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# Leading in Diverse Schools: Principals' Perceptions of Building Relationships with Hispanic/Latino Families

Sage Doolittle Smith

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, LEADING IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH HISPANIC/LATINO FAMILIES by SAGE DOOLITTLE SMITH, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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Sage Doolittle Smith

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## ABSTRACT

### LEADING IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH HISPANIC/LATINO FAMILIES

by  
Sage Doolittle Smith

This study investigates principals' perceptions about the importance and degree of building relationships with Hispanic/Latino families in highly diverse schools in an Atlanta area school district. Over the past ten years, the school district's Hispanic/Latino student population increased by more than 12,000 students. The school district's current Hispanic/Latino enrollment is almost 15,000 students, which is 14.4% of the total student body. Six principals from different elementary and middle schools with growing Hispanic/Latino student populations participated in this qualitative study involving in-depth, one-on-one interviews, informal observations, and artifact collection. The data analysis process involved transcribing the interview tapes verbatim, analyzing the narratives for theme categories, and identifying the common theme patterns.

Critical theorists Giroux, Apple, and Freire provided the framework to examine the principals' responses and experiences. Hegemony, patriarchy, and reciprocity are critical theory concepts used to criticize and critique the data to glean meaning and understanding of the principals' perceptions about relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

There is a disequilibrium between what the principals say is occurring at their schools and the hidden and taken-for-granted structures that exist at their schools. Based on their actions, it seems principals perceive that in order to build relationships with Hispanic/Latino families, the school leaders need to take on a patriarchal role and explain the necessary knowledge, skills, and practices to the parents. This hegemonic behavior perpetuates the dominant group's power and control over the non-dominant, oppressed groups. In addition, there was no indication that the principals gain an understanding of the Hispanic/Latino culture and language before attempting to help the families with parenting and schooling. The findings suggest that the principals are operating on the assumption that they know what is best for the Hispanic/Latino population without prior inquiry. There is little evidence that the principals believe they have something to learn from the Hispanic/Latino parents and families, thus, a reciprocal learning relationship is non-existent. These underlying beliefs and assumptions will hinder the principals from building a true relationship with the students, parents, and families who they serve in the school community.

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OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
HISPANIC/LATINO FAMILIES

by  
Sage Doolittle Smith

A Dissertation

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Degree of  
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in  
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in  
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2008



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The people, cultures, and languages of United States' neighborhoods and schools are changing rapidly with an increase in the Hispanic/Latino population. The United States Bureau of the Census (2003) reported that there are 37.4 million Hispanic/Latinos living in the United States, representing 13.7% of the total population. Hispanic/Latinos are the nation's largest minority group. The 37.4 million Hispanic/Latinos living in the United States consist of 63.3% Mexican-Americans, 9.5% Puerto Ricans, 3.4% Cubans, and 23.8% from other Hispanic/Latin American countries (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Hispanic/Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. The census projections indicate that by 2050, the Hispanic/Latino population will increase to 102.6 million, which will be approximately one-fourth of the total United States population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Many Hispanic/Latinos are choosing to settle in the southeastern region of the United States and want to be close to metropolitan areas. Although the increase of Hispanic/Latino residents is occurring in many areas in the United States and not exclusively in the southeast, there are several states experiencing a sizeable demographic change. Frey (2006) asserted that since 2000, numerous Hispanic/Latinos are dispersing inland toward more suburban metropolitan cities. The 2000 Census shows that of the ten states in the United States with the most rapidly growing Hispanic/Latino populations,

seven states are in the southeast. The seven southeastern states experiencing the greatest Hispanic/Latino population increase are Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Martin & Midgley (2006) stated that Georgia and North Carolina are considered two of the new immigrant destinations. According to 2000 Census data, Hispanic/Latino residents in Georgia increased 300% since the last census. In addition, Hispanic/Latinos living in and around Atlanta, Georgia escalated 362% since 1990. Gwinnett, DeKalb, Fulton, Cobb, and Hall counties of Georgia have the highest number of Hispanic/Latino residents. The metro-Atlanta cities with the highest Hispanic/Latino residents are Marietta City, Smyrna, Roswell City, and Rome City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As the Hispanic/Latino population increases in Georgia neighborhoods, so does the Hispanic/Latino student population in the Georgia public school system. United States public schools and classrooms are becoming culturally and linguistically diverse as a result of the increasing Hispanic/Latino student population (Holloway, 2003; Hawley, 1997). The United States Department of Education (2001) stated that Latinos are the fastest growing student population in United States public schools. According to The Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement Report Card (2000-2001, 2006-2007), there are several Georgia public school systems that are experiencing a significant increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino students enrolled in school. The table below shows the Hispanic/Latino student population surge from the 2000-2001 school year to the 2006-2007 school year for several Georgia public school systems (using pseudonyms).

Table 1

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Students in Georgia 2000-2007*

| School System | Students<br>2000-2001 | Students<br>2006-2007 | Increase | Rate of Increase |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|------------------|
| Hawk          | 19%                   | 32%                   | 13%      | 68%              |
| Galaxy        | 41%                   | 53%                   | 12%      | 29%              |
| Mackerel      | 17%                   | 29%                   | 12%      | 70%              |
| George        | 10%                   | 21%                   | 11%      | 110%             |
| Royal         | 12%                   | 22%                   | 10%      | 83%              |
| Little        | 8%                    | 14%                   | 6%       | 75%              |

*Statement of Problem*

The recent influx of large numbers of Hispanic/Latino residents into southeastern metropolitan areas and students into public schools has resulted in an array of new challenges for administrators in suburban school districts. Principals are responsible for addressing the academic needs of all students, regardless of ethnic, cultural, and language differences. One way to meet the diverse needs of all students is for school leaders to reach out, communicate, and collaborate with all of the students' parents and families.

Principals and teachers building relationships with parents and families has become an important aspect of school leadership for several reasons. The United States government mandates that school leaders create partnerships with all parents and families, regardless of race and ethnicity. In 1997, the National Education Goals Panel (1997) called for schools to promote partnerships that would increase parental



involvement and participation in supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of children. Shortly after this initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) required schools to organize and implement programs and practices to involve families in their children's education in ways that would help students improve skills and achievement. In addition, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC Standards) has added the area of collaborating and connecting with all families and the community as a principal's performance standard. Standard four of the six ISLLC Standards for School Leaders states: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 16). Federal, state, and local regulations charge the principals with the new challenge of building relationships with the increasing number of Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families, even though there are ethnic, cultural, and language differences.

This study investigates principals' perspectives on the importance of building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Also, this research offers meaning and understanding about the degree to which principals and schools are reaching out, connecting, and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community.

### *Research Questions*

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do select principals perceive the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?

2. To what extent have principals in schools with large Hispanic/Latino student populations developed relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?

### *Related Literature*

According to existing research, most Hispanic/Latino families are inclined to demonstrate a strong commitment to their family members. Hispanic/Latinos regard the family to be the single most important element in their lives (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006; Diaz-Loving & Draguns, 1999; Gil-Rivas, Greenberger, Chen, & Lopez-Lena, 2003; Gonzalez-Forteza, Salgado de Snyder, & Andrade Palos, 1993; Rubel, 1970). Gaitan (2004) agreed by saying, “The family is the primary social unit among Latinos” (p. 3). Because family is so important, Hispanic/Latinos tend to be more unified, tend to spend more time together as a family, and tend to travel in larger groups than other races. Hispanic/Latino families are likely to be more cohesive than some other minority families (Griswold del Castillo, 1984). Hutchison (1987) reported that Mexican-Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be in a family group than Whites or Blacks. Hutchison & Fidel’s (1984) research showed that Mexican-Americans are more likely to be outside of the home with immediate and extended family than either Central- or Anglo-Americans. In addition, Hutchison & Fidel’s (1984) study revealed that the average size of the number of White family members in a group is 2.5 and the average size of the number of Hispanic/Latino family members in a group is 5.7. The large size of the Hispanic/Latino family, compared to the White family, may be a result of the extended family playing a very strong role in the Hispanic/Latino’s daily life (Gaitan,

2004). Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins are considered part of the immediate Hispanic/Latino family and stay closely connected.

Authors of several studies explain how Hispanic/Latinos and some of the people in the United States view the concept of family differently. Hispanic/Latinos emphasize the importance of kinship, devotion, respect, and loyalty to the extended family, which includes blood and non-blood relatives; this concentration contrasts with the Anglo-European focus, which is on the nuclear family and independence (Ghali, 1982; Canino, Earley, & Rogler, 1980; Gonzalez-Ramos, 1990). Ethnic minority parents focus on teaching children interdependence more than White parents (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990) and interdependence is important in Hispanic/Latino families (Gaitan, 2004). Similarly, Hispanic/Latinos are familistic, focusing on family values and the needs of the whole family, as opposed to the individual and personal needs of members of the Anglo-European family (Bean, Curtis, and Marcum, 1977). For example, if there is an issue involving a Hispanic/Latino family member, the norm is to solve the problem within the extended Hispanic/Latino family unit and not seek outside assistance (Sullivan, Harris, Collado, & Chen, 2006). Gaitan (2004) agreed by saying that “family unity is a strong value in the way that families serve as resource for each other” (p.10). Since the family is considered to be the most important element in the Hispanic/Latino community, the family members are always available to assist the other family members. According to Sullivan, Harris, Collado, & Chen, (2006), “In Latino culture, the extended family is always ‘there’ for its members, acting as a resource and guide” (p. 992).

Previous studies discuss how Hispanic/Latino families exhibit different levels of involvement in school when compared to other ethnic groups. Studies show that

Hispanic/Latino parents tend not to be as involved in school as other ethnic groups' parents. Floyd (1998) and Griffith (1998) explained that Hispanic/Latino parents, when compared with their Caucasian and African American counterparts, are found to have less contact with their children's school and report lower levels of school involvement. Similarly, several researchers (Zellman & Waterman, 1998; Sheldon, 2002; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Wong & Hughes, 2006) reported that White and Black parents have a higher level of parental involvement, more communication with school, and more shared responsibility in education than Hispanic/Latino parents. School personnel may misinterpret the reasons surrounding the reduced amount of Hispanic/Latino parental involvement in school when compared to other groups. Teachers and principals may perceive the lower level of Hispanic/Latino parent involvement in school as a lack of motivation to cooperate, a lack of concern for their children's education, and a lower value placed on education (Lopez, 2001).

In contrast, Wong & Hughes (2006) indicated that such assumptions regarding parent involvement levels are erroneous and that many Hispanic/Latino parents place a high importance on their children's education. Habermehl (2006) and Gaitan's (2004) research discussed Hispanic/Latino parents valuing education, having very high expectations for their children in school, and wanting the very best education that the schools can offer. Chavkin and Williams (1993) and Tinkler (2002) discovered that many Hispanic/Latino parents agree with the importance of education, agree with the importance of being involved in their children's education, and have positive attitudes toward parent involvement.

Existing investigations offer reasons why Hispanic/Latino parents are not as involved in school as other groups of parents. Many researchers (Boethel, 2003; Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Nieto, 1996; Holman, 1997) identified transportation to school, parents' work schedules, and finding child care for while the parents are at school to be barriers contributing to the lack of Hispanic/Latino family involvement in school. Moreover, language differences and the limited amount of English proficiency are major obstacles for some Hispanic/Latino parents' participating in their children's education (Tinkler, 2002).

Another issue that hinders Hispanic/Latino parent involvement in school is the confusing and unfriendly educational system (Habermehl, 2006; Gaitan, 2004). This may explain why Hispanic/Latino parents feel less comfortable with the teachers and the school setting when compared to other ethnic groups (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993).

Aside from these difficulties, Hispanic/Latino parents may feel as though their presence in school is not necessary. Hispanic/Latino parents tend to be deferential toward school and trusting of the educational professionals (Ritter et al., 1993), therefore, they may be less likely to get involved within the school building. In conjunction with this finding, Chavkin and Williams' (1993) study revealed that ethnic minority parents believe that the school is responsible for reaching out to them and offering ways for parents to get involved in school. These researchers conclude that this discovery may explain why ethnic minority parents participate less in school-based parent involvement activities when compared to non-minority parents. A survey conducted by Chavkin and Williams' (1993) across six southwestern states found that ethnic minority parents are

more likely than are majority parents to believe that the school is responsible for initiating efforts and creating opportunities for parent involvement in school. This means that Hispanic/Latino parents tend to wait for the school and school personnel to request their presence in the building rather than entering the school without an invitation. Also, Hispanic/Latino parents tend to wait for the principal or teacher to offer specific ways for parents to get involved in school. Thus, a conclusion can be made that if principals and teachers do not reach out to Hispanic/Latino parents and provide specific days, times, jobs and/or roles for the parents, then the Hispanic/Latino parents are less likely to feel welcome in school which may cause the parents to not participate in school.

Studies suggest that educational initiatives should expand the meaning of parent involvement because diverse cultures view parent involvement in various ways. The way Hispanic/Latinos view parent involvement may contribute to why they are not as visible in school as other parent groups. Wong & Hughes (2006) described how parents from diverse ethnic groups may define parental involvement differently and may demonstrate different levels of participation depending on the type of involvement opportunity. There are two involvement opportunities. There is school-based parent involvement, which takes place within the school building, and home-based parent involvement, which takes place outside of the school building. United States schools are most familiar with the school-based parent involvement model and may misunderstand the parents' intentions. Nieto (1996) and Holman (1997) asserted that school staff should not interpret the Hispanic/Latino parent's absence from school as a lack of interest in their child's education or that they believe education is not important. Gaitan (2004) concurred by saying, "Instead of operating on the assumption that parental absence translates into not

caring, educators need to focus on ways to draw parents into the schools” (p. 61). The parent’s involvement in school may be home-based which means that the parents are supporting the school and valuing the child’s education at home instead of at school.

There is another home-based perspective to consider. Holman (1997) stated that the school staff should realize that some parents may lack formal education and also may have difficulty in their native language or in English. These parents may struggle when helping the child with homework, but the parents may be involved by ensuring that the child completes the homework assignment. Chavkin and Williams’ (1993) study exposed that Hispanic/Latino parents express a strong interest in assuming various parent involvement roles such as program supporter or home tutor, which are both examples of home-based parent involvement. Thus, lack of interest in school may not be the reason why Hispanic/Latino parents are not as involved in school as other parents.

Previous research offers ways of encouraging Hispanic/Latino parental involvement in school regardless of significant barriers such as language difficulties or lack of information about parent opportunities. Holman (1997) suggested that schools decrease the intimidation factor of education by providing a warm, welcoming, and nonjudgmental reception when Hispanic/Latino parents arrive. One way of creating a friendly and accepting atmosphere is by having staff and parent volunteers present who speak Spanish. Since Hispanic/Latino parents tend to believe that the school is responsible for initiating efforts and creating opportunities for parent involvement in school (Chavkin and Williams, 1993), school principals should personally invite Hispanic/Latino parents to get involved. Schools can promote Hispanic/Latino parental involvement by persuading Hispanic/Latino parents to participate in parent education

classes, parent support activities, school functions, school governance, school leadership, and home visitation programs (Buysse, Castro, West, & Skinner, 2005; Acosta, Weist, Lopez, Shafer, & Pizarro, 2004; Gaitan, 2004). In addition, schools can create opportunities for Hispanic/Latino parents to share their culture and backgrounds as a way of encouraging parent involvement (Holman, 1997). If the principal and teachers make an effort to invite Hispanic/Latino parents to get involved, they are less likely to view the school as unfriendly and more likely to participate at school. Inviting the parents into the school is an example of how principals can reach out to the Hispanic/Latino community, develop relationships with the families, and foster a parent-school partnership. Developing a relationship between the family at home and the school setting is very important, particularly for Hispanic/Latino students (Acosta, Weist, Lopez, Shafer, & Pizarro, 2004; Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; House, 2005; Nieto, 1996).

As discussed previously, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino residents in the southeastern region of the United States is increasing. As a result, public schools are becoming more ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Although the demographic changes are not unique to the Atlanta, Georgia area, that region is experiencing a significant Hispanic/Latino student population transformation. The demographic change creates a new challenge for school principals with regard to building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.



### *Significance*

Previous research that discusses Hispanic/Latino parents and families investigates different topics than this study. Much of the existing research on Hispanic/Latino parents and families in schools addresses how Hispanic/Latino parents are not as involved in school as other parent groups. Also, the related research focuses on how the lack of Hispanic/Latino parental involvement is negatively impacting Hispanic/Latino student achievement. Despite many areas in the United States experiencing an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino residents, most of the previous research on Hispanic/Latino parents and families is from New York, Texas, California, Florida, Utah, and Colorado. Lastly, most of the existing research is conducted using quantitative methods with surveys and questionnaires. This study builds on earlier research in several ways. First, this research attempts to investigate principals' perspectives on the importance of building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Second, this study examines to what extent the educational leaders and personnel are reaching out, connecting, and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community. Findings of this research provide useful information that can improve the practice of principals related to the Hispanic/Latino community. Third, the principals' first-hand experiences with Hispanic/Latino parents and families in schools are gathered using qualitative methods through in-depth interviews, informal observations, and artifact collection. Fourth, the context of this study is unique and different from other studies because it examines a suburban public school district outside of Atlanta, Georgia, which is one of the fastest growing Hispanic/Latino states in the southeast. The Hispanic/Latino student population increase over the past few years in the investigated school district mirrors what many

nationwide metropolitan school districts are experiencing; consequently, this research will contribute to the research field of educational leadership.

### *Method Summary*

Qualitative research is this study's method to investigate the principals' perspectives on the importance of building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families and to explore the degree to which principals are reaching out, connecting, and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community. The study is a multiple case study in six schools with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students. Six school principals from elementary and middle schools participated in one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Each interview was approximately sixty minutes long, and the interview phase occurred over several weeks. Each interview was scheduled at the principal's convenience and occurred at the principal's school. The specific interview questions guided the interview, yet the sessions were informal and the questions were open-ended so the dialogue could generate additional probing questions. The data analysis process for this study included: (a) transcribing the interview tapes verbatim, (b) analyzing each interview and creating categories of themes, (c) identifying common theme patterns between the six interview transcripts, (d) connecting the findings to existing literature, and (e) explaining the findings in narrative form. In addition to principal interviews as the primary data collection method, the researcher conducted informal observations at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, assemblies, and during the school day. Lastly, the researcher collected artifacts such as newsletters, meeting agendas, and event flyers.

### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research is an appropriate method for producing in-depth information and increasing understanding (Patton, 1990) about the principals' perspectives on relationship building and the degree that school leaders are connecting with Hispanic/Latino parents. Strauss and Corbin (1990) would agree with this method since the qualitative study tries "to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which is yet unknown" (p. 19). Eisenhart (2005) would concur because qualitative research investigates human behavior, beliefs, and intentions. Since this study tries to reveal and comprehend the principals' actions, viewpoints, and goals as it relates to Hispanic/Latino parents, qualitative research is suitable for this topic.

A case study is an appropriate research approach for looking at how the principals' perceive relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Yin (1993, 2003) explained that two characteristics of case study research are that the study investigates "how" or "why" questions about a particular situation and that the study focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. In addition, within a case study the researcher is independent from the experiences of the principals and does not manipulate any of the parts of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that the researcher is the receiver of information and will not alter or control the data in the study. This case study is descriptive and interpretative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because it describes and interprets the principals' experiences in schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student population. The design of the study is a single-case, embedded case study (Yin, 2003). This means that there is one topic being investigated and several different participants from different schools are involved in discussing the same topic.

Since this study examines how the principals are building relationships with the Hispanic/Latino community, discusses a contemporary phenomenon set in a real-life context, and the researcher is independent from the experiences of the participants, using a case study approach is appropriate.

### *Interviews*

Qualitative data can be collected from interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 1990) and interviews are the most common form of collecting data when conducting a case study (Merriam, 1998). Interviewing principals is a suitable approach for this study because the researcher cannot observe the school leaders' experiences with the demographic changes at their schools. Kvale (1996) explained how interviews expose the participant's feelings and perspective based on his/her experiences. "The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Interviews focus on some specific part of a person's life (Brown, 1988) and are used to find out things that cannot be observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, and previous experiences (Patton, 1990). Since these items cannot be observed, researchers ask people questions to understand the other person's perspective (Patton, 1990). This study used interviews to gain meaning and understanding of the principals' perspectives about building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families in school.

The interview process involved several steps. The researcher created specific questions that guided the interview. However, the sessions were informal and the

questions were open-ended so the dialogue generated additional probing questions, which elaborated or clarified the information from the principal's previous responses (Hoopes, 1979; Kvale, 1996). The interviews were tape-recorded and the interviewer took notes during the session. The researcher transcribed the audio tapes verbatim, the participant reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy, changes were made to incorrect information, and the participant confirmed the accuracy of the data (Hoopes, 1979; Brown, 1988). Next, the researcher analyzed all of the transcriptions and decided which methods of analysis were appropriate (Kvale, 1996). This involved coding the significant themes in the principals' experiences in order to identify the common patterns. The final stage of the interview process was reporting the findings of the study in a readable summary (Kvale, 1996).

Qualitative research involves credibility, dependability, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility relates to the truth value within the research findings so that they are both believable and supported by the evidence provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research demonstrates authenticity if the researcher can show a range of different realities with descriptions of his/her associated concerns, issues, and underlying values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). In an attempt to build credibility, dependability, and authenticity of results, this study included member checks, peer examination, and the researcher's bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Conducting a member check involved testing the data with the members of the group from which they were collected (Driessen, Van der Vleuten, Schuwirth, van Tartwijk, & Vermunt, 2005). Peer examination entailed the researcher sharing the data with a

colleague to ensure that the information is comprehensive. This qualitative research achieves credibility, dependability, and authenticity.

### *Principal Interviews*

Six principals from separate schools is an appropriate number of participants for this study. There is existing research that uses in-depth interviews of a small number of school administrators such as principals. For instance, Sheppard's (2006) study interviewed two principals to determine the reasons why successful mathematics student have been able to thrive in schools labeled academically unacceptable. Idol's (2006) research interviewed eight administrators about principal perceptions of special education services. Bridgemohan, van Wyk, & van Staden's (2005) study interviewed three principals from diverse socioeconomic communities to determine the type and extent of school-to-home and home-to-school communication in the early childhood development phase. Shahid's (2003) research examined the relationship of school principals and the nutritional environment of middle school students by interviewing eight school principals. Six school principals shared their perspectives on the nature of teacher leadership through in-depth interviews in Anderson's (2004) study. Finally, Tate's (2003) study explored the ways six effective elementary school principals use their listening skills in conversations with their teachers to better understand them, make decisions, and make sense of the day-to-day operations of their schools. Based on this prior research, interviewing six principals about building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families is acceptable.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis for this study required several steps. First, the researcher tape recorded the interviews and immediately transcribed the tapes verbatim. Next, the researcher compared the transcripts to the recordings to assure accuracy. The third step in the data analysis process was for the participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcription so what he/she intended to say was in fact what was stated. This 'member checking' involved reviewing interpretations with participants so that they can provide feedback (Cresswell, 1998). After that, the researcher used the simultaneous analysis of the data and the constant comparison method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998; Taylor & Bodgan, 1998). This means that data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously and that there was a constant comparison within and between interviews. After that, the researcher grouped the transcript information into categories and then grouped the categories into themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, after the first two interview tapes were transcribed verbatim, the data was analyzed, compared, and coded for common categories or themes. This preliminary analysis helped the researcher prepare for the next set of interviews in which the process occurred again. New interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and continuously compared to categories that had been discovered in previous data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Strauss & Corbin (1990) explained, the researcher analyzes the data for new ideas about a subject, evaluates the data and brings meaning to the data to improve understanding of the subject. At this point, the data is coded a final time. The last step in the data analysis process was connecting the findings to the prior literature.

*School District, School, and Principal Selection*

The Little County School District was used for this study because it is experiencing the same demographic population change as many suburban, metropolitan school systems in the United States. The Little County School District is ranked among the thirty largest school districts in the United States with 107,307 students, 15,229 employees, and 113 schools (Little County School District Annual Report, 2007). The Little County School District is the second largest school system in Georgia and its student population grows by nearly 2,000 each year (Little County School District website, 2008). The ethnic composition of the Little County School District is heavily impacted by the national and regional demographic changes. Over the past ten years, the Hispanic/Latino student population in the school district increased by more than 12,000 students and the current Hispanic/Latino student population is 14.4% of the total district-wide student body (Little County School District website, 2008). The table below shows the increase of ethnic diversity in the Little County School District from the 1996-1997 school year to the 2006-2007 school year (Little County School District Annual Report, 2007). The table demonstrates that as the percentage of minority students has increased over the past ten years in the Little County School District, the percentage of White students has decreased.



Table 2

*Growth of Diversity in Little County 1996-2007*

| Year    | Total   | White  | Black  | Hispanic | Asian | Multi-Racial | Am. Indian |
|---------|---------|--------|--------|----------|-------|--------------|------------|
| 2006-07 | 106,997 | 51,447 | 31,564 | 14,889   | 4,472 | 4,378        | 217        |
| 2005-06 | 105,885 | 52,936 | 31,030 | 13,422   | 4,290 | 3,975        | 232        |
| 2004-05 | 103,447 | 54,260 | 29,386 | 12,032   | 3,994 | 3,537        | 238        |
| 2003-04 | 101,543 | 53,148 | 30,168 | 11,028   | 3,716 | 3,270        | 223        |
| 2002-03 | 100,077 | 57,591 | 26,292 | 9,283    | 3,802 | 2,889        | 220        |
| 2001-02 | 97,343  | 58,744 | 24,314 | 7,951    | 3,570 | 2,537        | 227        |
| 2000-01 | 95,718  | 60,369 | 22,582 | 6,888    | 3,329 | 2,344        | 206        |
| 1999-00 | 92,984  | 61,446 | 20,780 | 5,541    | 3,076 | 1,947        | 194        |
| 1998-99 | 90,495  | 62,346 | 18,983 | 4,439    | 2,862 | 1,687        | 178        |
| 1997-98 | 87,561  | 62,617 | 17,273 | 3,513    | 2,656 | 1,354        | 148        |
| 1996-97 | 84,667  | 62,726 | 15,425 | 2,849    | 2,477 | 1,063        | 127        |

To determine which schools and school principals should participate in the study, the researcher searched for the elementary, middle, and high schools with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students as indicated on the Georgia State Department of Education School Report Card website. Since the study is focused on Hispanic/Latino

parents and families, it is important that the schools in the study have a substantial percentage of Hispanic/Latino students when compared to other schools. School district data shows that schools in the southern region of the county are experiencing a more rapid increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino students than other sections of the school district so the researcher targeted schools in that area.

The researcher completed an application to conduct research in the school district and was granted permission to proceed by the Little County School District Office of Accountability. Also, the researcher submitted a research protocol to the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was granted permission to conduct research using human subjects. Once the researcher received approval from these two departments, the selected principals received a summary of the proposed study, an invitation to participate, and a consent form through the mail. If a principal did not return the consent form, the researcher selected another school with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students located in the southern region of Little County and mailed the information to that principal. This process continued until six principals agreed to participate by submitting the consent form.

### *Language Usage*

The researcher made several decisions about the language in the dissertation and a discussion of these personal preferences is relevant. The first decision relates to how the study identifies individuals. The researcher uses the term Hispanic/Latino throughout the study to identify the population being studied. According to Nieto (1996), even though Hispanic is more universally used, the terms Hispanic and Latino can be used

interchangeably to refer to people of Latin American and Caribbean heritage. Using Latino includes the African indigenous heritage, as well as the Spanish heritage, of these groups. Just as the word Asian describes the incredibly diverse backgrounds of the Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Pakistani, and Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino is used to describe people from Mexico, Central America, South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Africa, Spain, and Latin America (Nieto, 1996).

The researcher made other deliberate decisions that warrant an explanation. Out of respect for all groups of people, the study capitalizes all races and ethnicities such as Caucasian, White, African American, Black, and Hispanic/Latino. In addition, people are described in a positive sense as what they are (i.e. Spanish speakers) as opposed to in a negative way by what they are not (i.e. non-English speaking).

Lastly, the names of the school district, schools, and principals have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of all involved in the study. Also, references to school district documents and the website are included, but the specific citations have been deleted to conceal the identity of the school district. This information on language usage explains the author's perspective.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to better understand and share meaning about school principals' perceptions of and experiences with building relationships, connecting, and communicating with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. A qualitative study using case study methodology with interview questions, observations,

and artifact collection is an appropriate approach for looking at this phenomenon. The data was coded looking for patterns that emerge from the transcriptions derived from the audio taped interviews. Chapter two provides a review of literature on the key themes in chapter one. Chapter three offers an extensive explanation about the methodology mentioned in chapter one.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As chapter one discussed, this study is looking at principals' perceptions of the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and to what degree the principals are reaching out, connecting, and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community. The United States government is addressing the need for schools to create partnerships with all parents and families, regardless of race and ethnicity. In 1997, the National Education Goals Panel (1997) called for schools to promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of children. Shortly after this initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) required schools to organize and implement programs and practices to involve families in their children's education in ways that help students improve skills and achievement. Previous research discusses the topic of principals and schools building relationships with the people in the communities that they serve.

#### *School-Community*

Scholars operationalize the concept of community in a variety of ways. Sergiovanni (2000) defined communities as centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of "we" from the "I" of each individual. Sergiovanni (2000) added that communities are organized around

relationships and ideas. Villa (2003) pointed out that The Oxford American Dictionary defines the word community as a body of people living in one place or district or country and considered as a whole. Villa (2003) also mentioned that according to the Random House Word Menu, community is any group with shared interest, feelings and values or geographical location. Buber (1965) and Greene (1988, 1993, 1995) described communities as places always in the making and where social contexts are continuously shaped and re-shaped by the activities and interaction of diverse people. Schools are part of the neighborhoods and communities that surround the building and, therefore, are a reflection of the shared values, sentiments, ideas, customs, and beliefs of the people of that area.

In the past, the school and the community were believed to be separate units and that there was not a relationship between the two entities. Before the 1970s, according to social scientists, American schools were viewed as having a generally uniform character that was separate from the conditions in the local communities (Parsons, 1959; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Since schools were viewed as primarily functional, schools did not significantly vary from other schools as a result of the community setting. Some authors argued that schools had their own organizational culture and were “encapsulated” by, or only “loosely coupled” to, other organizations in their environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Sarason, 1971; Weick, 1976). In addition, teachers had a tendency to view their professional work as separate from the local communities (Bender, 1993; Keener, 1999). Literature about the relationship between schools and their communities began to surface in the 1970s (Arum, 2000). Around that time, the definition of the school community expanded to include the

people and events inside of the building as well as the people and events outside of the building. Furthermore, the school community began to mean the school's organizational environment rather than referring to the residents who lived in areas surrounding a school (Barr, Dreeben, & Wiratchai, 1983; Bidwell & Kasarda, 1985; Gamorna & Dreeben, 1986).

Presently, the definition of the school community encompasses more than just the racial and ethnic composition of a neighborhood. According to Arum (2000), "Today more than ever, a school's relevant community is not just a neighborhood demographic environment, but equally an institutional environment" (p. 400). Many researchers focus on how neighborhood demographic and social factors influence educational outcomes. For instance, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Sealand's (1993) study demonstrated an association between the likelihood of dropping out of school, income levels, occupational category, and marital status of neighborhood residents. Clark (1992) and Crane (1991) debated about the affects of concentrated neighborhood poverty on school. Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson, (1996), Duncan, (1994), and Datcher (1982) investigated the association between educational attainment in terms of years of schooling and demographic factors present in specific neighborhoods. All of these studies are based solely on the neighborhood factors and did not consider the school factors that could contribute to the outcomes. Conversely, some studies explore school factors that impact school outcomes. For example, Bryk and Raudengush (1992) and Fischer et al. (1996) identified the affects of students attending schools with socially disadvantaged students on test scores and the increased risk of poverty, respectively. Wells and Crain (1997) and Lareau (1987) analyzed how the social and cultural competencies of

neighborhood parents impact parent interaction with schools and how educational institutions respond to community pressures. Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton (1996) examined how the peer climate in school, which is from the neighborhood setting, affects youth behavior. Two researchers looked at how students who go to schools in settings of more concentrated poverty have higher rates of adolescent delinquency (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston, 1979) and during later points in their life course suffer higher rates of adult incarceration (Arum & Beattie, 1999). As a result of this previous research, sociologists discussed how the school community impacts what occurs in school and vice versa. “Sociologists have come to recognize that although local neighborhood settings are often (but not always) the location where students reside, schools are also shaped by institutional aspects of organizational environments” (Arum, 2000, p. 411). Both the neighborhood and the school have important social relationships that should be developed. Some research provides a focus on the identification of the importance of specific social relationships and suggests that an individual’s community is actually both created and defined by an individual’s specific social relationships (Coleman, 1988; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Wilson, 1987).

### *School-Family-Community Partnerships*

Numerous studies discuss the benefits of the school environment developing relationships and building partnerships with the home and community environment. According to Sanders (2001), “School-community partnerships can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged to promote students’ social, emotional, physical, and intellectual



development” (p. 20). Effective partnership programs deal with children as part of a family and with families as part of a neighborhood (Lerner, 1995; Schorr, 1988). Many researchers (Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Doll & Lyon, 1998; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Taylor & Adelman, 1996) addressed the need for strong school-community partnerships to assist with the changing school demographics. “Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have called for the advancement of school-community partnerships that address the multiple, co-occurring needs of students and their families” (Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006, p.155). In addition, Doll and Lyon (1998) stated that it is “essential for schools and communities to align themselves in partnerships to foster resilience and capacity-building among high-risk students” (p. 360). The National Research Council (2001) recommended that early childhood programs build relationships with parents to develop equally beneficial learning environments for young children at home and at school. Bronfenbrenner (1992) identified the family system as the most influential system in children’s early learning. “Good home-school relationships are essential to meeting the educational goals developed for students today” (Patton, Jayanthi, & Polloway, 2001, p. 227). Thirty years of research on effective schools has shown the importance of developing strong home-school connections (Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Chrispeels, 1996; Hoofman, 1991; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

With the Hispanic/Latino people becoming the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, schools are becoming more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse (Villa, 2003). There is an increased importance for school-family-community partnerships in areas where the students are from minority, urban, low-socioeconomic

areas because these students are at risk of disengaging from school (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Sanders & Harvey's (2002) study suggested that communities could play a vital role in the school improvement process. Schools are being asked to partner with students' communities to mobilize the human and material resources needed for academic success (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). "Current educational reforms emphasize the need for schools, especially those serving poor and minority students, to partner with families and communities to create more challenging, responsive, and supportive learning environments" (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p. 1346). These researchers suggest that schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student population try to establish a partnership with the parents, families, and community.

Promoting relationships with Hispanic/Latino families involves the school collaborating with the community. Gray (1989) defined collaboration as a process where diverse people see issues from different perspectives and they search for solutions that take into consideration other people's perspectives. Others have described collaboration as a process that allows individuals and organizations to combine their human and material resources so they can accomplish objectives they are unable to achieve alone (Kanter, 1994; Mayo, 1997; Wandersman, Goodman & Butterfoss, 1997). Collaborations that bring together diverse people, organizations, and sectors can change the way communities conceptualize and solve problems (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1998; Potapchuk, Crocker, & Schechter, 1999). Working together, through a process that encourages the exploration of differences, people involved in partnerships have the potential to break new ground, challenge accepted wisdom, and discover innovative solutions to problems (Gray 1989; Fried & Rundall, 1994; Mattesich & Monsey, 1992;

Richardson & Allegrante, 2000; Silka, 1999). Torres (2000) pointed out that collaborating and developing relationships with diverse people is not always easy.

Collaboration among a diverse group of stakeholders is a clear example of ‘the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.’ It requires a special tripartite partnership among students, faculty and the community solidified by strong, trusting relationships. However, building those relationships is one of the most challenging aspects of any partnership. (p. 13)

It is challenging to truly collaborate and allow different perspectives because diversity can lead to tension and conflict (Fried & Rundall, 1994; Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000; Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 1997). Despite the difficulties of collaboration, other researchers believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. “Collaboration is the key mechanism through which partnerships gain an advantage over single agents” (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001, p. 183) and the whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Shannon, 1998; Taylor-Powell, Rossing, & Geran, 1998). Researchers state that collaboration will help school leaders connect with Hispanic/Latino parents. When diverse participants such as parents, share their unique traits, abilities, and attitudes with each other, there is a greater chance for developing relationships between schools and families (Lasker, Weiss, & Miller, 2001). Within this study’s context, this means that to increase the possibility of developing relationships with the Hispanic/Latino community, there should be collaboration between the school staff and Hispanic/Latino families. “Reaching out to the Latino community is a matter of building trust as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents” (Gaitan, 2004, p. 16).

According to Walshok (1999), certain elements of partnership building needs to be in place in order to develop a good relationship. During the early phases of a school-community partnership, a clear sense of identity and purpose (e.g., a mission statement,

program priorities, strategic plan, learning objectives), procedure (e.g., policies, contracts, evaluation), and resources (e.g., personnel, facilities, time) need to exist and be effectively communicated to the other party (Walshok, 1999). Once a partnership relationship has been created, it needs to be nurtured to continue. Research on closeness of a relationship (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989) identifies three components of describing close relationships, which are frequency of interaction, diversity of interaction, and strength of influence on the other party's behavior, decision, plans, and goals. This means that one way for schools to develop and maintain a close relationship with the community members is for the school to offer numerous opportunities for interaction with parents and families as well as offer a variety of different ways to interact during the school year. The principal can nurture a close relationship with parents by influencing their interaction and involvement in school.

Research shows that students benefit when schools reach out to their surrounding neighborhoods, parents, and families and build relationships with the people. Gaitan (2004) explained that the strongest way of promoting Hispanic/Latino parent involvement in ethnically diverse schools is for the school to reach out to parents. Epstein (1987, 2001) asserted that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development. Boyd & Crowson (1993) stated that schools should "reach out into the community in an attempt to strengthen the social capital available to children" (p. 36). Coleman and Hoffer (1987) defined social capital as relationship skills and organizational skills. Nieto (1996) maintained that school environments with strong parent involvement leads to better student academic performance. In addition, Nieto (1996) added that students who are

attending schools with constant contact with the community outperform students in schools that do not have regular contact with the surrounding area. Gaitan (2004) contended that Hispanic/Latino parents are more likely to stay involved in school if educators “hold open the doors and reach out to the community in caring and effective ways” (p. 43). Family involvement in education is a beneficial factor in young children’s learning (National Research Council, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Toffler & Toffler (1995) claimed that school-family-community collaborations are one way to provide a caring component to today’s often large, assembly line schools. Heath & McLaughlin (1987) argued that community involvement in schools is important because, “the problems of education achievement and academic success demand resources beyond the scope of the school and of most families” (p. 579). Schools across the United States are partnering with their students’ families and communities to support the school improvement efforts and student success (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). A United States Department of Education report states high performing schools “make use of their communities and reach out beyond the schools’ walls” (National Association of State Coordinators of Compensatory Education, 1996). Education does not take place solely within the structure of the school building and learning takes place beyond the school and the classroom into the community (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Villa, 2003). Reaching out and building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents, families, and community is beneficial to the school and the students.

School leaders play a vital role in initiating and developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Principals must cultivate parents and their surrounding communities as potential allies (Villa, 2003). Sanders & Harvey (2002) and

Ferguson (2005) showed that principals value the role of family and community involvement in school and that principals are critical to successful involvement efforts. Sanders & Harvey's (2002) study confirmed the need for the principal's invested interest in promoting a school-home connection. "Principal support for community involvement was a central factor in the case school's success in developing meaningful community connections" (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p.1360). In addition, the area of collaborating with families and the community now appears as a school administrator's performance standard on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Standard four of the six ISLLC Standards for School Leaders states: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 16). School leaders are critical to the process and success of connecting with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

### *Communication*

Communication is important when principals, teachers, and schools are reaching out, initiating, and building relationships with parents, families, and the community (Duck, 1994, 1998; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001; Gaitan, 2004). According to Patton, Jayanthi, & Polloway (2001), "Fundamental to the success of all home-school collaborative efforts is an effective communicative component" (p. 227). Establishing a home-school connection requires that educators and parents get to know each other's culture, and this happens through clear and deliberate communication

(Gaitan, 2004). True two-way communication is when the two parties are exchanging information by talking and listening. Villa (2003) explained that when schools communicate with parents, it is usually one-way consisting of notes, newsletters, or calendars going home from the school setting and the parents do not have the opportunity to respond. Sanders & Harvey's (2002) research participants emphasized the importance of two-way communication and this type of communication is identified as playing a major role in helping school-community partnerships to grow, improve, and intensify over time.

In order to have effective two-way communication and expand the involvement of Hispanic/Latino families in school, school personnel should actively listen with sensitivity to the concerns and issues of the families (Birch & Fern, 2002). Listening to the other person, discussing the issue from both sides, and compromising on the solution are elements of two-way communication. "The crux of communication rests on the willingness of both sides to listen to the other's position and negotiate a win-win solution" (Gaitan, 2004, p.23).

Ongoing dialogue between the learning environment and the neighborhood environment is an important step toward mutual understanding. Hayes & Chodkiewicz's (2006) findings suggested that there is a need for active communication between schools and their communities to build shared understanding of the nature of community and of learning. McCarthy's (2000) study revealed that the sharing of information is a key component to connecting the home and community with the school. School communication should recognize that parents, siblings, extended family, members of the

community, and employees of the school have a role to play in facilitating the students' achievement of a broad range of academic and social learning outcomes (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006).

In addition, the school should use a variety of ways to communicate with the community. Ferguson (2005) suggested the school making announcements in the students' home languages on the local radio, community bulletin boards, and other news sources as a way of increasing communication between the school, neighborhoods, and families. Educators need to become experts in teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication with colleagues, parents, and community partners (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Two-way communication between school and families builds relationships.

#### *Examples of Schools Reaching Out to Parents*

Research indicates that there are many ways principals, teachers, and members of the staff are reaching out to parents, families, and the community to build relationships. However, Gaitan (2004) stated that each school creates a unique school-family-community partnership depending on the distinctive resources and people involved in the effort and one approach may not work at all schools. Similarly, Lucas, Henze, & Donato (1990) discussed how successful parent involvement programs utilize the local talent in their respective communities. Nonetheless, good programs share certain characteristics. Epstein et al., (2002) described how research and practical knowledge have advanced on the structure of school, family, and community partnerships and on how to organize and implement more comprehensive programs in elementary, middle, and high schools. Bringle & Hatcher (2002) discussed the importance of respecting the people in the



partnership. “Successful school-community partnerships must find ways to preserve the integrity of each partner and, at the same time, honor the purpose of the relationship and the growth of each party” (Bringle, & Hatcher, 2002, p. 513). Hayes & Chodkiewicz’s (2006) research explained how the investigated school district acknowledges the importance of connecting with the community by each school in the study employing a school-based community liaison officer whose purpose is to involve parents and the community in the school through a range of formal and informal activities. Similarly, Gaitan’s (2004) study highlighted how employing bilingual staff members who can communicate by phone and who can translate correspondence will send the message that the Hispanic/Latino parents are valued in the school. In addition, Hayes & Chodkiewicz (2006) credited the implementation of site-based management with being an important factor in drawing parents into the school. The researchers explain that because the schools are enabling and empowering the parents to get more involved, the parents’ confidence develops and they feel a sense of belonging within a school community.

Several authors offer examples of how schools can connect with the parents, families, and communities. Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole’s (1999) study noted that the most effective schools reach out to parents by having them as representatives on school committees, focus groups, and through the use of phone and written surveys. Beck & Murphy (1999) offered these suggestions for building relationships: organizing a pot luck dinner with all of the community stakeholders (i.e. families, district officers, government employees, police, etc.), creating a parents’ center, recruiting parents to participate on leadership council, encouraging parents to attend district-level meetings with the principal, and parents regularly assisting in classrooms. It is also important for

school personnel to make parents and families feel welcome in the building (DiCecco, Rosenblum, Taylor & Adelman, 1995; Ferguson, 2005; Gaitan, 2004). The authors make the following suggestions on how schools can foster a welcoming environment: (a) organize a welcoming table where staff meet and greet parents and families in their native language, (b) provide a relevant school materials/information sheet such as a welcoming booklet in their native language, (c) offer a welcoming club for parents and students with regular meetings, (d) dedicate a “welcome” bulletin board with pictures of new students and families, (e) ensure each classroom has several student greeters, (f) ask teachers to have a parent-teacher-student conference when the new student arrives, (g) make contact with new students and families, and (h) offer a parent resource handbook with names of bilingual staff at school and in the school district. Reaching out to students and parents in these ways will promote an ongoing connection between the families and the school.

Sanders & Harvey’s (2002) research showed that a welcoming school climate is one of the factors that supported one urban school’s ability to develop and maintain meaningful community partnerships. Ferguson’s (2005) report showed that teachers who proactively reach out to parents, rather than wait for them to come to the school, are often successful in their efforts to foster effective family and community involvement in student learning.

DiCecco, Rosenblum, Taylor & Adelman (1995) insisted that school staff members reach out to parents and encourage them to drop in, be volunteers, go on field trips, participate in publishing a community newsletter, organize social events, plan and attend learning workshops, and meet with teachers to learn more about their child’s curriculum and learning. Another strategy for reaching out to parents is meeting with families at locations away from the school campus. Ferguson (2005) and Gaitan (2004) suggested conducting

meet-and-greet walks in the students' neighborhoods and offer parent classes on academics or parenting skills at a local community center, library, or church. Finally, Nieto (1996) and Gaitan (2004) stressed the advantages of educators valuing, acknowledging, and celebrating the Hispanic/Latino language and culture in the daily school environment. Many principals and schools are finding ways to reach out to Hispanic/Latino parents, families, and the community to build relationships.

### *Summary*

Chapter two provided a review of literature on the key themes surrounding school, family, and community relationships. Many researchers study the importance of principals and schools collaborating, communicating, and reaching out to the people in the communities they serve. Chapter three provides an explanation about the research methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### *Introduction*

This study offers meaning and understanding regarding principals' perceptions about the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino families and the degree to which the principals have connected and communicated with the Hispanic/Latino community. The research is a qualitative multiple case study which examines individual cases as well as provides a cross-case analysis. The research presented in the study contributes to existing literature by providing first hand information on the topic collected through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with principals. The study offers a description of principals' experiences in schools with a growing Hispanic/Latino student population in the Little County School District outside of Atlanta, Georgia.

This chapter describes the methods used in this study. The chapter consists of the research questions, summary of qualitative research, explanation of data collection using interviews, participant selection, data analysis, limitations of the study, and the researcher's bias.

### *Research Questions*

The recent influx of large numbers of Hispanic/Latino residents into southeastern metropolitan areas has resulted in an array of new challenges for building-level school administrators in large suburban districts. Prior literature discusses parent involvement in schools and school-family-community partnerships. However, the literature is lacking research on principals' perceptions about the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino families. Also, previous studies do not investigate the extent that the principals have connected and communicated with the Hispanic/Latino community at elementary and middle levels. This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do select principals perceive the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
2. To what extent have principals in schools with large Hispanic/Latino student populations developed relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?

### *Method*

Qualitative research is an appropriate method to assess the principals' perceptions about relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. The study is a multiple case study in six schools with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students. Six school principals from elementary and middle schools participated in one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Each interview took place at the principal's office and was approximately sixty minutes long. The overall interview phase for the study occurred over several weeks. Specific open-ended questions guided each interview and prompted

additional probing questions. The data analysis process for this study included: (a) transcribing the interview tapes verbatim, (b) analyzing each interview and creating categories of themes, (c) identifying common theme patterns between the six interview transcripts, (d) connecting the findings to previous research, and (e) explaining the findings in narrative form. In addition to interviews as a data collection method, the researcher conducted informal observations during the school day and at evening functions such as PTA meetings, holiday programs, and learning nights. Also, newsletters, flyers, and calendars were collected as artifacts related to the Hispanic/Latino community.

The interview questions attempt to answer the following:

1. If at all, how has the Hispanic/Latino population increase in the community impacted what goes on in the principal's school?
2. If at all, how has the Hispanic/Latino student population increase in the principal's school impacted his/her ability to reach out, communicate, and collaborate with the Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
3. What are some strategies, programs, events, services, and/or initiatives that are helping the principal and school develop relationships with Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families?

A qualitative study using case study methodology with interview questions, informal observations, and artifact collection is the most appropriate means of looking at this phenomenon.

### *Qualitative Research*

Quantitative research and qualitative research are different study approaches. Quantitative research tends to “investigate whether a change in one variable,  $x$ , causes a change in another variable,  $y$ ” (Eisenhart, 2005, p. 245). Qualitative research tends to “investigate causal processes, that is, they are interested in *how*  $x$  influences  $y$ ” (Eisenhart, 2005, p. 245). In other words, the theory of causation is when  $x$  flows into or leads to  $y$ . For studies that look at human behavior, beliefs, and intentions, qualitative research design and methods are appropriate (Eisenhart, 2005). According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), “qualitative research plays a discovery role” (p. 29). For these reasons, qualitative research design looks at principals’ perceptions about building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

A case study is an appropriate research methodology for looking at this topic. Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996) explained that one goal of a case study is to understand the phenomenon as it is experienced by the participant. Cresswell (1998) agreed but stating that qualitative design using in-depth interviews is appropriate for uncovering the meaning of phenomena from participants’ perspective. According to Yin (1993, 2003), the characteristics of case study research include the researcher having little control over events, the researcher can retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, and the research contributes to the knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. The case study reader can learn about situations that occur to one person or to a group of people who are linked together by a common experience.

Case studies could be descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative in style (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). This case study is descriptive and interpretative because it describes and interprets the principals' experiences about connecting and communicating with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. The design of the study is a multiple-case, embedded case study (Yin, 2003) meaning one topic is researched from several different principals' perspective from different schools. Conducting a case study is appropriate for learning about the principals' experiences with building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

#### *Data Collection: Interviews*

In-depth interviews are the primary data source in this analysis of relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. A variety of interview questions were used in this study such as introducing questions, follow-up questions, and probing questions (Kvale, 1996). Introduction questions from an interview guide were asked during the interview. The specific questions guided the interview and provided a structure for the data collection. However, the informal sessions involved open-ended questions so the dialogue generated additional follow-up and probing questions. Follow-up and probing questions strive to elaborate or clarify the information (Hoopes, 1979; Kvale, 1996) in the principal's previous responses. Examples of probing questions which helped the researcher get a sense of the principal's perspective are: "Can you give me an example of that?" and "Can you describe that in more detail?" and "Let's go back to..." and "Tell me more about..." (Brown, 1988, p. 42). These types of interviews are



also known as semi-structured interviews and are used to gain meaning and understanding about the principals' experiences and perspectives.

The interview process in this study included tape recording the conversations and taking notes during the interviews. The researcher summarized the principal's thoughts as well as wrote down what needed explanation or further questioning during the session. Hoopes (1979) explained that taking notes during the interview, even though it is being tape recorded, sends the message to the interviewee that the information is interesting and significant and helps the interviewer concentrate, listen, and remember what is being shared. "Nothing will destroy rapport more quickly than for you to show that you have forgotten or not listened to what he has said" (Hoopes, 1979, p. 89). Next, the tapes were transcribed which is defined by Hoopes (1979) as translating "language from one medium to another, from speech to writing, while attempting to preserve as much of the original meaning as possible" (p. 114). The tapes were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word typed document so the principals' words were identical to the words spoken during the interview. "People's words are their own and belong to them; words cannot be changed without violating the spirit of the narrator" (Brown, 1988, p. 53). The next step in the interview process was reviewing the transcription with the interviewee and confirming the accuracy of the data (Hoopes, 1979; Brown, 1988). The principals made changes to the interview transcriptions as necessary. Then the researcher analyzed all of the transcriptions and decided which methods of analysis were appropriate (Kvale, 1996). This involved coding the significant themes in the individual principal's experiences in order to identify the common patterns among the six principals. At the

conclusion of the interview process, the investigator reported the findings of the study in a readable summary (Kvale, 1996).

Credibility, dependability, and plausibility/trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are important components of qualitative research. The research findings show credibility by demonstrating believability and supportive evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher addressed credibility by sharing the principals' perspectives in a practical manner. Also, credibility was obtained by offering artifacts and observations related to the topic. Plausibility/trustworthiness, also known as authenticity in literature, was established because the researcher can explain the participant's concerns, issues, and underlying values along with his/her own standpoint (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Tobin & Begley (2004), "The ability to help people appreciate the viewpoints and constructions of others is indicative of educative authenticity" (p. 392). The researcher tackled plausibility/trustworthiness by stating the principals' experiences from the transcripts and explaining her point of view in which the information was filtered. Member checks, peer examination, and the researcher's bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) are used to build credibility, dependability, and plausibility/trustworthiness of the study's results. According to Driessen, Van der Vleuten, Schuwirth, van Tartwijk, & Vermunt (2005), member checks are defined as reviewing the data with the members of the group from which they were collected. The researcher shared the individual interview transcript with each principal and provided the opportunity for each principal to change, add, or delete text. Peer examination involved the researcher selecting a colleague to review the data to ensure that the information is explained in a clear manner. The researcher presented a copy of the findings to her

dissertation committee chairperson who is a former school administrator and a person not involved in the study. Researcher's bias is an explanation of his/her background, education, or experiences that may influence the way the data is analyzed. The researcher is mindful of her biases and identified them in the findings. The researcher has been an educator for 17 years and she worked closely with Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families. The researcher believes that schools with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students should provide programs, services, and events that help the Hispanic/Latino community feel like a valued and important part of the school community. Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families offer many ethnic, cultural, and linguistic benefits to the school setting. This qualitative research achieved credibility, dependability, and authenticity.

### *Principal Interviews*

Principals from elementary schools and middle schools were interviewed for this study. Interviewing six principals is an appropriate method and an acceptable number of participants for looking at principals' experiences and perspectives about building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Below are examples of existing research that uses in-depth interviews of a small number of school administrators such as principals.

Sheppard's (2006) study sought to determine the reasons why successful mathematics student had been able to thrive in schools labeled academically unacceptable, and why they had chosen to stay in these schools despite having had the option to leave the school. The researcher selected a qualitative approach in order to gain a descriptive understanding of how the students triumphed over the perceived obstacles

embedded in low performing schools and to obtain perceptive explanations as to why the students chose not to attend better performing schools. The investigation includes individual, one-hour, audio taped interviews with the two principals from the two academically unacceptable schools.

Idol's (2006) research was a program evaluation to examine and describe how special education services were provided in eight schools, and the ways in which students with disabilities were supported in the least restrictive environment. Principal perceptions of special education services were examined by conducting individual interviews with the eight administrators.

Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and van Staden (2005) investigated three primary schools in diverse socioeconomic communities to determine the type and extent of school-to-home and home-to-school communication in the early childhood development phase. This qualitative research project was designed to be exploratory and descriptive, so in-depth interviews with the three school principals were appropriate. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed for closer examination.

Shahid's (2003) study examined the concern of school principals for the nutritional environment of middle school students through an analysis of the affective, social, and educational factors that may have contributed to dietary behavior among students. Eight school principals were interviewed individually for the qualitative portion of the study. The interviews were based on the need to understand how middle school principals view their leadership role as it relates to nutritional health practices among students. Furthermore, the study investigated why some school leaders made the decision to allow the selling of items to students, while others did not. The tape-recorded

interviews, consisting of semi-structured questions, were transcribed and repeatedly reviewed for recurrent patterns and themes.

The purpose of Anderson's (2004) research was to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of teacher leadership. The study investigated how teacher leadership often involves the mutual influence between teacher leaders and principals. Six school principals shared their perspectives on the nature of teacher leadership through in-depth interviews. The principal statements were coded and counted for frequency of occurrence. The data and themes in the report were largely descriptive and somewhat interpretative.

Tate's (2003) paper explored the ways effective elementary school principals used their listening skills in conversations with their teachers to better understand them, make decisions, and make sense of the day-to-day operations of their schools. Six elementary school principals in a large suburban school district near a large metropolitan area were interviewed individually to investigate the listening skills of the selected principals and their perceptions of their own listening skills.

To summarize, all of these studies demonstrate that it is acceptable for research to interview a small number of school leaders. Therefore, a qualitative study using case study methodology with interviewing six school principals is an appropriate means of looking at the phenomenon of principals building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

### *Participants*

The Little County School District has 113 schools with an enrollment of over 107,000 students. Schools in the southern region of the county have the largest percentage of Hispanic/Latino students so this was the recruitment area for participants. Six principals were selected to participate in this study based on the Hispanic/Latino student enrollment in their school. As Patton (1990) explained, the researcher carefully chooses participants who will provide the most relevant information. This ‘purposeful sampling’ is appropriate when the researcher’s goal is to discuss the similarities and differences between organizations (Cresswell, 1998). For this study, the researcher discussed similarities and differences across schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student population. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select principals and schools for this qualitative study that would contribute meaningful information about the study’s topic (Patton, 1990). In order to gain a wide range of principals’ perspectives on the importance and degree of relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families, elementary school principals and middle school principals were selected for the study.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis for this study involved seven steps. First, the interviews were audio taped and immediately transcribed verbatim. Second, the transcripts were compared to the recordings to assure accuracy. The next step involved sending the transcripts to the principals for comment after identifying emerging themes. This is called member checking and requires reviewing interpretations with participants so that they can provide feedback (Cresswell, 1998). The fourth step in the data analysis process was guided by

the simultaneous analysis of the data and the constant comparison method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998; Taylor & Bodgan, 1998). This means that data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously and that there was a constant comparison within and between interviews. The fifth step was taking the transcript information and grouping it into categories and then the categories were grouped into themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, after the first two interview tapes were transcribed verbatim, the data was analyzed and compared and coded for common categories or themes. This preliminary analysis helped the researcher be prepared for the next set of interviews in which the process occurred again. New interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and continuously compared to categories that had been discovered in previous data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Strauss & Corbin (1990) explained, data is analyzed for new ideas about a subject and the researcher evaluates the data and brings meaning to the data to improve understanding of the subject. At this point, the data was coded a final time. The last step in the data analysis process was connecting the findings to the prior literature.

### *Limitations*

This research study was limited to the six individual principals' experiences and was based on data collected from the six schools. The schools studied are all in the Little County School District of Georgia. Interviewing principals from other school districts across the State of Georgia would provide additional research opportunities. While the information gained in this study was collected in order to provide insight into the principals' perceptions about the importance and degree of relationship building with the

Hispanic/Latino community, it was not generalizable to all schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student enrollment.

Another limitation of the study was how the research was conducted on a small scale. Expanding the study to include more than six principals from all over Little County and the State of Georgia would benefit the research. Also, the limited timeframe prevented further investigation of interesting material that emerged during the data collection and data analysis phase. For instance, the study would improve if the researcher interviewed the principals multiple times. This would be a much larger research endeavor and was not possible with this study.

There was another limitation of the study regarding the data collection. Data collection from interviews were analyzed simultaneously and compared continuously to themes that emerge from previous interviews. It is possible that the data interpretations collected from the first three interviews influenced how the researcher interpreted the last three interviews.

The final limitation involved the number of researchers working on the study. If a team of researchers work on this study, it would benefit the study because more than one person would interpret the data, create categories/themes, draw meaning and understanding, and check if the principals' experiences were captured correctly and interpreted similarly. Credibility would be enhanced with more than one researcher working on this study.



### *Researcher Bias*

The researcher has been an educator for 17 years and held positions as an elementary school teacher, human resources representative, and assistant principal. During these experiences, she worked closely with Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families. The researcher has some preconceived ideas about building relationships, connecting, and communicating with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. For instance, the researcher believes that schools with a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino student should employ a full-time parent liaison who is fluent in Spanish to communicate with Hispanic/Latino parents, translate school documents from English to Spanish, assist the Hispanic/Latino community, and educate the school staff on Hispanic/Latino culture and language. In stating this bias, it is the researcher's hope that the reader has a better understanding of the personal interest the researcher possesses, which guides this inquiry.

### *Summary*

This research study is a glimpse into the principals' perceptions about the importance and degree of relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. This chapter explained the research methodology and design. Chapter four provides a description of each case study generated by the six individual principal interview transcripts and then the six cases are compared and contrasted.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Chapter four explains school principals' perceptions of how important it is to develop relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families and to what degree the principals are connecting and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community. Six elementary and middle principals from schools with a growing Hispanic/Latino student population provided the study's data.

The researcher met with each principal once and the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Each principal reviewed his/her transcripts and either confirmed that the transcript's content was accurate or made changes to ensure the accuracy of the data. The common themes among the six principals are identified and explained in this chapter.

Chapter four has two sections. The first section provides a profile of each principal so the reader knows the background of each participant before reading the data analysis. The second section examines the common themes that emerged from the principals' narratives.

#### *Principal Profiles*

Principal Bird is a female with 35 years of experience working in the same school district. She was a special education teacher, computer lab manager, kindergarten teacher, and learning support strategist before going into administration. She was an assistant

principal for three years and had been the Bishop Elementary School principal for five years at the time of the study. Bishop Elementary School is a Title One school, which means that the percentage of students enrolled who are eligible to receive a free or reduced lunch is greater than 52%. Principal Bird worked in three Title One schools before coming to Bishop Elementary. Principal Bird described herself as a “hands-on” principal who likes to make learning fun for children and adults since education is a “very difficult job” and “challenging work” with “lots of barriers.” Principal Bird believes in “servant leadership” and explained that if every teacher is successful then she is successful and if there is a failing class, then she is failing too. Also, Principal Bird stated that she is good at communicating her vision and passion, loves to work in the area that she does, and supports teachers with training and coaches. Principal Bird said she needs the best teachers at her school so she recruits the “best and the brightest.”

According to the principal, Bishop Elementary School's Hispanic/Latino student enrollment has increased “gradually” over the past few years, which is about 8% in five years. Principal Bird said that the majority of the students are African American with about 37% being Hispanic/Latino. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 3

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Bishop Elementary School 2001-2007*

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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 38%     | 34%     | 29%     | 25%     | 19%     | 19%     |

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In five years, Bishop’s Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 19%.

Principal Brick is a male with 24 years in education. He has experience working in two southern states. Prior to going into administration, he was a second and third grade teacher. Principal Brick was an assistant principal for seven years with the selected school district and was in his second year as principal of Breeze Elementary School at the time of the study. Breeze Elementary School is a Title One school, which makes this the fourth Title One school Principal Brick where he has been employed. When asked to describe himself as a principal, Principal Brick said that he is a people person who is visible in every classroom, everyday with “a lot of interaction” with the children. He tutors students daily, is approachable so teachers can ask for what they need, and gives his teachers support. Principal Brick said that he gives teacher strategies to put into place so students are successful and the teachers “have the power and leadership with their classrooms.” Principal Brick explained that the Hispanic/Latino student population in his school has increased 10% from last year. He stated that 50% of the student population is African American, 45% is Hispanic/Latino, and five percent is Caucasian. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 4

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Breeze Elementary School 2001-2007*

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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 41%     | 39%     | 33%     | 35%     | 37%     | 31%     |

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In five years, Breeze’s Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 10%.

Principal Faith is a female with 17 years of experience working in the same school district. She was a guidance counselor for twelve years, an assistant administrator

for two years, an assistant principal for three years, and was in her first year as an elementary school principal at the time of the study. Fancy Elementary School is a Title One school, which is a new experience for Principal Faith. Principal Faith described herself as a “compassionate rule follower.” She understands how things are going and understands people’s concerns, “but the bottom line is we are going to do what we need to do for kids.” Principal Faith said the Hispanic/Latino student population in her school has “ballooned” in the last five years to 70% of the total enrollment. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 5

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Fancy Elementary School 2001-2007*

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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 70%     | 67%     | 66%     | 61%     | 59%     | 58%     |

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In five years, Fancy’s Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 12%.

Principal Gray is a male with 22 years experience in education with the same school district. He was a Health and Physical Education teacher for twelve years, an assistant principal for seven years, and was in his third year as Grand Middle School’s principal at the time of the study. Grand Middle School is a Title One school. Principal Gray described himself as “the policy man” who is a “teacher of teachers.” He prefers to guide people through discovery together rather than telling them what to do. Principal Gray said the Hispanic/Latino student population in his school is “steadily going up.” Currently, 40% of the school enrollment is African American, 40% is Hispanic/Latino, and 20% is Caucasian. Three years ago, each category had approximately 33% of the

total enrollment. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 6

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Grand Middle School 2001-2007*

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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 39%     | 35%     | 33%     | 31%     | 26%     | 23%     |

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In five years, Grand's Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 16%.

Principal Hill is a female with 17 years of education experience in Georgia. Her previous experiences include being a special education teacher and working in the state education department with special education. Principal Hill was an assistant principal for five years and had been the Hike Elementary School principal for four years at the time of the study. Hike Elementary School is a Title One school. When asked to describe herself as a principal, Principal Hill stated she likes to “empower and support people to accomplish their goals.” She admitted to never wanting to be a leader and wanted to get teachers, students, and parents “to think for themselves” so they can figure out how to solve problems. Principal Hill said the Hispanic/Latino student enrollment in her school has changed “drastically” from 10% to 24% in four years. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 7

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Hike Elementary School 2001-2007*


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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 23%     | 18%     | 13%     | 12%     | 12%     | 9%      |

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In five years, Hike's Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 14%.

Principal Lamb is a female with 29 years of education experience in the same school district. Before becoming an administrator, she was a kindergarten teacher, a first grade teacher, an early intervention teacher, and a learning support strategist. After four years as an assistant principal, she became the Land Elementary School principal and was in her fourth year as principal at the time of the study. Land Elementary School is a Title One school and all of Principal Lamb's experience has been in Title One schools.

Principal Lamb's goal was to become a Title One principal. She believes it is important to have administrators who have a good understanding of what the Title One needs are and what the challenges are and how to work with the community. Principal Lamb explained that her goal was to work with the parents and the community to get more involvement in school and a greater "comfort level" of parents in the school. She feels "lucky" to have worked in schools with a high Hispanic/Latino population and wants to be in these schools because she really enjoys working with the English as a second language population. Principal Lamb says the Hispanic/Latino student population in her school has increased about 5% to 6% each year and from 50% to 72% in five years. The State of Georgia K-12 Report Card offers the following Hispanic/Latino student enrollment data.

Table 8

*Growth of Hispanic/Latino Population at Land Elementary School 2001-2007*


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| 2006-07 | 2005-06 | 2004-05 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2001-02 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 71%     | 66%     | 58%     | 50%     | 48%     | 42%     |

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In five years, Land's Hispanic/Latino student population has increased 29%.

*Principals' Themes*

This section examines the common themes that emerged from the principals' narratives. The six principals' experiences of working in a school with a growing Hispanic/Latino student population can be drawn into two themes: (a) challenges and (b) developing relationships. The themes are explained using paraphrasing and quotes from the interviews.

Each principal mentioned several challenges associated with their individual schools with a growing Hispanic/Latino population. Principals cited the difference between the Spanish language spoken at home and the English language spoken at school as the biggest challenge. Most of the principals do not speak Spanish or know only a few words, which creates problems in communicating one-on-one with the parents and families. Some principals explained that having to have a third person present to talk to parents is very frustrating. Principal Hill of Hike Elementary School said, "I think we are attempting to reach out, but I can't sit down and have a conversation if a Hispanic parent came in with a concern. Unless I have a third party, I couldn't translate it. As a principal,



that's frustrating for me." The Spanish-English language barrier is a struggle for the principals.

Another challenge that the principals revealed was how their schools have low parental involvement. The principals stated a variety of reasons why they think the parents are not coming to school to be involved in the daily academic lives of their children. The principals attributed the lack of parental involvement to the parents not seeing education as their job, the parents reside too far away from the school building, and the parents are insecure about their English proficiency. Principal Bird of Bishop Elementary School explained that she is frustrated with the parents who "just don't feel like it's their job to be involved in the school program, in the academic program; they just feel like that's the schools work." She wants to change this belief and she wants to change the culture of families who have had a bad experience in school. Principal Gray of Grand Middle School described how five elementary schools feed into his middle school, but only two elementary schools are close in proximity to the middle school building. The other three elementary schools are too far away for family members to walk to the middle school so the parents are less involved. The parents who live close-by are more involved than the families who live a farther distance from the school.

The transient student population was another challenge for the schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student population. Two principals shared that there are apartment complexes whose residents attend their schools. These families tend to move in and out of the neighborhood throughout the year and contribute to the school's high transiency rate. Principal Bird explains:

Then we have two huge apartment complexes and that's where most of our economically disadvantaged students come from and where many, many of our challenges come from. Lots of transiency in those apartments. They offer specials. So the parents will move in to take advantage of the specials and then three months later as soon as the special is over, they're out. So we have had kids who have been in four different schools a year. And that's not an uncommon occurrence.

This principal said that having a high transiency rate makes it difficult to engage parents in school. Principal Faith of Fancy Elementary School described working in a high transient school like "shooting at a moving target all the time" because the students are constantly moving in and out of her school.

Closely related to a high transient student population issue is having students attend school on a regular basis. Some principals cited student attendance as a concern. Principal Gray mentioned how the Hispanic/Latino parents need to know how the United States public education system operates. Parents may not understand how important regular school attendance is for student's academic achievement. Principal Gray explained that due to a lack of transportation, many Hispanic/Latino parents keep their children home more often.

We found for a lot of our Latino families, because they don't have transportation, they are very hesitant if their child doesn't feel good to send them to school. What happens if they get sick at school? I can't come get them. So they just stay home altogether.

Principal Gray said that the parents may not know that the school has a full-time nurse on staff who can help with a sick child.

Lastly, getting Hispanic/Latino parents involved in leadership positions with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the school council is a challenge for some schools. Principal Lamb said that her biggest ongoing challenge is getting parents to come to the school and take on leadership roles and to be a part of their children's

academic lives. “There seems to be a real comfort level there that’s not happening as far as taking on that role.” Some parents are uncomfortable with their English proficiency. “Many of the parents feel that their English is not good enough to serve as an officer. Many of the parents feel that if you put them in an office position, they’re not going to be able to do it well.” Getting Hispanic/Latino parents to volunteer for school leadership positions such as PTA or school council is a struggle for some schools.

The second theme that emerged from the principals’ narratives relates to how principals are developing relationships with the Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Every principal mentioned that his or her school has a parent liaison. The parent liaison’s job is to help connect the school to the parents and to the community. The parent liaison encourages all parents to get involved in their child’s education and volunteer at school.

Principal Faith elaborated:

She helps them to understand how to help their child be successful in school. She helps them understand that no matter what they can do, it’s important. If a parent can come in and cut out lamination or run the copy machine, it’s just as important as the parent who can come in and read with a group of children or one-on-one with a child. No matter what they have to offer, it’s important. So she’s trying to help build that confidence in the parents.

Also, the parent liaison offers and distributes books, pamphlets, and materials that help parents understand how they can help their child be academically successful and offer specific strategies and techniques even if it is in the student’s native language and not English. In addition, the parent liaison translates documents and publications into Spanish, if he/she is bilingual.

Another common theme among the principals was how each school offers parent workshops, programs, and classes. The parent programs concentrate on how their

children can be successful in school and how parents/families can help their child at home. Specifically, the workshops cover topics such as how parents can help children with homework and how to help a child who is struggling to read. Principal Faith of Fancy Elementary School shared how the parent workshops “are very much focused on good parenting skills, on communicating with your children, on setting limits with your children, just some general behavior management type things, and then academic and how to help your child be successful.” Hike Elementary School offers parent programs during the day where school-related topics such as test preparation, problem solving techniques, and instructional strategies are discussed. The workshops are called ‘Donuts for Dad,’ ‘Muffins for Mom’ and a new Hispanic/Latino version called ‘Padres and Pastries.’ Principal Hill explained the reason for creating a new parent workshop was, “Because our Hispanic population has grown, we added Padres and Pastries where the translator comes in and we would do workshops with just our Hispanic parents. That’s been really helpful.” The content of the ‘Padres and Pastries’ program is translated from English to Spanish. Other schools offer the parent workshops in English and Spanish. Bishop Elementary School, Fancy Elementary School, and Grand Middle School present the programs in English and Spanish so the parents choose which language to best to hear and understand the information. Grand Middle School opts to have the English version of the program in one school location and the Spanish version of the program in a different school location so it is going on simultaneously. Bishop Elementary School’s English workshop is on one night and the Spanish workshop is on another night. The principals said that the length of the meeting is not doubled because the content does not have to be translated from English to Spanish. Bishop Elementary School’s principal explained how

her school makes their night classes very inviting to parents and families. Parents are encouraged to bring their children to the program because the school serves everyone dinner, provides babysitting for pre-school age children, and offers tutoring for school age children. Also, Breeze Elementary School and Bishop Elementary School present a family literacy program so Hispanic/Latino family members can learn the English language. In addition, Bishop Elementary School offers another type of parent program by having each grade-level team of teachers host a workshop once a year, which is specific to the grade level curriculum. The grade level workshops are offered one night in English and a different night in Spanish. Principal Lamb of Land Elementary School arranges for parent sessions called 'Lunch and Learn' twice a month. These programs are customized to the needs of the parents, which may not be related to school. Principal Lamb described her program:

We've even had [the parent liaisons] helping parents with completing income tax forms and reading mail that comes to them that they don't have an understanding of. So a lot of times it's just community needs that really have nothing to do with the school. Working with technology. How to get a library card. We had so many students who didn't go to the library. So we have them come in and said let's call in somebody and let's work on what you do to get a library card. We kind of regularly are checking what the needs are and then we arrange Lunch and Learns to go along with that. We have at least two a month.

The Land Elementary School's 'Lunch and Learn' agenda changes based on the information that the parents want to learn. Lastly, Grand Middle School offers parent workshops outside of school in locations closer to where the families live. Principal Gray believes in going to the parents in the neighborhood instead of always asking the parents to come to school. Due to the fact that some parents do not live within walking distance to the school, the administrators and staff

schedule “Town Hall Meetings” at elementary schools which are closer to some of the parents’ homes than the middle school. Principal Gray explained:

This year we started something new and what we call Town Hall Meetings, as opposed to having someone from [Fancy Elementary School] come here to see us, we are actually going to [Fancy Elementary School]. So we had our first one about two weeks ago where we took PTA officers, teachers, the administrative staff, and a translator and we had a [Grand Middle School] meeting at [Fancy Elementary School] so that those folks from that community could come. We had 17 families. That doesn’t sound like a lot, but four of those families walked. They were within walking distance of the elementary school. They would not have come down here at seven o’clock on a Thursday night to come all the way to [Grand Middle School]. So what we are trying to do is to go out into the community and meet there.

Having a meeting closer to where the families live makes the meeting more convenient and accessible to parents. Parent programs, workshops, and classes are offered at all of the schools in the study.

Improving communication between the school and the Hispanic/Latino parents and families was a common theme that emerged from the principals’ narratives. All of the principals mentioned how they are making an effort to translate documents and information from English into Spanish. The principals discussed how translating materials such as newsletters, flyers, notes, invitations, meetings/conferences, the school website and the weekly/monthly phone messages into Spanish was an important way of building relationships with the Hispanic/Latino community. All of the principals provided the researcher with English/Spanish versions of these items when asked for an example. Also, the researcher was able to Principal Faith said, “Everything we send home from the school is always English and Spanish. We just send it home with every child that way. So it lets our English speaking parents know that there’s a need for that. We want everyone to be able to understand what we send home.” Principal Faith makes an

effort to translate the school's website. Fancy Elementary school's website has two screens which can be translated from English into Spanish by clicking a link. The website's home page and the "parent reading links" are available in Spanish. There are translating websites available online, but Principal Faith shared her negative experience with using the Internet to translate documents.

But going to a website for translation is not always a good way. I did that during preplanning for something and (name) from the International Welcome Center was here and he said now, it's fine, but the choice of words from the website is a little higher level than probably the population that you're sending it to. So they might know what that means, but they might not. I said okay. I've learned my lesson on my first try.

Principal Faith said that it is better to have bilingual staff members translate online items because they are more likely to be accurate and on the correct comprehension level for the parents. Regarding improving communication between the school and Hispanic/Latino families, Principal Lamb commented that when communication is present, it makes a difference in the type of relationship the school has with the parents. Principal Lamb explained that her philosophy for translating all items into Spanish is to celebrate the diversity in her school and not to make families feel like they have to give up their language and culture when entering the building.

Like I say, you've got to have them feeling comfortable coming in. Part of that is there is communication available, but part of it is that you value the diversity and that you value the culture. The coming a part of the school and blending into a school does not mean that you lose your sense of culture in the sense of where you came from. So that's one of the things that we work on right away is part of that relationship is that there's still going to be things that are present where they feel that they can celebrate where they come from.

Principal Lamb believes that translating all items into Spanish will improve the relationship between the home environment and the school environment. Land

Elementary School's website has one page of the website that can be translated from English into Spanish by clicking a link. The online copy of the school's newsletter has the translation option. Principal Hill of Hike Elementary School said,

I do a newsletter monthly and I try to do a better job of getting it translated ahead of time to send out to parents. Of course when we do the phone master call-out, we send it out in Spanish to those families. So we are really trying to do some things to communicate.

Hike Elementary School's entire website can be translated from English to Spanish.

There is a link on the school's homepage that allows for the whole website to appear in Spanish. The other four schools investigated did not offer their website in Spanish.

Due to the high volume of materials that must be translated into Spanish, some principals designate certain bilingual employees to work with certain groups to translate the items so the workload is distributed evenly among the Spanish-speaking teachers. For instance, each grade level team has a bilingual staff member that is responsible for translating those teachers' documents. Principal Lamb explained that the benefit of using this system is "so when you have that many folks, you can pretty much get things translated without too much of a wait time."

A few principals mentioned a piece of equipment that helps translate the content of PTA meetings from English to Spanish. Instead of having the presenter say a few sentences in English and then the interpreter repeat the same sentences in Spanish, there is an instant translation that occurs with headsets and an earpiece. Principal Brick explicated:



But what we do is we use the earpiece, the translation device. So we have a set, which has 25 and [school name] has a set, which has 25. So we borrow their set. So what we do is while we're having our PTA meeting in English, one of my staff persons who speaks Spanish is speaking softly into the microphone in Spanish translating what they are saying. So everybody is hearing it at the same time. So it's not that you hear it in English and then you stop and you hear it in Spanish, but it's kind of a smooth systematic way through.

The immediate translation prevents the meeting from being twice as long as it would be if the presentation was stated in English first and then stated in Spanish. The researcher observed the translation device in use at Breeze Elementary School's PTA meeting.

Principal Faith of Fancy Elementary School explained her dilemma with the translation headsets due to the 70% Hispanic/Latino student population.

My question to them was, okay I would probably need the ten or so headsets for my people who need to hear me in English. But the meeting would have to be in Spanish. Then I struggle with the question of if we are an English speaking school, it's a struggle there. It's an ethical dilemma. You know? Do I persevere and say no, we're speaking English and so I need 300 headsets? Or do I meet the needs of my community and do the meeting in Spanish and have 10 headsets? It's an ethical dilemma. What do you do? I'm really leaning towards having the meeting in Spanish and then having English just for the few people that need it.

This approach requires Principal Faith to write out a meeting script for the Spanish-speaking translator. When the researcher attended Fancy Elementary School's PTA meeting, the principal did not use the translation equipment. Principal Lamb of Land Elementary School stated that her school uses the headsets and earpieces for PTA meetings so the speaker does not have to say a few sentences and then pause as it is translated into Spanish. Principal Lamb said, "That can be kind of awkward and difficult. When you have those types of things available, parents will come more readily." The Land Elementary School PTA meeting that the researcher attended was a holiday performance and the headsets were not used, but the brief announcement portion of the

meeting was translated from English to Spanish. Principal Lamb explained that since the purpose of the PTA meeting was for the students to sing, there was not enough content needing translation to warrant using the headsets and earpieces. Also, she said that the school did not have enough units for the large crowd. Principal Lamb showed the researcher the briefcase with the translation equipment. All of the principals mentioned translating school related information from English into Spanish as a way to develop relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

Several principals explained the importance of having an inviting office environment and school where parents feel comfortable and welcome. Principal Bird revealed the public's impression of Bishop Elementary School when she first became principal. She was told that the school's office "had a reputation of being very curt and rude to our public; so that includes our Hispanic public." She explained how she created a more inviting office setting.

So the first thing I did was go about changing the culture of how we greet people at the front office, what we say to them, what our tone of voice is, who's responsible for dealing with folks who come in, whose responsible for answering the phone, how quickly we answer the phone, and in what manner do we answer the phone so that really gave a facelift as far as greeting people at the door.

This new approach at Bishop Elementary School made the public's impression of the school a much warmer and inviting environment. Principal Brick said he makes people feel welcome at Breeze Elementary by being visible and friendly, learning a few Spanish words, and inviting parents to school to participate in activities. He extends a smile and a handshake and makes positive statements to the students and parents everyday while he is walking around the school. Principal Hill of Hike Elementary concurred about the importance of having parents feel comfortable visiting school. Principal Hill said,

“Making sure the parents feel comfortable coming to the school. I think that’s really important. That’s the only way we’ll be able to get the feel for what’s happening is if they come to the school.” Principal Faith shared how she believes in having a positive relationship between herself and the parents in order for the school environment and the home environment to work as a team.

So I have to create an environment or a climate where they are comfortable coming to talk to me, where they know that whatever their concern is that I’m going to listen. And that together we are going to make a difference or fix whatever it is that is a concern for them.

Regarding speaking Spanish, Principal Brick and Principal Hill believe knowing a few Spanish words makes a big difference to Hispanic/Latino parents. Principal Brick stated, “And with my Hispanic community, just trying to learn a few words to communicate with them, I’m telling you, they respect that so much. They respect the fact that you’re trying to learn their language and they are very patient with you.” Learning a few Spanish words helps the Hispanic/Latino parents feel welcome at school. Principal Hill said, “I’ve taken a couple of Spanish classes and I know [a little]. I know very little Spanish. So much of what we do is communicating. If you can communicate, I mean that’s half the battle in our job. And if you’re not able to communicate, that’s tough.” Also, Principal Brick encourages the staff to be inviting to students and parents. Principal Brick said, “I think when you have a good teaching staff that are inviting and really engaged with the parents, I mean that’s a reflection of the principal too.”

Another key component to making Hispanic/Latino parents and families feel comfortable and welcome at school is to have Spanish-speaking employees. A few principals mentioned how the bilingual staff members such as the receptionist, clerk, and parent liaison are developing a good relationship with the Hispanic/Latino parents and

families because they speak the same language. This good relationship will promote more parent involvement in school because the parents will feel more comfortable coming to school knowing there is someone there who will understand what they are saying.

Principal Brick explained that having a bilingual parent liaison who is working closely with the Hispanic/Latino parents to encourage them to come to school is building relationships with the Hispanic/Latino families. Hispanic/Latino parents want to know if there are people in the school who can communicate in their native language. Principal Land shared how the community members talk about the school in the neighborhood and through these conversations the parents and families get to know the school.

Word of mouth gets around real quickly that schools are very open to try new programs. They have a lot of resources. When they know there are a lot of people who are bilingual, they just acclimate. So that relationship begins and then you'll see that the populations change based on that feeling, that comfort level with coming into the school and being a part of the school.

Having Spanish speaking staff members to greet Hispanic/Latino parents and families makes the school an inviting place to visit. These approaches make the school an appealing environment.

Many principals talked about how they concentrate on increasing the number of bilingual staff members as the school's Hispanic/Latino student population increases. Bishop Elementary School, Gray Middle School, Hike Elementary School, and Land Elementary School have increased the number of Spanish speaking employees since their current principal arrived. As Principal Bird explained, "We try to make sure we have a good eight to ten staff members who are bilingual. We really work at that when we are looking for candidates. One of the things I look at is increasing the skill set of people we

have on staff. One of those skill sets is a Spanish speaker.” Principal Lamb agreed by saying,

I think you always consider having as many people who are bilingual as possible. Just even helping teachers and myself, you know with having enough of an understanding of the language. If it’s at the end of the day and there’s not someone present who is bilingual, I feel like I can at least communicate well enough to understand what their needs are. So that was probably one thing was just increasing the number of bilingual staff members.

Similarly, Principal Gray said, “We have hired more teachers who can speak Spanish as well to help with [the language barrier]. So we are really trying to reach out to the neighborhood. But that was the biggest issue, our biggest barrier, was just the language.” Principal Hill and Principal Bird articulated that if they do not know the language, they surround themselves with people who are able to converse fluently. Increasing the number of bilingual staff members to improve communication and relationships has been a focus for some principals.

In summary, this chapter analyzed the principals’ experiences of working in schools with a growing Hispanic/Latino student population. The principals have common challenges in different schools such as (a) communicating with Spanish speaking Hispanic/Latino parents, (b) low parental involvement in school, (c) a transient student population, (d) student attendance issues, and (e) struggling to get Hispanic/Latino parents involved in school leadership positions. In addition, the principals have common experiences related to developing relationships with the Hispanic/Latino parents and families such as (a) using a parent liaison, (b) offering parent workshops/programs/classes, (c) improving communication by translating items from

English to Spanish, (d) creating an inviting office environment and school, (e) making Hispanic/Latino parents and families feel comfortable and welcome at school, and (f) increasing the number of bilingual staff members.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study investigates principals' perceptions of how important it is to build relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families and to what degree the principals are connecting and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do select principals perceive the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
2. To what extent have principals in schools with large Hispanic/Latino student populations developed relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?

Chapter five demonstrates evidence of data analysis and abstractions based on the principals' narratives. The findings of this study are related to the research questions.

#### *Discussion*

There are several patterns that appear in the data. Based on the interview narratives, the principals from different schools have common challenges such as communication, parental involvement, transiency, and student attendance issues. In addition, the principals have similar experiences related to developing relationships with the Hispanic/Latino parents and families such as employing a parent liaison, offering parent workshops, improving communication, creating a welcoming school, and

increasing the number of bilingual staff members.

Initially, I did not consider critical theory as a theoretical framework for this research. Through analysis of the principals' responses and the data collected, issues of power, control, assumptions, and oppression emerged which are critical theory concepts. Therefore, I used a critical theory lens in chapter five.

A few implications appeared while analyzing the data using a critical theory lens. Critical theory is a demystification of reality (Crotty, 1998) and seeks to reveal true social relationships and expose false consciousness with an aspiration for change (Sayman, 2007). The principals' responses are examined through a theoretical framework provided by critical theorists Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, and Paulo Freire. These critical theorists are used to offer an outline of the hidden and taken-for-granted structures within society and education such as the dominant group's power, control, assumptions, and the oppression of groups other than the dominant group (Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1990; Freire, 1970, 1993). Hegemony, patriarchy, and reciprocity are critical theory concepts used to criticize and critique the data to glean meaning and understanding of the principals' perceptions about relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

There are limitations to using critical theory for this study. Analyzing the principals' perspectives and practices using a critical theory lens reveals inequalities that exist in the educational setting of these select schools. Critical theory does not focus on providing solutions to problems and challenges that exist. Therefore, this study exposes and acknowledges the deep social structures that are present and the principal's role in the hidden and taken-for-granted social relationships.



### *Hegemony and Patriarchy in Education*

A simple definition of hegemony is the presence of dominant power. The dominant group rules the educational system and determines the way schools operate. This power maintains the dominant group's authority and decision-making control. The dominant group of a culture determines and prescribes standards of conduct (Sayman, 2007), which perpetuates the norms in society. The non-dominant group does not have the power so they continue to be oppressed and forced to conform to the dominant group's ways of operating.

Cultural hegemony and critical race theory are closely connected concepts related to injustices and inequalities that are present in civilization. Cultural hegemony tries to expose racial and cultural inequalities that exist in society and education in an effort to promote social justice. Urrieta (2005) discussed how the dominant group "supports the hegemony of one cultural worldview that alienates large groups of people in U.S. society" (p.191). In education, the school leaders see the world from their powerful position and may alienate other smaller groups such as Hispanic/Latino families. "Culture is informed by the worldviews that members of that society share and the cultural artifacts that convey meaning" (Urrieta, 2005, p.191). People benefit unequally from the established norms of society according to their position in that culture. Critical race theory challenges the notion of White privilege (Lynn, 2002; Taylor, 2000) and aims to challenge conventional accounts of educational and other institutions and the social processes that occur within them (Powers, 2007). Critical race theory essentially posits that race is socially constructed and that racial oppression is a normal facet of society's social structures (Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006). Cultural hegemony and

critical race theory attempt to reveal marginalized groups of people with the hope of enlightening the advantaged dominant group. Lopez (2003) opined:

We [educational leaders and scholars] have a duty to know and raise questions about race and racism in society, as well as an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems, organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or perspectives over others, (p. 70).

Giroux (1983) attempted to expose the dominant group's educational power and control by asking, 'How does the process of education function to reproduce and sustain the dominant status quo?' (p.8). The principals in this study unknowingly reveal examples of hegemonic behavior in the form of adopting a patriarchal role with Hispanic/Latino parents. Education is a patriarchal system because the principal is the head of the school and he/she makes decisions about the leadership, operation, and management of the educational environment. The patriarchy is evident in this study with the principals deciding what is best for the Hispanic/Latino families.

The principals and schools offer assistance to Hispanic/Latino parents and families. This 'help' involves telling the parents what to think, telling them what to do, and making decisions on their behalf. For instance, several schools offer classes that teach the parents about how to be better parents (i.e. improving communication, establishing boundaries, creating a home learning environment, and promoting regular school attendance) and how to help their children be better students (i.e. strategies for improving reading achievement, assisting with homework, and test preparation techniques).

School leaders tend to be the most influential people in the school building so many people rely on the principal's knowledge, skills, and abilities when discussing the

best educational practices. The principals choose the workshop topics based on the assumption that Hispanic/Latino parents need to be told the important knowledge to have and the actions to do regarding parenting skills and the education of their children.

Principal Faith explained her assumption that parents do not know how important it is for them to help their child with education and support the efforts of the school. Principal Faith said,

The biggest goal that we are working on, and that is always going to be a goal is how to help parents see how important their role is as a parent in supporting what's going on at school, and helping their children to make school a priority, and helping parents understand how to help their child.

Principal Hill talked about her assumption that Hispanic/Latino parents need information at a slower pace so it is easier to understand, even if the content is in Spanish. She said,

So we just decided to just do the Padres and Pastries. So the content is the same [as Moms and Muffins and Dads and Donuts], however, it's translated. It's a slower pace. We may break some things down so that they will be able to comprehend and support.

There is little evidence that the principals try to discover what the parents already know about education prior to conducting the workshops. This deep societal assumption that one group of people knows what is best for another group of people, based on their status, is powerful. The dominant group perpetuates the established control over other groups and provides meanings, values, and actions for the rest of society to view (Apple, 1990).

The findings suggest that the principals believe that the greatest way to develop relationships and offer parent assistance is to take on the patriarchal role of telling the Hispanic/Latino families what is best for them. The parents hear the consistent message that they must conform to the established school's structure. The parent workshops and principal's patriarchal role perpetuates the dominant group's power (i.e. school and

school leaders) and control over non-dominant groups (i.e. Hispanic/Latino parents). As Giroux (1983) explained, this is an example of how schools are reproducing and sustaining the dominant status quo.

Another example of hegemonic behavior is how several schools created separate Spanish-speaking parent sessions consisting of only Hispanic/Latino parents. This isolation sends the message that Hispanic/Latino families are purposefully divided and disconnected from the rest of the school community (Nieto, 1996). Principal Gray shared,

This year we actually had a Hispanic open house. We had a 6<sup>th</sup> grade open house, a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and one just for Hispanics that we had our translator and some International Welcome Center folks here. It was specific to the Hispanic community.

Principal Hill talked about her school's Hispanic/Latino parent workshop called Padres and Pastries. She said,

We were really excited about the Padres and Pastries because if they would come then we could give them some strategies. We have a few parents who will come and they'll bring their own translator. So that's encouraging because it indicates that at least there's a level of comfort that they know that we are here to support them. That we are here to support their children. They are making an attempt to translate. I think that's really important. It's been a huge, huge success for us. Even though I realized the Hispanic population was growing, it wasn't really on my radar as much as probably it should have been. I think that's the nature of the principalship.

Some of the principals mentioned that they use the headset device at PTA meetings, which immediately translates English to Spanish. However, the principals did not think to use the translation headsets during the parent workshops and classes so all parents can be together in the same location.

There is an assumption that Hispanic/Latino parents and families do not have all of the knowledge that they should possess and that the principal and teachers need to fill

in the gaps. The principals' perceptions of needing to provide missing information to parents connects to Freire's (1970, 1993) "banking" concept of education. Freire attacked the notion that students, and in this case parents, are similar to an empty bank account that needs to be filled with information provided by knowledgeable education professionals. The Hispanic/Latino parents seem to accept that the school and school leaders are making decisions for them. The findings suggest that the non-dominant Hispanic/Latino families are striving to be like educators in the dominant group, which is a natural reaction according to Freire (1970, 1993). Freire would see the Hispanic/Latino parents as being the oppressed people who are trying to live in the all-powerful dominant group's society.

### *Reciprocity*

As established above, the principals believe that they are building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families by conducting workshops about parenting skills and academic strategies. The principals did not mention that they talked to the Hispanic/Latino parents to gather their current understanding of the educational system of the United States. The school leaders seem to make decisions without prior investigation, questioning, and learning. Freire's (1970, 1993) position highlights how the principals in the study are missing an important element to developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Freire discussed the importance of a reciprocal learning relationship between people involved in education. Freire believed that people have something to learn from one another and that there should be two-way learning between individuals and groups. Applying this idea, Freire would say that the home

environment and the school environment equally have something to share and something to learn from each other. The findings suggest that that the school leaders are not seeing the value that exists in the Hispanic/Latino culture and do not see that the families offer a wealth of knowledge and information to be embraced. Since only two of the six principals mentioned a desire to recognize and celebrate the Hispanic/Latino culture, but did not offer examples of how they are actually accomplishing that, it seems reciprocity is missing from the principal's point of view.

Through dialogue, the teacher of the students and the student of the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student and student-teacher. The teacher is ...one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. (Freire, 1993, p. 80)

In this study, Freire would advocate for knowledge and information to be given and taken from the individuals and travel in two directions from principal to parents and parents to principal. In his eyes, both groups would be equals within the learning process.

Other researchers discuss the importance of principals creating a reciprocal learning relationship between home and school so a meaningful connection can develop. Nieto (1996) advocated for schools to discuss, value, and celebrate the differences that exist between people rather than deny the diversity of backgrounds. She believes that refusing to acknowledge and affirm the differences that make people unique will only sustain the dominant culture as the norm. Holman (1997) suggested that schools establish opportunities for Hispanic/Latino parents to share their backgrounds as a way to unite the home environment with the school environment. Similarly, Nieto (1996) and Gaitan (2004) described the significance of educators learning about the Hispanic/Latino culture and language and valuing, acknowledging, and celebrating it in the educational

environment. Bringle & Hatcher (2002) shared how successful home-school partnerships maintain the integrity of each partner and this is accomplished through the leaders learning from the Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Lasker, Weiss, & Miller (2001) discussed how the home-school relationship will likely be better if the Hispanic/Latino families have an opportunity to share their characteristics, talents, and position on issues. Schools should make a strong commitment to reduce the gap between the home and school environments by designing programs that respond to and build on the values, structures, language, and cultures of the family's background (Nieto, 1996). As the school leaders learn about the Hispanic/Latino culture, a trusting relationship may develop based on mutual understanding. "Reaching out to the Latino community is a matter of building trust as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents" (Gaitan, 2004, p.16). Likewise, Boyd & Crowson (1993) encouraged schools to reach out into the community. The two-way sharing and listening nature of collaboration is a way for principals to develop genuine relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. When principals collaborate with Hispanic/Latino parents, it sends the message that the Hispanic/Latino culture and language are respected.

The language barrier is another example of how the principals do not seem to value a reciprocal learning relationship with Hispanic/Latino parents. According to researchers, effective communication between principals and parents is an important element when attempting to build relationships and collaborate with families (Duck, 1994, 1998; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001; Gaitan, 2004; Patton, Jayanthi, & Polloway, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; McCarthy, 2000; Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). All of the school leaders stated that

communication is an important element for developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families, however, most of them do not know Spanish well enough to communicate with parents without assistance. Principal Bird and Principal Brick said that the staff's ability to speak the Spanish language would develop a closer, stronger relationship with the Spanish-speaking parents because they would know that the school employees care about their children. Principal Gray discussed how eliminating the language barrier would minimize the isolation that the parents probably feel. Many school leaders expressed their frustration with not being able to talk to the families one-on-one, yet it is followed-up with an excuse as to why they have not mastered the language. Principal Brick shared,

I did take a Spanish class through the district, but it moved at such a fast pace I just couldn't keep up with it. So I need it to go slower for me. I need to look at Rosetta Stone or one of those. Truthfully, for me, that will always be a barrier because I can't communicate the way I need to because I don't speak the language. I'm sure you lose something in the translation, but we are very fortunate to have people here that do translate and do a great job with it.

Principal Bird admitted to not attempting to learn Spanish at all and preferring to surround herself with people who can communicate on their behalf. Principal Bird stated,

I've really not made that effort to learn Spanish. I had a very hard time with French in High School. I'm not particularly adept at learning a foreign language and I'm old. So I figured that's where I'm not going to put my effort. So I try to surround myself with people who are able to converse fluently. Quite often I'll have a parent conference and I'll pull the parent liaison or the translator in the office in. I have great conversations with people.

Principal Gray explained how he was not interested in learning about the Hispanic/Latino culture in a Spanish class and wants to focus on learning the language. He said,



I was actually involved with the Spanish One class. We spent a lot of time trying to understand the culture and foods. That really is not what we were looking for. We needed just the communication tool. You know, can I talk to you. Your child got suspended off of the bus; I need to be able to tell you that. So those kinds of issues I think are much more important, that useful language versus the culture stuff. I'm not trying to degrade the cultural aspect of it, but just that communication tool I think is the most important thing to work on.

Principal Hill articulated how her ESOL teacher and custodian are the school's translators. She expressed,

I do have a parent facilitator, but she does not speak Spanish. I don't have any administrators who speak Spanish. So communication is a real issue. So we rely heavily on our ESOL teacher to communicate for us. I have a Hispanic custodian and he is incredible. He helps translate like during conference week for us. But it has become an issue and almost to the point of teachers asking why don't you hire for Hispanic people. I'm almost to the point of if a Hispanic walked through the door, I probably would just hire them on site simply because I don't get a lot of candidates. I would love to have more Hispanic speaking people in the building because that's definitely a need because the communication is really critical for us.

Principal Gray talked about not having time to translate the entire school newsletter into Spanish. He declared,

In our PTA newsletter, we did not do an entire dual language newsletter, but we did certain sections in Spanish. We didn't have time to translate the entire thing, but at least there were some snippets in it that were done in dual language.

There was little evidence to demonstrate the principals' belief that communicating with Hispanic/Latino parents and families was important.

### *Conclusions*

There is a disequilibrium between what the principals say is occurring at their schools and the hidden and taken-for-granted structures that exist at their schools. Based on their actions, it seems principals perceive that in order to build relationships with

Hispanic/Latino families, the school leaders need to take on a patriarchal role and explain the necessary knowledge, skills, and practices to the parents. This hegemonic behavior perpetuates the dominant group's power and control over the non-dominant, oppressed groups. In addition, there was no indication that the principals gain an understanding of the Hispanic/Latino culture and language before attempting to help the families with parenting and schooling. The findings suggest that the principals are operating on the assumption that they know what is best for the Hispanic/Latino population without prior inquiry.

There is little evidence that the principals believe they have something to learn from the Hispanic/Latino parents and families, thus, a reciprocal learning relationship is non-existent. These underlying beliefs and assumptions will hinder the principals from building a true relationship with the students, parents, and families who they serve in the school community.

Based on a critical theory analysis of the principals' narratives and data collected, it seems these select school leaders do not perceive developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families as being important. This is evident with examples of the principals' hegemonic behavior and patriarchal leadership and lack of a reciprocal learning connection between the school environment and the Hispanic/Latino community. Regarding the extent to which principals have developed relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents, there is evidence that the principals have attempted to reach out, connect, and communicate with the families they serve. However, the critical theory issues of power, control, assumptions, and oppression will inhibit the principals' progress in relationship building with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

### *Recommendations*

There are recommendations for further research and possible ways that principals can improve the school's relationship with Hispanic/Latino parents and families based on this study's select group of principals' perceptions and practices. The principals' perspectives provide a glimpse into their world of leadership in schools with large Hispanic/Latino student populations.

Future research should use these interviews as baseline data and follow up with the six principals in the future to create a longitudinal study. As the principals become more experienced working with Hispanic/Latino parents and families, it would be beneficial to conduct additional interviews to see if their perspectives and practices change over time. These follow up interviews would allow opportunities for the current data to be strengthened with the principals' extensive leadership experiences in diverse schools. In addition, expanding the study to include principals from different school districts in metro-Atlanta and increasing the number of principals participating in the study would provide a deeper and broader understanding of principals' perceptions and practices in developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families.

The selected school district and other similar school districts can learn from the information provided by the principals and help administrators improve their leadership skills. The need for additional school district support emerged from the data. Since it seems the principals feel they need to take on a patriarchal role with Hispanic/Latino parents and do not seek a reciprocal learning relationship, it would be advantageous for the school district to provide principals with multicultural training. This training would give principals a better understanding of diverse backgrounds and how to affirm, value,

and celebrate the diversity in their schools (Nieto, 1996). Multicultural training would help principals identify their hegemonic behavior in hopes of avoiding it in the future. Also, multicultural training would help principals appreciate that the home environment and the school environment equally have something to share and something to learn from each other.

In addition, there are several ways school districts can address the need for principals to learn Spanish so their communication improves with the growing number of Hispanic/Latino families. One way to accomplish this is for the school district to offer structured Spanish classes with an incentive, such as a stipend, to encourage the principals' participation. A different option is for the school district to provide financial support to the principals of schools with a large Hispanic/Latino student population so they can purchase the Spanish software. This option would allow the principals to learn Spanish at their own pace when their schedule is free. Another way to make it easy for principals to learn Spanish is to incorporate Spanish lessons into the regularly scheduled monthly principals' meetings. It would be beneficial for the meetings to devote thirty minutes out of the three-hour meeting to Spanish instruction to the captive audience. Lastly, the school district could promote principals learning Spanish by offering an immersion program. This would entail the school district sending school leaders to Mexico during the summer for an extended period of time so the principals learn first hand about the culture and language.

*Summary*

This study investigated how select principals perceive the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families and to what extent the principals develop relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. The study revealed important findings. The select group of principals perceived Hispanic/Latino parents and families as needing patriarchal leadership. The principals explained how their schools offered numerous parent workshops focusing on teaching the parents how to be better parents and how to help their children be better students. The principals chose the parent workshop topics based on the assumption that the Hispanic/Latino parents did not have this important knowledge already. The principals did not mention asking the Hispanic/Latino parents about their existing understanding of the educational system or their needs prior to the conducting the sessions. This patriarchy of principals knowing what is best for the parents without previous inquiry is an example of hegemonic behavior where the dominant group perpetuates their power and control over a non-dominant group. The other important finding is how principals do not attempt to learn about the Hispanic/Latino culture and language so that a reciprocal learning association exists between the home environment and the school environment. The select principals stated that it is important for the school to develop a relationship with Hispanic/Latino parents and families, but the leaders accomplish this by controlling the parents' knowledge, making decisions on their behalf, and not learning about the diverse Hispanic/Latino background so the parents and families feel valued in the school setting.

This study contributes to the existing research and knowledge about principals and schools building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. Principals

should learn about the Hispanic/Latino culture and language from the Hispanic/Latino community that they serve. This information will help leaders avoid the patriarchal role, which they are accustomed to in school, and decrease the hegemony, which exists in school.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999  
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999  
Phone: 404/413-3500  
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In Person: Alumni Hall  
30 Courtland St, Suite 217

February 11, 2008

Principal Investigator: Breault, Donna Adair

Student Principal Investigator: Doolittle, Sage

Protocol Department: Educational Policy Studies

Protocol Title: Leading in Diverse Schools: A Case Study of the Impact of the Hispanic/Latino Population Increase on School Leadership

Funding Agency:

Submission Type: Continuing Review #1 for H07304

Review Type: Expedited Review

Approval Date: February 11, 2008

Expiration Date: February 10, 2009

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study and enclosed Informed Consent Document(s) in accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services. The approval period is listed above.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.
2. For any research that is conducted beyond the one-year approval period, you must submit a Renewal Application 30 days prior to the approval period expiration. As a courtesy, an email reminder is sent to the Principal Investigator approximately two months prior to the expiration of the study. However, failure to receive an email reminder does not negate your responsibility to submit a Renewal Application. In addition, failure to return the Renewal Application by its due date must result in an automatic termination of this study. Reinstatement can only be granted following resubmission of the study to the IRB.
3. Any adverse event or problem occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Adverse Event Form.
4. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is obtained and that no human subject will be involved in the research prior to obtaining informed consent. Ensure that each person signing the written informed consent form (ICF) is given a copy of the ICF. The ICF used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB; the approval dates of the IRB review are stamped on each page of the ICF. Copy and use the stamped ICF for the coming year. Maintain a single copy of the approved ICF in your files for this study.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at <https://irbwise.gsu.edu>. Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3513) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Ann C. Kruger, IRB Chair

**Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00000129**

## APPENDIX B

### *Interview Protocol*

#### *Problem Statement*

This study investigates principals' perceptions about building relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families. This research offers meaning and understanding about to the extent that principals and schools are reaching out, connecting, and communicating with the Hispanic/Latino community.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do select principals perceive the importance of developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
2. To what extent do principals in schools with large Hispanic/Latino student populations develop relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?

#### *Method*

A qualitative study using case study methodology with interview questions, observations, and artifact collection is an appropriate approach of looking at this phenomenon.

#### *Setting*

The in-depth, one-on-one interview takes place at the principal's school office. The session is scheduled at the principal's convenience and is approximately 60 minutes long.

### *Procedures*

The principal and researcher sit across from each other with a table in between. This allows the researcher to have her questions available and something to write on during the interview.

### *Tape Recording*

The interview sessions are tape-recorded and the researcher also takes notes. The tape recorder is placed on the table in front of the interviewee and the researcher.

### *Transcribing*

The tapes are transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document.

### *Interview Questions*

The interview questions attempt to answer the following:

1. If at all, how has the Hispanic/Latino student population increase in the principals' schools impacted their ability to reach out, communicate, and collaborate with the Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
2. What are the principals' experiences on developing relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
3. What are some strategies, programs, events, services, and/or initiatives that are helping the principals and schools develop relationships with the Hispanic/Latino students, parents, and families?

There are four sections in a semi-structured interview format.

A. Interview Opening: The researcher introduces herself, states the purpose of the interview, ensures confidentiality, gains consent from the participant, and establishes rapport.

B. Description of the Participant's Career: The researcher asks for a narrative summary of the principal's education career. The researcher asks clarifying and/or probing questions to gain a fuller description of the educator's experiences.

C. Interview Questions: The researcher asks the participant the pre-determined questions.

D. Interview Closing: The researcher asks if there is anything else the participant wants to say that was not covered in the session. Finally, the researcher thanks the participant for his/her time.

### *Specific Interview Questions*

The following is a list of the introducing questions, follow-up questions, and probing questions:

1. Describe your career in education.
2. Describe your leadership style as a principal.
3. Has your school's Hispanic/Latino student enrollment changed since you have been principal? If so, please describe the change.
4. Describe the relationship between the neighborhood, the community, and the school.

5. There is an expectation that principals build relationships with parents, families and the community as outlined by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC Standards). What does ‘developing relationships’ with parents and families mean to you?
6. Can you recall a particular incident that you saw as a success or challenge when building relationships with your school’s community?
7. During your first year as principal of this school, did you see any needs of the Hispanic/Latino parents and families that were not being met or areas that you thought needed improvement? If so, how did you respond?
8. What efforts are you and/or the school making to build relationships with Hispanic/Latino parents and families?
9. What advice would you give aspiring principals who will be working in schools with a growing Hispanic/Latino population?
10. How can graduate school programs and/or the school district prepare aspiring principals to be successful principals in diverse schools?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add about the Hispanic/Latino population?