Hall, W. For a Better Life: A Case Study of a High School Latina Learning English in a Rural Community (2008)

This capstone focuses on a Latina learning English and asks the question: What is the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community? Ibenez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla (2004) examined motivation among Latino adolescents and found academic competence and a sense of belonging affect language learner achievement. These researchers also found that there is a correlation between a parent's belief in the importance of education and the child's belief. The researcher of this study collected data by interviewing the participant, her father and one of her teachers. The data revealed that the participant and her parents greatly value education. She is academically competent and has a sense of belonging. The participant utilizes different identities in her daily life which help her meet her needs in different contexts.

FOR A BETTER LIFE: A CASE STUDY OF A HIGH SCHOOL LATINA LEARNING

ENGLISH IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

English language learners (ELL) are not new to this country; however, they are relatively

new to the rural school district in which I teach. According to the 2000 U.S. Census bureau,

Latinos constituted 12.5 percent of the United States population. In 2000, there were 143,382

Latinos in Minnesota which represented 2.9 percent of the population. At the county level,

where this study was conducted, Latinos make up 4 percent of the population, but only 2.3

percent of the town's population. This means 96.3 percent of the people in this rural

community are white. Recent events in the region have occurred that have caused both white

and Latino populations much stress. A Latino woman, who was living here without

documentation, was involved in a bus accident which killed four school age children. Raids have

been conducted in businesses and undocumented immigrants have been deported. These

events have contributed to an increased tension and distrust between the white and Latino

communities.

Racial tensions exacerbate the difficulty of being a minority in a small town, which can

impact graduation rates of high school students. The Compendium Report of 2006 dropout and

completion rates, states that 36.2 percent of Latinos (between the ages of 16 and 24) whom

were born outside of the United States were status high school dropouts (Laird, Cataldi,

KewalRamani, and Chapman, 2008). First generation Latinos, born in the United States, have a

dropout rate of 12.3 percent and second generation or higher Latinos have a rate of 12.1

percent (Laird, et. al., 2008). The report also indicated that Latino youth were more likely to be

dropouts than non-Latino youth. With these statistics, I wonder what motivates successful

Latino students.   What inspires them to graduate? How are rural schools meeting their needs?

Delgado-Gaitan (1998) concludes Mexican-American students who stay in school have

consistent, systematic support from their parents. Because these parents want their children to

have a better life, they support their children by helping them conform to the majority group.

Resilience, or an individual's ability to positively deal with stressful situations, is a characteristic

of academically successful students (McMillan & Reed, 2004). Resilient students overcome

difficult situations by having a positive attitude, being actively involved, and receiving support

from their families and school.

Ibanez, et. al (2004) conducted a study showing that immigrants' academic competence

(their perception of their school-related abilities) and school belonging (the extent to which they

feel accepted, respected and supported at school) affect the achievement of English language

learners. In order to help language learners gain a sense of school belonging, Brewster and

Bowen (2004) recommend that all school personnel: educate themselves in effective practices

and interventions, become aware of stereotypes, and increase family and school connections.

Background of the Researcher

As an ESL teacher in our school district, mainstream teachers often approach me in

search of advice for improving their instruction in the classroom. In this study I have chosen to

follow one student whom I first met when she arrived in Minnesota in sixth grade. She is now in

high school and expects to graduate this spring. She has been given the pseudonym, Lupe for the purposes of this study.   I have watched Lupe overcome many challenges in her life and I want to know what has been helpful in overcoming the challenges. Although I know that learners are unique and strategies that work with one student may not work for every student, I hope to be able to identify questions that could help us as teachers think about our ESL students in ways that might better support their educational experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I have known Lupe for six years. She moved to the community, along with her father and older brother, when she was in sixth grade. At that time she knew very little English. Lupe and I developed a special relationship because her mother was in Mexico. I "took her under my wing" as I empathized for her and her situation. She did not have many opportunities to socialize in the community, so I tried to get her involved as much as I could. Her father was not able to transport her to other communities, but he allowed me to provide transportation. One of Lupe's favorite activities was reading Spanish books to children at the local bookstore.

Because there are not many social resources in the community, I helped her family locate housing. After her mother came to the United States and I discovered she had a desire to learn English, I conducted a survey in the communities of the school district and learned there was enough interest to begin an adult ESL class. Although I was not the instructor, I played an instrumental role in initiating the program. I also wrote a grant to secure Spanish and bilingual materials and began a library in my classroom for parents and their children to utilize.

Out of the six years that I have known Lupe, I was her ELL teacher for three years. I left the school district for two years and returned as a second grade teacher. I have been teaching second grade for two years now and Lupe and I have had informal conversations as we meet each other in our K-12 school building and in the community.

As this study was being conducted, I was contacted by the school district to be a mentor for the current ESL teacher. In addition, I was asked to help redevelop the ESL program. To balance my biases and personal investment, I worked closely with other ESL colleagues and my Hamline advisors to ensure as much objectivity as possible.

Guiding Questions

I have often wondered what it has been like to be in Lupe's shoes. What are her life experiences? Why is she a successful student? As a mainstream teacher now, I also wonder what more I can do to help the ELL students that I have in my mainstream classroom. These wonderings lead me to the question of my research, what is the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community?

Summary

Nationwide, the dropout rate for Latinos is very high. Sometimes the lack of appropriate programs for Latinos learning English while they are learning content prevents students' success in school, particularly in meeting high school graduation requirements. Rural communities seldom have the resources or the numbers to provide the type of programming often considered best practice for English learners. This study, which occurs in a rural community with very few English learners, has success stories. This study aimed to document

the success of one student. The data revealed that the participant utilizes three identities: personal, students and cultural. These identities help her meet her needs in different contexts. The transition between these identities is so smooth that others do not realize she does this. As I collected, analyzed and interpreted the data, I learned that although I thought I knew Lupe very well, I was only seeing things on the surface. It is important for teachers to realize that there is more to their ESL students than what they see in the classroom. This is important in order to ensure inaccurate assumptions of ESL students are not made which will impact their educational experience.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I have introduced my research by establishing the purpose, significance, and need for the study. The context of the study was briefly introduced and so was the role, assumptions and background of the researcher. In the next chapter, I will provide a review of literature relevant to the areas that impact ELL students in their educational success. I address questions such as: What program models are utilized to instruct English language learners? and What factors affect the acquisition of a second language? In chapter three I present the qualitative research paradigm and describe the case study approach used for this study. Chapter four presents the results of the study. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings of my research and its implications as well as the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of a high school Latina

learning English in a rural school district.   This chapter is divided into two sections. The first

section briefly explains the different types of program models that have been developed to

meet the needs of English language learners. There are a variety of models that fit into either a

bilingual program or an English as a second language program. Because of the limited language

minority student population in the rural schools, the challenge of finding bilingual teachers and

budgeting constraints, bilingual programs are rarely implemented in rural school districts.

Typically an English as a second language program model is implemented based on the student

population at the school, their needs and the district resources that are available. The second

section discusses the factors that affect second language acquisition. I present research that

pertains to the effect of an English language learner's proficiency in their first language, teacher

expectation and support, culture, parental expectation and involvement, motivation, resilience,

social acceptance and identity. All of these variables affect the acquisition of a second language.

Program Models

The number of children from families in which English is not the primary language

spoken at home is rapidly increasing. Language minority students can be found in schools

throughout this country, not just near the border or in large cities. Because of this all schools

must be prepared to meet the challenge of educating a diverse population. An effective school

environment for all of its students' achievement is characterized by having high and

comprehensible expectations, a disciplined environment, and the need to maintain a sense of

community (Alexander & Entwisle, 1994). There are different approaches that have been

developed to meet the needs of students learning English: bilingual education programs and

English as a second language programs. Bilingual programs aim to maintain a language

minorities' first language in addition to the development of English, while English as a second

language programs focus exclusively on English language development.

Bilingual Program Models

Bilingual programs use the students' home language and English for instruction. One

example is a dual language model, also known as two-way immersion. This model is designed to

serve both language minority and language majority students simultaneously. In this model,

English speaking students can learn a second language while maintaining and developing their

English skills. English language learners can learn English and continue to develop and maintain

their home language. In addition, each type of student can serve as a role model of their native

language for students trying to learn that language. Both language groups are together and

instruction is delivered through both languages. Another model of a bilingual program is the

transitional bilingual program model. This model uses both languages to teach subject matter

and English language development is taught. The primary purpose of this model is to facilitate

the ELL transition to an all-English instructional environment while getting instruction in the

native language to the extent that it is necessary and/or possible.   Finally there is the

developmental bilingual program model. In this model, content is taught through both

languages and the goal is for the students to become bilingual.   Bilingual program models are

most easily implemented in districts where there are a large number of students from the same

language background. Teachers in this type of program must be proficient in both of the

languages. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2005)

<u>English as a Second Language Program Models</u>

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are used when there are very few

English language learners in a school or district or when the language minority

population is diverse and represents many different languages. In the sheltered English

instruction program model, English is used to help language minority students acquire

proficiency in English while achieving content skills at the same time. The sheltered

instruction observation protocol (SIOP), is an example of sheltered instruction. SIOP

helps teachers plan and deliver instruction in a way that allows English language learners

to acquire academic knowledge as they develop English language proficiency. In a

structured English Immersion program model, language minority students receive all of

their subject matter instruction in their second language. The goal of this model is to help

minority language learners acquire proficiency in English while achieving content areas

at the same time. The content-based ESL program model uses instructional materials,

learning tasks, and classroom techniques from content areas in English to develop

language, content, cognitive and study skills. Finally in an ESL pull-out program model,

the language minority student is "pulled out" of the regular mainstream classroom for

special instruction in English as a second language. (Minnesota Department of

Education, 2005).

The decision as to which ESL program will be used to service language minority students needs to be made at the local level. Schools need to consider several variables when determining which program model would be most effective and appropriate in their given situation. Rennie (1993) identifies three critical variables: school or district demographics, student characteristics, and school or district resources.

School or district demographics. School districts need to look at the total number of language minority students, the number from each language background, and their distribution across all of the grades and schools. In the rural communities, where a school may house all grades, pre-kindergarten through grade twelve, there are typically few English language learners. Most of the English Language learners in the rural districts in this part of the state are Spanish speakers; however, when there are children from other languages, it is important to understand the similarities between the first languages and English. Knowing the similarities and differences of the languages compared to English helps the ESL teacher plan appropriate instructional activities, locate necessary materials, and develop an environment of cultural respect.

It is not uncommon for there to be as few as twelve students spread across all of the grade levels. Because of the low number of students, school administrators typically do not offer full time contracts to teachers of language minority students. Having limited teaching time creates challenges when trying to meet the needs of diverse language learners. Often teachers, who are in k-12 school buildings, simultaneously deliver instruction to groups of students who vary in age, language background, and/or academic ability. Even though the ESL teachers differentiate instruction, best practice would indicate that these groups should be taught at separate times in order to effectively meet the students' needs. In other rural

districts, where school buildings belonging to the same district are located in neighboring towns, ESL teachers travel from one building to another and instructional time is wasted during travel.

   Student characteristics. School districts also need to consider the academic preparation students have had in their native language. Some language minority students are classified as newcomers. Newcomers are students who have moved to the United States within the past twelve months and have typically had little or no exposure to the English language.   It is important to learn how much academic preparation these students have had in their native language as a student with a strong academic background in their native language will have much different needs than a student with little or no schooling in their native language. Students who have a strong academic background will be able to transfer linguistic skills from their first language and apply them to a variety of situations when learning the second language. Those who have little schooling need to learn what linguistic skills are in addition to learning a new language. When looking at students who are not new to the country, but are new to the school, it is important to learn about their first language preparation and the academic background or schooling history in the United States. This information will help school personnel make more educated decisions about the placement of these students in the program. Students with similar first language preparation and academic backgrounds will have similar instructional needs.

       In the rural communities, even though there may be fewer students, those students can enter the program with a wide range of academic preparation. Some students are newcomers who have had no formal schooling experience; while others come to the United States with formal schooling and they are proficient in their first language. Some students have lived in the

United States all of their lives, but have had limited exposure to the English Language. Next

there are students who have lived in the United States and have had exposure to the English

language, but they have only acquired the basic language that is needed to survive. Finally there

are students who have had formal schooling in English since they were old enough to attend

school. Because of appropriate programming and effective instruction, they have not only

learned the basic English, but they are also learning the academic language.   The academic

preparation students have when they enroll in rural schools, is information that needs to be

considered when placing students in the program since their instructional needs will vary based

on that information. Students with strong first language skills enter second language schools

with an advantage since concepts of learning and literacy transfer from language to language

(Cummins,1979, and Thomas & Collier, 1997).

   District characteristics. Rural school districts face unique challenges. Fewer numbers of

language minority students and longer traveling distances impact budget decisions. Attracting

and retaining qualified teachers in rural districts is a challenge, especially for specialty areas like

ESL. ESL teachers are frequently hired for part time positions or they spend their days in several

different schools. The range of serviced students can be all grades kindergarten through grade

twelve. This is in stark contrast to more populated districts where ESL teachers may serve

students from one or two grades.

        Student numbers also impact program choices for rural schools.   Bilingual

programming, even sheltered courses are not viable options given student numbers.

Mainstream teachers are less interested in professional development pertaining to English

learners for the one or two students every couple of years.

In addition to providing language instruction, ESL teachers in rural districts, often find themselves in advocating and support roles for ESL families. ESL teachers often assume responsibility for locating community and county resources to help both schools and families. ESL teachers often find themselves being the sole link between the families and the community when it comes to accessing resources such as housing, social services, and employment.

Successful program models for English language learners are those that develop academic skills to promote academic achievement while teaching English at the same time. The best program organization meets the linguistic, academic and affective needs of the students that are being serviced while making the best use of the district and community resources. Unfortunately, in rural schools, student and district characteristics often prevent school districts from making "best practice" choices in programming for students.

Factors that Affect Second Language Acquisition

There are many variables that affect the rate of second language acquisition. In this next section, I will review the literature that discussed first language effect, motivation, and resilience. A few Latino cultural customs are reviewed. In addition information about the importance of a teacher's expectations and his or her support will be reviewed. Research also stressed the importance of parental expectations and their involvement in a child's education. Finally the concept of social acceptance and identity will be reviewed.

First Language Effect

Cummins (1979) developed the linguistic interdependence hypothesis, which states that language and literacy skills can be transferred from one language to another. His primary argument was that success in learning a second language depended on the learner's previous competence in the first language. Students who can read proficiently in their first language are better equipped to learn to read in the second language because a child only needs to learn how to read once. When languages are structurally similar the skills used to read words in the first language are highly correlated and more applicable to the skills in the second language.

Thomas and Collier (1997) found that the deeper a student's level of cognitive and academic development is in their first language, the faster the student progressed in English. They also found that formal schooling in a learner's first language is a significant predictor of academic success in the second language. Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach, & Javorsky (2008) studied the effect of first language in learning a second language. They followed students over a ten year period to determine if early first language (L1) decoding, comprehension, spelling, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and listening comprehension were predictive of later second language (L2) reading and spelling. They concluded that mastery of L1 decoding skills early in primary school benefited students who wanted to learn a second language in high school. They also learned direct and explicit teaching of the phonology and orthography of the second language was beneficial for students learning to read and spell the second language, especially if the first language was mastered initially. Finally, this study showed once students learned to decode the second language, they benefited from reading as much text as possible in the second language. This increased students' fluency and helped them acquire more vocabulary and grammar which improved comprehension.

Ginorio and Huston (2001) looked at Latinas and the importance of teacher support. Their study defines teacher support as the degree to which teachers listen to, encourage, and respect students. They found that teacher support is related to academic achievement. Effective, skilled teachers who have educated themselves about the culture of their students are more likely to make a personal connection with their students which can make a significant difference in the education of a Latina. Academic achievement is encouraged when teachers support their students by allowing them to share their cultural knowledge and experience in the classroom. Cultural traditions, such as storytelling, can also be incorporated into regular classroom procedures. Educators can also incorporate a variety of teaching strategies that utilize different learning styles. When teachers use an interactive approach that is focused on interdisciplinary problem-solving and when teachers utilize the students' knowledge and resources from their diverse life, students reach higher long term levels of academic achievement in all areas (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Brewster and Bowen (2004) examined the effects of social support from teachers on the school engagement of at-risk middle and high school Latino students (2004). The results indicated levels of school meaningfulness increased as the levels of perceived teacher support increased. The study also found that teacher support contributed to better attendance and fewer behavior problems. Teacher support may be of greater importance to Latinos than those of other races because white teachers may have less understanding of Latino culture (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

Hassinger and Plourde (2005) also examined characteristics of academically successful Latino students. They found students reported their teacher's expectations were high because

they felt their teachers "believed in them". They also found students with a positive

relationship with their teachers felt they could talk to their teacher at any time about any

matter.

Brewster and Bowen (2004) make three recommendations that promote the

educational engagement and achievement of Latino students. First, all school professionals

need to educate themselves about the practices and interventions that are effective when

working with Latinos. In the rural school districts, many teachers have not had specific training

pertaining to working with English language learners. Many times, the ESL teacher becomes a

mentor for colleagues. This is a challenge for some ESL teachers, especially when they are not

fully licensed. Many times, teachers are hired on a variance while they complete courses to get

their license. At this time in their career, they may not have a full repertoire of second language

acquisition principles and/or best practices in ESL. Some ESL teachers have taken on the

responsibility to provide colleagues with simple basic information.   Monthly newsletters,

containing strategies and interventions that can be immediately implemented into the

classroom, are dispersed to all school personnel. School personnel are given the opportunity to

provide input as to topics they would like to see covered in these newsletters.

Second, school professionals must become aware of stereotypes, both cultural and

other stereotypes, which inhibit students' academic success. It is important for teachers to

develop a strengths-based perspective when working with Latino students and their families so

that they may challenge stereotypes, increase the students' academic success and emphasize

the strengths of each different culture. Addressing stereotypes and raising cultural awareness

are other topics that are included by some ESL teachers in their monthly newsletters for colleagues.

Finally, school professionals need to maintain a comprehensive approach in helping Latino students achieve academic success. In order to do this, school professionals must strive to increase family and school connections. In the rural area, parents have found it difficult to locate Spanish literature and picture books to share with their children. When schools and public libraries provide Spanish or bilingual materials along with information about the importance of reading material in the primary language, literate Spanish parents have been granted the opportunity to share the reading experience with their children. Informing parents of the importance of reading with their children and providing appropriate reading materials, can be combined with schooling efforts for the parents. In many rural communities, ESL teachers have taken on the responsibility of establishing and providing ESL classes for the immigrant adults of the community. Many times these adult English learners are the parents of the school-aged English learner. This provides a wonderful opportunity to combine language instruction about the schools and ways in which parents can help their children. Typically these courses are offered at the school using community education funds and are offered at times when the adults are not at work.

Culture

When a teacher is not aware of the Latino cultural values, a misinterpretation of the students and their educational intent may result. Vasquez-Nuttall and Romero-Garcia (as cited in Ginorio & Huston, 2001) explain that Latino families show respect for authority over individual assertiveness. Achievement is rewarded most highly when the collective group

benefits. The Latino students' emphasis on respecting teachers, such as not responding to

traditional question and answer prompts or volunteering answers, may cause teachers to

misperceive behavior as apathy. Consequently, this misperception may cause the student to

receive less attention in the classroom.

Parents in the Latino culture have expectations for their children's commitment to the

family that are frequently different than the expectations of the culture at large and the school

system. In some cases, gender roles for women are extremely restrictive, even to the point

where traditional Latino adults would question any education for women. Post secondary

education is often perceived as being attained at the expense of maintaining close family ties

and personal interdependencies (Vasquez-Nuttall & Romero-Garcia as cited in Ginorio & Huston,

2001).

Parental Involvement and Expectation

Education research repeatedly shows that parental and community involvement in

education contributes to students' academic success. Henderson and Berla (1995) identified

many benefits for the students, families, and school when this involvement occurs. The benefits

include: higher student achievement, higher grades and test scores, greater attendance, higher

graduation rates, and greater enrollment in post-secondary schools. Educators also have higher

expectations of students when parents collaborate with the teacher.   Contrary to what most

people think, the most accurate predictor of student achievement is not income or social status,

but it is how well a family creates a home environment that encourages learning, communicates

high expectations about student achievement and future careers, and becomes involved in the

education at school and in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1995). Family interaction with the school is crucial for the academic success of all students.

Delgado-Gaitan (1998) conducted a case study of 12 Mexican–American students to determine what enabled students, with the same ethnic and socioeconomic status, to complete school while others left. They concluded students who stayed in school had consistent, systematic support from their families throughout their school careers. Parents of successful students helped their children deal with school rules, recognize and work through conflict in addition to provide academic support. This helped students navigate and conform to school morels enough to stay in school. The successful parents also attended school activities, had regular meetings with school personnel, encouraged their children, and provided other types of support such as materials, after school activities and friendships to keep their children in school. In essence, parents in this study helped their children acculturate to the ways of the target culture. These were activity choices by parents in order to help their children have a better life. School districts and educators must find ways to honor not only cultural diversity and promote parental participation, but they must also recognize the many ways in which parent do support and encourage school success.

Because many language minority parents view the teacher and other personnel as authorities, it is important for the school, ESL and mainstream teachers, to initiate and to maintain communication with parents throughout the school year. Accommodations for language minority families, such as translated documents, interpreters, designated outreach to families and cultural recognition, may be necessary before parents are comfortable in the school setting. Ultimately, schools must actively promote relationships with the families whose home

language may not be English in order to enhance the education of English language learners (Miramontes, et al, 1997).

Motivation

The role of attitude and motivation has been an important aspect of second language learning. The overall findings of this research do show that a positive attitude and motivation are related to success in learning a second language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) coined two terms referring to motivation; integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to language learning that takes place for personal growth and cultural enrichment. Integrative motivation would be the motivation to learn a language in order to successfully integrate in the target language community.

Instrumental or extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the language learning that takes place for more immediate or practical goals such as education and employment (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Instrumental motivation comes about when a language learner needs to read technical information, meet the graduation requirements, pass exams, and obtain employment. Initially, instrumental motivation may be high because of the need; however, when enough of the second language is learned and goals are met, the motivation can easily decline (Krashen, 1988). Although we know that these types of motivation are related to second language learning success, research does not tell us exactly how it is related (Lightbrown & Spada, 2000).

Even though motivation has been linked to success in English language learners, we must be careful not to label English language learners as simply motivated or unmotivated. Too much emphasis on motivation simplifies the language learning process and may contribute to

blaming unsuccessful students as unmotivated for a lack of motivation when there are many

social factors that English language learners must regularly address and deal with (McKay &

Wong, 1996). Examples of social factors include: identity, social acceptance and social distance.

Norton-Peirce (1995) argues the simplistic dichotomy of motivated or unmotivated does

not consider the complex relationships between power, identity, and language learning that

students must navigate. In a study of immigrant women, Pierce explains motivation of English

learners by their actions and reactions. She calls this concept investment. Investment takes into

consideration the social identity of the language learner and their relationship to the social

world they are in. When English learners speak, they are not just exchanging information; they

are constantly reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world in

which they are a part of. They are investing in an identity as speakers of the target language.

This identity is constantly changing across time and space.   English language learners invest in

the second language hoping to gain access to its resources such as education, friendship, and

money.

Resilience

Resilience can be simply defined as an individual's ability to positively respond to

stressful situations. Resilience may be another factor that contributes to the academic success

of Latino high school students. Linda Winfield (as cited in McMillan & Reed, 1994) is a

researcher of African American youth, schooling and resilience. She describes resilient students

as those who have developed characteristics and coping skills which enable them to succeed

even though they have endured incredible hardships.   Although individuals cope differently,

researchers have found some similarities.   McMillan and Rees (2004) identify characteristics of

resilient students and categorize them as: individual attributes, positive use of time, family factors, and school factors.

Individual attributes. Students with resilience have a positive attitude which helps them overcome difficult situations. The second language students respect others, go to class prepared, and volunteer for in- and out- of-class assignments. They are intrinsically motivated by the desire to succeed and they credit themselves with their successes. Resilient students are also able to look beyond the present to gain a broader perspective of what the future might hold for them (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).

Positive use of time. Resilient students are actively involved in activities that allow their time to be used in positive and meaningful ways. Some resilient children are involved in school and extracurricular activities while others are involved in activities which McMillan and Reed coin as "required helpfulness". Required helpfulness activities are activities that give purpose to the individuals' life. Examples of such activities might include: volunteering in the community, tutoring another individual at school, or simply caring for siblings or just helping out at home (2004).

Family factors. Having family support seems to be another attribute of resilience. Children who have a close bond with at least one caregiver are able to develop a sense of trust which is necessary in order to appropriately interact with teachers and parents (McMillan & Reed, 2004). Parents of resilient children have higher expectations for their children's education. Ibenez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla (2004) conducted a study that examined motivation among Latino adolescents. These researchers found a correlation between a parent's belief in the

importance of education and the child's belief. Resilient students not only have success in school, but they also have positive goals for the future.

School factors. Resilient students seem to have support from their families, but they also tend to find support outside of the home. Many times the support is found at school. Resilient students have stated that teachers who play an important role in their lives are caring, have respect for them as individuals and learners, get along with their students, listen without being intrusive, take them seriously, are available and understanding, help them, provide encouragement and laugh with them (McMillan and Reed, 2004).

Academic and Social Acceptance

Ibanez, et al. (2004) define academic competence as a student's perception of his/her school-related abilities. They also define school belonging as the extent to which a student feels accepted, respected, and supported at a school. These two factors have been shown to affect the achievement of students who are likely to feel alienated and unaccepted in an environment where the beliefs and values are different from their own. Latino students who were not born in the United States felt school was important regardless of their perceived ability. However, there was a correlation between how important school was to the U.S. born Latino and their perceived level of competence. A possible explanation for this may be that students who have not mastered the English language may perceive language to be their main barrier to academic success. Once the English language is learned, and school performance cannot be attributed to how well the language is being learned, the student may explain his/her performance in terms of their sense of competence. English language proficiency and self perceptions of language ability are factors in school success or failure. Self-perceptions of the importance of schooling

and parental involvement as well as perceptions of academic competence and school belonging

may also affect achievement.

Most individuals have a desire to fit in and be a member of a group. We make sense of

our lives by our belonging to a group. When people want to belong to a group because they are

favorably viewed by that group, they are often more successful in acquiring the language skills

of that ethnic group (Gardner, 1985). Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that a positive attitude

by a language learner toward the target language and it's speakers is highly motivating.

However, academic competence and a sense of belonging are not the only factors that

determine language success. Another key aspect is identity.

<u>Identity</u>

A person's identity, according to Ginorio and Huston, is the internalized aspects of

society and culture. Developing a strong sense of identity is an important part of adolescence

(2001). Immigrants who arrive in the United States during their childhood or adolescence face a

daunting task. Not only do they need to continue to develop their home cultural identity, but

they must also simultaneously develop an American cultural identity. This task is complicated

by the different status of the two cultures as well as class and racial differences. The experience

of a Latino who grows up as a minority in a community is very different from one who grows up

in a Latino-majority community. Latinos in the rural area are the minority in their communities

and are faced with the challenges of discrimination and tension between the two cultures.

Language learners in the rural areas are forced to be in contact with different social groups all of

the time. They do not have the opportunity to thoroughly develop their cultural identity

because they can only observe and practice their culture at home. Norton (1997) states that the

interaction with the majority group influences how they perceive their identity as it relates to the social world that they are in. While learning another language, the learners' social identity will change as it is established and maintained by the learner's ability to speak English because it is through language that a person is either allowed or not allowed to enter social groups. A non-native English speaker may not feel comfortable or be confident enough to speak up during a casual conversation at school with native English speaking peers. This lack of participation may exclude the English language learner from the social group which may affect how native English speakers interact with them.   The more fluent a learner is in English, the more opportunities the learner has to participate with members of that group. They may learn the target language to the extent that they feel is necessary; while maintaining their old identity. In order to be a part of multiple groups, language learners must have multiple and changing social identities. The learner will adjust his or her identity based on the social situation. For example, a high school Latina may identify as a student at school, but may have to identify at the woman of the house at home if the mother is not present. Social identity then becomes a site of struggle (Norton Norton-Peirce, 1995, p 20). In order for immigrants to develop healthy bicultural identities with strong attachments to two or more cultures, they must be able to simultaneously function in their primary culture as well as the mainstream culture. In addition, there must be opportunities for them to contribute to the enrichment of both cultures (Weisman 2001).

Summary

My research question is: What is the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community? Through this study, I hope to learn what it has been like to be a Latina learning English in a rural school district. I want to know how her lived experiences and

the variables discussed in this chapter have impacted her academic performance. Research in the literature review has shown there are multiple variables that can affect the rate and acquisition of a second language. Many factors need to be considered when schools determine which type of program model will best meet the language needs of their learners. The acquisition of second language is a complex process for immigrants. Factors such as their first language proficiency, motivation and resilience all play an integral part. In addition the support they receive from their families, teachers, peers, and school communities greatly impact the achievement of language learning. Finally, as they learn a new language and respond to social groups, their identity is contested. Some individuals are able to form a new identity while maintaining their old identity. All of these factors impact the learning of a new language.

The following chapter describes the methodology I implemented to help me answer my research question.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to understand the lived experience of a high school Latina

learning English in a rural school district. It was my desire to learn what it has been like to be

the first English language learner in our elementary and middle school and one of the first ELL

students in our high school. I hope to discover what she found helpful on her educational

journey and what has motivated her to continue when challenges are presented. In this study I

wanted to know:

What is the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural

community?

This is an ethnographic case study that relied on in-depth interviews, observations, field

notes and documents to explore the life experiences of the participant "in depth, in detail, in

context, and holistically" (Patton, 1987, p 19). The primary data collection included in-depth

interviews of the participant and field notes of the researcher. Secondary data collection

included interviews of the participant's father and a teacher whom the participant referred to

extensively during the interviews.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodologies used in this study. First, the rationale and description of the research design is presented along with a description of the qualitative paradigm. Second, the data collection protocols are presented.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research in education is a natural fit. According to Merriam, "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base of education" (1998, p. 1).

The most common types of qualitative research in education are basic, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study. While each research type is distinctive in that it draws from a particular field of study or follows a particular format, they frequently work in conjunction with each other and share the five general characteristics of qualitative research: (1) a focus on the participant's views, (2) the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection, (3) the need for fieldwork, (4) an inductive research strategy, and (5) rich description to convey what has been learned about a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). This study combines educational ethnography and case study.

Ethnography is influenced by the field on anthropology. A major appeal of ethnographic research is that it "can construct, better than any other type of research, a richly detailed picture of human life – a picture that is interesting, informative, and potentially filled with implications" (Charles & Mertler, 2002. p. 241). Ethnographic research "uncovers and describes

beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure behavior of a group" (Merriam, 1998, p. 13). Patton

(1990) describes the use of a cultural perspective a key to the interpretation of ethnographic

data. The rich detail and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study make

ethnography well suited for study about an individual's behavior. Ethnographic techniques are

based on values that (1) represent an insider's view of the phenomenon, (2) provide holistic,

big-picture descriptions, (3) take a non-judgmental orientation, and (4) require the data to be

considered only in the context of the environment in which it was gathered (Gall, Gall, & Borg,

2005).

The ethnographic researcher often assumes a role as a participant observer in the

collection of data. As a result, the researcher establishes a social relationship with the

participant in order to "get into the head" of the informant and collect data from an emic point

of view. The researcher must also be able to move beyond the perspective of the person being

studied and use social science concepts, terms, and procedures to describe and explain behavior

from an etic, or external perspective.

Educational ethnography is a descriptive research method. It is associated with

particular strategies for data collection such as interviews, interactive observations, and artifact

collection. Typically, ethnographers use multiple methods to corroborate data. Multiple

methods may include observations, casual conversations, or focused interviews. This study will

rely on all these strategies for data collection.

Case Study

A qualitative case study is a research design particularly suited to understanding process through intensive, holistic descriptions and analysis of an event, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1998). This most critical aspect in case study design is creating the bounded context for the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A bounded system, or case, might be a program, an individual, a process, an issue or a social unit (Merriam, 1998). In this study, a high school ESL student constitutes the bounded context.

Case study design does not rely on any particular method for data collection or analysis although rich description is a common feature. Rich description provides complete and literal descriptions of the situation under study. In the study, in-depth interviews were used to gather rich descriptions. A strength of case study is the ability to interface with other qualitative designs such as ethnography (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). A limitation of qualitative work is the time it takes to gather and analyze large amounts of data. Because the researcher assumes the dual role of data collector and analyst, the sensitivity, integrity, and biases of the researcher must be established to address issues of reliability and validity.

Data Collection

Interviews

An interview is a conversation with the specific purpose of finding out about how people understand their world, their life. The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of experiences, to uncover the lived world. The researcher listens to the informant and participates in the conversation of

mutual interest, but not as an equal partner. The interview process has a structure and a

purpose that the researcher controls through careful questioning, listening, and follow-up.

The interview serves two specific purposes. First, it is a way to explore and gather

narrative material in order to gain a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon.

Second, it is a way for the interviewer to develop a conversational relationship with the

interviewee about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). Patton claims interviews

are a vital method of collecting qualitative data.

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly

observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe

behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe

situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people

have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world.

We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing,

then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (1990, p. 196).

In this study, the participant was interviewed three times. The interviews were a

combination of Patton's informal conversational interview and his general interview guide

approach. Patton defines his informal conversational interview by stating that it relies entirely

on spontaneously formulating questions in the natural flow of a conversation (1987). The

informal conversational interview is generally used when the same person is interviewed more

than once. It is a valuable approach to use when a researcher wants to conduct an intensive

case study of one student (McKay, 2006). The strength of using informal conversational

interviewing is that the interviewer can respond to topics as they surface in the conversation. A

downfall of using the informal conversational approach is that it takes a lot of time to get

systematic information (Patton, 1987). The interview guide approach uses a list of

predetermined questions what will be asked during the interview. Basically the interview guide

serves as a checklist to make sure important topics are covered. The advantage of using the

interview guide approach is that it helps create a systematic and comprehensive interview

agenda (Patton, 1987).

In this study, the guiding interview questions focused on three different aspects of the

participant's lived experience: background information, schooling in the US, and her

interpretation of these experiences. Appendices B, C, and D include the guiding interview

questions. All of the interview questions were open-ended so the participant was able to

respond in her own terms. Given the participant is a learner of English, it was important to take

into consideration her linguistic proficiency when determining the interview guide. It is

essential she understands the questions being asked. With second language learners it is vital to

ask questions that are at a linguistic level which the student understands and to use probing and

follow-up questions as appropriate for detail and depth (McKay, 2006).

Each interview was tape recorded so that the actual language used could be preserved.

Taping the interview provided an objective record of what was said so it could more accurately

be analyzed at a later time (McKay, 2006). Even during taping, participant researchers

frequently take notes to help formulate new questions and locate important information and

quotations during the analysis (Patton, 1987).

Field Notes

Because an interview is also an observation, it is important to spend time immediately

following the interview reflecting and writing field notes. Field notes, are the written account of

what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and

reflecting on the data in a qualitative study (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). After each interview, I

wrote out field notes in order to capture the meaning and context of the interview more

completely. While doing this, I reviewed the purpose of my study, read the data, and made

notes in the margins to comment on and help categorize my data. I wrote both descriptive and

reflective field notes.

Descriptive field notes consist of describing the interviewee, the setting of the interview,

the dialogue that took place, and the observer's behavior (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). I

described the participant's appearance, mannerisms, and style of talking and acting. I also

wrote down words and phrases that I wanted to remember as well as the participant's gestures

and facial expressions. I wrote a description of the physical setting where the interview was

conducted. Finally, I wrote about my own behavior and assumptions that might have affected

the data that was gathered.

Reflective field notes consist of reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas and

conflicts, the observer's frame of mind and points of clarification (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003).

When I wrote my reflective field notes, I speculated about what I was learning and I wrote about

any patterns or themes that I thought may have been unfolding. I also made sure that I wrote

questions that I wanted to ask and I made notes about data that I wanted to look for in the next

interview.

Secondary Data

In addition to conducting the interviews with the participant, recording observations,

and writing field notes, the participant's father and an influential mainstream teacher where

interviewed.

Data Collection Procedures

Recruitment Process

I chose to conduct an ethnographic case study because we have a limited number of ELL

students in our school district making it difficult to conduct an action research project. When

thinking about who I wanted to have as my participant for the case study, Lupe, a psydonom,

was a clear choice. Her family has been in our school district for six years and I had established a

rapport with Lupe as well as her parents. This was a family established in the community and

the risk of relocation was small.

The participant was asked if she would be willing to participate. Her affirmative

response led to formal requests orally and in writing to her parents. Informed consent forms

were signed by her parents.

Location and Setting

Initially we decided to conduct the interviews in a variety of places. After completing

the first interview session, Lupe decided she would be most comfortable if all sessions were

completed at her home.

Introduction of Lupe

Lupe is a high school Latina that immigrated to the United States from Mexico when she

was in sixth grade. When her family lived in Mexico they were very poor. Their family had some

land, but they could not afford to build a house so the four of them lived in a one room

apartment. At night, her mom would lock her and her older brother in their apartment while

she and her father went to work. When she was three years old, her mother entered their

name in a church missionary drawing and they won a new house. This three bedroom house

with a living room and a kitchen was built on their land by Americans. It was made out of wood

(not adobe like all the other houses in her neighborhood). They did not have any furniture, but

they had blankets and a house. That made her mom happy. After the house was built, her aunt

and two cousins moved in with their family. Because of this, her older brother, Alex, was

responsible for feeding, watching and caring for five children while the adults went to work.

"He used to cook eggs and potatoes and stuff like that when he was like 8. He would have to

cook with gas in our wooden house and he used to start that with matches and he would have

to cook with hot oil. He was cooking, and washing dishes and cleaning the house."

When Lupe was four, her mom was invited by her aunt to vacation in the United States.

This experience caused her mom to want the family to move to the United States to make a

better life for themselves. Lupe's mom and her younger brother, Filepe, were the first family

members to live in Minnesota. Her mom worked for a year before going back to Mexico. It was

then that her dad lived in various places throughout the United States, trying to find a job and climate that suited him. After two years, Lupe's mom and younger brother joined her dad in Minnesota. Lupe and her older brother, Alex, had to stay in Mexico with their grandmother because there was not enough money to bring the whole family to Minnesota. The next year, her mom came back to get Alex and Lupe moved in with her aunt. The following year, Lupe came to the United States, but her mom and Filepe had to go back to Mexico because there were issues with the house. After two and a half years, Lupe's mom and younger brother were able to join them and the whole family was together in Oakwood. The family moved to Waterfall to live in a better house while mom was with them. Waterfall is a town within the Riverview school district so they did not need to change schools.

Lupe's older brother, Alex, graduated from high school. He still lives with them in Waterfall and works at a turkey plant 20 miles away. "My mom asks him, 'Why don't you move out?' Alex says, 'Why would I want to move out?' I think it is because in Mexico, families are so close together. Then Alex was like, 'Are you telling me to leave already?' My mom said, 'No. It is just weird because here everyone moves out when they graduate.' Alex was like, 'Well I am Mexican, you know." When Lupe's mom was talking to Alex about his girlfriend of five years, she said, "Don't have kids right now. Even though you live in this house, you don't have a house of your own and I am not going to want you and your kids living in my house. Once you are married, you are out of this house. You need to get your life together before you have kids."

Alex and Lupe's dad now support the family financially as mom was only with them for 2 years before having to go back to Mexico. Someone needed to go back to Mexico because their house there had been vandalized, broken into and everything was stolen. Since Lupe's

dad and brother had better jobs, mom volunteered to go.   It is not known when her mom will

return to the United States. As Lupe reflected on her lived experiences, she stated, "I went

through a lot of stuff to get here and I think that is a good thing because if I would have got

everything easy, I wouldn't really value it… If my parents would have given me everything, I

don't think I would value them or like be proud of them."

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Yin (2003) speaks of qualitative data analysis as the recombining of evidence through

examination, categorization, or tabulation to address the initial study questions. Interviews rely

heavily on this process of categorization. The first step in analyzing was to chronicle my own

perceptions related to the research experience immediately afterward.   Bogdan and Biklen

(2003), recommend that qualitative date is examined immediately with each interview date and

setting clearly identified. After each interview I transcribed the tapes verbatim. I typed up the

interviews starting a new paragraph each time a new person was talking and labeled with the

name of the individual talking in order to make referencing it later easier.   I typed with wide

margins on the paper so that notations or codings could be easily added as needed (2003).

According to Merriam (1998), codings are shorthand designations to make the data easier to

retrieve, particularly specific aspects of the data.

I transcribed my interviews shortly after I wrote my reflections so that everything was

fresh in my mind. My transcripts were typed on the computer so that a hard copy was saved. In

addition, I printed a copy so that the information could be color coded by highlighting the data.

The printed copy was also be cut up, labeled with the correct coding, and physically manipulated into the appropriate themes. These were the codings: life experiences in Mexico, family, school, and important miscellaneous data.   The data for each coding was placed on color code poster board so that the information remained organized and easily accessible. Once the data was placed on the poster boards, my peer reader and I analyzed it and extracted two primary themes: identity and coping mechanisms. This was considered my case record. Patten states that a case record is the condensation of raw data that has been organized, classified and edited into manageable and assessable files (2002). According to Patten, "a case study is readable, descriptive picture or story of a person" (2002, p 450)."

Secondary Data

Besides collecting data through interviewing the participant, I also interviewed her father and a mainstream teacher. When talking with Lupe's father, I asked him about his role in her educational process. Our conversation clearly illustrated his active role in her schooling: he does everything possible to help her achieve her goals. Lupe's teacher and I discussed her class participation, peer interactions and academic performance. This discussion confirmed the information that Lupe had shared with me about her experiences in mainstream classrooms.

Verification of Data

To ensure internal validity, the following strategies were employed in this study:

1. Triangulation of data - Denzin states that the use of multiple methods to study a single person is referred to methodological triangulation: "No single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors…   Because each method reveals different aspects of

empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed. This is termed

triangulation." (1978, p 28).

In order to follow Denzin's methodological rule, I conducted in-depth interviews and

took field notes. I also visited with Lupe's father and a teacher, whom Lupe identified as having

a great impact on her high school career.

2. Participant concurrence – toward the end of the third interview, I shared with Lupe

my interpretation of her story. While sharing these interpretations, Lupe was given the

opportunity to add or change anything that I may have misinterpreted.

3. Peer-examination – my colleagues have reviewed the classification of data and have

engaged in discussions as several stages of data analysis have taken place.

4. Clarification of researcher bias– I have known Lupe and her family for six years and

because of the relationship we have established, my peers have looked at my data and the

extracted theme in order to help overcome potential bias.

Reliability in the traditional sense does not fit well with qualitative research, especially

in education which is highly contextualized, multifaceted situation that does not lend itself to

exact replication. It is more valuable to think of reliability as evidenced by results that are

dependable and consistent with the data collected.

To ensure reliability I have explained the assumptions and theory behind the study, the

basis for selecting my participant, and the context from which the data were collected. I used

multiple methods and provided a rich narrative description of the research process so the

findings could be authenticated. A rich, thick description was the primary strategy to address external validity.

Ethics

Ethical considerations are important in research and I have accepted the responsibility to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of my participant. Professional codes and federal regulations take into consideration the protection of informants from harm, the right to privacy, informed consent, and protection from deception. This study employed the following safeguards to protect informant's rights:

1. The research objectives and the manner in which the date would be used were articulated verbally and in writing in English and in Spanish to the informant and her parents so that they were clearly understood.

2. Written permission to proceed with the study was secured from the informant and her parents.

3. The research plan was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Hamline University for approval.

4. The informant was informed of all data collection devices and activities.

5. Verbatim transcriptions, written interpretations and reports were available to the informant and her parents upon request.

6. The informant's rights, interests and wishes have been considered regarding reporting the data.

7. The anonymity of the community has been maintained in reporting the data through the use of a pseudonym.

The next chapter presents the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community. My question was: What is the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community? In this chapter, I present the themes that emerged through interviewing the participant, her father and one of her teachers. As the

reader may recall from chapter three, Lupe is a Mexican immigrant who has lived in the United States for six years. She currently lives with her father and two brothers.

This chapter is organized into three sections: personal identity, student identity, and cultural identity. The data from interviews are presented accordingly.

Personal Identity

Lupe's personal identity appears to be based on a strong sense of self worth. Her mother always told her "not to let anyone make you less than them. We are all the same and if someone tries to hit you, you hit them back." If Lupe's self worth is questioned, it is okay for her to fight. When Lupe attended school in Mexico, she received certificates for the grades she earned; however, because of her socioeconomic class she was not treated equally. Lupe found herself fighting with others at her school in Mexico because of the unfair treatment she received. "So even in Mexico, we were all the same race, but they go by classes and if you are in the low [socioeconomic] class they don't treat you very well. I was like in the lowest class, but I was the smartest in my whole class. It (the fighting) was not because we were different, but it was like they made fun of people and then I got all mad and then we start fighting and pushing and stuff."

When Lupe came to the United States, she did not speak English. Her family lived in a rural community of 400 people and she was one of the only English Language learners in the elementary school. "When I was just here from Mexico, I was really like a big trouble maker. That is kind of why we moved here from my first school because people weren't treating me right and I couldn't understand anything, but I could see it. People were making bad faces and

stuff. I could see it and I would get mad and I started fighting with people." After about four months of attending this school, she told her dad that they were either going to have to move or she was going to quit school. The family moved to another community about 20 miles away. Lupe started to attend the local school, where she has remained, and will graduate from this spring.

When Lupe started at the new school, she did not feel the need to fight because she felt her dignity was not being questioned. "Everyone was like nice and no one was mean to me and stuff so I became nice and now I am not really a troublemaker. I don't like fighting with people…fighting took all the anger out, but it I still had something in there that made me feel bad, so I didn't want to fight anymore."

When asked what advice Lupe would give other newcomers, she said, "Don't let others make you feel bad because you are different. Don't fight because it is not going to bring anything good. It is just going to make you feel bad at yourself. Just keep working cause they will forget about it. They will forget you are different because you will learn English and stuff and it will be worth it sometime."

Lupe's family has worked hard to improve their lives. Lupe values what she has and has accepted responsibility in helping her family continue to improve their lives. "I think of everything like how my life was down in Mexico and I think how it is here so it is a lot better. It makes me value myself and value what I have now because of everything that I went through. I think that it is a good thing that I went through everything with my parents because if I would have got everything easy, I wouldn't really value it.   I am proud of my parents because they work so hard."

Lupe knows that education is important to her family. Her parents want her to get a good education. "They help me in any way that they can because they want me to have a good education and a good life." They encourage her to do her best at school by attending parent teacher conferences, talking to her teachers about her grades and attending her choir concerts. When I asked Lupe's father how he lets Lupe know that education is important to him, he told me, "I am involved in her education. I support her in any way that I can. I want her to continue to do well because I want her to have a career, not just a job."

Lupe is willing to accept the responsibilities of helping her family even though it means she is forced to sacrifice. "The biggest sacrifice has been being away from my mom." She has been separated from her mother for more than half her life. The separation has forced her to mature sooner. She has assumed the responsibility of cooking, cleaning and caring for her siblings and father.   She is also the family interpreter.

Initially, Lupe did not want to come to the United States. "I didn't want to come because if I came my mom had to stay in Mexico for awhile until she got enough money to come back. I had never been here and I didn't know anything about being here."   She was used to living in a large city where she knew the language and the culture. Now that she has been in rural Minnesota for six years and is comfortable with her life here, she says, "I don't want to go back." Recently Lupe and her mom were talking on the phone about the current situation in Mexico. Her mom told her, "There are a lot of killings right now; people are just killing people for nothing. Like if they see fake rings on your fingers, they will try to kill you for it because the economy is bad and stuff. It is bad." After telling me about this phone conversation Lupe lamented, "I'm not going back if that is what it is like, but yeah obviously I have to go back."

Lupe's sense of self and her role in helping her family better their lives are a primary part of her personal identity.

Student Identity

Lupe's student identity has been greatly influenced by being the only Mexican in her rural high school. She sees herself as an average student who is doing her best. "I am an okay student. There's a lot of people higher than me, but I don't think I am really bad because I don't know I just feel that sometimes when I see like other students, they have really low grades and I don't get why they can get really low grades when I don't know that much English and I can do better than them."

Lupe says that it has been good to be an English language learner at her school. "It is good because there aren't that many people. That makes me kind of special because I don't know in the high school, I am like the only one." At the same time, she says "It is kind of hard. I don't like being the only one that speaks Spanish cause it would be good if there was more people like me." She has a couple of Anglo friends that she associates with. "My friends are nice and they help me when I have questions. When I don't understand something they try to explain things to me." This friendship extends beyond the school when the girls go bowling or to the movies.

When I asked one of her teachers about her interaction with peers, he said Lupe has a couple of close friends in class. As for the class as a whole, the teacher noticed classmates are rather ambivalent. "They [the class] don't exclude her, but they don't necessarily include her either. She is [in] a cohort with a couple of friends that are on the outside of the main group."

Lupe notices the ambivalence, "It is like they don't really see me as different, even though I am the only Mexican."

Lupe describes the mainstream teachers who have helped her the most as those who "really take the time to explain things." She feels most at ease in one classroom where the teacher "lets me be comfortable around him, like he talks to me and makes me feel comfortable. And my other ones (teachers) well, yeah, they talk to me obviously, but not as much." I asked Lupe's teacher if she participates in class and he said that she will participate in a small group setting, but she does not participate in the whole group discussions unless asked.

Lupe is motivated to do well in school. She states, "I want to get a good job when I am out of school. I want to do good and get good money to help my parents and stuff. In order to get a good job, you have to have a good education." Lupe's plan for herself after she graduates high school this year is to go to college. "I am going to work here for a year to get money and then I will go to Mexico and go to college down there." Part of the reason why she would like to work in the United States for one year is because she is afraid that it will be difficult to get a job when she goes back to Mexico. Not only is the economy struggling in Mexico, but she does not have the diplomas needed to get a job. "To get a job is going to be hard because to get a job I need to show an elementary diploma, a middle school diploma and a high school diploma. In Mexico you graduate from each school so you have three diplomas. You don't need all three diplomas to go to college, but you do need them to get a job." She indicated that she will be required to pass a certain test in Spanish in order to get each diploma. "Everything is in Spanish and if you don't understand it, then you are in trouble. It is like when you come here, you have to learn everything. It is like a big deal down there." If Lupe cannot find a job in Minnesota, she

will try to locate work in Texas because her hometown is close to the Mexico and United States border. She plans to earn a degree in cosmetology and wants to someday own a beauty salon.

Lupe sees herself as a successful student who is accepted by her peers even though recent events in the region have caused great tension between the Latino population and the local population. Within the past year, a Latino woman was driving a minivan that collided with a school bus. This tragic accident killed four students and injured many more. The news of the accident horrified the region, the horror turned into rage when people learned the driver of the van was an undocumented immigrant. Shortly after the tragedy, a discussion took place in one of Lupe's classes where a classmate referred to Latinos as "those stupid Mexicans". The teacher stopped the discussion and told students that they needed to be respectful of everyone in the classroom. The classmate then responded, "Lupe is not one of them, she is one of us." When I asked Lupe how the comment "those stupid Mexicans" impacted her, she said, "I didn't really do anything because I understand. I understand that they were upset because of what happened."

Typically, Lupe does not participate in large class discussions. This occurs even when the discussion is based on situations that she is very passionate about. For example, in her Sociology class, the topic was about people in poverty. Some of the other students were asking questions about why poor people don't just go and get a job. The conversation also included discussion about how poor people just live off of the government and most children of poor people get into drugs and become drug dealers. Lupe did not verbally participate in the conversation, but she knew from her experience that what was being said was not true for all poor people. When I asked her if she participated in the discussion her response was, "No, I

didn't say anything. I was just listening and was like 'That is not true. Not everyone wants to be poor.' They don't know anything about me. They don't know that I was really low class when I was in Mexico. They don't know that I used to fight. They don't know anything about that."

Other conversations have taken place as well. One day in art class, students were complaining about how much work they have in their classes. They were wondering why they had to have all of the projects assigned to them and why they had to go to school.   Lupe told me that her thoughts were simply, "You guys have no idea how hard life is. This is nothing." She said that she just tries to ignore people when conversations like this take place. "I just like ignore people because if I talk back to them obviously something is going to happen and I don't want that."

There are times when Lupe would like people to know her story.   However, as she recalled one conversation with her friend where she was trying to explain her to family's challenges in getting to Minnesota, she told me the conversation ended quickly. It didn't seem like her friend was going to be able to comprehend her family's experiences so Lupe told her, "Never mind. It is just not that easy because of everything that you have to go through to get to where you want to be."

Cultural Identity

Lupe's cultural identity is based on being Mexican; however, she has also established an American identity. Lupe says that coming to the United States has changed her way of being because she is "kind of between two cultures. I have my Mexican culture and I kind of have a lot

of American culture and beliefs". Her culture as Lupe puts it, "is how my parents raised me –

the examples they gave me is with most of the Latino people."

Lupe's family eats Mexican food and celebrates Mexican holidays and customs. Each

year they attend the Mexican Independence Day celebration in the cities with her aunt. They

also celebrate holidays such as Los Posadas and when celebrating birthdays, they always have a

piñata. When Lupe turned fifteen, her family hosted a quinceanera for her. In addition to

celebrating the Mexican holidays, Lupe and her family also celebrate U.S. American holidays

such as Valentine's Day, Independence Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Lupe

told me she enjoys listening to "hip hop and some country songs." Her family practices customs

of both cultures.

Lupe feels she can really be herself when she is at home. "I am more myself here –

outside of school." Lupe speaks in Spanish when communicating with her parents. She often

finds herself being the family interpreter. When talking with her brothers she uses both English

and Spanish.

Although Lupe feels somewhat accepted at school, she feels that she is not really

included, "In school, I can't really be myself because everyone is a certain way so if I do

something different, everyone is going to look at me weird. I just do the same thing that

everybody else is doing."

Summary

Language learners not only struggle with learning the target language, but they are

forced to create new identities to navigate new expectations and cultural ways and means. The

participant in this study has created three identities, which she moves between depending on the context she is in. She knows there are certain ways to act when she is at home, in school, and in the community. The overarching theme that emerged from the data was Lupe's ability to shift between identities depending upon the situation in which she is engaged. Lupe has a personal identity, a student identity, and a cultural identity that she moves between as the situation warrants. Her personal identity is shown in her sense of value as a human being as well as her role in helping her family improve their lives. Her student identity includes her interaction with her classmates and teachers as well as her goals for the future. Finally her cultural identity consists of the interface of her Mexican heritage and U.S. American identity.

In the next chapter, I will interpret the data and discuss these experiences as they relate to the literature that was reviewed. I will discuss the study's implications for those who teach language minority students. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and make recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I interpret the data and discuss Lupe's lived experiences in a rural

community as they relate to the literature that was reviewed. I discuss the study's implications

for those who teach language minority students. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study

and make recommendations for further study.

Data Interpretation

I have analyzed the data and will discuss it based on the overarching theme that emerged: Lupe utilizes different identities in her daily life. She has developed these identities to help her meet her needs in different contexts. Lupe understands where each well-formed identity should be used and is able to instinctively transfer from one identity to another. She knows that this transfer occurs, but it does not take a conscious effort. The transition between the identities is so smooth that others, especially her classmates, do not realize she does it.

Personal Identity

Lupe's personal identity appears to be based on a strong sense of self worth. Education is important to Lupe's family. Ibenez et. al, (2004) found there is a correlation between a parent's belief in the importance of education and the child's belief. This is definitely evident with Lupe and her parents: they all value the importance of education. Lupe's parents have provided consistent systematic support which Delgado-Gaitan (1998) says will enable her to conform to the school values long enough to stay and graduate.

Lupe knows that her parents have sacrificed many things in their lives to better hers and she accepts that she might have to sacrifice for her family as well.   Lupe is proud of how her parents have raised her and she is proud of who they are. This supports what Vasquez-Nuttall & Romero-Garcia say about the Mexican culture. Latinos gain a sense of accomplishment when the collective group benefits (as sited in Ginorio & Huston, 2001). This is especially true when one considers how Lupe and her family have sacrificed in order to better their lives.

Student Identity

Lupe knows that she is Mexican. She recognizes that she is the only Mexican in her rural high school, yet there are times that she feels accepted and senses that other students don't see her as being different. Ibanez, et. al (2004) found academic competence and a sense of school belonging affect the achievement of language learners. Because she has a sense of belonging and is academically competent, this could be one explanation for Lupe's success in school. Lupe was proficient in Spanish when she moved to rural Minnesota. Cummins' (1979) linguistic interdependence hypothesis states, the language and literacy skills of one language can be transferred to another language. Success in learning a second language depends on the student's competence in their first language. Resilience may also be a contributing factor to Lupe's academic success (McMillan & Reed, 1994). She can be described as a resilient student because she encounters challenges with a positive attitude, has goals for the future, is supported by her family and has made a connection with at least one teacher.

The mainstream teacher whom Lupe has identified as supporting her most has made her feel welcome by specifically greeting her and asking her how she is.   Lupe would like help with class content at times, but she does not ask for it in the mainstream whole group setting. Vasquez-Nuttall & Romero-Garcia would apply this to the fact that in the Mexican culture, respect for authority is valued over individual assertiveness (as sited in Ginorio & Huston, 2001). If the teacher makes a basic attempt to create an environment that welcomes her, she will seek additional help from him or her, but the relationship needs to be initiated by the teacher. According to the research of Ginorio and Huston (2001), teacher support is related to academic achievement. Although Lupe has not received extensive support from her mainstream teachers, she has been academically successful.

Norton-Pierce (1995) has found that language minority students invest in a second language in order to gain access to education, friendship and money. It is evident that Lupe has invested in English in order to get these things. She has friends and is getting an education, which will lead to a better job in the future.

Implications

This study has illustrated the lived experience of a high school Latina learning English in a rural community. In small rural communities, where there is not a large minority population, people typically know most members of their community. Educators are embedded members of their community in addition to being teachers of the community's children. Because of this dual role, it is common for rural educators to know their students in many different contexts. They might be relatives, neighbors, acquaintances of their students' family, or members of the same church and other community organizations. It is common for rural educators to meet their students when they are shopping or attending community events. Because of this, teachers tend to have a large knowledge base of their student's background and are able to establish vital connections with most of their students and their students' family. These connections help develop and guide teachers' relationships with their students. In addition the connections help teachers establish high expectations and plan and deliver appropriate instruction.

Unfortunately, educators in the rural area do not always have a similar shared community, exposure and therefore knowledge base of their immigrant students and families. Based on my experiences, immigrant families tend to live in an isolated part of the community. Often times it appears immigrant families are unable or less willing to participate in community

events or become active members of the community. This lack of participation may be due to many factors such as language barriers, cultural differences, or racial tensions. Because rural educators often rely on out-of-school experiences to understand their students and deepen their relationships with their students, not having similar access to English language learners creates a significant knowledge gap for teachers.

As I have collected, organized, discussed, analyzed, and interpreted the data in this study, I have come to realize how little I knew about Lupe.   This was a surprise to me because I thought that I knew her well. When teachers think they know their students, they may make assumptions that are totally inaccurate. In addition, teachers may inaccurately interpret behavior, students' comments, etc. Teachers need to realize that there is more to their ESL students than what they see in the classroom. Students come with a variety of unique experiences that influence how they respond to the world around them. I did not realize that Lupe had multiple identities that she moves between in order to help meet her needs in different contexts. I was unaware of this even though I knew her in different contexts: not only did I teach her at school, but I took her to events in the community. In addition, her family invited me over to their house to celebrate special events with them. I thought I was an integral part of her life and I knew her well, but now I realize that I only saw things on the surface.

After conducting this study, I have realized that my mono-cultural experience has influenced my understanding of others. It is hard for teachers to understand the different ways of being when most have not experienced similar situations such as leaving their home country, living in a different culture, being schooled in another language or splitting up the family for the

hope of the future. It is hard for us to put our culture and beliefs aside when trying to understand a new culture.

Even though there are few minority students in the rural area, school districts need to help educators become aware of cultural differences in order to try to gain an understanding of what our immigrant students are enduring. It is vital for educators to be aware of the differences between the culture dominating the community and school environment and the culture present in the homes of our English language learners. Teachers should be informed of these differences so that they can plan appropriate classroom routines and instructional methods as well as develop high realistic expectations for their English language learners. By doing these things, teachers can help students transition between their two worlds.

Teachers must be able to respect cultural differences and make time to reach out and establish relationships with all of their students. Educators must also accommodate all students and validate each one as a contributing member of the class. So many students carry experiences with them that we may not be able to comprehend, yet we must do our best to try to understand. It is the teacher's responsibility to not only help children feel welcome, but also provide them with an environment where they feel safe.

Students need to be prepared for the diverse world that they will encounter in the future. All schools must instill cultural respect and an understanding for others in their students. One way for high schools do this would be to require students to study the history, culture and language of one world region for four years. This in-depth study would help students develop a more worldly view which would be beneficial for all career fields, especially the field of education.

With the rapid and continual change in our country's demographics, future teachers need to be more prepared. Teacher education programs should require these teachers to participate in simulated activities, which address the challenges our English language learners endure on a daily basis. These experiences will help them relate to the English language learners that enter their classrooms.

Study Limitations

This study is based on the lived experience of one person. Because of this fact, the data may not be applicable in describing the lived experiences of other English language learners, even if they are in a similar situation.

Recommendations for Further Study

Not much research has been conducted on immigrants in the rural setting. It would be interesting to learn what factors affect the success of other English Language learners in the rural schools. How are school districts in the rural communities meeting the needs of their language minority students? What motivates English language learners in the rural area to continue to go to school?

The data in this study revealed that Lupe has chosen to remain silent during class discussions even when she was very knowledgeable about the topic being discussed. What factors contribute to students' choice to limit their participation?

It would be interesting to conduct another study with Lupe as the participant in five or ten years. To what extent will she maintain and continue to develop her different identities? Where will she be living? Will she earn a cosmetology degree? What sacrifices will she make for her family?

Finally it would be interesting to compare the lived experience of a Latina growing up in the rural setting compared to the urban setting? How are their identities the same? How are they different?

Summary

This capstone project has been extremely important to me because of my relationship with Lupe. I have always admired her as she is an amazing young woman who has positively overcome many challenges in her life, but that admiration has grown as I have learned more about her lived experience. I have often thought about what my students' lives must be like outside of school and how that impacts their learning. After investigating the literature, presenting that information, collecting the data for this project and analyzing the data, I have a deeper understanding of the challenges Lupe and her families have overcome. I have an even greater amount of respect for this young woman as she will graduate from high school this spring.

August 11, 2008

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am completing my master's degree in education at Hamline University. As part of my graduate work, I need to complete a capstone project. For this project, I would like to conduct an ethnographic case study of your daughter. The purpose of this letter is to get your permission for your child to participate in the project. The final product will be a bound capstone (thesis) that will be printed and shelved at Hamline's bush library. I may also publish or use my findings in scholarly ways in the future.

The purpose of my study is to discover what it is like to be an English language learner in a rural community and school. I want to learn how your daughter's school experiences relate to her academic performance. I hope gain some insight in order to help other English language learners have a positive educational experience in our school district. I will interview your daughter three times and these interviews will be transcribed so that the actual language is preserved. I will also be examining her school cumulative folder to look for relationships between her school performance and lived experiences that may have supported or hindered her performance. This study will not pose any threats to your daughter.

Your daughter's identity will be protected. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your daughter's name as well as the name of the school district and its communities. The audio tape of the interviews will be locked in a safe at my home. Your daughter may withdraw from the project at any time without negative consequences. If you feel the need to be present during the interviews, you may be.

I have already received permission to do this research from the principal and superintendent of our school as well as the Hamline University Graduate School of Education.

Please return the permission form on the back of this sheet and then keep the other copy for your records. If you have any questions, please call me at 507-530-0613 or Ann Mabbott at 651-523-2446. You may also email Ann Mabbott at amabbott@hamline.edu   Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Wendy Hall

August 2008

Dear Mrs. Hall,

I have received and read your letter about conducting an ethnographic case study of my daughter. I understand that your goal is to learn about her lived experiences and how her school experiences have affected her academic performance. I also realize that you are attempting to gain insight as to how the school district can help all English language learners have a positive educational experience.

I give permission for my daughter, _____, to participate in the research project that is part of your graduate degree program. I understand that all results will be confidential and anonymous and that my child may stop taking part of this project at any time without negative consequences. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records

Signed,

_____

(Parent/Guardian)

Date:_____

1. Are you getting excited about school starting again?

2. Tell me what it is like to go to school in Mexico. How has your experience in schools there helped you go to school here?
   Possible prompt: Did knowing how to read and study in Spanish help you learn English faster?

3. What is it like to be an English Language Learner in our school?
   Possible prompt: What do you like about school? What don't you like?

   Many people don't understand what it is like to be learning math,

   science and such at the same time as they are learning English. What would you tell them about this?

4. What has helped you be a good student?
   Possible prompt: How have your friends, classmates, teachers, or family helped you be a good student?

5. How do you know that your education is important to your family?

6. Tell me about your experiences of living in our town (Oakwood and Waterfall). ***You can name these in the interview, along with the school, just give a pseudonym when you transcribe and write it up.

7. What do you plan on doing after you graduate from high school?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about?

1. When you are at home – what language do you use more often? Why?

2. Tell me about how comfortable you are talking to others in Spanish.
   Are you learning more in Spanish? If so, how? If not, do you wish you were?

3. The last time we talked you mentioned that it would be nice to have more people at school who spoke Spanish – do you think not having Spanish speaking friends at school has forced you to learn more English? Are you comfortable carrying on conversations in English with your friends at school?

4. What has it been like to learn a second language? How have you felt as you have been learning English? How do you feel about it now? How have you changed through this process?

5. Tell me about how the teachers at our school make learning English possible for you. What do they do to make the information and materials more accessible for you?

6. Tell me what we could do at our school to make it a better school for you and your family.

7. You know that you will have a new ESL teacher this year. What would you like her know about your needs as an English Language Learner? How much time do you think you should have ESL each day? What do you want to accomplish when you go to ESL class? What types of materials do you want to use?   Do you prefer to have other ESL students in the classroom at the same time or to   be one on one with the teacher?

8. In our last conversation you talked about how there were problems with young kids being discriminating and saying mean things on the bus. You also indicated that there might have been a few people that don't like you when you first came to our school. What helps you feel good when you hear people say mean things or when you sense that someone may not like you? How do you handle situations when people are not treating you with respect?

1. In the last interview, you talked about how you fought at a previous school(s).
    Why did you fight?   Why don't you fight anymore?

    What is different about our school– why haven't you fought here?

    Have you ever thought about fighting when you have been at this school?

    Did you fight when you went to school in Mexico?

2. Tell me what a perfect world would be like for you.

3. When you have your own children, how will you let them know how important
    their education is to you?

4. Tell me about an experience (or more than one experience if you want to) where
    you were discriminated against or when someone was treating you differently
    because you were a Latina.   How did you feel?   What were you thinking to
    yourself?   How did you react?

5. What do you do when someone is being racist toward you or someone you care
    about?

6. Have you ever been in a situation where you hear someone complaining about
    how hard their life has been and thought to yourself, "You don't have an idea of
    what a hard life is?" YES/NO Tell me more about this.

7. In the last interview you talked about being caught between 2 cultures. What are
    you doing to stay connected with your Mexican culture?
    How do you see yourself as an Americanized Latina?

8. If you were asked to talk to "or mentor" someone who just moved to the United
    States and who knew very little English, what would you tell them?

9. As you think about the future – how do you see yourself in 5 years? Where will
    you be? What will you be doing?, etc

10. Tell me about yourself in 10 years.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Letter to Parents Requesting Permission for a Minor

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Session 1

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Session 2

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions for Session 3