

C: Christian Aniciete

D: Ms. Delia Perez

C: The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Washington County Museum and Century High School. The interviewee is **Ms. Delia Perez**. The interviewer is **Christian Aniciete**. The interview took place at Century High School's Library on May 19th, 2004 at 4:00 PM.

C: What has been your involvement with our Hispanic population?

D: Okay my involvement basically started back when I started teaching in California at community college level. But now that I am deeply involved or more involved with the Hispanic community because we are in a committee, a program for the Hispanic Outreach Parents. What we are trying to do is to educate parents on how we can become on how we can be more involved with their sons and daughters' education. The Hispanic Outreach Program basically what we do is we have meetings, inviting all of Hillsboro's parents. We come to meetings and we have speakers who talk about college, who talk about drugs, try to talk about gangs, talk about just various issues that certainly can help Hispanic parents become more proactive, more proactive with their sons and daughters' education, more proactive at home, essentially what we want to do is to build a strong, healthy Hispanic community.

C: Do you feel that the Outreach is effectively reaching out to the Hispanic population?

D: I think we're reaching out to many, many parents. Are we effective? Well we see an increase in parents coming to our meetings. I think overall what we'd like to see happen is to be able to reach maybe 200 parents, maybe 300 parents, and that would just be quite awesome and we would like that to happen.

C: As ESL Coordinator, what methods are used to transition Hispanic ESL students into mainstream classes?

D: I am not the ESL coordinator, that would be Ms. Saideh Haighighi but I am aware as ESL teacher. What I understand that they have done for students is they implement munoz is one of the methods or styles that basically kinda lets you know what level our ESL students. Now whenever we exit an ESL student, they would be exit from ESL 3 and once again they would take munoz and then we would also have a conversation with a teacher to see if the ESL student is ready to move or needs another semester. What we want to make sure the ESL group is that students need to be placed accordingly and make sure their level is appropriate.

C: So about how many years of English does a new speaker...

D: Well it depends. If we have a student who have previous academic background for example they've been to high school in Mexico or they went to junior high, their transition is certainly going to be easier and faster then they're probably going to learn

the language at a faster pace compared to students who maybe don't have a good, strong academic background in their own country and in their own language. That makes it more challenging and a little more difficult for the student to move faster so sometimes, it depends. We have newcomers, level 1, level 2, and level 3, a newcomer let's say a student with previous education, he will go through the levels quickly and mainstream wonderfully. If the student does not have previous education academic background, he may have to spend I'd say 1, 2, 3, 4 maybe 4, 5 years, all depending on academics.

C: So the ESL Program determines when a student is ready when that student is able to speak English better.

D: The ESL Program, along with the test along with the teachers. Several aspects that determine if the student is ready to move on.

C: What are the parents' reactions to the academic outreach programs provided for their children?

D: In general, parents are quite supportive of our outreach program. Why? Because they know if parents are more aware of what to do, how to become involved in their sons and daughters' education, know who to call, then it empowers parents. Feels good having a committee or program that's educating them and helping them to understand better the American educational system.

C: So, sounds to me, that the parents may only need to be aware of where to call and the opportunities around them to support their children?

D: Sure. I think they are happy to support us, as teachers. I think they are happy to support their sons and daughters. But the parents need to know who to call, what to do, to understand the dynamics of the educational system. For example, who will the parents call if their son or daughter are arriving late or they want to change classes or they want their son or daughter to be involved in sports. If the parents are educated and they are getting information, they feel proud about it and are very supportive of anything that's going to support them in their family.

C: And it doesn't matter if they only speak Spanish?

D: That's correct.

C: What type of feedback do you receive from Hispanic students?

D: Well, those students, Hispanic students, who are happy that their parents are involved, they are grateful. Those students who don't want their parents to know what they are up to and are not academically doing well, I don't think, I mean, they don't give us feedback but I think once they know that we're educating their parents, they don't like it too much because then their parents are going to have power. I think it's important, even though some people may not want it to happen, it's important that we educate them.

C: What are some reoccurring issues for Hispanic students?

D: Well, there are several. Some of the reoccurring issues that tend to be repeating among Hispanic students particularly are not passing their classes, dropping out of school, that's one of the biggest problems, biggest issue that we're trying to address with our committee, the Spanish Outreach Program. Basically, students not taking school seriously as they should be. I think that if they don't prepare early enough, they're juniors and seniors and they're worried about their credits and so that's a reoccurring problem or issue. The other thing is that instead of becoming involved in activities, they get in trouble. Unfortunately, sadly enough, teenage pregnancy. It is an issue that needs to be addressed and quite often, our Hispanic young ladies are pregnant at an early age and this is going to affect them, not in a good way because they could be missing their high school graduation. Something to think about.

C: Could these issues be influenced by cultural or language barriers?

D: To a certain extent, yes. I think if parents are more educated, more aware of the issues, more aware of their sons and daughters, maybe a little more open. I think that will help them. Does it have to do with cultural? To a certain extent. Culture is important and does have an impact on how your life changes and how your life is; that's part of it.

C: Do you think the students are perhaps having a hard time with their English or adapting to the American culture that's why they're not able to take advantage of the opportunities found at school?

D: If they are finding it difficult to make the transition, like 'Oh my gosh, it's so difficult to learn English, to accept the American culture.

C: They may feel hesitant.

D: In the beginning, they do, they feel hesitant, they feel like 'Oh my gosh if I learn English, I am going to lose my identity, my culture, my language. That's a fact. We all know that. But as the students stay longer, stay in our educational system, they realize it's important to learn the language, to get a job. So in the beginning, they feel hesitant. The more the students are more aware of the importance of education, they are less afraid of assimilating into the culture.

C: Have the issues changed over the years? If so?

D: Specifically, which issues?

C: Maybe, drop out rates, low test scores...

D: Hhmm, I think low test scores have been an issue in the 60s, 70s, 80, in the 90s. It has been a prevailing issue and interesting enough, it is still HOT if you want to call it. Scores are still low; we hope, one day, as a goal of the Hispanic Outreach Program, we'd

be able to close the gap. There's a big gap between test scores and Hispanic kids and Anglo kids and that's the reality and we have a lot of work ahead of us. These issues have been around for many, many years.

C: What improvements do you believe could be made to better address the needs of students?

D: More Hispanic teachers, more role models, parents need to start planning for their sons and daughters' education at an early age. Not when you're a Senior, Junior, I mean, this is critical. Parents need to be educated so that they can turn around so that they can transmit the importance of education to their sons and daughters so that they start planning early on in age and these are critical issues. And I truly think that if we want to make some change, this is what we need to do. More mentors more Spanish-Hispanic teachers. And educators, principals, districts, really addressing the needs of implementing personnel that's qualified, also materials need to be provided. More importantly, accepting, understanding that this is critical and how to resolve it.

C: What is the greatest obstacle for Hispanic students trying to further their education? I think we mentioned earlier, the, maybe, cultural and language barriers...

D: I think sometimes, themselves. They come to think 'I can't do it. I can't learn it.' Sometimes, they feel like it's overwhelming. But I think part of the greatest obstacle in the end, and not just for Hispanic students, but an individual, himself or herself. For the Hispanic students, it's a combination, a combination of not having confidence, a combination of not having enough information, a combination of feeling that they cannot do it, and more importantly, not having your appropriate support groups so that they can help them and support them and help them move the family.

C: With that, do you think that attitude is affected by their environment. Maybe they're not getting the opportunities that they'd like to have.

D: Ok, let's talk a little about attitude. Students feeling, 'Ok. I don't speak English. Therefore, no one is going to understand me and people are not going to meet my needs. Why should I go to school since nobody really cares.' I truly think that this is a fallacy. It's incorrect for students to have that type of idea. Number one, I can understand, when a newcomer, a person that just comes from their country comes to this country, you know, they struggle the first six months, the first year, it's a big struggle. We know that. Maybe the struggle for 2 years. But students need to understand that this is a nature of learning the language, they are more apt to be successful. Having the attitude, 'I don't care. Why should I learn English? I really don't like this country. I hate it. Nobody really talks to me. And nobody really is meeting my needs. They don't really care.' This is the feeling that people feel in the beginning, first six months, maybe a year. But I feel that after that, each student needs to start advocating for himself or herself, they need to advocate by learning the language, going to school, putting in the time, working on the assignments, becoming more involved, there's community activities that students can do. Language, to a certain degree, is a barrier for some things. But, we have other basic communication

you know..if you can see, hear, walk, talk...there's so many ways to communicate. I think at times, we do find students who get discouraged and they say, 'Why do I care? I don't want to live in this country. I don't even like this language or country.' This kind of depends on their home environment at times, the kind of friends they have, the kind of influence that they received as a child in their home, in their environment. Sometimes if they're negative, then there's a possibility, a student may have a negative attitude. I believe that if the home environment or whatever surrounding them is positive, those students tend to have a more positive experience and outlook of life. You know, we come to America, we come to improve our lives, and this is something that every one wants to do, learn English, improve your life, so I truly believe that each person should be advocating for themselves, advocating for a group of people, which is certainly something wonderful to do.

C: So you feel that there are opportunities out there. It's just a matter of taking the initiative for that person to...

D: Yes, I believe there are a thousand and one opportunities. It's how you view the world. Somebody may think, that's not an opportunity, but another person say, oh yeah, that's an opportunity. I came to this country...all my Dad, my Mom, my friends, brought us when we were 4 years old. I can tell you that my Dad took opportunities. My Dad's brothers took opportunities. They all had to learn the language. They are self-employed. They have worked hard to take opportunities in what this country offers. It's not easy. No it isn't. Sometimes, it takes 25 years to get what you're feeling comfortable and at one point, you would say, 'Wow. I took advantage of the wonderful opportunities America has to offer.' There are opportunities out there. It's what you do with the opportunities, it's what you do with your life. That's reality. We have opportunities. We chose to educate ourselves, my sisters and I, my brother chose not to continue with college, but he took opportunities to learn his trade, he's self-employed, he has a company and he's doing really well. He had to take those opportunities. So you have choices. You can either make things happen or watch things happen. And I believe that if you're one of those people that make things happen, then you're creating opportunities for yourself and for others.

C: What programs, other than the Outreach Program, are place to address the needs of Hispanic students? What we have here in Century or in the District...

D: In Century High School, we have our Spanish News, we have our Latinos Sin Fronteras, which is another, it's a club, and of course we have the Hispanic Outreach Program. There are also organizations out there around the world, supporting the Latino people, there are politicians involved in this, there's radio stations, TV stations. As a matter of fact, James Olmos is producing a miniseries, that comes out Sundays, it's called *Mi Familia*, very educational. There's Boys and Girls club, we also have summer programs for our migrant and ESL students, and it's out there. Many programs.

C: So the things you mentioned that we have here in Century, like the Spanish News, the...

D: Spanish dances that we've had. The Latinos Sin Fronteras...

C: Could you tell me the tactics, strategies, and policies that they have...like the Latinos...

D: The Latinos Sin Fronteras' goal is mainly to participate in the community, become involved, get other Latinos to become involved, to get back to the community. And to certainly have the best attitude and participate and be part of the school environment.

Now, in terms of our Spanish News, the strategy that has been implemented, is we hope to inform the Spanish speaking community what's going on at school, what's going on at school, and hopefully, they'll understand that they want included, and want make sure they're updated and in terms of the news. And more importantly, to let people know, hey, you know what, if you want change, if you want things happen to you, if you want your needs to be met, you have to participate. Basically the strategy is participating, making things happen, being part of your community.

C: Where do you think these programs are going? Do you think these programs are successfully reaching out to the Hispanic population of our school?

D: I think we have a while to get there. I think we need to work harder. We're working at it..the Spanish News...you know, we have a new team every semester, sometimes, every year. It's going to take a while to get there. You have to keep working day by day to ensure that the programs continue to improve, continue to better, continue to bring more people, reach more people. Basically, they're here, and hopefully, I am hoping that we can continue to improve it.

C: So you mentioned that we should improve the programs. Do you have any ideas how we can do that?

D: Yeah. I think, like our Latinos Sin Fronteras and our news, you know, interesting enough, we need a commitment from our Hispanic enough, you know, what do you want? How do we interest them? How do we get them involved? Another thing is school involvement needs to come from middle school, we need to start training our kids at a young age to let them know that you have to participate to make things happen. Sometimes, we find that our Hispanic students have to work after school so it's hard for them to participate, so I guess if we have the activities happening during school time, then maybe more will participate.

C: What is your role in the Tutoring Program here at Century?

D: Well my goal is to ensure that we do have an after school program. We basically have to sign in, find out who's here, how do we provide help, making sure that students stay focus, that they come after school to do what they are supposed to do. That we are meeting their needs in terms of getting the help and that they do feel that the after school program is effective.

C: What kind of assistance does Hispanic students, in particular, get from the Tutoring Program?

D: They get a lot of help with the writing, the writing and the reading. When they have to work on projects, sometimes the projects are the most difficult. Other times, sometimes they get help for Biology. Math isn't my specialty. But I do help with the reading, writing, with Biology projects, History projects, with Politics. That's where they're getting their help on.

C: Also help on work applications...

D: Yes, sometimes they come here and ask 'Miss, how do you do this...' and we help them.

C: Going back to the question I have asked you, do you think the Hillsboro School District provides enough support to Hispanic students, considering the opportunities and services we offer here, not just here in Century, but also other high schools...

D: It's hard for me to say what the other schools are offering. However, I do know that the HSD *is* trying to improve, they say we are one of the best school districts in Oregon in terms of providing our Hispanic parents opportunities to be educated, opportunities to be involved with their sons and daughters' education. I see really good things about our district. Have we met our needs? I don't know we met our needs; I believe that we're trying to meet the needs, every day we try to improve. I think we will get there in the next 5 years, 10 years, I don't know if that's even a good benchmark, but I do know that we're working to meet their needs.

C: Looking at the past, do you think we have made some improvements?

D: Yes we have, we have made an improvement, for example, especially the Hispanic Outreach Program. We have information that we pass out in our meetings telling parents who they can contact. We've made some great improvements, because now, in the HSD, we have an office of Hispanics and there's a person, her name is Olga Acuna, she was a teacher here, she's the Director of Programs. Have we made any improvements? Oh yes we have and I think it's going to get better and better, maybe in the next 10 years and we're going to see some really awesome changes.

C: So in the next 8 to 15 years, what do you see, what's your vision about Hispanic students that we have in the District and the programs that the District is implementing?

D: Well, hopefully the programs that the District implements are going to be programs that are going to help graduate more Hispanic high school students, reduce the drop out rates. We really hope that these programs are going to implement these. Hopefully there's going to be more Hispanic teachers, more models, role models that students can look up to, hopefully, we're going to see more professional people returning to Hillsboro, which is basically more Hispanic faces out in the professional era. I really hope that this is the

direction we're working on. I think this is going to happen. If we continue to have the group of people that are supportive, then it's going to happen. I am really hopeful and positive.

C: So the research question is: Describe, analyze, and evaluate the response of the Hillsboro School District to the needs of Hispanic students from the 1970s to the present. With this question, is there anything else that you wanted to tell me that I haven't already asked.

D: From the 1970s, if one had to analyze, observe our HSD, I think we've done some improvements. I really do. From the 70's to today, there have been amazing improvements in education, teachers, there have been programs implemented, health professionals, bilingual instructors, Spanish materials, programs getting to the parents, funds so that we can promote student activity. We have gotten better. And today, it's much better. Tomorrow, it's going to be outstanding.

C: Thank you so much, Ms. Perez, for this interview.

D: You're very welcome. Good luck!

C: Thank you.