THE SOCIAL MOBILITY JOURNEY:
KEY FACTORS IN EDUCATION
ATTAINMENT OF AT- RISK
HISPANIC STUDENTS OF
MEXICAN ANCESTRY

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by
Elizabeth Viciana
Summer 2012
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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIAL MOBILITY JOURNEY:
KEY FACTORS IN EDUCATION
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HISPANIC STUDENTS OF
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by
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Given the current demographic profile for Hispanics in the United States, academic underachievement is of increasing concern. This study investigates factors that promote and impede academic achievement of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry in postsecondary education. Chapter 1 highlights the research questions used to guide this study: (1) What does research reveal about the relationship of the living conditions, traditions, and habits of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry and their educational attainment?; (2) What does research reveal about the key socio-cultural factors that keep at-risk students of Mexican ancestry from getting a college education?; (3) What does research reveal about key factors in the K-12 educational systems that contribute to
underachievement?; and (4) What does research identify as key features of successful educational programs implemented for students of Mexican ancestry at the community college level? In responding to these questions, the study emphasizes the social, economic, cultural, and educational factors that affect Hispanics living in northern California. It addresses educational attainment as it relates to living conditions, with an emphasis on home and family, and focuses on social mobility, cultural capital and class stratification. The study then highlights conditions in the K-12 that contribute to underachievement, and addresses successful practices and program characteristics.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background and Purpose

In recent years, numerous studies have focused attention on the education of Hispanic students; e.g., Chávez-Reyes 2010; Fry & González; McCallister, Evans & Illich, 2010; Satterfield & Rincones, 2008. The common concern they share is the focus on Hispanic students and their pursuit of a college education. The Hispanic students characterized in this study are primarily first and second generation of Mexican immigrants. Factors such as housing, segregation lack of access to public services, deficient nutrition, and policies and practices in the educational system put them at-risk of not pursuing and completing a post-secondary education. This thesis examines the conditions that put so many at-risk. This includes the lack of essential knowledge on how to navigate societal and educational cultures to attain upward social mobility. It is important for these students to integrate effectively into the mainstream community in order to have access to and complete a college education or vocational training.

The Hispanic population comprises California’s largest minority. Its presence greatly impacts the mainstream community socially and financially. In terms of per capita income, this population’s growth affects the California economy. California’s revenue is based on various taxes. Personal income, or simply the “income for the state,” is the
personal income of all the residents in the aggregate, a much larger figure than just taxes or state revenues. The Hispanic population’s growth is reflected in its proportional contribution to per capita income.

By completing their education and graduating from college, Hispanics in California will have an opportunity to find productive, higher-paying jobs. They will be able to take advantage of job opportunities available to college graduates in their community. Current concerns address the educational underachievement of Hispanic students. Due to the lower college graduation rates of Hispanic students, it is predicted that by 2020, the nation will see a two percent drop in per capita income (compared to a 40 percent increase in the prior two decades) (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.5). States like California and Texas will see larger declines in per capita income of five percent to eleven percent respectively (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.5). For this reason, educational outcomes affect Hispanics upward social mobility and threaten the states’ growth in per capita income.

Introduction

Many Hispanic students in this study are first and second generation Mexican immigrants. This population’s circumstances affect their college graduation. This thesis explores recent research and scholarship that examines the conditions putting Hispanics of Mexican ancestry at-risk of failing to complete vocational training and/or a community college degree.

The risk factors that impede students from pursuing higher education are examined in three categories: (1) demographic and living conditions; (2) socio-cultural
factors; and (3) factors in the K-12 educational system. All contribute to the underachievement of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry. These three categories serve to profile, students at-risk and facilitate the identification of risk factors such as background, nutrition, access to health care, and housing. As skills must be met before students can consider attending community college, students have to demonstrate knowledge in areas such as mathematics, sciences, writing, and English language proficiency to pass college entrance exams.

The second and third categories encompass factors that facilitate or impede the K-12 education of Hispanic students and contribute to underachievement. At a later point in their lives, students face college entrance exams that act as gatekeepers because they are tested on proficiency and skills that they still need to develop. Examination of this set of factors takes into account the mainstream educational system and programs for students at-risk. The factors reviewed at the community college level focus on what works and what does not work.

For Hispanic students at-risk, education serves a two-fold purpose. First, it facilitates social integration into the mainstream culture; second, it allows students to achieve upward social mobility. Students increase their knowledge of how to operate in mainstream culture by gaining cultural knowledge of the people in that culture, their perspectives, the formal and the informal systems in their community, and the products of the mainstream culture. Students gain access to better employment in the mainstream community and add to the state’s revenues through their taxes. They also create a cadre of role models for other generations to follow.
Lastly, the education of Hispanic students is related to mainstream cultural perspectives about Mexican immigrants and their reasons for being in the United States. The students described are mostly first-generation Hispanics who arrived in the United States at an early age. In general, they belong to families lacking the cultural capital to guide their children and advocate for them. These students of Mexican origin are often the children of undocumented parents, but legal citizens themselves. Being undocumented, their parents live in fear of being deported. It is important to establish that students lack the cultural capital necessary to access mainstream culture, for them, knowledge is capital.

The successful factors in the education of at-risk Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry are highlighted in chapter five. This includes examination of compelling research studies that identify effective teaching practices used in successful programs for at-risk populations implemented at the community college level.

Two essential elements must be considered and examined in the lives of Hispanic students at-risk, cultural capital and *habitus*.

**Cultural Capital and *Habitus***

The concept of cultural capital was originally attributed to Bourdieu (1986), a French social academic. He considered the existence of *habitus*, “a concept referring to a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structure, objectively unified practices” (Bourdieu, 1986). These habits are transmitted from one generation to the next (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 1):

The *habitus*, social capital, and cultural capital directly shape a student’s academic achievement, and a student’s academic achievement feeds back to shape her
habitus, social capital, and cultural capital. Habitus, social capital, cultural capital, and academic achievement all directly affect the perception of the costs and benefits of a college education. (Jez, 2008, p. 4)

Bourdieu also discussed the existence of societal factors that contribute to marginalization:

For Bourdieu, classes are differentiated from one another in terms of the overall volume of capital (economic plus cultural) controlled by individuals or families. (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 1)

The dominant class monopolizes the “know-how” and perpetuates itself. The classes lacking this capital are marginalized.

In the last ten years, studies have adopted the concept of cultural capital as referring to “cultural habits and dispositions inherited within the family, which are fundamentally important to school success” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p.1). This paper examines compelling research from Jez (2008), Moran (2001), and Gándara and Contreras (2009) that supports the importance of cultural capital. Cultural capital affects Hispanic students’ self-actualization. This study analyzes how the lack of cultural capital regarding mainstream culture affects students’ opportunities to continue their post-secondary studies.

Statement of Problem

The Hispanic populations of Butte and Glenn counties are mostly first and second generation immigrants of Mexican ancestry, undocumented and documented, underserved and underrepresented, and at-risk of not attaining upward social mobility by pursuing an education at the community college level. At-risk students often lack mainstream cultural capital. The population of Hispanics of Mexican origin is the largest
and fastest growing minority, locally, state-wide and nationally; however Hispanic students attend colleges at a 25 percent lower rate than their white American counterparts (Fry, 2008; Gándara & Contreras, 2009, pp. 24, 25). For this reason, it is critical to investigate the factors that impede realization of a college education.

Study Questions

Four questions define the focus on key areas of the stated problem:

1. What does research reveal about the relationship of the living conditions, traditions and habits of the Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry, and their educational attainment?

2. What does research reveal about the key socio-cultural factors that keep at-risk Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry from getting a college education?

3. What does research reveal about key factors in the K-12 educational system that contribute to the underachievement of Hispanic students at-risk?

4. What does research identify as the key features of successful educational programs implemented for Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry at the community college level?

Limitations of the study

A great deal of research encompasses different Hispanic populations under the terms “Latino” or “Hispanic.” Hispanic immigration comes from different places, e.g. Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The proportions may be different in different areas, but in California most of the Hispanic population comes from Mexico. This is especially true in Butte and Glenn counties. In fact, Gándara and Contreras (2009, p.7) talk about
the “Mexicanization” of Latinos. Even in communities where there are different Latino groups, the Mexican influence is so strong that they seem to have “Mexicanized” the culture with their traditions and lifestyle (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 7). While learners of Mexican ancestry constitute the majority of Latinos, it is often difficult to extract specific data on this population. A significant segment of the population under investigation is documented, but undocumented immigrants are also included.

Definitions of Terms

Some of the terms used in this paper are defined below.

- **Basic Needs**: are nutritional needs, the need to belonging, self-esteem, and security, which have to be met before students may attain self-actualization.
  - Basic Skills: comprise the mastery of skills in the English language, mathematics, reading, writing and the knowledge necessary to understand the products of the real world, such as information about politics, services, legislation, legal work in the community and the like. Acquiring these skills allows Hispanic students greater upward social mobility (American Council of Education, 2011).
  - Cultural Capital: encompasses “cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family and fundamentally important to school success” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, p. 14; Laureau & Weining, 2003, p. 1)
  - Generations: “First-generation” refers to people born outside the United States. This includes naturalized U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrants, also referred to as “foreign-born” and “immigrants” (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008; Taylor & Lopez, 2010, p. 5). Those referred to as “second-generation” are people born in the United States descending
from one foreign-born parent. Among the “third-and-earlier generations” are people born in the United States with two parents also born in the United States, or “U.S. citizens at birth” (Fry & González, 2008; Taylor & Lopez, 2010, note 3).

- Hispanic students: The term “Hispanic” is used in agreement with the Pew Hispanic Research Center’s classification, which recognizes the differences between first-, second-, third-and earlier generations (Fry & González, 2008; Taylor & Lopez, 2010).

- Hispanic students at-risk: are first-, second- and third- generation students of Mexican origin, documented or undocumented, in Butte and Glenn counties who are underserved, underrepresented, and at-risk of not completing their education and attaining upward social mobility (Fry & González, 2008; Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2008).
CHAPTER II

THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS OF MEXICAN ANCESTRY: DEMOGRAPHIC AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Introduction

This chapter approaches research question number one *What does research reveal about the relationship of the living conditions, traditions and habits of the Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry, with their educational attainment?* To explain the risk factors, the chapter explores the influence of Hispanic’s living conditions on educational achievement. More specifically, the chapter examines: (1) demographic data on Hispanics of Mexican ancestry throughout the U.S. in general, and in Butte and Glenn counties in particular; (2) the struggle of many Hispanic students to fulfill their basic needs due to living conditions characterized by segregation, poverty and marginalization; and (3) the role of Hispanic beliefs and social traditions in their educational practices.

Demographic Profile

Before addressing the socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect Hispanic’s educational attainment, it is important to discuss how the Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority. California has a total population of 33,871,648...
inhabitants, including 14 million Hispanics. Thus, Hispanics are 37 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau of 2009). The Hispanic population in Glenn County represents 36.3 percent of the total number of inhabitants. Of these, 6,973 are of Mexican ancestry. In Butte County, Hispanics comprise 13.3 percent of the population, and 17,134 are of Mexican ancestry (Census Bureau, 2009; Glenn County, 2003; Butte County Center for Economic Development, 2010, p. 10). The majority of Hispanics in Glenn County reside in Hamilton City, where 80.56 percent of the inhabitants are Hispanic. In Orland, 45.26 percent of the residents are Hispanic, and in Willows, the percentage of Hispanics is 23.3 percent.

In Butte County, 38.63 percent of the Hispanic population is in Gridley, 27.55 percent in Biggs, and 12.3 percent in Chico. Chico boasts 40 percent of the county’s total population, of which 16,000 are students. In the city of Oroville, 8.73 percent of the residents are of Hispanic origin, and in Paradise, they account for 4.27 percent (Butte County Economic, Demographic, Health, and Social Profile, 2009).

Hispanic populations are well represented in the school system. In California schools, 50 percent of all K-12 students are Hispanic. Also, the Census Bureau reports that:

Nearly five million Latino students were enrolled in America’s public schools in the 1993–94 school year. By 2005–06, that number had doubled. Over the past two decades, the percentage of Latino students in U.S. elementary and secondary schools has grown significantly, while the percentage of white students has declined and that of African American students has held steady. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009)

The demographics reflect the growth of the Hispanic population in the educational system. It is projected that by 2025; one in every four students will be Latino
and that the population will continue to become more Hispanic (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.17). At Butte Community College, Hispanic students represented 14 percent of the total enrollment of full-time students who began their studies in Fall 2006, and completed the program in which they were enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Student enrollment and graduation, bachelor’s degrees and high school diplomas are general indicators of Hispanics educational achievement.

Hispanic students drop out at all levels due to multiple factors. For example, the Glenn County Office of Education reported a 36 percent dropout rates for grades 9-12, while just a year before the national rate was of 4.4 percent, according to the county report. In Butte County, the high school dropout rate was 3.5 percent (Butte County Center for Economic Development, 2010, p. 122).

Hispanic Students and Basic Needs

The struggle of Hispanic students is often reflected in their living conditions and the way they fulfill their basic needs. Before they achieve upward social mobility through a college education, Mexican-American students must be able to satisfy their basic needs. Maslow (1943) described the existence of a hierarchy of needs that have to be met before an individual will strongly desire or focus motivation upon a higher level of needs. The basic needs defined by Maslow (1943) are (1) psychological well-being, (2) safety, (3) love, and belonging, and (4) self-esteem. In this hierarchy, attention to self-actualization or schooling, and the acquisition of basic skills can only be fulfilled after basic needs are met. On this basic needs list, it is important to include housing, as well as access to health care, nutrition, and education.
Students need to access mainstream culture to fulfill their basic needs. When they encounter obstacles, they may not have access to social services or institutionalized forms of assistance offered by the community. The factors that contribute to the risk of educational underachievement include poverty, health issues, poor nutrition, segregation, low self-esteem, and lack of role models (Gándara, 2009, pp. 72, 236). At-risk Hispanic students often lack the knowledge, expertise, abilities and connections needed to succeed. This spectrum is recognized as cultural capital by researchers in the field of educational sociology (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Jez, 2008). In addition, students need the cultural knowledge which facilitates knowing “what, who and where to go” to get information (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 68). In Glenn and Butte counties, Hispanic communities are the non-dominant group, frequently segregated and underserved.

The Need for Self-Esteem

At-risk students often have to overcome self-esteem issues. Self-esteem is dependent on the need to belong, to be loved and feel competent (Stevens, 2002). It is based on feelings and evaluations of one’s ability to handle life, situations and attitudes (Leary, Terdal, Downs & Tambor, 1995; Stevens, 2002, p. 43). Adolescents’ levels of self-esteem are in great part related to home and parents, school and school performance, as well as peers in social settings (Stevens, 2002). High parental self-esteem is crucial to the ability to nurture personal effectiveness in children. The family context may affect self-esteem. Parenting styles and attitudes, like praising children, may determine future success for some Hispanic students. Growing up, children generally emulate their
parents’ efforts towards occupations and careers. For some Hispanic adolescents, there are limited role models in education to identify with (Meléndez, 2001, Stevens, 2002).

Research has clarified the connection between self-esteem and academic success, especially in disciplines related to math and science (Stevens, 2002, p. 32). In general, Mexican American youth have lower educational achievement than other subgroups in our society (Gándara, 1994). In 1990, only 44 percent of Hispanics aged 25 or older had successfully accomplished secondary education, compared to 80 percent of non-Hispanics. Schafer argues that:

Hispanics who do choose to continue their education beyond high school are more likely to select a proprietary or technical school or community college to acquire work related skills. This information may be indicative of lower self-esteem of Hispanic adolescent females. (as cited in Stevens, 2002, p. 38)

A higher order of self-esteem encompasses self-respect, power, aptitude, mastery, self-confidence, autonomy, all of which are factors that may drive individuals to further self-actualization (Maslow 1973). Self-esteem is considered a factor, one of many, contributing to underachievement. Hispanic students empathize with their family needs. Their tendency is to yield to the demands of close family and friends, putting their needs before their own. In doing so, they relinquish their desires, including self-actualization. This is how self-esteem becomes a factor in the underachievement of at-risk Hispanic.

Living Conditions: Poverty, Segregation and Marginalization

At-risk Hispanic populations live in conditions characterized by poverty, segregation and marginalization. Several indicators suggest that socioeconomic and academic achievement among Hispanics could drastically change as the population
grows. “A part of this growing population is poor, undereducated, and under-skilled” (Garza & Watts, 2010, p.1). Their living conditions differ from mainstream living conditions.

Hispanic family members remain more united than mainstream family members. Statistics show that most at-risk students over 18 years of age live with their parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Fry & Gonzalez, 2008). A similar number of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students live with both parents or with a single parent; 10 percent of Hispanic students “live in a household with a person other than a parent or grandparent” (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2008, p. 14). The rates are different beyond the first generation: “71 percent of second-generation Hispanics born in the United States live in a two-parent household” (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2008, p. 14). Sharing a room is 3.5 times more likely among young Hispanic children than among whites (28 percent in Hispanic families versus 8 percent in white families). Under certain living conditions with several people per room may pose challenges for children under certain conditions. Children may have difficulty finding a quiet place to study, and they may be at greater risk of spreading communicable diseases and other health problems. However, larger households may also provide emotional support, childcare, or additional family income, which are positive factors. According to the 2010 Census, most of the families profiled are living below the poverty level.

Poverty rates are only one factor affecting students at-risk. According to the Glenn County Economic Demographic Profile 2009-2010, many students of Mexican ancestry are at-risk due to socio-economic status. Poverty rates are higher in Glenn County than in California as a whole. For example, “In 1999, Hamilton City had a
poverty rate of 20.6 percent, Orland had a poverty rate of 19.0 percent, and Willows had a poverty rate of 18.2 percent” (Glenn County Economic Demographic Profile 2009-2010, p. 52). In Butte County, the average poverty rate in the five incorporated areas in 2004 was 15.2 percent, which was also above the statewide average of 13.2 percent (Butte County Center for Economic Development, 2010, p. 27).

Poverty and deprived neighborhood environments contribute to lower academic achievement; they affect the quality of instruction with consequences in their further educational direction or eventual college achievement. Orfield describes these conditions as follows:

Low-income and minority students are concentrated in schools within metropolitan areas that tend to offer different and inferior courses and levels of competition, creating a situation where the most disadvantaged students receive the least effective preparation for college. (as cited in Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 113)

For K-12 students, poverty-related conditions can jeopardize and impede students learning. These include lack of access to good schools, fear of family separation, immigration raids (in the case of undocumented students), and crime, drugs, and gangs (Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008). Nieto (2008) argues that poor populations are served less well, despite their need for more attention: “Across the country nearly $1,000 less is spent per student in the highest poverty districts than in the most affluent districts (Nieto, 2008, p. 184).

According to the 2000 Census, out of a total population of 203,171 inhabitants in Butte County, there are 866 Hispanic families (4,955 individuals) of Mexican ancestry, who are living below poverty level. In Glenn County, out of a population of 26,453
In Butte and Glenn counties, Hispanic populations are often segregated, underserved and underrepresented (Teaching for Rural Academic Basic Achievement and Job Opportunities (TRABAJO), 2010). Being segregated, these families network with others of similar traditions and habits. This reality does not permit new social contacts, since the same perspectives and cultural capital are recycled within the community. There is no inclusion of new members who can act as role models; consequently, the pool of influence is limited to the same people. According to Gándara and Contreras, Latino housing segregation has increased significantly since 1980-2000 (Gándara and Contreras, 2009, p. 74). This suggests that many of these families have limited interaction with representatives of mainstream culture that would expand their social network.

Segregation, single parenting, an authoritarian parenting style, and lack of social networking affect educational outcomes for many Hispanics. An authoritarian parenting mode is also more common in Hispanic families. Inflexible boundaries and reverential respect for hierarchy may sometimes emerge as a result of circumstances, such as families adapting their parenting style to the community in which they live. Unsafe urban areas may call for a disciplinary style that imposes harsh restrictions on children’s exploration of their surroundings (Ream & Stanton-Salazar, 2006, p. 7). In such situations, an authoritarian parenting style may restrict personal freedom in order to assure safety.

Single parents lead a great number of households. Female heads of households raising children are most likely to be exposed to psychological stress and depression,
factors that affect parenting and child development (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 62). Residential mobility is a related factor as, “Children from single parents or extended families often change their place of residence more frequently than those from intact families” (McLanahan & Aston, 1998, p. 575).

In combination with the authoritarian family style adopted by some families, this serves to restrict children’s opportunities to extend their social network. When families are segregated, social networks may be limited to extended family and friends. At the neighborhood level, this means that the social and cultural capital among families and among schoolchildren continues to be unequally distributed (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 74). When segregated, families network with others of similar traditions and habits. They do not promote social contacts outside the neighborhood. This limits their children’s exposure to the cultural capital of other community members. Without new members to act as role models, the pool of influence is limited.

“Habitus” and Family Perspectives

Living conditions such as poverty, segregation and marginalization are often influenced by traditions and customs. Moran (2001) observed that cultural perspectives such as rituals, beliefs and traditions are important dimensions of culture. Culturally based on core values, perspectives are represented as *habitus*.

To varying degrees, many Hispanic students hold four core values that help shape their priorities and perspectives. Cultural values contribute to their “*habitus*,” because the value assigned to traditions perpetuates the practices of the culture. The “*habitus*” may be a factor of mainstream cultural capital. The distinguishing
characteristics of Hispanic values that contribute to “habitus” are: (1) the importance of the family, (2) “respeto,” (3) “personalismo,” and (4) “confianza.”

First, for Hispanic students in general, the family is a core value. From a sociological perspective, families, “including both nuclear and extended members, are a significant supportive influence in Hispanic culture” (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 109). The same authors explain that “familismo” is a cultural value, in which family members are viewed:

As an extension of the self, Hispanic families value interdependence rather than independence. Historically, a sense of obligation to the family has been a cultural survival strategy that helps develop family cohesion. This leads to greater life satisfaction and better health. (Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003, as cited in Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 110)

In relation to education, students often attend to family needs first, and then to school assignments or other commitments. Having to respond first to family needs is one of the main causes reported for dropping courses (Butte College, personal communication). When there is a need to provide care for family members, the normal course of events is altered.

Second, “respeto” is a cultural practice reflected in relationships “based on age, gender, social position, economic status, and authority” (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 110). It has many implications for child-rearing within the hierarchical system of Hispanic families. Parents are considered the first teachers, and treated with obedience and respect (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 20). Personal relationships value actions that demonstrate a concern and consideration for others than self. When defining behavioral problems involving their children, Hispanic close relatives frequently apply the expression "no me hace caso” or "she/he does not pay attention to me" (Garza & Bratton
This fact may be directly related to the importance of “respeto,” joint behavior and deference for parental authority. It may also be a manifestation of conflicting values when two cultures are in contact.

Third, “personalismo” “refers to behaviors and actions that demonstrate a direct interest in and concern for others” (Zayas, Evan, Mejias & Rodriguez, 1997, p. 405). Addressing cultural competency, the authors studied counselors working with Hispanic patients in a social context. They examined the extent to which Hispanics tend to establish and nurture personal relationships. Hispanics tend to interact with others personally, creating emotional bonds. Counseling style among Hispanics and professionals, is direct and personal “relating to others, more specifically, caring behaviors that foster personal relationships” (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 108). Their practices supported use of person-centered principles and shared values. “Both place importance on building interpersonal relationships that are nurturing, loving, intimate, and respectful” (Garza & Watts 2010, p. 108).

At the community level, Hispanic families are characterized by a strong investment in and commitment to their local communities. This value is evident in Hispanic students’ appreciation of personal relationships with tutors and instructors. Fourth, the core value of “confianza” is a subtle, implicit gesture based on unstated relational expectations, especially in times of need. This may be seen in offers of work, food, housing, (e.g., “mi casa es su casa”) and offers of service. This value may be understood as the sum of the central Hispanic principles of familismo, respeto, and personalismo (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 110).
In education as in life, students make decisions based on the core values and traditions that constitute their “modus operandi” or “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990; Jez, 2008; Gándara & Contreras, 2009. For Hispanic students, “habitus” relates to cultural capital and educational achievement. At-risk Hispanic students need to develop mainstream cultural knowledge to access educational institutions so they can ultimately achieve upward social mobility.

Cultural Capital and “Risk”

Research suggests that there is a correlation between the fulfillment of necessary skills and cultural capital (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Jez, 2008). In essence, Gándara and Contreras conclude that low-income people and minorities “often lack mainstream cultural capital (i.e., knowledge of how the system works and what it values), and social capital (access to important networks) necessary to manage public resources to the advantage of their children” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 68).

Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes (1990) and Bourdieu, (1984) explain how the patterns of a culture become internalized as follows:

Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is culturally valued taste and consumption patterns that one inherits. This definition is expansive and includes abstract as well as concrete inherited items, such as art, education, and language. Capital’s value is associated with the social and cultural traits of the “‘habitus.’” (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990 p. 194)

Cultural capital has also been closely associated with wealth and social positioning. Jez, (2008) states that:

The hypothesis that wealth matters through the provision of differential ‘‘habitus’’, social capital, and cultural capital that support the college-going process [is tested through the application of a series of binary logistic regressions]. The results indicate that while wealthier students are much more likely to attend a four-
year college than their less wealthy peers, the influence of wealth is essentially eliminated once we consider academic achievement, ‘‘habitus,’’ and social and cultural capital. (p.5)

Wealth, parental influence and social networks promote students to a certain level of opportunity. Individual effort is required to achieve academically, since wealth is not a guarantee of college success.

Summary

This chapter addressed question number one of this study: ‘‘What does research reveal about the relationship of the living conditions, traditions and habits of the Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry, and their educational attainment?’’

Demographic data from the Census Bureau suggests that Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority in the nation. They comprise 13.3 percent of the total population in Butte County, and 36 percent of the inhabitants in Glenn County. In Butte College, Hispanic students represent 14 percent of the total number of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The presence of such a large number of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry has prompted an examination of demographic factors and living conditions.

Demographic data demonstrates that this Hispanic population is often underserved and underrepresented (TRABAJO, 2011; Butte and Glenn County Demographic Profiles 2009-2010 and 2003, respectively). This reality contributes to their segregation and marginalization. Poverty and other circumstances affect families, especially, single-parent households. Families often adopt an authoritarian mode that may contribute to a lack of self-esteem and limit the expansion of social networks. Research
from Learly (1995) examined how a lack of self-esteem may further reduce the scope of social networks.

For most Hispanics, the basic social unit is the family, with strong bonds among members and community (Garza & Watts, 2010, p. 112). The cultural values that characterize Hispanic traditions and perspectives are based on four core values: “familismo;” “personalismo;” “confianza;” and “respeto.” Embracing these values, Hispanics inherit and perpetuate traditions and customs that constitute their “habitus.” “Habitus” and cultural capital are related factors that influence educational attainment.

Hispanic populations need to grasp essential knowledge of mainstream culture. This is facilitated by the inclusion of other members in their social network. The Hispanic ‘habitus’ then, should include perspectives of mainstream culture, as larger social networks may increase dynamics towards promoting educational achievement because there is a larger inclusion of people, traditions, habitus and educational degrees.
CHAPTER III

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS OF MEXICAN ANCESTRY

This chapter answers question number two of the study: “What does research reveal about the key socio-cultural factors that keep at-risk Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry from getting a college education?” The four key interrelated socio-cultural factors examined are: (1) social capital and mobility, (2) peer support, (3) mainstream cultural capital, and (4) class stratification. In combination with living conditions and educational factors, these impede attainment of a college education for many Hispanics. These factors were selected after a review of literature in which they consistently emerged as important variables, e.g., Arbona and Amaury, (2007); Kaljmijn and Kraaykamp, (1996); Lee and Bowen, (2009).

Social Capital and Social Mobility

Social mobility is the extent to which an individual or group is able to change positions, vertically or horizontally in the class hierarchy (Grab, 1997). To determine how flexible social mobility is, factors that promote or impede mobility may be
examined. Mobility is thought to be promoted by cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Jez, 2008; and Zwiers, 2001), as well as social capital through support from one’s social network. Social mobility is influenced by economic capital (Jez, 2008), and human capital, (Willis, 1982). Hispanic students need access to an education that provides opportunities for upward social mobility. Mainstream knowledge is essential.

Cultural, educational, social capital, and social mobility are interrelated (e.g. upward social mobility may be affected by lack of an extended social network or by social capital. Social capital is derived from social networks and cultural capital. Jez (2008) has proposed a conceptual framework where wealth and other background characteristics interact with one another to influence a student’s habitus. Academic achievement further shapes his or her habitus, social and cultural capital (Jez, 2008, p.4). Gándara and others assert that:

Although education is not the only road to social mobility, it has become increasingly important as the primary avenue into the middle class for underrepresented groups. Meanwhile, qualifications inflation has placed more and more jobs out of the reach of individuals who lack appropriate academic credentials. (Gándara, 1994, p.51)

Some elements favor upward social mobility, while other factors impede it. For example, Gándara (1994) suggests that traditions and myths told in stories about family members enhance self-esteem because they show a member of the family who achieved remarkable success. This serves as a blueprint or ideal model of “upward social mobility” and “family cultural capital.” Gándara says, “they may serve as a model of social mobility and call these stories family cultural capital” (Gándara, 1994, p. 51).
Factors that inhibit upward social mobility include delinquency, teenage childbearing, and lack of social capital. A community lacking in critical social capital also limits social mobility for members of the lower and working class (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, pp. 72, 313). Poor neighborhoods and housing opportunities segregate Hispanic populations, isolating them from mainstream experiences and fewer critical social contacts (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 313). This is just one example of the interactivity between factors, illustrating how living conditions are closely related to socio-cultural factors.

Peer Support

Peer support towards an educational goal is less common among Hispanic students, and this lack of peer support puts many Hispanics at-risk. Social networks act as agents for social mobility. The larger the network is, the more opportunities its members have to interact and influence other individuals. Many Hispanic families of Mexican ancestry have limited social networks.

Poor settlement areas and a lack of cultural capital are both associated with peer influence. Hispanic students who aspire to higher academic achievement are singled out as “acting white” or being like a “schoolboy.” Students’ hard work collapses under peer pressure, undermining positive academic behavior (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.75). In “A Profile for Hispanic Students,” The Pew Hispanic Center (2006) reported that it is very common to find Hispanic parents in working-class or service jobs. As a result, many Hispanic children do not see their parents working in white-collar and professional fields (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, pp. 72, 236; Willis, 1977).
Like other ethnic groups, Hispanic students have a strong tendency to spend time with people of their own ethnicity and those in their neighborhoods, most exclusively. Among those included are peers who are low achievers or dropouts (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 75). This is another factor in perpetuating class stratification and limiting upward social mobility.

Mainstream Cultural Capital

Access to mainstream cultural capital is related to *habitus*, and it may affect decisions on educational goals. Pierre Bourdieu argued that culture is distinguished by *habitus*, defined as habits and dispositions fundamentally important for school success. These habits are practiced “by individuals and groups, and transmitted from one generation to the next” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 14).

Gándara and Contreras (2009) explain that there is a gap in the cultural capital and habits inherited by many Hispanic students. When it comes to knowledge of how to access public resources, interpret school curricula, and advocate for their children, parents without an understanding of the educational system are at disadvantage in influencing their children’s decision to pursue a college education (Gándara, 2009, p. 68). Bourdieu argues that children from high socioeconomic surroundings are most likely exposed to intellectual activities at home (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). They acquire cultural capital at home, and later achieve higher levels of schooling than other learners (Kaljmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996, p. 24). For example, cultural capital seems to be an asset for several reasons: students may be better prepared to master academic materials, and
better able to interpret abstract and intellectual concepts (Kaljmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996, p. 24).

Cultural capital is also associated with arts and music appreciation. This influence is often reflected in students’ grades (Kaljmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996, pp. 24, 25). Cultural capital is also measured by parental participation in children’s school activities. Increasing parent involvement at school is considered an important factor in support of the education of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry. Increasing parent involvement at school is considered an important factor in support of the education of Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry. Even if students receive the emotional support, this is not enough. The parents’ lack of proficiency in English and exposure to the American education system may limit them from providing the cultural capital their children need. Arbona and Amaury (2010, pp. 267, 268) explain that the level of education attained by parents, and their expectations and encouragement regarding higher education for their sons and daughters also affect degree completion (pp. 267, 268). Hispanic students’ need social networks, and their families need essential mainstream culture knowledge.

**Perpetuation of Class Stratification**

Barker (2005) argues that class is determined by the socio-economic conditions of individuals, or groups, people with “a relational set of inequalities with economic, social, political and ideological dimensions” (Barker, 2005, p. 436). Without inclusion of new members from other classes the repetition of ‘habitus’ perpetuates group status quo. Stratified societies lack resources for social mobility (Grab, 1997). In a social
context, scholars have criticized the degree to which members of lower classes do not advance socioeconomically. Dahrendof (1988) argues the need for an educated workforce in a technological and service economy.

Class perpetuation is also influenced by class segregation and *habitus* repetition, along with commonly held beliefs about the working class. Willis (1982, p. 215) explains how *habitus* accumulates in the working class, using the question of "Why working-class kids get working-class jobs?" Willis explains that society expects it. “Working-class children get working class jobs because they don’t think they can do otherwise” (Willis, 1982, p. 215). Society allows for this to occur by accepting it as a fact. Middle class kids believe that they must achieve, and their own culture promotes such possibilities. In some Hispanic communities, children come to understand that they do not speak the same language as the educational system, and eliminate themselves from possibilities. Willis suggests that cultural forms streamline the process of “self-induction” into roles. In the end, this determines that “working class kids want working-class jobs” (Willis, 1982, p. 215). This factor is related to cultural capital. The factors that explain the lack of cultural capital produce class stratification, which in turn contributes to a cycle that places attainment of a college education and social mobility at-risk.

**Summary**

This chapter focused attention on question number two: “*What does research reveal about the key socio-cultural risk factors preventing Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry from getting a college education?*” Four key, interrelated, socio-cultural factors were examined: (1) social capital and mobility, (2) peer support, (3) mainstream cultural
capital, and (4) class stratification. Research seems to suggest that *habitus* prevents students from attaining upward social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Jez, 2008; Zwiers, 2006). Beliefs and traditions practiced and repeated from one generation to another do not generate the new cultural capital and essential knowledge required for access to mainstream culture. The social network of Hispanic students at-risk may be large, but research reveals that it does not include members outside the group (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Zwiers, 2006). Socially, Hispanics tend to interact with people from their same ethnic group and class, perpetuating stratification. Members of the lower working class believe they deserve the jobs they have, and generation after generation conform, “self damning themselves” (Willis, 1982, pp. 212-215). In addition, while parents may project educational dreams for their children that they are able to sustain emotionally, lacking mainstream cultural capital affects their children’s educational prospects. Parents are not able to provide the cultural capital that supports social mobility. Hence, upward social mobility does not occur. Finally, the lack of social capital and peer support greatly hinders students’ opportunities to attain a college education.
CHAPTER IV

FACTORS IN THE K-12 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS AT-RISK

Overview

This chapter addresses the third question in this study: “What does research reveal about key factors in the K-12 educational system that contribute to the underachievement of Hispanic students at-risk?” Several factors fit into this category. Gándara and Contreras (2009) identify thirteen conditions that affect the education of at-risk students of Mexican origin:

- Hispanic children enter the school system without a preschool education.
- Students encounter inadequate school facilities.
- At-risk students lack access to technology in their schools.
- They receive inadequate instruction.
- Students are subject to tracking and high school curricula that present stereotypes and negative self-fulfilling prophesies.
- Students lack well-prepared teachers.
- There is high turnover among school teachers and administrators.
- Students encounter school-related safety concerns.
- There is segregation within and between schools.
- Students lack social capital.
- There are mixed results for intervention programs. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 87-100)
Most of these factors were addressed in *Williams v. State of California*, in 2000, in a statewide class action lawsuit. The case involved California's responsibility to supply educational materials for public schools, as well as qualified teachers (California Department of Education, 2011). When the case was settled in 2004, it resulted in a package of legislative proposals designed to ensure that all students would be provided books in specified subjects, and that schools would be proper and safe. In addition, legislation also would assure that children have qualified teachers (*Williams vs. State of California Settlement Agreement*, August 13, 2004 (California Department of Education, 2011).) Reports on progress four years after the settlement implementation have demonstrated improvement in educational opportunity for California public school students (California Department of Education, 2011). The report evaluated progress on the increase in number of instructional materials provided to students to remedy insufficiencies. Not all districts showed similar outcomes; however, *Williams v. California* (Allen, 2009) asserted that all students need and may legally expect instructional materials, clean, safe, and functional classrooms, and qualified teachers. The then current governor of California decided not to defend the conditions in the schools. Instead, a certain ‘floor’ was established for all the schools: schools were given five years and a billion dollars to fix bathrooms and leaking roofs, get a textbook for every student, and phase out the practice of shortening the students’ academic year in order to accommodate more students on a campus (Gándara & Contreras, 2009 p. 94).

However, the measures adopted were not generally effective, since the funding provided represented less than one percent of the annual education budget. As a result, the money allocated for improvements was not sufficient to remedy the situation
(Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 94). In the last three years, California schools have experienced even more significant reductions in funding.

This thesis has identified common concerns raised consistently in recent literature such as in Carbonaro & Gamoran, (2002); Gándara & Contreras, (2009, pp. 87-150); Padrón, and Waxman & Rivera (2001). The concerns had been addressed in the sections that follow:

1. School conditions
   A. Well-prepared teachers
   B. School administration and teachers
   C. Instructional offerings

2. Mastery of basic skills.

School Conditions

A. Well-prepared teachers

Well-prepared teachers are able to address students’ learning needs. Studies have found a clear correlation between the achievement of their students and the quality of instruction (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Oakes & Saunders, 2004, as cited in Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 359). The quality of instruction translates into student outcomes as measured by the California Department of Education. Two ways of measuring academic performance and school progress are the API: Academic Performance Index and the SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test (Butte County Center for Economic Development, 2010). In 2004, the API was accepted as an assessment of satisfactory progress under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).
Williams v. California addressed students’ access to appropriately certified and assigned teachers. The court case revealed that many of the teachers in schools serving Hispanic students lacked the credentials required to teach English learners. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing released a report describing how across all schools, the Williams v. California settlement resulted in better identification of teachers lacking authorizations to provide instruction to English learners (Allen, 2009).

In Butte County’s Demographic profile, 2009-2010, indicators show that ELL students lack language proficiency skills due to the scarce number of credentialed teachers to instruct them (Butte County Center for Economic Development, 2010, p.132). English proficiency is possibly the most obvious factor associated with the underachievement of Hispanic students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001, p. 9). The authors agree on several facts: there are not enough credentialed teachers, and there is a lack of preparation among credentialed ranks. In the schools with the largest number of minority students, 88 percent of teachers attain “the bottom quartile of the teacher quality index” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 103) By contrast, schools with the lowest percentage of minority students had just 11 percent of teachers who scored in the bottom quartile of teacher quality (Gándara & Contreras, 2010 p. 103). Qualified teachers appropriately address the needs of Hispanic learners, and respond with positive attitudes to reinforce the students’ motivation.

Hispanic students often claim that teachers and other school personnel do not forge meaningful relationships with them in ways that would make them feel welcomed and cared for, a factor associated with una buena educación. As a result, they experience
restricted access to academic knowledge and skills for college preparation (Chavez-Reyes, 2010, p. 498).

B. School administration and teachers

Another important concern is the high turnover of teachers and administrators, and the scarce number of Hispanic personnel. Poor schools and poor school districts have more difficulty than affluent schools attracting both teachers and principals who remain in their jobs. The best job offers in terms of signing bonuses, benefit packages, resources, and opportunities for professional development are in more affluent districts rather than poor neighborhoods (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 108). The stability of leadership and length of tenure for superintendents is correlated to higher achievement in schools where the leaders are responsible for the achievement of more advantaged students, rather than low-income Latino schools and districts (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 109). The lack of Hispanic models is also widespread in most school systems; there are not many Hispanic leaders, credentialed teachers, and Hispanic administrative personnel. Gándara and Contreras (2009) concluded that the crisis in the education of Hispanic students is reflected in the absence of Latinos in the teaching force (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 110).

High turnover among school personnel impacts Hispanic students’ achievement in a number of ways. First, the costs of teacher turnover are substantial for the districts involved. Districts confront leaving costs, replacement costs and transition costs that often exceed the allocated budget. Secondly, teacher turnover undermines at-risk schools. Teachers working:
In high poverty schools have an annual turnover rate of 20 percent, while those in low poverty schools have a rate of 12.9 percent.”(…). Teachers “at-risk” of leaving the profession are also more likely to be teaching in urban, low-income schools with high concentrations of minority students. (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007, p.4)

Thirdly, at-risk schools spend scarce dollars on teacher turnover. It implies that teachers have to be replaced or that schools not always have the means to deal with their depart. Fourthly, at-risk schools should invest in teacher retention. Not all attrition is bad, but whether it is bad or good, it has financial ramifications (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007). The annual calculation of turnover and related costs allows a school district to evaluate the impact of interventions. Researchers speculate that if the districts did not have to confront turnover expenses, they could reinvest the money in bonuses that would have a positive impact on teacher retention (Barnes, Crowe & Schafer, p. 87).

C. Instructional offerings

This category encompasses the environment in which instruction is offered as well as instructional quality. Both contribute to teacher and student performance. Safety concerns, poverty, and deprived neighborhood environments produce unsuccessful learning settings. Whether the students belong to gangs or are their victims, gang activity, infuses terror and increases dropout rates (Gándara & Contreras 2009, p. 67). The term “at-risk school environment” suggests that it is the school rather than the individual that is at-risk: schools that are poorly maintained and staffed by unqualified teachers offering school programs and organizational features that contribute to academic failure (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). It is difficult to teach or learn in an environment that does not feel safe, either psychologically or physically (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 110). In California, schools are near the bottom of rankings of teacher/student ratios and academic
proficiency scores (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 93). All of these considerations affect the quality of students’ knowledge acquisition, as much as the teachers’ decision to work in such environments. These are causes of distancing between students and teachers, adding to the inferior quality and standards of education and lowering students’ expectations (Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008; Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002a).

To improve math and science education for Hispanic students, several factors must be addressed. The socio-economic conditions of poverty and poor schools are a primary barrier. The schools in poor urban areas must concentrate on:

. . . quality of education, bilingual education programs, dropout rates and curricula. Potential compromises to learning, such as illegal immigration, may undercut children’s ability to learn, even if they have access to better schools, teachers, and courses. (Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008, p. 4)

The educational approaches offered exemplify effective and ineffective teaching practices. Padrón, Waxman and Rivera (2001) explain that the most common educational approach currently found in schools that serve at-risk Hispanic students is the direct instructional model (p. 3). In this model, teachers direct attention to the entire class, in a teacher-centered manner. Some researchers have named this technique the “pedagogy of poverty” (p. 5). This same approach has been found in mathematics and science classrooms, as the instructors generally control the class, allowing just seven percent of class time for students to work in groups (p. 4).

Students are motivated to belong to a target culture when they are provided with opportunities to use the English language in meaningful contexts and interaction. Effective teachers cultivate a mutual-learning community, and foster an environment of collaboration, cooperation, and inquiry rich in social interaction (Byram & Feng, 2005,
Effective teaching practices enable students to interact and actively participate during instruction. Zwiers, (2006) recommends creating learning spaces for diverse students, so that they can build from what they have, and add knowledge and language skills to expand linguistic capital.

The problem is that some teachers do not value the knowledge and language skills that linguistically diverse students bring to class (Zwiers, 2008, p. 11). This practice is in sharp contrast to a student-centered classroom, where teachers adapt instruction to include English language learning and base instruction on embracing learners’ backgrounds. Zwiers (2006) argues that even the brightest students have been marginalized and unrecognized, “left behind” because of their diverse languages, learning styles and ways of thinking. Zwiers encourages teachers to work towards using various practices to develop and add new forms of academic, linguistic, and cultural capital (p. 17).

Mastering Basic Skills

At-risk Hispanic students are often confronted with the need to develop and master basic skills. Basic skills consist of basic abilities measured in college assessments in essential areas, as well as abilities related to and promoted by the practices, products and perspectives of American society. The mastery of these skills becomes the threshold for understanding mainstream perspectives, since mastery enables at-risk students to be accepted in the American educational system. Mastering basic skills promotes upward social mobility for Hispanic students. For example, in order to assess their high school education and basic skills mastery, students may need to understand the significance of a “G.E.D” and how to obtain it. The American Council of Education, as well as more than
98 percent of colleges and employers, accepts a G.E.D to demonstrate knowledge and skills in five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, sciences, and social studies, for those students who have not been able to obtain a high school diploma.

Research suggests that there is a correlation between the fulfillment of necessary skills and cultural capital. Jez, (2008) and Gándara and Contreras, (2009), explain that:

Low income and minority parents often lack the cultural capital (knowing how the system works and what it values) and social capital (access to important social networks)[…] Cultural capital takes the form of knowing how to manage public resources, like school curricula, to the advantage of one’s children. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 68)

The proof of language proficiency is the most obvious challenge that nearly 2.5 million students between 17 and 24 years old need to meet. (Schaetzel & Young, 2007). Indicators of English proficiency in Butte County reveal that:

At this time, ELL students are so severely lacking English proficiency skills that it is difficult for them to succeed in regular school instructional programs. This is largely due to the lack of credentialed teachers working with them, a lack of a specialized curriculum used to provide instruction to them, the poverty levels of ELL families, and the social pressures that these students feel. (Center for Economic Development 2009-10, p.113)

Students who do not succeed on college entrance-level assessments most likely follow one of two avenues. These students will either be advised to take non-credit remedial courses, or they will be allowed to join more advanced classes in order to demonstrate that they have the ability to grasp the content and remain in the class. The second avenue can have a strong impact on motivation. Without a strong structure supporting them, students will eventually drop the classes. This is one of the main concerns expressed by representatives of Butte College. Under these circumstances, the
entrance assessment tests act as gatekeepers, instead of gate openers for Hispanic students. Scholars assert that ELLs (English language learners) face a language barrier when they take a test in English, as it is difficult to entirely divorce language proficiency from content knowledge (Menken, 2010).

Another barrier may be cultural. Students who have acquired essentials (i.e., English, mathematics, and writing abilities) in a different country and with a different curriculum were most probably not taught in English (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2001). Often, they may not have acquired the same skills at all. As a result, English language learners are in a difficult position when they take college entrance exams. They not only have to master the language, but also the content, in order to be in a parity position with other students.

Summary

Chapter four addressed the third question in this study: “What does research reveal about factors encountered in the K-12 educational system that contribute to the underachievement of Hispanic students at-risk?”

Several factors fit into this category. Following the findings from recent research, Gándara and Contreras (2009) identified thirteen conditions affecting the education of at-risk students of Mexican origin. This chapter considered all of these thirteen factors. Hispanic children enter the school system without preschool education; at-risk students encounter inadequate school facilities; and they lack technology-assisted education. Among other conditions, students receive inadequate instruction; and
encounter tracking systems and high school curricula that present stereotypes and foster negative, self-fulfilling prophecies.

According to the literature reviewed, at-risk students are often served in an educational system that lacks well-prepared teachers. In their schools, there is high turnover of school teachers and administrators; there are safety concerns; there is segregation within and between schools; students have a lack of social capital; and finally, there are mixed results of intervention programs (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Most of these factors were addressed in Williams v. State of California (Just Schools California, n.d.). After considering the thirteen factors mentioned by Gándara and Contreras (2010), and the influence of Williams v. State of California on the educational system, the chapter examined two categories of key factors that at-risk Hispanic students encounter in the educational system:

1. School conditions
   A. Well-prepared teachers
   B. School administration and teachers
   C. Instructional offerings

2. Mastery of basic skills

   Among the first category of factors, studies have shown a clear correlation between the achievement of their students and the quality of instruction (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Oakes & Saunders, 2004 as cited in Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 359). The importance of well-prepared teachers is critical, and according to research, the most obvious factor associated with the underachievement of Hispanic students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2001, p. 9).
Researchers agree that there are not enough credentialed teachers, and that even credentialed teachers lack preparation in critical areas.

Another concern is the high turnover of teachers and administrators. Poor schools and districts have more difficulty than affluent ones in attracting both teachers and principals who remain in their jobs. Teacher turnovers impact Hispanic students’ achievement. The costs of teacher turnover are substantial for poor districts; they undermine at-risk schools.

Among other concerns, safety issues affect school conditions. Poverty and deprived neighborhood environments are related to unsuccessful learning settings. The term “at-risk school environment” suggests that the educational institution is the one at risk, rather than the students as individuals. The key factors are the quality of teachers in these situations (Barnes, Crow, & Schaefer, 2007; Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2001; Melendéz, & Melendéz,, 1993) as well as organizational features that affect student knowledge acquisition. The majority of teaching practices used to instruct Hispanic students do not consider that many English language learners have limited English exposure in their homes and communities. It is essential that students acquire higher English proficiency levels through instruction that facilitates their academic development.

Notably, “the most common educational approach currently found in schools that serve at-risk Hispanic students is the direct instructional model” (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p. 5). Effective teaching practices enable students to interact and actively participate during instruction. Zwiers (2006) recommends creating learning spaces for diverse students, so that they can build from what they have, and add knowledge and language skills to expand linguistic capital. The fact is that teachers do not value the
knowledge and language skills that linguistically diverse students bring to class, which presents a problem (Zwiers, 2006, p. 11). Zwiers (2006) argues that even the brightest students have been marginalized and unrecognized, left behind—because of their diverse languages, learning styles and ways of thinking. Zwiers encourages teachers to work towards using various practices to develop and add new forms of academic, linguistic, and cultural capital (Zwiers, 2006, p. 17).

The second category of factors is related to students’ critical need to develop basic skills and demonstrate their mastery. Basic skills are seen as the threshold for achievement in college and upward social mobility. Basic skills consist of abilities measured in college assessments in essential areas, as well as abilities related to and promoted by the practices, products and perspectives of American society.

Research suggests that there is a correlation between the fulfillment of necessary skills and cultural capital. In essence, as Jez (2008) and Gándara and Contreras (2009) explain, at-risk students often lack cultural and social capital. Under these circumstances, the entrance assessment tests act as gatekeepers instead of gate openers for Hispanic students.
CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUALIZED SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED IN THE EDUCATION OF AT-RISK HISPANIC STUDENTS

This chapter examines question number four of the study: “What does research identify as the key features of successful educational programs implemented for Hispanic students of Mexican ancestry at the community college level?” The chapter is organized into two parts. Part I addresses features of effective teaching and instructional practices at the community college level. Part II highlights key features of successful programs within community colleges and universities.

Part I
Effective Teaching Practices

Hispanic learners from diverse backgrounds are often engaged in second language acquisition and may not be able to fully grasp the same content as native speakers. Special teaching techniques would better attend to their needs. This section examines the seven most effective practices identified in literature reviewed (Padrón,
Waxman and Rivera, 2002a; Zwiers, 2006; Crisp & Cruz, 2010; Melendez & Carlos, 2001) among others:

1. Culturally-responsive teaching
2. Cooperatively oriented learning
3. Learning-centered communities
4. Instructional conversations
5. Cognitively-guided instruction
6. Mentoring-based instruction
7. Technology-based and contextualized instruction

These practices contribute to successful learning experiences for Hispanic students by personalizing the intake of new content. Students learn the new language while gaining knowledge of another culture. These techniques play a key role in making input comprehensible, because they build on understanding and allow teachers and students to improve communication. Ultimately, these practices allow for teacher initiation, student responses, and teacher evaluation, as Shrum and Glisan (2007) indicate, these are valuable in learning a foreign language. The ideal structure allows students to produce learning outcomes in a student-centered environment.

- Culturally-responsive teaching

“Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the everyday concerns of students, such as important family and community issues and works to incorporate these concerns into the curriculum” (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p. 7). Culturally responsive classrooms improve knowledge acquisition and help students to prepare for meaningful social roles in the community. The implications of a culturally responsive education are content integration, the construction of knowledge, reduction of prejudice and equity pedagogy, in an empowering school culture, and a social structure that attends to
multicultural education (Gay, 2000, p. 8). Cultural education embraces multicultural views.

It is not only important to understand the mainstream culture. It is also essential that students compare and contrast this with other cultures to enrich their knowledge of mainstream culture. A multicultural approach is sustained by encouraging exposure to diversity. Culturally responsive teaching also “exposes students to other individual or cultural groups” (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p. 6) and to mainstream culture, emphasizing social and academic responsibilities (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a). Cultural teaching helps students to acquire English and activates their schemata, improving self-assurance (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p.12) Student views of culture develop through comparisons and connections between the new culture and their own. All of these critical features of culturally responsive teaching are essential for ethnic groups to demonstrate what they know (Gay, 2000, p. 168).

(ii) Cooperatively-oriented learning

Within culturally responsive teaching, cooperative learning and research projects are very important on multiple levels (Gay, 2000, p. 167). Cooperative learning enables students to work together. Johnson and Johnson (1991) describe cooperative learning as the use of small groups to facilitate learning and allow students to make the most of their knowledge by learning from others (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p. 6). Cooperative learning is “An effective instructional approach that stimulates learning and helps students achieve complex understandings through sharing opportunities and ideas in discussion” (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p.6).
Students perceive cooperative learning as a way to state opinions freely without judgment. Visher, Schnider, Wathington, and Collado (2010) emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers to what students feel. Cooperatively-oriented learning encourages ELLs to learn at a steady pace (Visher et al., 2010, p. 70). In a study of six community college experiences, researchers examined different learning techniques (Visher et al., 2010). Among these, cooperative learning was reported as providing students with productive personal interactions with leaders or coordinators that resulted in strong leadership. The students who attend community colleges often do not have good prior high school experiences. Often, they do not come from families with college backgrounds. In some cases, they may be the first in their families attending college.

In a cooperative learning setting, students negotiate and acquire learning about themselves and others. Instead of lecturing and transmitting materials in a teacher-centered way, the instructor serves as a facilitator, promoting cooperation among students (Bejarano, 1987). Students produce language, manage a minimum level of anxiety, and develop self-confidence and self-esteem through their individual contributions and the achievement of group goals. This instructional practice decreases the anxiety that learners often experience by creating a climate and ethos of valuing cooperation and community in the classroom. Cooperative learning initially uses a combination of individual, small-group, and whole class learning activities. Students attach themselves to specific tasks within a group context, satisfying their need for individual task responsibility and recognition (Gay, 2000, p. 168).
(iii) Learning-centered communities

Learning communities are used by community colleges to help students. They are particularly useful for academically disadvantaged students (Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002b). The National Center of Postsecondary Research (Visher et al., 2010) evaluated learning communities in six community colleges from their starting point to development. Within the first year, 130 learning communities were established, serving more than 3,000 students. The study reported that:

Learning communities often feature thematically linked courses and offer an integrated curriculum that helps students to see connections between disciplines. Increasingly, colleges use learning communities to help academically underprepared students progress more quickly toward successful completion of their studies by linking a developmental course with a college-level course. (Visher et al., 2010, p. 14)

Linking courses in this way helps students to get to know each other and allows them to see interdisciplinary connections. Learning communities encourage student-faculty relationships. They connect students, facilitate learning partnerships, help with goals, and improve attainment of learning objectives (Visher et al., 2010). Some of the strategies frequently used for these purposes are class discussions, presentations, reflective writing and long-term projects integrating class material. All of these create synergy among students that contributes to motivation and engagement.

Data on participation from the Merced Community College in California revealed that “Many faculties at Merced said that their learning community students have a high level of comfort and sense of belonging, to which these instructors attributed a higher level of engagement and participation” (Visher et al., 2010, p. 14).
One example of the higher level of engagement is at Merced Community College, where one of the learning communities specifically addressed mathematics for Hispanic students. “Ethno-mathematics” considers different ethnic perspectives on numbers. Students learn about different cultural approaches to mathematics, such as Mayan mathematics: “Making a connection between writing about Mayan mathematics and the math class that they’re taking—to change their relationship essentially to the core content” (Visher et al., 2010, p. 94). As a result of this practice, Hispanic students successfully created strong student relationships while building academic and personal networks.

(iv) Instructional conversations

An instructional conversation is a dialogue between the learners and the instructor, in which students further develop their critical thinking and language skills. These are essential for Hispanic students as they promote exposure to and increase skills in academic discourse and interaction. Extended instructional conversations are especially significant for second language learners, because they often increase control of the language through active participation (Melendez, 2001; Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2001, p. 6; Visher et al., 2010).

Instructional conversations increase opportunities for students to participate in collaborative efforts to construct and communicate meaning in the classroom through “talk stories” and “co-narration” (Gay, 2000, p. 153). Zwiers observes that instructional conversations cultivate a positive, receptive classroom environment, where effective discussions explore ideas by engaging all learners equally in discussions that are not dominated by one individual (Zwiers, 2006, p.130).
These practices are important and effective among Hispanic students, because they require the academic skills of mental multitasking. Students construct thoughts, and add to conversations. In this context, the beneficial effect is that the conversations are non-threatening and challenging (Zwiers, 2006). Special triggers prompt students to expand upon discussions, using comments like “what makes you think that?” or “may you clarify your idea?” Zwiers (2006, p.114) supports the practice of maximizing the motivation of all students by interacting with peers and teachers.

Conversations can also promote openness and academic language. This requires instruction on specific skills. For example, instructional conversations require nonverbal responses that are used to convey feelings when a subject may be sensitive. In this way, participants may be more open to discussion of some subjects that students are not comfortable debating in larger groups. According to Zwiers, conversations offer excellent opportunities for students to build academic language, as they introduce and contrast main ideas, provide supporting evidence, and relate cause and effect (Zwiers, 2006, p. 120). It is important to give the contributors time to think, and allow wait time for responses that are more academic.

Strategies such as voting, simulation and role playing activities may enrich instructional conversations. Through a task, teachers can prompt students to take positions on controversial, real world and meaningful subjects. As an example, a task may be structured so as to invite students to take opposing roles on a mock radio talk show (Zwiers, 2006, pp. 118-128).
Cognitively-guided instruction

Cognitively guided instruction fosters the development of learning strategies that contribute to students’ metacognitive development; they learn about how they learn. Students monitor their own learning by summarizing tasks, self-questioning, clarifying and making predictions. Hispanic students benefit from developing awareness of their knowledge base. This, in turn, helps them to better integrate into mainstream culture.

Cognitively guided instruction, allows them “to monitor their own instruction” (Padrón & Knight, 1989 (as cited in Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002a, p 10). Padrón, Waxman, and Rivera (2001) suggest that this instructional approach can be advantageous in improving performance. Through cognitively guided instruction, students “learn how to use cognitive strategies effectively, and some of the individual barriers to academic success may be removed” (Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002b, p. 13). For example, in the area of acquiring basic skills, cognitively guided instruction has been used in mathematics to teach children to problem solving. “Students are instructed in four specific comprehension-monitoring strategies: summarizing, self-questioning, clarifying and predicting” (Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002a, p.8). This practice is important because it is based on research in cognitive psychology, adapted from an information processing view of teaching and learning (Waxman, Padron & Knight, 1993, as cited in Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002a). It facilitates active mental processing which activates students’ prior knowledge. Cognitively guided instruction illustrates appropriate learning strategies and connects prior knowledge to learning strategies used to develop new knowledge (Jones & Friedman, 1988, as cited in Waxman, 2002).
(vii) Mentoring-based instruction

Mentoring provides substantial support for Hispanic students, as evidenced by numerous recent empirical investigations (Crisp & Cruz, 2010, p. 233). Among Hispanics, interpersonal dimensions are a factor in the success of Hispanic serving institutions; those are institutions with a population that is at least 25 percent Hispanic. Crisp and Cruz’s (2010) study validated the importance of mentoring of Hispanic students. The study had four components of interest: (i) psychological and emotional support, (ii) degree and career support; (iii) acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge; and (iv) role model and mentor. Mentoring is particularly important and beneficial among Hispanic students because it works on the acquisition of mainstream cultural capital. Cultural capital is often built upon positive role models that allow students to enhance mainstream cultural knowledge. “In many cases Hispanic parents are unable to provide their children with cultural capital, . . .” (Ceballo, 2004, as cited in Crisp & Cruz, 2010, p. 233).

(vii) Technology-based and contextualized instruction

Technology-based instruction is effective for Hispanic students, since it supports comprehension in the content areas. (Cummins & Sayers, 1990; Smilkin, 2000, as cited in Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001, p.8). Visual presentations with sound and animation, as well as digital books, are recommended for Hispanic students who respond well to student-centered instructional practices. Although technological instruction is in rapid development, it is used unevenly outside of schools. According to the U.S. Census (2001), more than half of white students use the Internet at school, compared to 37 percent of Hispanic students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 94). Poor and low-income
schools have less access to technology than middle-income schools. These rates also correlate with better educational outcomes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 96). Moreover, “too few Hispanic students are being encouraged and equipped to take advantage of opportunities in technical disciplines”, despite the large and growing number in careers of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) (Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008, p. 1).

Contextualization is critical in proficiency-oriented instruction, and technology serves to contextualize and support proficiency development. Digitized books, for example, can help Hispanic students to acquire pronunciation of new vocabulary and improve comprehension. Several library archives offer electronic reading versions of books. Assisted technology is a student-centered instructional practice modeled on ELL classrooms (Padrón & Waxman, 2001, Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008).

Part I
Summary

Part I examined the first part of question number four of this study: “What does research identify as key features of successful educational practices implemented for at-risk Hispanic students?” The effective practices identified as successful among Hispanic students at-risk are: i) culturally-responsive teaching, ii) cooperatively-oriented learning, iii) learning-centered communities, iv) instructional conversations, v) cognitively-guided instruction, vi) mentoring-based instruction; and vii) technology-based and contextualized instruction. “A culturally responsive classroom emphasizes the everyday concerns of students, incorporating them into classroom instruction” (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p.6).
It exposes students to other individuals and cultural groups, and promotes knowledge of mainstream culture among students (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a p. 6). Cooperatively-oriented learning is a social practice that enables students to work together. Social interactions and joint efforts to acquire knowledge contribute to academic development (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Small groups and student partnerships maximize learning by providing access to understandings through the sharing of opportunities and discussion of ideas (Padrón, Waxman & Rivera, 2002a, p.6). As students engage in productive personal interactions with leaders or coordinators, they are able to produce language, manage a minimum level of anxiety, and develop greater self-assurance and self-respect.

Among the practices mentioned above, extended instructional conversations are especially important for second-language-learners, since ELLs can increase their control of language by participating actively (Hinkel, 2006; Christian, 1995, Hakuta 1998, Duran, Dugan & Weffer, 1997, as cited in Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002a, p. 6; & Visher et al., 2010). Through cognitively guided instruction, at-risk students benefit from developing awareness about their academic progress, and integration into mainstream culture. Cognitively guided instruction allows them to monitor their own learning (Padrón, 1992).

In addition, mentoring provides students with direct interaction and role models, embodying the components identified in the Crisp and Cruz (2010) study: (i) psychological and emotional support, (ii) degree and career support, (iii) acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge, with a focus on life learning, and (iv) presence of a role model.
In conclusion, the techniques of *technology-based teaching* serve to contextualize and support instruction that facilitates learning in content areas. Visual presentations with sound and animation, as well as digital books, are especially recommended for Hispanic students who respond well to student-centered instructional practices (Cummins & Sayers, 1990, Smilkin, 2000, as cited in Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002b, p. 8).

Part II
Features of Successful Programs Implemented for Hispanic Students

Part II examines the second part of the fourth study question: “*What does research identify as key features of successful educational programs implemented for Hispanic students?*” The literature highlights programs implemented in the U.S. at the community college level, specifically programs providing training and innovative strategies for Hispanic populations at-risk. Meléndez and Ewin (2001) collected data on programs that targeted candidates qualified for the Job Training Partnership Act. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The findings were reported to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). Key features that contributed to success were grouped into three categories: (i) Offering comprehensive case management; (ii) Promoting student-focused instructional practice, and designing student-friendly training programs; and (iii) Creating links to industry and employers. These are examined in the sections that follow.
Offering Comprehensive Case Management

Several successful community colleges and programs use comprehensive case management to serve non-traditional students. Comprehensive case management addresses multiple barriers related to socio-economic factors, such as those discussed in Chapter II. This involves focusing on individual students and linking them to appropriate academic or social support services on a case-by-case basis (Melendez, 2001, pp. 6, 19). Case management attends to specific Hispanic learners’ needs by providing a designated person or persons responsible for mediating interactions with a college representative.

Case management has a two-fold purpose. It ensures that the perspectives of individuals and institutions are duly considered, while it strengthens diversity. Case management supports the students enrolled in certification or degree programs that targeted disadvantaged Hispanics. The programs evaluated in the study (Melendez & Carlos, 2001) “... integrated case management, counseling services, financial aid, and other support services into their work,” […] “promoting and fostering a group of identities for its participants” (p.19). These practices create a safe environment for student learning, a network for discussing problems, developing strategies, and dealing with individual situations (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p.19; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001, p. 8). Since many Hispanics value personal relations and interaction with colleagues, peers, mentors, and tutors, case management enriches social practices and social capital and increases knowledge precepts (Adamson, 1990; Capossela, 2000; MacDonald, 2000, p. 88, as cited in Squires, 2001, pp. 70-74).
Promoting Student-Focused Instructional Practice and Student-Friendly Programs

Programs and curriculum are student-friendly, designed in order to facilitate a completion of certification or an academic degree (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 20). Students receive social and academic support “dedicated” to better serve them. Another aspect of the programs designed to be student friendly is how they accommodate students and schedules and encourage staff to be aware of barriers to students’ progress. In addition, flexibility allows students to be able to transfer credits from previous institutions, even from other states or countries. “The main objective of program friendly design features is an advantage in promoting the integration of support services, providing academic support, and offering a work oriented education.” (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 20).

The learning context can be further enhanced using small discussion groups, handouts, and conversational techniques. “Teaching methods and other instructional practices are critical factors for success” (Camacho, 1995; Jlomo 1995; Kraemer, 1996, as cited in Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 26). Successful student centered programs are based on the learners needs, and specifically designed in accordance with industry expectations. Students are more comfortable directing questions to instructors, because they have been able to develop professional and personal relationships (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 20). Some instructors also organize small discussion groups. Mentors, peers, and academic tutors support students in the programs. Tutors discuss the material presented in class with students, while simultaneously developing personal relationships that enrich students’ learning experiences.
Creating Links to Industry and Employers

All programs utilized workshops to instruct students on workplace norms, mainstream work ethics, and behavior. They also taught employability skills. Some included structured internships as part of their program requirements. According to Meléndez and Ewin (2001), creating links to community employers was a critical common element among the four college programs. Continuous and extensive relationships with employers and industry heightened students’ motivation. Community colleges building with “strong connections to employers enhance the learning experiences and employment opportunities of participating students.” (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 7), which is remarkably important in a lagging economy.

There is a strong demand for Hispanics trained in various fields. A study by Gasbarra, Johnson and Public (2008) determined that there would soon be an increased demand for Hispanic students in technical and scientific disciplines. The IBM International Foundation interviewed Hispanic and Latino leaders in a variety of fields, inquiring about their views on training for at-risk Hispanic students. Findings suggested that there will be a need for 1.75 million engineers, a 20 percent increase from the current number. This demand for new talent exists in a growing number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers in American business (Gasbarra, Johnson & Public, 2008, p. 3).

Part II
Summary

The Meléndez and Carlos study (2001) identified key features of successful programs targeting at-risk students in four community colleges in the U.S. The features
that contributed to success were examined and then grouped in three categories: (1) Offering comprehensive case-management; (2) Promoting student-focused instructional practice, and designing student-friendly training programs; and (3) Creating links to industry and employers.

The first feature, offering comprehensive case-management, attended to specific Hispanic learners’ needs. It ensured that individual and institutional perspectives are duly considered while strengthening diversity. “These sessions created a safe environment for students to learn about existing resources within the program network and throughout the college, discuss common problems, and design strategies to deal with individual problems” (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 19; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002b, p. 8).

By promoting student-focused instructional practice and designing student-friendly programs, students received social and academic support (Melendez, 2001, p. 20). The instructional practices, programs and curricula were designed specifically in accordance with industry expectations and focused on students’ needs. These practices used discussion groups, mentors, peers, and academic tutors to support the students.

Finally, links with employers have been a critical common element among the four college programs. Continuous and extensive relationships with employers and industry encouraged students’ motivation. Students were placed in internships, and a number of them were later hired (Melendez & Carlos, 2001, p. 23).
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Due to the lower college graduation rates of Hispanic students, it is predicted that by 2020, the nation will see a two percent drop in per capita income (compared to a 40 percent increase in the prior two decades). States like California and Texas will see larger declines in per capita income of five and eleven percent respectively (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). For this reason, educational outcomes affect upward social mobility and threaten the states’ growth in per capita income.

Several factors contribute to the educational underachievement of Hispanic students of Mexican descent. The strongest risk factors are living conditions, family traditions, habitus, and the conditions of the K-12 educational system. These factors must be considered in the implementation of successful instructional practices and program features with Hispanic students nationwide.

Living Conditions

In the counties studied, the segregation of at-risk students, poverty and reduced social networks are risk factors that affect attainment of higher education. Families of at-risk students support traditions and core values (personalismo, familismo, respeto and confianza) that influence their ability to become mainstream culture members. Core values, habitus and traditions affect cultural capital and educational attainment.
Socio-Cultural Aspects

Socio-cultural aspects such as delinquency, and lack of social capital, impede education and upward social mobility among at-risk Hispanic students. Students tend to follow their parents’ work patterns, thus increasing class stratification.

School System

The quality of instruction and inadequate school facilities, foster poor basic skills development, further impacting the education of at-risk students.

Successful Instructional Practices and Features of Successful Programs

Several instructional practices are positive contributors to the education of at-risk “Hispanic students include culturally responsive teaching, cooperative”-oriented “learning”, learning communities, “instructional conversations, cognitively-guided instruction”, mentoring “and technology” contextualized “instruction”. Personalized, programs implemented with strong case management have been especially successful with Hispanic students.

Habitus is a factor in the pursuit of a college education. Some researchers suggest a correlation between habitus and the fulfillment of basic needs (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Others embrace habitus as a component of cultural capital (Jez 2008). This study reconciles both views. The underlying rationale is that at-risk students and their families often lack mainstream cultural capital or the knowledge of how the system works and what it values (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Habitus is the modus in which the family operates. Children do not pursue further education if their parents did not. As a result, habitus is a factor since students choose to support their families, personally or
financially, over self-actualization. It is clear that *habitus* can impede the pursuit of a college education for at-risk Hispanic students. However, further quantitative research is needed to confirm this finding.

“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.”

Leonardo Da Vinci, 1452-1519
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