothers preferred that their children complete homework at the kitchen table, so that they could supervise them. Often, older siblings, who were proficient in English, provided oversight of the homework, but the parents still tried to stay involved. Several participants had computers with internet access, so anytime a question arose it was possible to search on the world-wide-web. In addition, the use of dictionaries and hand-held translation devices were mentioned as everyday tools, which were used to help their children with homework assignments.

Support for parents by the teachers and other school staff. The participants communicated appreciation for the help they already received from their children's teachers and other school staff. Several parents were in the English language course offered through the Family Resource Center (FRC). Other parents were familiar with the resources in the FRC and had checked out materials to use at home. Two important issues were raised by the participants. The primary observation was that the non-English speaking parents needed to take the English language course. The problem the participants addressed was the scheduling of the classes. Also, some preferred a live teacher instead of a computer-based instructional program. Because of prolonged work

hours in order to make ends meet, the need for childcare, and the lack of transportation, many parents could not attend classes during the school day. The parents reported that classes in the evenings and on weekends would allow more of them to participate. In addition, the lack of transportation was factor that limited students' participation in the after school remediation programs specifically designed to help their children who struggling academically. The socio-economic factor cannot be removed from this matter. The majority of the mothers, who were interviewed, were homemakers and did not work outside the home. The limitation of access to transportation prevented the participation of many mothers in school activities and, often, the scheduling of events prevented the fathers' participation.

School personnel's support for the parents' efforts to help their children. The participants in the study had one primary suggestion as to how the school staff could help them: English language classes. The current classes offered at the school during the day are not accessible to many of the LEP parents. A more flexible schedule for class offerings, including evenings and weekends, was the recommendation of most participants. Two participants mentioned their preference for a live instructor instead of the computer-based program currently being offered. Also, they suggested that more classes should be scheduled per week to promote more success. The participants emphasized the importance of having someone available at the school to translate for them during conferences, meetings, and when they come to the school for events or other school business. Translation of documents being sent home was another issue, which participants addressed with somewhat mixed opinions. Several felt being forced to read newsletters and assignments in English encouraged them in their quest to learn to read

and speak English. Providing documents for the participants in their native language is consistent with Cummins' (1979, 2001) second language acquisition theory noting the interdependence of L1 and L2. Having the documents translated into Spanish for the parents not only helps them maintain L1 as they begin learning L2 (English), but also it provides an opportunity for the students to maintain and improve their own L1 skills as they move toward acquiring CALP. Other parents appreciated the efforts on the part of school personnel to make communication easier: (a) documents translated into Spanish, (b) scheduled academic help classes during the mornings after students arrive at school on the bus, and (c) teachers speak slower so parents can more easily understand. These recommendations seemed to be within the scope of the school staff to address in order to meet the needs of the LEP parents; however, one issue was raised that I did not immediately see as something local school personnel could adequately address. Several participants observed that their participation in language classes and school events to support their child is hindered by a lack of transportation. This absence of transportation impedes their children being able to participate in remedial academic programs that are held after school hours. The basis for this concern over the lack of transportation is not purely socioeconomic or due to the absence of individuals with vehicles. Also, it is a result of fear of harassment by local police. Parents feel somewhat vulnerable if they leave their homes to attend an event in the evening. To ask a friend to provide transportation can place the parent in an awkward situation in the event that friend were stopped by police and found to be an undocumented immigrant. Although this issue seemed to be beyond the scope of what school personnel could tackle, it was a very real concern for the participants in the study and merits further investigation.

As each interview was concluded, I asked parents again to share any other impressions they had regarding the school. My intention was to elicit any additional insight the participants might have that could instruct my analysis of their responses and solidify my focus in the study. The goal is to determine how school personnel could better assist parents, who are LEP, as they seek to help their children be successful in school from the parents' perspective.

The majority of parents reported satisfaction with the efforts of the teachers and administrators to reach out to parents, particularly those who did not speak English. Also, the participants reinforced their belief that English language classes for LEP parents would be the greatest benefit to them in their quest to help their children succeed academically. One parent expressed her concern about lack of transportation to school events, conferences, parent meetings, and even English language classes after school hours. Another parent reiterated her apprehension that her child's teacher concerned herself more with hygiene or clothing issues, instead of only with his academic progress.

Theoretical Implications

The impact of the findings of this study on education rests on two key elements: parental support of their children and parental involvement in school. Both of these outcomes produce positive benefits for the child. According to Sohn and Wang (2006), parental involvement is beneficial to the parents and teachers, as well as to the students. In addition, Sohn and Wang acknowledged that teachers need to attempt to communicate well with parents, who do not speak English, less they imply to these parents that they are not wanted or needed. Turney and Kao (2009) suggested that parental involvement, regardless of race or cultural background, promotes the importance and value of

education to the child. Teachers have always understood the value of parental involvement in regard to student achievement. The genuine, caring outreach of teachers in the target school to the parents (i.e., especially those who are somewhat disenfranchised by the lack of English language skills) has helped to build a culture of acceptance and warmth. The parents in the study reported their satisfaction with the teachers and their efforts to make communication effective. Additionally, the participants were positive about their own involvement in school programs and activities, largely due to the presence of interpreters, who were present at meetings to make understanding possible. Hyslop (2000) suggested that parental involvement programs must reach Hispanic parents and enable them to participate in their children's school in spite of cultural barriers. There has been a marked increase in parental involvement at the target school since the inception of the Family Resource Center (FRC) and the directed efforts of the Parent Involvement Paraprofessional 3 years ago. Most recently, there has been a greater involvement of parents, who are culturally and linguistically diverse, specifically, the Hispanic parents.

Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2007) suggested that minority and low-income students entered school notably behind their more affluent peers and were not prepared to learn to read. These study participants acknowledged the importance of their children learning to read. All participants indicated the use of at least some minimal positive literacy-building practices in their homes, such as reading to their children and the presence of children's books in the home. However, none of the children in the study attended a preschool prior to kindergarten. Every family is unique, and how they chose to assimilate into the culture was determined by the beliefs and values held by the parents, and times have changed.

Preschool and even kindergarten were not major factors in the overall U.S. educational

program a generation or so ago but, participants were primarily from Mexico. Today,

with the prevalence of working parents in the U.S. culture, who must utilize child care

facilities and the desire of those parents for their children to get ahead academically,

preschools are almost considered foundational to the educational experience. The target

school staff always asks the parents of new kindergarten students if they attended a

preschool program. Those from other cultures may not necessarily ascribe to the belief

that formal education is essential in the very early years. The participants in this study

held a very high regard for family, and several of the mothers did not work outside the

home because of their commitment to family values. In one specific case, the mother

indicated that her husband did not want her to work, but preferred her to be at home to

care for the household and raise the children. My impression from our discussions was

that keeping their children at home in those early, developmental years was preferred.

Constantino (1999) maintained that pre-literacy training, including vocabulary building

and developing cultural awareness, needs to begin early in a child's development.

Most of the participants' children receive free or reduced lunch, an indication

their family's income is near or below the poverty level. Even though the implementation

of various initiatives, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have been focused on

closing the cultural and socioeconomic achievement gap (Lee, 2006), little change has

been noted. The cost of preschool and private daycare would have been prohibitive for

the participants in the study; thus, their children were denied the advantage of that early

preparation. The pre-literacy initiatives in the participants' homes did not adequately

prepare students for the rigors of the classroom, as all struggled academically, particularly in the area of reading and language arts.

Implications for Practice

The primary objective in this study has been to hear the voice of parents who are CLD in regard to what school personnel could do to support them as they seek to help their children who were struggling academically. From the outset of this investigation, I have been concerned with the barriers to learning experienced by CLD students. Poverty and the lack of resources early in a child's development negatively impact his or her readiness for school (Garcia & Gonzalez, 2006; Rivera, 2009).

Also, cultural differences and unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system can be limiting factors. Hyslop (2000) suggested that many Hispanic parents are unfamiliar with strategies to help their children at home. My discussions with the participants and their frustrations in working with their children at home supported Hyslop's conclusion. This was particularly evidenced in the participants' desire for more curriculum nights and advanced notice of what their students would be covering so they would be able to help them. The parents definitely wanted to be able to help their children, but they did not know how to address the particular standards being taught. Some parents related notable differences in classroom instruction from what they had experienced in their own elementary education. A learning gap existed for some parents because they did not complete their education, although the majority finished the elementary grades.

Hyslop (2007) indicated that many of the parents felt inadequate because of their own experiences in school; however, the majority of the participants in this study seemed more focused on their children's academic struggles and possible solutions than their

inadequacies. In particular, one participant made a conscious effort to help her children understand the greater opportunity they have by being educated in this country.

Until recently, the number of Hispanic parents, who do not speak English and still participated in school-based activities was very low. Turney and Kao (2009) perceived the participation of parents in fund-raising or social events, chaperoning field trips, and serving on advisory committees as indications of parental involvement. I observed parents who were trying to be as actively involved in their children's education as possible, especially as they: (a) supervised their children's time and activities, (b) helped with homework, and (c) provided encouragement in spite of the barriers they faced. They were not highly visible in activities at the school, but they tried to be involved. With the implementation of the FRC, an initiative of the district to support parents, and the targeted efforts of the parent involvement paraprofessional, Hispanic parents were noticeably more visible and involved at school. This includes: (a) parents' attendance at conferences and parent meetings, (b) eating lunch with their child, and (c) chaperoning field trips. These activities have taken place in spite of the language barrier. One parent commented that it made her feel good to be at school and support her child, even if she did not understand what people said. She knew her child valued having her at school.

One of the primary concerns I had in the implementation of this study was to understand the hindrance to learning, which exists because of the language barrier, particularly in the most foundational area, that is, learning to read. Cummins (1979) distinguished between two different types of language acquisition: social language and academic language. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is the context-embedded language used in everyday life, and Cognitive Academic Language

Proficiency (CALP) is the more abstract language, which involves the mastery of vocabulary and understanding the concepts requisite to for school success. Many children develop native language fluency (BICS) within 2-3 years of immersion in the target language (Cummins, 1991). However, the achievement of proficiency in the more abstract aspect of the language (i.e., CALP) and being able to function on a level comparable with native language speakers typically takes 5-7 years (Cummins, 2001). All of the participants in the study indicated they understood some English, although none could fluently speak or read English. In comparison, their children were reasonably proficient in BICS. Some of the children were beginning to attain a degree of proficiency in CALPS, although this is the form of language acquisition that requires the highest level of skill and takes the longest amount of time to master. Even though Cummins and other experts in language acquisition for CLD children, such as Collier and Thomas (1997) provided insight in the lengthy process and challenges of teaching CLD students to speak and read in English, they did not address the particular phenomena, which I identified as I interviewed the study participants. In several of the homes, not only are the parents non-English speakers, but the children are non-Spanish speakers. The parents speak in Spanish, and the children converse in English, and yet they somehow manage to communicate. Although in most families both students and parents speak Spanish in the home, there were several families who cannot. In fact, several of the parents indicated that they often depend on older siblings to translate for them, particularly to help the younger children with school work. An interesting finding in the study was that one father decided that in order for his children to become proficient in English, they should not be allowed to watch cartoons and other programs on the local Spanish television

channels. Seemingly, this would run counter to Cummins' (1979, 2001) theory that in order for the child to become proficient in L2, he or she needs to maintain and develop proficiency in L1. Engaging Hispanic parents in a practical, non-academic discussion regarding Cummins' theory and how allowing the children to continue using and developing their Spanish will actually help them with their English will be important as I seek to implement the things learned in this study. This was another indicator to me of the important role language plays in regard to the academic concerns of the children in these homes. Parents need to be able to read and understand their children's assignments in order to help them complete them properly.

The participants in the study believed learning to speak and read English was the most important thing they could do in order to help their children be successful in school. Almost all the parents reported that the most helpful resource for them would be access to English language classes at more convenient times. Currently, parents may attend a computer-based English language class during the school day once a week. Because of work schedules, lack of transportation, and child care issues, parents suggested that classes be offered in the evenings and on the weekends. Several participants voiced a concern over the lack of effectiveness of the computer-based program and suggested that a live instructor, who could respond to their questions, would be more beneficial.

Just as there are questions about how children best learn to speak and read English as a second language, the participants in the study raised a concern about their own second language acquisition. Atherton (2009) observed that the ability to transfer learning in a second language is preceded by the ability to transfer learning in one's native language; this applies correspondingly to both children and adults in the learning English.

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Those parents, who are non-English speakers, would progress along the same continuum as their children, that is, comprehension to application to analysis to synthesis to evaluation. The difference is that most of the children have learned English in the context-embedded experiences of everyday life, then began their cognitive pursuit of the intricacies of the language to meet academic demands (Cummins, 2001). Parents, who now seek to learn English, must begin the process without the benefit of having acquired the social dimension of the language as did their children. This accentuates the need for face-to-face conversations with a live teacher in the language classroom context.

Based on the findings of this study, Hispanic parents want to be involved and help their children academically; however, they feel they are handicapped due to the language barrier. Because Hispanic families represent nearly 20% of the school population, there are important implications for the staff of the target school. Teachers need to be sensitive to the challenge faced by these non-English speaking parents as they seek to help their children in school. Efforts to communicate, even flawed attempts at having documents translated by computer-generated websites, are appreciated by the LEP parents, as indicated by the participants in the study. Also, teachers need to avoid stereotypical thinking that might suggest a lack of English proficiency equates to ignorance, and be welcoming and inviting to LEP parents. This appears to be the norm at the target school, where teachers seek to be accessible to all parents and deal with them empathetically. Typically, teachers compensate for any perceived lack of parental support due to a lack of English language skills on the part of the parents. Educators must continue to go out of their way to include these somewhat estranged parents and provide them with help to

understand classroom routines and procedures, and even provide classes for parents to help them understand new units or special projects their children are about to undertake.

Having addressed what I believe are pertinent suggestions for educators to consider regarding the parents' concerns, I would also like to suggest a broader implication that reaches into the larger school community. The school partners with a number of churches and other local organization through the Partner In Education (PIE) initiative in our district. In light of my findings there are a number of ways that these partnerships would be beneficial for our CLD students and parents. Implementing the kind of English language program desired by the parents will require qualified ESOL instructors. Several churches in the area currently work with pockets of the Hispanic population and the opportunity to broaden the scope of their outreach through the efforts we are taking at the school would give them a more far-reaching capacity to minister to these families. Utilizing volunteers from the churches to facilitate the English language program would provide significant support for the Family Resource Center (FRC) at the school. Another valuable service for parents would be providing translation services at school functions such as parent-teacher meetings, special parent involvement programs, and student presentations. Several parents expressed a desire to learn job-related skills such as computer software proficiency, and even preparation for taking the general education diploma (GED) examination. There are materials available in the FRC for GED preparation, but there is a need for personnel to conduct classes. Similarly, there is access to computers on both a small and large scale at the school, but currently there are no funds to support job-skill training for parents. Through our partnerships with businesses in the community that would benefit from qualified job applicants and the

assistance of volunteers from the churches and other organizations to conduct skill-based classes, we could address the needs of our Hispanic families and continue building strong relationships within our local community.

Regarding the correlation of the findings of this study to other ethnicities, the literature was clear that parental involvement in a school is beneficial to students, teachers, and parents (Sohn & Wang, 2006). This applicability of this concept crosses all cultural lines. Sohn and Wang also determined that unintended insensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences, regardless of what ethnicity, could communicate negative messages to CLD parents, suggesting that because of their lack of proficiency in English they are unintelligent. Such barriers have no place in a school community that is seeking to reach out and include CLD families. Cummins' (2001) theory regarding acquisition of a second language or L2 while maintaining the native language (L1) would also be relevant to CLD parents and students from cultures other than Hispanic. Best practices in teaching students also apply across ethnicities. Gersten, Baker, Marks, and Smith's (1999) synthesis of research on effective instructional techniques for CLD students , including use of visuals and cooperative learning, apply to learners from any ethnicity.

The objective of this study has been to gain the parents' perspective in regard to what they need to enable them to support their children academically at home. The participants in the study clearly identified what they believed would help them the most: learning to speak and read English. They suggested the provision of curriculum nights to prepare parents for new units in school. However, the translation of more school documents into Spanish was, in the parents' opinion, a secondary issue, since they want to learn English. Based on Cummins' theory (1979, 2001) of second language

acquisition, learning a new language or L2 and continuing to maintain L1 are vitally interconnected. Maintaining and even developing L1 skills will benefit the parents as they learn English.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover CLD parents' perspective regarding their need for support in helping their academically struggling students. In a phenomenological study, the researchers describes what all the participants share in common in regard to the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2007). All eight families who participated in the study shared the common experience of helping a student or students who struggled academically, but their efforts were directly and negatively impacted by a second common thread: their own inability to read or speak English. In looking for common themes as I examined the data, these two commonalities surfaced immediately. These two themes share the *big idea* concept of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and are a prominent part of the findings of the study.

Another common experience that surfaced was the somewhat oppressive fear of harassment by the local police. Although this may not be seen as an immediate threat to the academic support of struggling students, it was a very real concern for these parents. This fear of discrimination and possible maltreatment had a notable impact on the parents' reluctance to be involved in school functions, even coming to the school for a parent-teacher conference. The parents expressed a concern that just leaving their home in order to come to the school could bring unwanted intimidation from the police. Several participants shared stories of acquaintances in their mobile home park, who were threatened and even arrested simply because they were Hispanic. Even though, as

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educators, we say that one's legal documentation status is not our issue, it becomes genuine part of the dynamic in building strong bonds between parents and teachers. Parent, who are afraid of incarceration or even deportation, are not likely to make their presence known openly, nor do they want to focus any attention on themselves. This challenge could impede the kind of communication and true connection between the parents and teachers, which could potentially benefit them as they seek to help their children be successful in school. These themes have had a notable influence on my evaluation of the data.

I would like the findings from this study to reach the level of general applicability, as suggested by Lofland (1974); that is, when a generic theme can be brought to a level of abstraction that causes it to be relevant in a much broader context and not seen as just a localized concern. However, there were some limitations that have an impact on the data obtained and, thus could restrict ,a broader application. The first limitation is the size of the sample. These eight participants were very representative of the targeted population, but the target school has a Hispanic population of nearly 20%. Not all of the Hispanic students struggle academically, and not all come from homes in which the parents do not speak English.

Another limitation could be my own position and influence within the school community. I have been at the school for over a decade, and I have gotten to know older siblings and been very visible throughout the school. This familiarity could impact data collection. The relationship of the interpreter utilized for the interviews and focus groups could be perceived as a limitation, as well. Her position in the school and demeanor with the parents and students has endeared her to them. They have a high level of trust and

respect for her. The overall atmosphere of the school is welcoming and caring. In general, parents feel good about the education their children receive, and they are comfortable with the warm environment that pervades the school. Parents may not have felt the need to raise issues with the school because they love it and their children love it. I encouraged them not to hold back or worry about hurting anyone's feelings, but my concern is that they were not willing to be critical of the teachers or administrators because of their respect for them.

Another limitation may have been the increasing influence of the parent involvement paraprofessional and the programs she has implemented. She specifically targeted those parents she felt were somewhat disenfranchised from the school due to their socioeconomic level or cultural differences. She was aware that some parents did not understand the workings of the U.S. school system, and some were not able to speak English. She has done much to build ties with the Hispanic community within the school and draw those parents into a higher level of involvement. Again, this positive influence, along with teachers who are understanding and *go the extra mile* for their students who struggle, may have somewhat disarmed the parents from being overly critical of the school. I pressed for more openness and brutal honesty, but the participants made the point that they believed learning to speak and read English was the single most important factor in them being able to better assist their children in their school work. Their secondary concern, in regard to a fear of reprisal from the local police, was a plea of sorts for the school to provide a level of protection that is beyond its scope. The effect of this fear of oppression is evident in their conversations, and this fear weighs heavily on me because it is beyond my sphere of influence and power to change it.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are boundaries of study set by the researcher and are not necessarily weaknesses or flaws (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). I limited the study to a rural elementary school in a small community in Georgia. The minority population of the target school is in excess of 50% including approximately 20% Hispanic students. Also, I limited the study to non-English speaking parents of children who struggled academically. As I considered the delimitations for this study, I wanted to focus on those who, potentially, were the most disenfranchised from the school community due to cultural and linguistic differences. This intentional emphasis on CLD families made data collection more difficult, as a translator was needed for each interview and focus group, but the experience was rich in terms of building relationships with families that previously felt somewhat excluded from the school community.

Recommendations for Future Research

A study, in which the educational needs of students at risk are addressed, particularly those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), and the focus is on parental involvement in their academic endeavors, is replete with potential for further research. The entire area of cultural and traditional mores that impact how parents view education, the role of parents in education, and the responsibilities of the educators for the education of their children, suggests possibilities for variations in this type of study.

One way in which I would approach this particular study differently would be to include more home visits, in order to gain a better understanding of the environment in which the parents were working with their children on homework and other school assignments. Due to the reservations of participants about in-home interviews, most were

conducted at the school. Parents seemed to be more comfortable with this neutral location. As a result, I was only able to visit two of the participants' homes. I feel the experience of being in the home and observing the surrounding and atmosphere of the family would be beneficial. Of particular interest would be the items in the home related to literacy, either in their native language of Spanish, or books and other resources in English. Accessible technology, especially computers and internet availability would be pertinent to the inquiry.

Another way in which I would approach this study differently would be to include a much larger group of participants. This could be accomplished in several different ways: (a) include all CLD families whether the children are struggling academically or not, and (b) include families in which the parents are bilingual. The value of parents knowing the English language and being able to communicate more effectively with the classroom teachers compared to those parents who have limited English-speaking skills would be pertinent to my overall findings.

Building collaboration with parents in education is critical for student success. How that collaboration is built when parents do not speak English deserves further examination. In this study, I examined the needs of non-English speaking or limited English proficient (LEP) parents, in particular, Hispanic parents, for support in order to help their academically challenged students. The same type of investigation in a school with an LEP population that is predominantly Asian or another ethnicity could provide a different perspective. For future investigation, a longitudinal study could be conducted to examine families of CLD students with parents who are LEP to identify the support provided for parents whose students are in middle and high school, as well as graduation

rates for those students. In a future study, the researcher could examine the whole facet of special education and how LEP parents of students with specific learning disabilities are able to work their way through the intricacies of the assessment, eligibility, and placement process for special education services. The level and types of parent involvement for LEP parents is an area that has attracted some attention. Future researchers could examine the impact of LEP parents on school involvement, as they learn to speak and read English on school involvement. Recommendations for further research include a more in-depth study of the effectiveness of computer-based language programs compared to the traditional approach to teaching English as a second language. The participants in the study, who participated in the computer-based program, indicated a desire for more interaction with a live instructor. Also, a longitudinal study could be conducted to follow LEP parents who take English language classes and become proficient speakers, and how that acquisition impacts their ability to help their children with their school work. The focus of this study was on LEP parents of CLD students who struggled academically. A broader study to include LEP parents, whose students are successful in school, might pose questions as to why there is a difference and what those parents could offer in support of parents of the struggling child. A study including all parents of CLD students, who are bilingual, might provide insight into the struggle of LEP parents face as they seek to assimilate into the culture and help their children to succeed in school. Another possible study could be focused on the educational level of the parents who are LEP and their children's academic achievement to determine any correlations. Within cultures, gender may also be an important factor to consider. In this study I did not specifically focus on the gender of the struggling students, although the

majority of them were male. Investigation of the gender biases within a culture and the impact of those predispositions on academic achievement could prove insightful in regard to the provision of academic support. Broadening the scope of this investigation of parents' perception of the support given to them by school personnel by including more schools with a significant CLD population could establish more ways in which educators could respond to LEP parents.

Biblical Principles Related to this Study

When I began this project, my focus was on how I as an educator could more effectively help parents help their children. In particular, my attention was drawn to a portion of the school population that I believed was somewhat disenfranchised from full participation in the life of the school due to the language barrier. Often, Hispanic parents, who were non-English speakers or LEP, appeared somewhat left out of the mainstream of activity at the school due to their inability to communicate with teachers, administrators, and even other parents. Modest efforts were being made by school administrators to provide for translation of documents and interpreters for parent conferences over the past few years. However, because of the high percentage of Hispanic students in our school, the need seemed more pressing to me. Through the efforts of the Parent Involvement Paraprofessional, notable changes began and we started to reach out to our non-English speaking population and provide more accommodations to facilitate LEP parents' increased participation in programs at the school.

I have always considered my career as a school administrator as my ministry, though the concept of school is not apparent in the Bible. I see the campus as my mission field, part of being a witness in my Judea or my Samaria (Acts 1:8). I have a tremendous

opportunity to *live the Gospel* in the context of an educational institution. Every day, there are opportunities to conduct one's life in such a way that others can see evidence of my faith in the decisions I make and the way in which I treat my students and my teachers.

What is clear in the pages of Scripture is the responsibility of parents to teach their children and "train them up" (Proverbs 22:6), and the obligation to pass along their heritage and culture from one generation to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:1-7). My role, as I assisted assisting parents to fulfill their task to educate their children, was a catalyst for my study. Gaining an understanding of how the LEP parents felt that we, as educators, could better assist them as they help their children was important to me in order to build trusting relationships with those parents and be able to implement strategies that would genuinely meet their needs as their child's primary educator.

As a parent, I have experienced the frustration of not being able to adequately help my child with an assignment. Sometimes, that inability to support one's child can be discouraging. In First Thessalonians 5:14(NIV), the Apostle Paul encouraged the church to "encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (NIV). My involvement in this study has enabled me to be an encouragement to those who have become discouraged or disheartened as they have faced the challenges of an unfamiliar system of education and the language barrier. I have equated these disenfranchised parents with those who Paul referred to as "weak" because, by their own admission through the interview process, they lacked the ability to help their children be successful in school.

The book of Deuteronomy records the final words of a truly great teacher, Moses. His classroom was a desert. His students were an incorrigible group of rebellious, stubborn people prone to betrayal and idolatry. He had taught them amazing lessons using remarkable visual aids during the years he served as their leader and the direct channel between God and His chosen people. Still, knowing that after his death the people would turn away from God again and again, he left them with a song of encouragement and hope.

The opening verses of his song found in Deuteronomy 32 are a prayer that his teaching would be like refreshing rain droplets on tender plants. His students had been anything but tender, yet he understood that in order to reach their hearts he would have to first see them as tender plants that needed the refreshing and the fulfillment that only an invigorating and revitalizing rain shower could provide. Throughout this study, there have been occasions to focus on the lack of skills of these parents or their lack of understanding about matters that we, as educators, see so plainly and often take for granted. The necessity that my words and my teaching throughout this study should resemble that gentle, energizing rain shower was clear. The ultimate goal of the study was to identify ways in which we, as educators, could assist and support parents who desire to be that same refreshing rain for their own "tender plants." The overwhelmingly positive response of the participants in the study and the sincere appreciation they expressed, because I sought their input in order to help them help their children, gave credence to the value of this study and emphasized the impact of viewing one's students as tender plants and being that refreshing rain to them.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of how educators could best assist non-English speaking parents in their efforts to help their children who struggle academically. There have been numerous discussions about instructional strategies for helping CLD children learn to read and write. Primarily, the on-going dialogue regarding the advantages of total immersion in a mainstreamed classroom environment (Office of Civil Rights, n.d.) in comparison to programs that emphasize the development and maintenance of literacy in the CLD student's native language (Cummins, 2000), impact the classroom. The intent of this study was to ascertain the needs of the parents in their endeavor to ensure their children's academic success as they help them at home. It was important to hear the parents' voice in regard to what would best support them as they wrestled with an educational system that was unfamiliar to them. Additional factors, which affected their challenge to help their children, included a culture much different from their own and a lack of English language proficiency.

I found that the most important concern of these participants was for them to be enabled to help their children more effectively. The focus of the parents was on how they could better themselves and thus help their children, not expect the educators at school to take on the full responsibility of their child's education. Additionally, several barriers were identified in regard to how parents were involved in the very school activities designed to help them. I found that educators need to build relationships with their constituents in order to break down barriers that interfere with student achievement. By probing beyond the surface, I was able to ascertain not only the parents' desire to learn

English in order to help their children, but also I gained an understanding of why they were hesitant to participate in school-sponsored functions. The difficulties of scheduling, child care, and potential harassment from the local police came to light, and these factors provided different avenues for pursuit, in order to best meet the needs of these parents, when school personnel plan English language classes or curriculum nights.

A cultural barrier or a lack of English language proficiency cannot stand in the way of achieving success for our CLD students. As educators in the 21st Century, we have to go beyond the confines of our classrooms and provide the resources parents need in order to support their children academically regardless of their cultural background or linguistic diversity.

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Principal's Consent Form

Application to Conduct Action Research
School-Level Application

Note: Please submit all materials together – not separately. Otherwise, the application will be considered incomplete and ineligible for review.

1. Name, address, telephone number(s), and email address(es) of the person(s) requesting approval to conduct research in --------- County Schools. Be sure to include honorifics (e.g., Dr., Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss.)

   > David G. Barber, Ed. S.
   > dgbarber2@liberty.edu

2. Names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses and professional affiliations (e.g., college or university, agency, corporation, sponsoring institution) of the following individuals, if applicable.

   > Advisor:
   > Dr. Joan Fitzpatrick
   > Department of Education, Liberty University
   > jfitzpatrick@liberty.edu

3. Describe the purpose of the proposed research (e.g., specific degree or course requirement). If the proposed research is in partial fulfillment of a degree or certification, please provide the degree or program information below (including the name of the certificate or degree-granting institution).

   > The proposed research project is in partial fulfillment for the degree of doctor of education from the School of Education at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. The project will be the completion of the study for my dissertation.

4. Describe your affiliation with xxxxx County Schools. **Note:** If you are not currently employed by xxxxx County Schools, you will need to complete the district approval process.

   > Assistant Principal at Target School, Georgia

5. Date of submission of request to conduct action research in your school.

May 25, 2010

6. What is the timeline for the proposed research? Include approximate dates for data collection, analysis, completion, and submission of final report.

IRB approval – June, 2010
Data collection –interview ESOL teachers, begin collection of documents – June, 2010
Preparation of questionnaires, documents translated into Spanish – July, 2010
Data collection - interview participants – August - September, 2010
Analysis of data – October-December, 2010
Completion of chapters 4 and 5 of dissertation, January-March, 2011
Re-write as necessary and submission to committee
Defense of dissertation, October/November, 2012
Conferring of doctorate – December, 2012

7. Describe the intended research subjects/participants.

Participants in the proposed study include teachers at the target school who evaluate and/or serve students who are culturally and linguistically diverse students through the ESOL program. Information obtained from them will aid in determining the actual participants in the study. The primary participants will be non-English speaking or limited English proficient parents of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, whether serve through the ESOL program or not.

8. Briefly summarize (no more than a page) your research study. Be careful to include the following (in the text box on the next page):
   a. Statement of the research problem/questions

   b. Approximate number of participants

   c. Existing relationship between the researcher and the participants

   d. Data and information that will be needed (including access to records, such as students' grades, test scores, attendance data, or demographic information)

   e. Any other means of collecting data (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, etc.)

   f. Proposed research methodology

In addition, the following documents will need to be submitted along with your application:

9. A copy of the statement that shall be provided to all intended subjects stating that participation is voluntary

10. A statement of confidentiality (no names of teachers, schools or the system can be mentioned in the final report)

11. Principal Approval Form (Attached).

12. Note/email from a program advisor, or Institutional Review Board, stating that the proposal has been reviewed and approved by the institution.

13. A copy of any survey instruments, questionnaires, etc. that will be used to gather data

14. A copy of the informed consent form(s) to be used to inform participants and parents about your study and requests their permission to directly participate or to have their child participate

Note: At this time, due to technology infrastructure limitations, we are unable to approve studies which include response to emails or on-line questionnaires.

Please submit all application materials and attachments to your principal.

A. The proposed study is an investigation of academic support in the homes of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The goal of the study is to hear the parent's voice in regard to how the school system can assist them as they seek to help their children be academically successful in school.

B. Approximately 20 percent of the student population at the target school is Hispanic. The majority of these students come from homes where English is not the primary language. Not all of the Hispanic students in the target school are doing poorly in school; however, there is a large number who struggle academically. Potentially, there could be in excess of 80 families who would fit the researcher's profile for participants. The procedure for determining who will participate in the study will be broad initially. As parents respond to initial questionnaires, the researcher will be able to determine which families to interview individually.

C. Currently, the researcher serves as assistant principal in the target school. He is well-established in the community, having served in this school for over 12 years, and lived in Hampton for nearly 9 years. The researcher has very positive relationships with school parents, in general. He is also respected and liked by students. Because of his caring nature and commitment to the welfare of the students, he is also well-liked and respected by parents. Hispanic parents are always greeted warmly and made to feel accepted in the school's office. The researcher believes the is a good level of trust between him and the Hispanic parents in the school.

D. In order to determine which students are struggling academically, the researcher will need to access student records, but only to generally qualify them as potential participants in the study. The basic items used to determine eligibility of the students' families to participate will be scores on the CRCT and student grade reports. The researcher will also interview both ESOL and regular education teachers to determine those Hispanic students who are struggling academically.

E. The primary means of collecting data will be focus groups and individual interviews with parents of CLD students. Because the parents speak little or no English, an interpreter will be utilized. All focus group sessions and interviews will be recorded in order to precisely transcribe responses for proper classification and analysis of responses.

F. The approach taken in this qualitative study is phenomenological. This is an examination of human experiences through detailed descriptions of the people being studied. Data will be collected through focus groups, interviews, observations, and review of pertinent documents. The researcher will create a framework for drawing conclusions using open coding (to organize data into general themes), axial coding (to establish connections between data), and the constant comparative method of coding (to determine the characteristics of concepts obtained and compare them with similar categories). A audit trail will be utilized to map the course of the study from the selection of participants to the interpretation and application of the data. The researcher believes there will be a high degree of generalizability and applicability of the findings to other similar academic settings.

School-Level Application
Principal Approval Form

School Name: __Nameofschoolremovedtoprotectanonymity__

Principal Name: __Nameremovedtoprotectanonymity__

Action Researcher's Name: __DavidG.Barber__

Action Research Project Title: __APhenomenologyofAcademicSupportinCulturallyand__

__LinguisticallyDiverseHomesofAt-RiskStudents__

☐ The researcher's application has been reviewed by me, or my designee, and meets all of the following requirements:

  ☐ Includes a statement of approval from the program advisor or Institutional Review Board

  ☐ Includes parental consent forms and informed consent documents (for participants), where needed

  ☐ The parental consent and informed consent documents are error-free. That is, I have reviewed the forms to verify that there are no typos or grammatical errors before distribution to parents, staff or students.

_____   _____
Principal Signature   Date

<u>Notetoprincipal:</u> **Please submit only the Principal Approval Form** by mail or email to the attention of:

> Name of administrator removed to protect anonymity
> Coordinator of Assessment, Evaluation & Development
> Leadership Services
> Name of System removed to protect anonymity

Appendix B

Consent Form

A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Homes of At-Risk Students

David G. Barber Liberty
University Department of
Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the level of academic support in the homes of culturally and linguistically diverse students. You were selected as a possible participant because your child has been identified as struggling academically and could benefit from school resources made available to your home. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: David G. Barber
Department of Education
Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: to find out from the parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students what the school can do to support them as they attempt to help their children be successful in school.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Respond to a brief survey to give the researcher some basic background information about your educational background and your child's academic performance.
- Participate in at least one focus group with other parents who also have students who need academic help in order to be more successful at school. Focus groups will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription of each individual's responses to questions asked by the researcher.
- Be interviewed individually regarding how you feel the school could better support you as parents as you help your children with school assignments. These interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription of each individual's responses to the questions asked by the researcher.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks: While no study is without risks, the risks of this study are minimal and are no more than one would encounter in everyday life. The questions being asked by the researcher will focus on academic skills, your cultural and educational backgrounds and the ways in which you are currently coping with the challenges your children are experiencing in school. While questions will center around cultural background, family customs, traditions,

beliefs regarding education, and practices in the home affecting school performance, questions will not be of an intensely personal nature. The researcher is, by law, a mandated reporter of child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse or intent to harm ones self or others. There are no anticipated psychological risks to participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely at the researcher's residence, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The research records and results of the study may be used in subsequent studies of a similar nature. Because of the use of focus groups, the researcher cannot assure that other participants will maintain the confidentiality and privacy of others in the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or Hampton Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: David G. Barber. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at Hampton Elementary School, 770-946-4345, or dbarber@xxxxxx.k12.ga.us. You may also contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Joan Fitzpatrick at jfitzpatrick@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, CN Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian:_____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Researcher's Data Collection Form

Researcher's Data Collection Form	
Week 1	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Week 2	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Week 3	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	

Week 4	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Week 5	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Week 6	
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	

Appendix D

Methodology

1. Qualitative inquiry

2. Phenomenological approach

3. Target school: rural, Title I Distinguished school located south of metro-Atlanta

4. Participants: Parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students who are struggling academically

5. Data collection:

   - Interview principal and teachers at target school

   - Invite parents to participate in focus groups

   - Interview parents individually

6. Data analysis

   - Open coding

   - Axial coding

   - Member checks

   - Memoing

   - Audit trail

7. Some generalizability and applicability of results to other students who are culturally and linguistically diverse

Appendix E

Interview Templates

Parent

"Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later review."

(Prompts: "Tell me more…", "Can you elaborate on that…", "Why do you think….", "Why did you state…")

1. Tell me about your family.

2. Elaborate a little on your educational background. (How many years in school? etc).

3. How would you say your student is doing in school?

4. What do you and other family members do to help him/her at home?

5. How do you view the school? Do you feel welcome there?

6. How do you communicate with your child's teachers?

7. How can the school help you help your child be successful?

8. What would you consider the best thing the school could do to help you personally?

9. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your impressions of or feelings about the school?

<center>**Appendix F**</center>

<center>**Interview Templates**</center>

<u>Principal</u>

"Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later review."

(Prompts: "Tell me more…", "Can you elaborate on that…", "Why do you think….", "Why did you state…")

1. Tell me about your student population.

2. Tell me about the immigrant population at your school.

3. How would you describe the academic standing of these students?

4. What programs and strategies do you have in place to help those students who are struggling?

5. How would you describe the school's attitude toward these immigrant families?

6. What is your school currently doing to assist families of these culturally and linguistically diverse students who are struggling?

<u>ESOL Teachers</u>

"Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later review."

1. Tell me about the students you serve.

2. What strategies are you currently using to help these students succeed academically?

3. Describe how you support these students outside the classroom.

4. Tell me about how you work with parents of your students.

<u>Teacher</u>

"Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later
review."

1. Tell me about your immigrant student population.

2. Tell me about the academic standing of these students.

3. How have you assessed students and determined they are struggling academically?

4. What strategies are you currently using to help these students achieve?

5. How do you work with the parents of these students in order to help them help their
   students?

Appendix G

Statement of Confidentiality

Name of Project: A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and
Linguistically Diverse Homes of At-Risk Students

Principal Researcher:

David G. Barber   317 Noel Way, Hampton, GA 30228

                                                       (770) 478-4747

Institution:

Liberty University   Lynchburg, VA

College of Education

The researcher will make every effort to protect the confidentiality and identity of all participants in the above-named study. This includes parents, students, and the target school and system.

The names of participants will not be used in the data collection process or in the final report, but will be changed to pseudonyms. All identifying information on all student records and surveys completed by participants will be removed. No names of teachers, schools or the system will be mentioned in the final report.

_____   _____

Principal Researcher Signature   Date

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

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Appendix H

Invitation to Participate in Research

David G. Barber

Estimados Padres,

Yo completo mis estudios en la Universidad de la Libertad y necesito su ayuda. Querría

invitarle tomar parte en un estudio que será el foco de mi proyecto final.

El estudio es una investigación en el apoyo académico en las casas de nuestros

estudiantes culturalmente y desde el punto de vista lingüístico diversos. Implicará los

grupos de foco y entrevistas de individuo.

Si estaría dispuesto a ser una parte de mi estudio, yo tengo alguna materia adicional para

compartir con usted. Responda por favor a esta carta por este el viernes si participará.

¡Gracias tanto!

Sinceramente,

David Barber, Ed. S.

Appendix I

Process for Determining Participation in Study

My intent in this study is to hear the voice of the parents of students who are struggling academically and come from homes where English is not the primary language. My cursory understanding of cultural differences and an awareness of the barrier created by language differences have been instrumental in focusing the concentration on these families. In order to determine which students are struggling and which families to interview in the study, I will use data gain from the "Response to Intervention" (RTI) process utilized by the target school's district to monitor student progress and adjust instruction based upon the needs of the students.

RTI is a research-based method of identifying , defining, and resolving students' academic and/or behavior difficulties (Strickland, 2010). Educators use a "Pyramid of Interventions" (POI) to assess the needs of their students and implement appropriate strategies of increasing scope and intensity based on those needs (HCS, 2008). The stated goals of the RTI and POI include increasing parental involvement and awareness in the student's educational program.

The POI (HCS, 2008) has four tiers. All students are considered to be in the first tier in which teachers implement the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) through researched and evidence-based practices. When formative assessments and analysis of student work indicates these strategies are not adequate for student progress, the student is placed in the second tier. Parents are notified of this intensified effort to meet their child's academic needs and encouraged to be involved in the process. Should Tier2

strategies not provide enough support for the student, he/she is moved to the third tier of interventions which initiates the formal progress monitoring and documentation processes of the Student Support Team (SST) with a focus on referral for further psychological-educational evaluation if needed (HCS, 2008). The fourth tier of intervention is for those students who require an individualized educational plan (IEP) in order to provide the academic strategies, modifications, and accommodations necessary for student success.

For the purpose of this study, I will invite the parents of students who are in levels 2 and 3 of the Pyramids of Intervention. Parents will already be aware of the teacher's evaluation of their child's progress and the strategies being implemented in the classroom via the compulsory RTI notification process. I will be offering to meet with the parents of these students in order to learn from them how the school might better assist them as they seek to help their struggling students in their academic pursuits.

ELL Student Skills Checklist

County Schools
ELL Student Skills Checklist

The Following Skills Checklist Is Completed By the ESOL Teacher.

I. ORAL COMPREHENSION	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
A. Understands basic functional English.			
B. Comprehends multi-step directions.			
C. Accurately recalls information given orally.			
D. Comprehends oral discussion in content classes.			
E. Seeks help when clarification is needed.			

II. ORAL EXPRESSION	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
A. Pronounces sounds in words accurately.			
B. Uses words correctly in context.			
C. Acquires vocabulary independently; uses new words in conversations and discussions.			
D. Expresses ideas in complete thoughts.			
E. Communicates with teacher.			
F. Communicates with students.			

III. READING	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
A. Demonstrates ability in word identification skills.			

B. Identifies main ideas and supporting details. _____ _____ _____

C. Identifies sequence of events. _____ _____ _____

D. Identifies cause and effect relationships. _____ _____ _____

E. Draws conclusions and makes predictions based on text read.

_____ _____ _____

IV. WRITING	**Excellent**	**Adequate**	**Poor**

A. Uses correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word spacing and letter formation.

_____ _____ _____

B. Uses correct grammatical structures. _____ _____ _____

C. Demonstrates ability to write directions. _____ _____ _____

D. Demonstrates ability to write short paragraphs. _____ _____ _____

E. Demonstrates ability to write stories /short reports. _____ _____ _____

V. STUDY HABITS	**Excellent**	**Adequate**	**Poor**

A. Shows willingness to participate. _____ _____ _____

B. Works independently when appropriate. _____ _____ _____

C. Completes work on time. _____ _____ _____

D. Works collaboratively when appropriate. _____ _____ _____

Research Study Confidential Survey

A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Homes

of At-Risk Students Research Study Confidential Survey

Researcher: David G. Barber

Liberty University, Department of Education

This is a brief survey to help the researcher understand your family better. It is completely anonymous and only for the purpose of this study. Please answer these questions and return this survey in the envelope provided to Mr. Barber. Please remember that all information obtained from this form and in any interview or focus group will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you for your participation.

1. How many adults live in your home? _____
2. Please circle identifiers for all adults living in the home. (Circle all that apply.)
    Dad   Mom   Grandmother   Grandfather   Aunt   Uncle   Cousin
    Older Sibling
3. How many children under the age of 12 live in the home? _____
    Please list the ages of these children: _____
4. How many children over the age of 12 live in the home? _____
    Please list age of each one here: _____
5. Who normally helps the younger children with their homework? (circle all that apply.)
    Dad   Mom   Grandparent   Aunt   Uncle   Cousin   Older Sibling
    Other: _____
6. Please indicate the educational level of the adults in your home.
    Father: elementary   some high school   graduated high school   college
    Mother: elementary   some high school   graduated high school   college

_____: elementary   some high school   graduated high school   college

_____: elementary   some high school   graduated high school   college

7. What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____

8. Do you feel as though the school is providing your child a quality education?

    Yes   No   (Circle one)   If no, please explain.

    _____

9. Is the school providing you, as a parent, enough support to help your child
    academically?   Yes   No   (circle one)   If no, please explain.

    _____

Appendix L

Training and Orientation for Translator

A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Homes of At-Risk Students

Responsibilities:

- Review translated documents for accuracy (questionnaire, informed consent, interview questions, etc.)

- Assist in correct wording of questions and approach to parents in focus groups and individual interviews

- Translate questions to non-English speaking individuals

- Translate responses of parents to focus group and interview questions

- Assist in "reading between the lines" in regard to recognizing subtle cultural influences on the parents' perspective (attitude toward education, etc.)

- Review the researcher's findings, especially deductions and conclusions drawn based on the input of the parents.

Requirements

- Fluent in Spanish

- Prefer someone of Latino descent

- Personality that creates trust and sense of welcome among parents

- Sense of professionalism, especially regarding the confidentiality of sensitive and identifying information

- Participation in focus groups and interviews as not only translator, but also as an "equalizer" or "clarifier" regarding responses the researcher may not understand or questions parents may ask of the researcher

Training

- Overview of the research study

- Discussion of important issues including confidentiality, sensitivity to nuances of Latino culture, particular characteristics of family life of Latinos, and the attitude toward school held by Latino families

- Review of use of digital recorder and procedure for transcription of interviews and focus groups

Note: the individual the researcher has asked to assist in this project as translator and transcriber is a front office employee of the target school. She has already developed a very positive rapport with our Hispanic parents. She is pleasant, caring, and responsive to those who enter the office. Part of her duties and responsibilities at school include translating for conferences, translating documents, and maintaining consistent communication with Hispanic families who make up over 20% of the school's population

Appendix M

Consent Form

A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Homes of At-Risk Students

David G. Barber Liberty
University Department of
Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the level of academic support in the homes of culturally and linguistically diverse students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher of students in the target school whose parents may be invited to be a part of this study. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: David G. Barber
                                   Department of Education
                                   Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: to find out from the parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students what the school can do to support them as they attempt to help their children be successful in school.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
> Be interviewed individually regarding the academic needs of students whose parents may be invited to participate in this study. Your input will help the researcher determine those families who should participate in the study. Examination of school records and your evaluation of the students' abilities in the areas of reading and language arts will be helpful in determining those families who could be invited to participate. These interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription of each individual's responses to the questions asked by the researcher.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has several risks: While no study is without risks, the risks of this study are minimal and are no more than one would encounter in everyday life. The questions being asked by the researcher will focus on academic skills, your cultural and educational backgrounds and the ways in which you are currently coping with the challenges your children are experiencing in school. While questions will center around cultural background, family customs, traditions, beliefs regarding education, and practices in the home affecting school performance, questions will not be of an intensely personal nature.

The researcher is, by law, a mandated reporter of child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse or intent to harm one's self or others. There are no anticipated psychological risks to participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely at the researcher's residence, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The research records and results of the study may be used in subsequent studies of a similar nature. Because of the use of focus groups, the researcher cannot assure that other participants will maintain the confidentiality and privacy of others in the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or Hampton Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is: David G. Barber. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at Hampton Elementary School, 770-946-4345, or dbarber@xxxxx.k12.ga.us. You may also contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Joan Fitzpatrick at jfitzpatrick@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, CN Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.
You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.
Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

A Phenomenology of Academic Support in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Homes of At-Risb Students

By David Barber, Ed. S.

- Most of the children come from 2-parent families.
- The majority of the moms do not work outside the home.
- On average, families have 3 children under the age of 12.
- Only 3 families have children over the age of 12.

- In most homes, mom helps the children with homework.
- The educational background of our parents runs the gamut.
- All parents went to school outside the United States.
  - -Dads- 2nd grade education -college
  - -Moms- 4th grade education -college

- In all homes the parents do not speak English.
- Some parents read and understand enough English to get by.
- In some homes the children speak only English, while the parents speak only Spanish.

- All parents agree that the children are receiving a quality education at our school.
- The majority of parents believe they are receiving adequate support from the school.

- Most parents feel the biggest barrier to helping their children is not being able to speak English.
- Parents agree that more English classes for parents would be a good idea.

Are there more ideas or suggestions?

Thank you!