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A case study of the process involved in organizing a parent-education group among Spanish-speaking low income families: "Nuestros Hijos" (Our Children)

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A CASE STUDY OF THE PROCESS INVOLVED
IN ORGANIZING A PARENT-EDUCATION GROUP
AMONG SPANISH-SPEAKING LOW INCOME FAMILIES:
"NUESTROS HIJOS" (OUR CHILDREN)

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the School of Social Work

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

by

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of The Study

This thesis is a case study of a group, "Nuestros Hijos" (Our Children), which was organized to provide parenting skills to low-income, Spanish-speaking parents of infants, toddlers and preschool children. The objectives of the group were to improve the parenting skills of the members and to reach as many parents as possible. It was designed as an educational parenting group for this particular population. Its organization resulted from a recognition that this population needed parenting skills, but would not, or could not utilize the available resources because of cultural and language barriers.

For the purpose of definition, parenting includes nurturing, guidance, teaching, sensitivity to children's needs, the ability to set limits and loving through the first eighteen years of an individual's life.

The goal of effective parenting is to help children to become self-respecting, productive members of society, capable of relating to and communicating with others with the energy, initiative and factual orientation to stand up for themselves. An effective parent understands self so that he knows to what extent he is capable of fulfilling

the needs of his child. An effective parent has:

The ability to organize,
The ability to delay gratification,
The ability to accept responsibilities,
The ability to make judgements and decisions,
The ability to tolerate stress and exercise
patience,
The ability to set limits and to discipline
appropriately and consistently.¹

The need for a parenting group specifically designed for Spanish-speaking parents was obvious. For example, a public health nurse stated concern over the nutritional knowledge of these parents, and that some practices had an adverse affect on their children. Problems presented themselves in a number of areas: education, social development, health, culture, language development, discipline, nurturing, unrealistic expectations, and an understanding of developmental skills.

If these parents were exposed to parenting skills, their self-confidence and self-esteem would improve. They would be better able to meet the needs of their children, and gain greater awareness of community resources. Thus, in assisting parents to become better parents, they would also assist in developing an improved understanding of themselves and the qualities which they must develop in order to become effective parents.

¹Elizabeth Philbrek, "The Role of Child Protective Services" (San Diego: The American Human Conference, 1975). (Mimeographed.)

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is a specific organization called Nuestros Hijos (Our Children). This organization came into existence in January, 1977. Since the first group was formed, several additional groups have been organized. Two have been terminated by plan and two are still in existence. The plan is to organize a number of these groups so that they will become ongoing in nature with a follow up support group.

Significance of the Study

This study has particular significance to schools of Social Work emphasizing the training of professionals working with the Spanish-speaking population. For example, San Jose State University School of Social Work has as its mission "the training of social workers to work with oppressed minorities, particularly the Chicano."² In order to work effectively with this population, a need exists to identify knowledge and experience which is of value in working effectively with the Spanish-speaking population. Review of the literature suggests that this population does not involve itself in group organizing and rejects group experience. Boulette states:

² "Mission Statement" San Jose State University School of Social Work Bulletin, 1977-78, p. 3.

On the contrary, there have been discovery comments, unsupported by sound research or extensive clinical experience to indicate that group therapy is inappropriate for the target population. Detractors make such comments as these: "Group therapy is a white middle-class approach." "It insults the distinctive culture of the people." "These clinics do not have the necessary psychological sophistication or the needed verbal skills to use it properly. Other critics say that if group therapy is to be effective with Mexican Americans, it must be modified; however, specific modifications are rarely offered.³

A need exists to look at Spanish-speaking persons in groups to arrive at an understanding of their behavior and abilities to use the group experience constructively. It may be stated that certain variables may affect how the Spanish-speaking use groups,^{*} but it is questionable if any ethnic or racial group would categorically reject the group experience since the family itself may be viewed as a small group. The group experience may need to be modified to meet the needs of certain groups.

Since social work itself has accepted that the Spanish-speaking population is hesitant to engage in organizing and constantly rejects group experiences, it becomes a matter of great significance to locate and systematically observe groups of Spanish-speaking people of low-income status who have become actively involved in organized groups. The findings of such a study may indeed hold

³Theresa R. Boulette, "Group Therapy with Low Income Mexican Americans," Social Work, September, 1976, p. 403.

*The groups were composed of Mexicans from Mexico, and Mexican Americans or Chicanos.

vast implications for the field of social work, and may dispel the myth that Spanish-speaking people do not actively organize. Any study which throws light on the organizational ability of the Spanish-speaking people and the conditions under which they organize should have vast significance, especially for those who will work with this segment of the population.

Identification of Need

The Public Health Department, Gilroy Unified School District, Gavilan College and South County Counseling Center offered parent-education classes to the community-at-large. It is surprising that none of them reached or focused on the Spanish-speaking community, especially since this community comprises the majority of the area's population. Professionals from Public Health, schools, Department of Social Services and Mental Health were very aware that a parenting skill program could benefit the Spanish-speaking parents. They were equally aware that past attempts at reaching this population were not successful due to the problems which were evident among this population. An innovative approach was required. This approach had to consider how this population could be reached, so that the problems with which the professionals were concerned could be addressed.

Parent Education Groups

Social work literature reveals that parent-education groups are not new in providing services to clients groups.⁴ The essential focus on parent-education groups is to provide education in a certain area to a group of people who have a common need or problem. Education is to instill knowledge so that those who receive the services can perform in an improved manner. Thus, a recognizable need existed, and the parent-education group was viewed as a vehicle to meeting those needs.

Possibly, the most difficult task which the human being undertakes in life, and the one which affects humanity more than any other is that of rearing children. It appears paradoxical that it is possible for human beings to receive education and training for complex specialized work, but education for child rearing is gained from generation to generation, or not at all. Parents are not trained in any formal manner for this role. Almost universally parents rear their children with only a smattering of information from an older, experienced generation. They learn by doing but this does not mean that methods are improved. Even though emphasis is placed on securing technological skills,

⁴Salvatore Ambrosino, "A Project in Group Education with Parents of Retarded Children," Casework Papers 1960, (New York, Family Service Association of America, 1960).

information for parenting is just now being recognized as a necessity.

Parents are essentially teachers preparing the child with the norms and expectations of his society. In this view, they are the first and most important teachers of children. The manner in which they show their love for their children, physically care for them, and attempt to stimulate their intellectual development have a profound effect on their children's readiness for worldly experience. The manner in which they rear their children also reveals the self-images which they hold of themselves as parents.

In the United States, the science of parenting is in its infancy. Inasmuch as the United States has possessed for only a limited number of years educational theorists such as G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey and William James, it has looked to foreign countries to gain knowledge of basic theories about the nature of man, his attributes and his needs. Some of these foreign theorists have been Jean J. Rousseau, John Locke, Henry Pestalozzi, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel, Maria Montessori, and, of course, Sigmund Freud and more recently Jean Piaget. Piaget, a Swiss epistemologist, has had a profound influence on American psychologists and researchers in child development since the early 1950's.⁵

⁵Milton J. E. Senn, "Early Childhood Education: For What Goals," Children, pp. 42-46, January-February, 1969.

Since 1955, preschool educational programs have been promoted with emphasis on cognitive development; it has been accepted that the beginning of intellectual waste starts in the early years, and research into the way the young child learns is growing steadily.⁶ At the foundation of preschool programs is the belief that education can lead people out of misery, as well as out of intellectual dearth, however, intervention must start early and be concerned with total personality development.⁷ Head Start in this country presents such an attempt to early reach children of low socio-economic circumstances.⁸

It is Piaget's view that experiences which the child encounters in the first five years of his life are vital and long lasting. He views the growth and structure of knowledge as proceeding over time, thus beginning in infancy and ending in adolescence. Human intelligence (or knowledge) begins with the phase of sensory-motor responsiveness. Because the infant is equipped by heredity and constitution with reflex patterns for reacting to touch, vision, sound, and kinesthesia, the infant's behavior is shaped by external demands imposed by the environment. The

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Edward Zigler, "Project Head Start: Success or Failure," Children Today, 2, November-December, 1973.

infant's response to these demands urge his mental growth.⁹ Thus, the stimulation which the infant receives from his parents can be a positive influence on his attitude and his development. Since parents do not always consciously know how they affect their children's development, this information must be conveyed to them. This need again illustrates the importance of a parent-education group as a way of meeting this need. In addition, Piaget states that the greater the variety of experiences a child is exposed to, and copes with, the greater becomes his ability to cope.¹⁰

In order for the above to be accomplished, parents must be guided and informed through parent-education. Primarily, parent-education groups are aimed as encouraging parents to lay a foundation for learning and to support the readiness skills of their children. These skills may be developed through a preschool setting, especially for low-income families.

Jerome Kagen, a researcher from Harvard University, observed that the distinctiveness of the stimulation, more than the amount of the stimulation, marked the difference between children from middle or lower socio-economic groups. Kagen concluded that learning should be fostered in infancy through a distinctive (not yet clearly defined) stimulation

⁹Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 9.

provided by parents and that all parents need education about this process.¹¹ These findings record the importance of developing parent education groups to help parents in gaining parenting skills. This need is particularly evident among lower income parents. A need exists for them to become more aware of their children's needs and how to meet them.

Development of Parent Education Groups Among Low-Income Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Gilroy, California

Many Mexican American children lack the basic skills for success in a classroom setting.¹² Factors which contribute to poor performance are underdeveloped language, inadequate social skills and poor nutrition. In the Gilroy Unified School District, a composite racial and ethnic distribution of pupils revealed that 52% were Spanish surnamed.¹³ A local newspaper revealed that the school with the largest enrollment of Spanish surnamed children achieved poor performance on test scores. These scores were part of the California Assessment Program administered in May, 1976 throughout the district in second and third grades. Factors

¹¹Ibid., p. 10.

¹²Julian Nava, "Cultural Backgrounds and Barriers That Affect Learning by Spanish Speaking Children," Mexican-Americans in the United States, ed. John H. Burma (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1970).

¹³Comparative Racial and Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Gilroy Unified School District, December 12, 1977. (Mimeographed.)

that influenced the prediction of results were based upon a number of background conditions including scores of first grade students, a socio-economic or poverty index, a percentage of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), youngsters who were bi-lingual and student mobility.¹⁴

A review of the literature also reveals that schools have failed the Mexican-American child. Joan W. Moore states that children of this population are receiving an inadequate education.¹⁵ She also states that the patterns of disadvantage are present even in the best school system in the American Southwest, and that there is no doubt that the parents want formal education, including education after high school for their children. Little doubt exists that the schools of the Southwest must improve enormously before they can satisfy these needs and aspirations. Schools are vulnerable to the demands of an informed citizenry. Thus, parents through parent-education groups can also become aware of their rights, and can mobilize to place pressure on schools to better meet their identifiable needs. This type of orientation falls under the social goals model of group work, and seems particularly applicable to a parent-

¹⁴"Local Test Scores Vary Greatly," Gilroy Dispatch, January 17, 1977, p. 1.

¹⁵Joan W. Moore, Mexican Americans, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 78 and 87.

education group.¹⁶ It was basically from these concerns that interested community people in Gilroy saw the need for a parent-education group. The formation of these groups will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature was undertaken to see if any similar group such as Nuestros Hijos existed among the Mexican American population. This review covered the major periodicals in social work from the years 1970-1977. These journals were Social Service Review, Social Casework, Social Work, Child Welfare, and Public Welfare. This literature review revealed the subject under discussion had not been dealt with in the literature. The journals contained articles on Mexican Americans in other areas. Boulette's article discussed group therapy with Mexican Americans.¹⁷ Ferris, Murillo and Hale's article on "The Neighborhood" focused on providing group services to Mexican Americans.¹⁸ Generally, the literature revealed an absence of material on this specific area under discussion. In this aspect,

¹⁶Catherine Popell and Beulah Rothman, "Social Group Work Models: Possession and Heritage," Journal of Education for Social Work, 2, 1966.

¹⁷Boulette, op. cit.

¹⁸Buford E. Farris, Gilbert Murillo and William M. Hale, "The Neighborhood, The Settlement House: Mediator for the Poor," The Practice of Group Work, eds. William Schwartz and Serapio Zalba (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

this study may make a contribution to the literature by increasing the information on Spanish-speaking persons and their use of groups.

Research Methodology

This research is a case study of an organization. The study will identify the process which the organization underwent in establishing itself as a viable ongoing group. It is essentially descriptive research. Descriptive research, according to Best, "describes and interprets what is." Best states,

Descriptive research describes and interprets what is. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of view, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing.¹⁹

This case study is a form of descriptive research. In describing the case study, Best states,

The case study is intensive and longitudinal, analyzing carefully a single case or a limited number of typical cases. A case may be an individual, a type, a group or an institution. The analysis is detailed and complete, noting change, growth, or development in the life cycle (or an important part of the life cycle) of the case under consideration.²⁰

Since this study focuses on a particular group, why it came into existence, the process which it underwent in

¹⁹John W. Best, Research in Education, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 102.

²⁰Ibid., p. 106.

reaching a given state, and the motivations of its members, the case study appears the most appropriate means of gathering and analyzing the data in answering the research questions.

Research Questions

1. The involvement of low-income, Spanish-speaking people in a group project is significant, especially in light of the assertion in the literature about their weak organizational ability. Since this does not appear the situation in "Nuestros Hijos," we want to identify the factors which led to successful involvement of these mothers in the group experience.

2. Is culture an integral part in organizing an effective group of Spanish-speaking people?

3. Does the group experience improve the self-image of the parents and result in their becoming better parents?

4. Does the group experience result in these parents gaining a greater understanding of their social environment so that they gain the skills to participate in social action?

5. What understanding did the group members gain of themselves and did this understanding result in a more cohesive social, cultural group with strong identity?

6. What is the role of the professional person in the formation and organization of such groups?

7. What are the perceptions of the members of such groups of the role of the professional person?

Groups in Social Work

Three models of group work are located in the literature.²¹ These models are social goals, remedial and reciprocal. The use of groups in social work does not focus only on remedial efforts.²² The group itself can be an instrument of growth especially if it is educationally oriented.²³ In this investigation, the primary type of group utilized is group education. In this type of group, the social worker assumes primarily an educational role. She becomes a teacher.

As mentioned previously, a view exists that Spanish-speaking Americans will not make use of the group experience.²⁴ Undoubtedly, every culture contains variables which affect how a group will utilize a group experience and their attractiveness to it. In our view, it is questionable if any racial or ethnic group would categorically reject the group experiences. The family itself may be viewed as a small group in which individuals are born. It is our spec-

²¹Papell and Rothman, op. cit.

²²Emmanuel Tropp, "The Group: In Life and in Social Work," Social Casework, May, 1968.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Boulette, op. cit.

ulation that group experience may need to be modified to meet the needs of certain ethnic/racial groups. The modification would have to be based on variables which are peculiar to the group itself. We think parent-education groups because of their primary focus could be used constructively with the Mexican American population.

Since a view is existent that the Spanish-speaking population is not receptive to the group experience, it becomes a matter of some significance to locate and systematically observe a group of low income Spanish-speaking people actively engaged in organized groups. The findings of such a study may reveal how social workers should go about organizing groups among the Spanish-speaking population. Thus, the implications for social work are great.

Chapter 2

LOCATION OF THE SETTING: GILROY, CALIFORNIA

Gilroy is a casual and friendly town surrounded by picturesque mountains. The population is 17,400 of which 52% are Mexican Americans. Its population engages in farming, cattle raising, dairy production, food processing and manufacturing. The town is located at the crossroads of the valley, only 16 miles to the ocean, 28 miles to Salinas, 40 miles to Carmel-by-the-Sea and Monterey, 28 miles to San Jose, 40 miles to Santa Cruz and only 77 miles to San Francisco. The town is a natural for industry. It is located on the main line of Southern Pacific and, in addition, is located on Highway 101 and Highway 152, the only East-West highway out of the valley.

Gilroy is presently operating under a new City Charter, written by local citizens, and is utilizing the most modern trends in municipal government. It has a 50-bed general hospital and also a 132-bed convalescent hospital. The town has 18 physicians/surgeons and 14 dentists. Three general hospitals are located within 30 miles.

The educational facilities in Gilroy include seven elementary, one junior high and a new high school; one Christian school, kindergarten to 8th; one parochial school, grades 1-8. Gavilan College is a relatively new junior

college. Furthermore, within a 50 mile radius are Harnell Junior College, Stanford University, Santa Clara and San Jose State Universities.¹

There are 24 churches in Gilroy, one library, one museum, two newspapers (Gilroy Dispatch and Valley World), one radio station, four banks and two Savings and Loan Associations. Recreational facilities consist of 2 theatres, a drive-in theatre, parks, playgrounds, golf courses and a public swimming pool.

The community has 60 industries. Food processing, seed production and research animals are the leading group classes of products.

Gilroy has three new multi-million dollar shopping centers that are on Hecker Pass Road. The estimated payroll in Gilroy is 25 million dollars.

Taxes have been reduced from \$1.35 to \$1.30. The city is without debts. It has a modern fire department with 21 regular employees and 25 volunteers. The police department has 32 regular officers and has a large reserve force.

Gilroy has plenty of water. It has five good wells that can supply 7,000,000 gallons of water a day, if necessary.

The sewer facilities would handle a population of

¹Armand White, "Gilroy," The Gilroy, Morgan Hill, San Martin City Directory (El Monte, R. L. Polk and Company, 1976) pp. vii - ix.

20,000 which is projected for Gilroy in the next four years.

The climate of Gilroy is one of the best in California. There is very little smog and fog. It has plenty of sunshine, which makes it a healthy place to live.

Gilroy has modern hotels, motels, and a good place to camp. Mount Madonna Park, six miles west of town, is equipped with all the facilities for campers.²

Gilroy is known as the sleepy town of the valley. It was given this name because of the serenity of its surroundings.

²Ibid., Introduction, p. ix.

Chapter 3

THE ORIGIN OF NUESTROS HIJOS

Some years ago, Goller stated:

Those who maintain that parent education is a valuable means of maintaining good parent-child relations and preventing difficulties from developing in this area, do so on the basis of these premises: (1) that the act of becoming a parent does not in itself provide the information and understanding about child development and parent-child relations which many parents feel they need to do a mutually satisfying job with their children; (2) that such a lack may be due to limited experience or knowledge, or to readily modifiable attitudes which interfere with potentially adequate functioning as a parent rather than to serious personality disturbance in the parent; and (3) there are educational methods which, as used by trained and skilled people can promote the healthy development of children by helping parents to make effective use of their children and themselves.¹

Goller's views were realized in the origin of Nuestros Hijos. This organization came into existence as a means of providing skills to low-income Spanish-speaking parents of infants, toddlers, and preschool children in South Santa Clara County. The objectives were the same as those stated by Goller above. More succinctly put, the objectives were to improve the parenting skill of the group members through a group experience. The organization wanted to comprehensively reach the Spanish-speaking community of South Santa Clara County.

¹Gertrude Goller, "Use of the Small Discussion Group in Parent Education," Social Work, 2, April, 1957, p. 48.

Nuestros Hijos had its origin as a result of unmet community needs. Professionals and community people were aware that the Spanish-speaking population needed some assistance in improving parenting skills and that this population was not making use of available resources for some reason. It was speculated that these reasons focused on language, cultural barrier and sensitivity. From this concern, a planning committee composed of concerned citizenry came into existence to deal with this problem. As mentioned earlier, this committee was composed of public health nurses, Child Protective Service, mental health personnel, Department of Social Service, preschool teachers, a community worker from South County Alternatives and interested community people. Since most of the planners had experience with the Mexican American community, a pool of knowledge was available from which inferences could be drawn as to how this problem should be approached.

Evolution of the Group

The planners, following deliberation, decided that a parent-education group would be a workable way of attacking the problem. The selection of a parent-education group was appropriate. Goller states, "The history of group education programs for parents is an interesting one because it records one of the earliest organized efforts to help parents in the specific area of their relation with

their children."² The planners also agreed that in order for the groups to be successful and achieve their objectives, they would have to exhibit the following characteristics:

1. Atmosphere - they would have to be conducted in a non-threatening environment,
2. Child care would have to be provided,
3. Transportation would have to be provided and,
4. A relaxed discussion format would be necessary.

The characteristics resulted from knowledge of the Spanish-speaking population and their socio-economic conditions. Babysitting was viewed as expensive and possibly presenting an obstacle to participation; again, transportation would be necessary due to the fact that some participants would not have a car and this would present another obstacle to participation. The informal atmosphere was viewed as less threatening and, thus, more conducive to participants.

In addition, it was decided that the group leaders, or at least one of the co-leaders, should come from the same culture. A qualification of the group leader, which was identified as extremely important, was that he/she be able to introduce information, in a basic, clear, unsophisticated manner and promote group discussion. The level of sophistication had to be such as to meet the level of

²Ibid., p. 47.

the group participants. As Goller states:

Because the purpose of this group is educational, not therapeutic, the group leader helps the group members focus their discussion on their children and their reactions to their children. Attention is given to what the parents feel and the facts that they react in different ways to their children's behavior, but not on the why of these feelings.³

It was important that the group provide a positive experience for the parents and that these experiences be geared to their levels. The focus was on experiential learning through discussion and examples, and not necessarily on interpretation of feelings. One approach was more concrete (experiential) as opposed to the other which was more abstract (intellectual).

The leaders selected had to have a belief in the effectiveness of this approach. He/she had to be motivated by the knowledge that a parent-education group has the potential for educating and assisting parents in dealing with problems in parenting in a positive manner which, in the long run, would be preventive. The preventive aspects would result from the parents using the knowledge gained with their children.

A decision was made to conduct the group in Spanish. This was viewed as positive inasmuch as this population had not attended parent-education classes previously given in English and no Spanish classes were available. Also, a

³Ibid., p. 49.

decision was made to limit group membership to parents of infants, toddlers and preschool children. This was based on knowledge that parents identify areas of concern more easily if the groups are organized for parents whose children fall within similar age ranges. This community of interest would be important in problem solving and developing group cohesiveness.⁴

Recruitment Efforts

Being well acquainted with low-income Mexicans and Mexican Americans, the planners were aware that this community would not seek out an educational parenting group. Therefore, it was felt that innovative ways had to be developed to successfully recruit the Spanish-speaking population for participation in the program and in the group. It was decided that to insure attendance and participation in the program, the participants would be personally invited to the group by the planner who had the most exposure to the parents of the children--the preschool educator or the public health nurse. This was suggested because the parents had developed trust and confidence in these persons. These individuals would serve as mediators

⁴Helen Northen, Social Work with Groups (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

between the leaders and the group members.⁵ The personal approach appeared a significant variable in recruiting members.

A brochure was also designed in English and Spanish to make the public aware of the existence of the group (see Appendix 1). This brochure was attractive, and explained the purpose of Nuestros Hijos, its goals, history, and El Arte de Paternidad (The Art of Parenting). The Art of Parenting approach was an important one. It suggested to potential members that parenting was an art, and that there was much to learn about it. This elevated the status of parenthood to a high level, and gave members a sense of importance, which served as a motivating factor for group participation.

The organization was also publicized in the local newspaper. This publicity made other professionals aware of its existence, and alerted parents to its existence. It may be stated that early newspaper publicity was not successful in reaching the target population.

Group Structure

The structure of the group was extremely important. It had to be structured in a manner that would be conducive

⁵William Schwartz, "Between Client and System: The Mediating Function," Theories of Social Work with Groups eds. Robert W. Roberts and Helen Northen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

to the participation of the group members. The following format was developed. The sessions were to commence always with a speaker. This speaker would discuss various areas of child development. Following the presentation, a "rap" session would be held. Refreshments were to be served. The refreshments consisted of coffee and Pan Mexicano (Mexican sweet bread). The group sessions would conclude with a discussion of communication skills applicable to child rearing.

The group was to meet weekly for six weeks with meetings lasting two hours. Child care was provided in a nursery room setting. Transportation was provided upon request.

The role of the leader would be democratic. He/she would assume the role of an educator and a facilitator to the group process. Indeed, the role of the group leader was crucial to the success of the group. He/she had to possess a sensitivity to the Mexican culture in addition to possessing knowledge of the cultural nuances. He had to be aware of the folklore of this population. For example, the importance of "un nino educado" (an educated child) which means that the child is respectful to his elders and obeys. If he doesn't, he is punished. He also is punished if he speaks out of turn. Knowledge of the expected behavior of children in the Mexican culture was most important. In teaching parents new ways of disciplining their children,

care had to be taken that the culture would not be attacked or abused. The parents had to gain awareness of the fact that they would be reinforcing their belief of "un nino educado," by a more effective means of communication. The group leader had to start where the group was, which is an important social work principle. He/she had to help parents explore alternative methods of child rearing and how to apply them in a true problem solving approach, giving them choices, and the opportunity to select the most satisfying way of handling their children.

Group Programs

Program selection is a most important aspect of working with groups and achieving goals.⁶ Programs are those experiences or activities which group members engage in as a way of achieving goals. Group discussion was the major program used. At the initial meeting, referred to as the convening phase by Margaret Hartford,⁷ the group leader defined his role and answered questions of the members. His role was to focus discussion on important common problems and to guide the members' discussion of these problems

⁶Lawrence Shulman, "Program in Group Work: Another Look," The Practice of Group Work eds. William Schwartz and Serapio R. Zalba (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); HarleIGH Tracker, Social Group Work (New York: Association Press, 1975).

⁷Margaret Hartford, Groups in Social Work (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

into areas for explanation. The leader offered information when it was appropriate. When the members required factual information such as specifics on a physical or mental disability, related to a child's growth, the leader would secure this information or refer them to resource people in the area.

The leader's objective was to help members explore alternative methods of child rearing. The model employed was essentially problem solving.⁸ It was explained that the group experience was designed to broaden the base of their thinking, and to explore different and, perhaps, easier methods.

The group discussed a broad range of subjects on parenting information--how health and nutrition affect a child's physical and mental growth and development, how to introduce good basic eating habits to children, how to avoid giving children junk food, how additives may produce hyperactivity. The parents also discussed the importance of holding, talking, listening and communicating with children from birth on. Emphasis was placed on how important it is to set limits, to give positive feedback, and how crisis in the family affects children.

Discussion also focused on how culture could be an

⁸Helen Northen, "Psychosocial Practice in Small Groups," Theories of Social Work with Groups eds. Roberts and Northen, op. cit.

asset in school, if parents viewed it as an asset. The responsibility of both the father and the mother was explained, along with the importance of relating with one another, of being supportive and enjoying each other. Other topics focused on the awareness of showing affection to each other in front of their children, the effects of reinforcing positive action, and listening to what children are saying.

The preparation for the group on the part of the leader was viewed as one of the most important steps. In preparation for the group, the leader reviewed material on communication skills. This information was furnished by an instructor who specialized in parent education.⁹ Outlines were prepared for all the leaders by the group coordinator. When more specific information was required on any topic, group members were referred to a resource person.

Setting

The group met at a community room at the United Presbyterian Church in Gilroy. This church was easily accessible and provided the required facilities for the group. The setting was often used by other community groups. The setting and the time at which group meetings were to be held were important.¹⁰ The members felt comfortable in the

⁹George Hinn, An Instructor at Gavilan College who specializes in Family Therapy and Communication Skills.

¹⁰Margaret Hartford, op. cit.

setting, and this created a positive atmosphere for the meeting. Babysitting services and access to available transportation undoubtedly were strong factors in the development of the group.

Chapter 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUESTROS HIJOS

A process is an orderly sequence of events leading to some desired outcome. The development of Nuestros Hijos into an organization is similar to that of the problem solving process. A problem is recognized; conditions operating in the problem are identified; alternatives are presented and choices are made. Groups such as Nuestros Hijos which start on an informal basis usually undergo a process of formalization.¹ Many reasons exist in formalizing an organization and some of these reasons will be discussed in this chapter. This analysis also will reveal the strengths and weaknesses which became noticeable in the development of Nuestros Hijos. An organization is goal directed and its continued existence is dependent on goal achievement.*

In discussing the formalization process of organizations, Chapin and Tsouderos make a number of observations.

¹Stuart Chapin and John E. Tsouderos, "The Formalization Process in Voluntary Associations," Social Forces, 34, May, 1956.

*Inasmuch as Nuestros Hijos was organized to achieve certain objectives and because people came together to develop it from a common concern, it is both a voluntary association and an organization.

They state:

The process of formalization was interpreted to imply a sequential stage by stage development of voluntary associations over time; an increasing complexity in social structure, a progressive prescription and standardization of social relationships and finally an increasing bureaucratization of the organization.²

In addition they state:

The age factor of an association is only a necessary not a sufficient condition of its structural differentiation and formalization; associations formalize at varying speeds. No unique time period of formalization can be established.³

In Chapin and Tsoudero's view, "the number of members and the continued growth of the membership is the result of both the success of the association in coping with its internal problem of organization posed by an expanding membership group, and the total adjustment or adaptation of the association as a functioning organizational unit to its social environment."⁴

Inherent in an organization such as Nuestros Hijos is a desire for growth. It must establish its legitimacy in a community and people must use its services. Nuestros Hijos has not shown any great spurt of growth since its existence. It also has not moved with any deliberate speed in formalizing itself as an accredited organization recog-

²Ibid., p. 342.

³Ibid., p. 344.

⁴Ibid.

nized by the State through a charter. It still operates as an informal group manned by volunteers. As long as Nuestros Hijos is dependent on volunteers for the provision of services, a serious question exists of how long it can continue its existence. It is generally known that volunteers cannot give the commitment to an organization which will insure quality and continuation of services. This is due to the fact that frequently volunteers must give time to other parts of their lives such as jobs and families. The time spent in providing services to an organization is sporadic. They do not have the investment in an organization which a paid staff member will have. The history of social work as a profession shows that in order to move to this status (profession) it had to replace volunteers with paid staff. The investigator also thinks that even informal groups must at some point undergo a process of formalization if they are to survive. They will need a regular funding source; staff to deliver both clerical and professional services. Volunteers cannot devote the time or the resources to a group which are a necessity if it is to grow and become an integral part of the community. Thus, a question which should be answered in this analysis is why did Nuestros Hijos not move in the direction of formalization? In answering this question, the process which it underwent in its development must be reviewed.

Process Review of Nuestros Hijos

As stated in previous chapters, Nuestros Hijos came into existence to meet an identified need in the community. Its founders were primarily professional people who met to develop a means of meeting this need. Their original motive certainly was humanitarian in nature. Eleven people constituted this core group of planners. They came from the professional areas of public health, mental health, social service, education and South County Alternatives. Three of the members were community people--one was a student in the School of Social Work at San Jose State University, one was a former social worker and the other was a journalist. All three community members are mothers who value parent education.

Following several meetings, the original planners established a board which functioned as a board of directors. In addition, they developed a Constitution and By-Laws. (See Appendix 1.) The board elected a chairman on a temporary basis and also a secretary. Monies needed for operation came totally from donations, the community and to a limited degree board members. The board members donated small sums to purchase needed supplies. The By-Laws of the Board clearly identified the goals of Nuestros Hijos:

Nuestros Hijos shall be a parenting group for low-income primarily Spanish-speaking families. The purpose of Nuestros Hijos shall be to discuss the child rearing patterns of the participants and

offer them opportunities to learn other methods.⁵

Goals Expansion and Conflict

Goals identified the organization's reasons for existence. Even though the goals were clearly stated and initially accepted, conflict soon developed among the board members as to the direction which the organization should follow. The board became divided into two factions. One faction wanted to expand the goals into the area of general education. They wanted to include speakers on a variety of topics such as wife and child abuse and alcoholism. The other faction wanted to remain true to the original goals. Following a brief period of time, several board members were opting for an expansion of program activities.

The board may be viewed as a small group. The group in social work passes through certain stages.⁶ The inability of the board members to remain true to the original group objectives suggested that the group had regressed in its growth. It had returned to a groping stage. A lack of cohesiveness was becoming evident. This lack of cohesiveness, regression, and groping revealed itself in many ways and weakened the group problem solving process. Some members wanted to initiate the process of securing a charter.

⁵By-Laws, Nuestros Hijos.

⁶A number of authors talk about group stages. See Northern, op. cit. and also Hartford, op. cit.

This process was not implemented. Vague reasons were given for not pursuing this area. One member suggested the process of securing a charter was a headache. Another raised a question of the expenses involved. Tasks were given to members but were not followed through. The environment in which Nuestros Hijos existed was a fearful one. Members were fearful of establishing linkages with other agencies. While the board members engaged in considerable brain storming, the inability to reach consensus in any area revealed a lack of goal directedness.

Attendance at board meetings was not great; the average was four or five members. Though the organization had been in existence for almost two years, only four parent-education groups had been implemented. Others were planned. The parent-education groups meet for six weeks, and then are discontinued by a planned process. At that point, one group is concluded, another is to be established. However, the last parent-education group was in February, 1978. By the middle of April, 1978 another had not yet been established. The time factor appears a crucial one. Continuity is absent, and this may result in difficulty in recruiting new members. Word of mouth recommendation becomes weak if a potential member at a height of interest contacts a group and discovers one is not available.

Achievement of Objectives

Nuestros Hijos achieved its objectives. It was decidedly demonstrated that the low-income Spanish-speaking parents were interested in learning parenting skills, and would become involved in a parent-education group if such services were available to them. However, the group's success was limited, and it did not reach a significant number of Spanish-speaking parents. This may seem strange due to the fact that the Spanish-speaking parents showed an eagerness to help, and profited from group members.

The failure to reach a larger number of Spanish-speaking parents cannot be attributed to a lack of interest or an inability to take part to engage in and profit from group experience. This failure must be attributed to organizational failure which resulted in Nuestros Hijos remaining at the informal level instead of developing into a formalized organization. This analysis strongly suggests that Nuestros Hijos was defeating its purpose due to internal processes, especially those revealed at the top level of organization, the board. As the organization is analyzed, a number of weaknesses became apparent. Lack of agreement among board members resulted in the following:

1. The absence of long range planning--the group operated on a hit and miss basis;
2. The inability to assign and delegate tasks to anyone with the expectation that they would be carried out;

3. A nebulous administration unit with accountability to no higher authority than itself. The administrative unit had difficulties in reaching a consensus and became literally immobilized in carrying out board policies through program activities;

4. The absence of paid staff which would carry out programs as a result of work responsibility, and

5. The absence of a regular funding source with little movement being directed toward locating any.

These were the essential weak points of Nuestros Hijos, and they had a serious impact on the organization and its functioning.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

Research Question No. 1. The involvement of low-income, Spanish-speaking people in a group project is significant, especially in light of the assertion in the literature about their weak organizational ability. Since this does not appear the situation in "Nuestros Hijos," we want to identify the factors which led to successful involvement of these mothers in the group experience.

This study sought information to several research questions. An important question was to identify the factors which led to successful involvement of Spanish-speaking mothers from a low socio-economic status in a parent-education group. Factors identified were (1) the personal approach, (2) the use of an intermediary, and (3) the removal of barriers to participation such as providing babysitting and transportation services if necessary. Additionally, the program of the group progressed from a simple to a more complex level, always starting where the group was.

Research Question No. 2. Is culture an integral part in organizing an effective group of Spanish-speaking people?

This question centered on the importance of culture in organizing a group of Spanish-speaking people. The findings did not reveal the culture was a crucial ingredient. Nothing was discovered which revealed that in the cultural background of Mexican and Mexican-Americans exists an antipathy toward groups. The fact that the groups were conducted in Spanish must be accepted as a positive factor in attracting members and maintaining group membership. Thus, culture, of which language is a major part, was revealed as a necessary ingredient for the success of the group. However, what appeared most crucial was to provide contents within a framework which was consistent with the cultural beliefs of these people. While it is not known that the knowledge of the culture was an indispensable factor in working successfully with the group, it does appear that it is a positive one and can accelerate more quickly the group progress. Planning and reaching the Spanish-speaking population, if to be successful, must be done within a framework which is consistent with the cultural values of this group.

Research Question No. 3. Does the group experience improve the self-image of the parents and result in their becoming better parents?

Question number three focused on discovering if the group experience improved the self-image of these parents. The answer to this question was decidedly yes. Comments

by group members illustrated that the group had positively influenced their attitudes as parents. When participants were asked if the positive approach to child rearing conflicted with their culture, they stated it was more a conflict with the Mexican philosophy of physical punishment as a form of discipline. Other mothers reported they were using methods presented in the group and found them to be successful. The group was a spur to further learning, and parents revealed a desire to learn more about child development and how to become effective parents.

Research Question No. 4. Does the group experience result in these parents gaining a greater understanding of their social environment so that they gain the skills to participate in social action?

This question cannot be answered definitely. However, we are hopeful that the group experience, especially the program which used outside speakers, brought to the parents greater awareness of the social environment, and how they can act on it if indicated.

Research Question No. 5. What understanding did the group members gain of themselves and did this understanding result in a more cohesive social, cultural group with strong identity?

This question revealed that the members become more cohesive in the group, and contributed positively to

their affirmation of their ethnic identity. A Chicana who led one of the groups served as a positive role model. Several members of the group stated that no one could acculturate anymore than they felt was necessary to help their children to succeed in society. We interpret these statements as being a reaffirmation of the importance of their ethnic identity, but also of the awareness that children need certain characteristics in order to succeed in an Anglo-Saxon society.

Research Question No. 6. What is the role of the professional person in the formation and organization of such groups?

Research Question No. 7. What are the perceptions of the members of such groups of the role of the professional person?

Research questions number six and seven are inter-related, focusing on the role of the professional person in the formation and organization of such groups as Nuestros Hijos. It is my belief that the professional plays a vital role. He has the knowledge to organize a group and to get it off of the ground. He can use his technical and analytical skills in the process of organizational building. His role is invariably that of a planner. However, in view of the problems which came into existence in Nuestros Hijos it appeared necessary at some point that this role be

re-evaluated. It appears desirable to seek leaders from the group, and to involve recipients in the organizational process. The recipients' identification with the purposes of the group and their involvement may be a crucial factor in the group remaining a vital one. In Nuestros Hijos, the planners also became administrators. It is quite possible that vested interests developed which hampers organizational growth and effectiveness.

The success of the group suggests that the members held positive views toward the professionals. They viewed them as helping persons with knowledge and expertise. They viewed the professional person as being interested in their welfare and established trusting and positive relationships with them.

The results of the groups were very positive. Parents discovered new ways of rearing their children. The following is an example:

Mexican or Mexican American children are treated permissably until they start to walk. After this age, children are no longer viewed as little children. From a very young age, they are being prepared for responsibilities. Thus, at age three, the children are exposed to much negative behavior which is a drastic change from previous treatment. Also, Mexican or Mexican Americans are more liable to use physical instead of verbal discipline. As a consequence, they find themselves in conflict with the dominant culture where physical punishment may be viewed as child abuse.*

*This information was secured from informal conversation with the parents. The investigator has taken the liberty of reorganizing it into a more coherent style.

As a result of the group meetings, the parents commented that they had discovered that physical punishment could not only be inappropriate but also ineffective. Some mothers stated they had started to use other methods which were presented in the group. They had discovered other methods by which to interact with their children, and were discovering they could be more effective. Thus, through an experiencing process, these mothers were learning new ways of managing their children. In this way, the parent-education group could truly be described as "a process by which people are helped through group discussion to broaden their understanding of family relationships."¹

It is an assumption of many professional workers that an educational program is geared only to information and takes place solely on an intellectual level, and that some of the format used in this group with the Spanish-speaking population was too sophisticated. The kind of program described here can be considered a form of therapy since its purpose is to encourage the expression of feelings and widen the experience of the members, as well as to have them talk about their ideas. However, since this group method makes no attempt to focus on or to resolve the individual conflicts of the members, it cannot be construed as therapy in the strict definition of the word. The

¹Gertrude K. Pollak, "Family Life Education: Its Focus and Techniques." Social Casework, 34, May, 1953.

members, however, may achieve therapeutic gains since the parent-education group goal is to help members increase their effectiveness as parents, gain emotional comfort and to help their children function not only within their culture but in a larger society. Because the group members are given a broader perspective from which to view their problems and are exposed to a wider range of emotional, behavioral and communicative skills, they have the opportunity to develop a greater capacity to make rational and wise choices. The interaction of the members provides the key dynamic to the learning and the emotional change that may occur. When members contribute their own experience and react to the experience and attitude of others, they are able to decide with some objectivity the position to take and what they wish to be like as parents. A chief task of the leader is to guide the discussions within the framework of what is relevant for the group and involve as many members as possible.

This organization suggests that this group method of parent-education is adaptable to this population. Although this was a brief and limited experience, the program appeared to have made the following positive contributions:

1. Parents experienced a sense of relief and support in sharing mutual problems.
2. Parents felt that they gained a better understanding of their child.

3. Parents became more aware of effective communication with their child and the importance of setting limits.

4. Parents became more aware of resources in the community and how to use them.

Recommendations

Groups such as Nuestros Hijos can have a tremendous impact on improving child rearing patterns, especially among low-income Spanish-speaking parents. Because of the barriers they encounter in the dominant society, Spanish-speaking parents need such groups. These groups are supportive and educational. A number of them should be established on a regular basis. They should become a part of the regular program of social service agencies. Education is preventive. If parents are made aware of the needs of children, it is possible they will develop more positive ways of meeting these needs, and future problems may be prevented. However, parents need a formal structure by which they can gain such information. The community, in recognizing this need, should assume a leadership role in providing services to meet it. These groups will open new horizons for the parents, and become a mechanism for positive growth. For example, some of the members enrolled in an English class at night school. Some members wanted the group to continue so that they could increase their cultural

knowledge and gain greater in-depth knowledge of parenting. They also expressed feelings of strong identity within the group, and found support within it. These attitudes suggest growth and a quest for knowledge. If the group had not existed, then the thrust for knowledge would not have resulted. Nuestros Hijos raised their consciousness to child rearing. Before attending the group, the members were unaware that parent-education was available. On this basis, a positive correlation exists between the group experience and individual growth. The members were able to use information gained in the group outside of it. It transferred over into other areas of their lives.

It is important to mention here also that the professionals did not become therapists. Their primary role was that of catalysts, educators, resource persons, and even consultants to the group. Nuestros Hijos is a group where growth should be encouraged, for it reaches a segment of the community which needs and can profit from its services.

APPENDIX 1

Brochure in English and Spanish publicizing Nuestros Hijos

NUESTROS HIJOS . . . a group
for parents who are interested
in successful child rearing methods



NUESTROS HIJOS

— the Spanish - speaking community
group dedicated to the art of parenting



The Art of Parenting



NUESTROS HIJOS
P. O. BOX 368
GILROY, CA 95020

You are invited to gather with other parents of young children to discuss the development of our children.

For example, what do you do when

your child refuses to eat . . .

your baby doesn't stop crying . . .

your child throws temper tantrums . . .

disciplining your child doesn't work . . .

your children fight . . .

At the Nuestros Hijos parenting group, you will discuss methods of dealing with these situations.

Discussions are centered on subjects of interest to parents of young children. Topics are determined by the participants.

Experienced and trained people are available for direction and guidance.

Discussion groups are held in Spanish or English.

Six parenting meetings are offered without charge to parents of infants, toddlers and preschool children.

Date:

Time:

Place:

Program: Health and Nutrition

Child Development

Communication

Education

Father's Role

Mother's Role

Culture

HISTORY

Nuestros Hijos was developed in the community by several people interested in a Spanish-speaking parenting group. Service agencies were asked to lend their support to the group.

I would like to attend the Nuestros Hijos parenting discussions.

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Ages of Children: _____

I will need babysitting for _____ (No.) children.

I will need transportation.

NUESTROS HIJOS . . . es un grupo
para p a d r e s interesados en mejores
metodos para criar sus niños.



NUESTROS HIJOS

— el grupo de la comunidad de habla
española dedicado al arte de paternidad



El Arte
De
Paternidad

NUESTROS HIJOS
P. O. BOX 368
GILROY, CA 95020

ESTAMPILLA

Usted esta invitado a reunirse con otros padres de niños pequeños para discutir el desarrollo de nuestros hijos.

Por ejemplo, que hace usted cuando . . .

su niño no quiere comer . . .
su niño no para de llorar . . .

su niño tiene ataques de coraje . . .

cuando le corrige pero no hace caso . . .

Venga a discutir metodos de tratar con esta situacions.

Personas con experiencia y entrenados estaran presente para dirigir y guiar durante la discusion.

Se ofreseran seis discusions. Las presentaciones son gratis, tambien habra cuidado de niños y transportación, si lo es necesario.

LA FECHA:

EL LUGAR:

LA HORA:

PRESENTAN INFORMACION DE

SALUD & NUTRICION

DESAROLLO DEL NINO

COMUNICACION

EDUCACION

RESPONSABILIDAD DEL PADRE

RESPONSABILIDAD DE LA MADRE

CULTURA

HISTORIA

La idea de "Nuestros Hijos" fue comensada por gente interesadas sobre el bienestar de nuestros hijos.

Se juntaron con agencias por soporte de padres de habla española para comenzar un grupo de paternidad.

Deseo registrar me para las discusions de Nuestros Hijos.

la fecha

el lugar

la hora

Nombre

Dirección

Telefono

Necesito que me cuidan mis niños. Tengo niños, de la edad de

Necesito transportación.

APPENDIX 2

BY-LAWS OF NUESTROS HIJOS

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this organization shall be Nuestros Hijos (Our Children).

ARTICLE II DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

Nuestros Hijos shall be a parenting group for low-income, primarily Spanish-speaking, families. The name, Nuestros Hijos (Our Children), indicates the concern of the group.

Since the Spanish-speaking population of southern Santa Clara County is isolated by language and, often, by culture from other parenting services available in the area, it is recognized that an educational and social parenting group is needed to serve this specific segment of the population.

The purpose of Nuestros Hijos shall be to discuss the child raising methods of the participants and to offer them the opportunity to learn other methods.

ARTICLE III GOAL

Our goal shall be to raise Nuestros Hijos (Our Children) to become strong, dignified, humane individuals.

ARTICLE IV MEMBERSHIP

Membership shall be open to low-income, Spanish-speaking parents of young children.

ARTICLE V ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

Section i: Nuestros Hijos Coordinators

Nuestros Hijos Coordinators shall be experienced and trained in parenting skills. Coordinators publicize, screen, coordinate, guide, and evaluate the Nuestros Hijos parenting groups. Two coordinators shall be present at each meeting of the group.

Section ii: Nuestros Hijos Board

The Nuestros Hijos Board shall be composed of concerned community and agency representatives who screen Nuestros Hijos coordinators, offer guidance to Nuestros Hijos coordinators, and serve as resource people for the Nuestros Hijos parenting groups.

The officers of the board shall be a chairperson and a corresponding secretary. The chairperson shall call and direct meetings of the board. The corresponding secretary shall notify the board members of regular and special meetings, shall write correspondence and, at the request of the coordinators, shall write publicity for the Nuestros Hijos parenting groups. The chairperson and the corresponding secretary shall serve for one year, January through December.

The board shall meet once every six weeks at a place designated by the chairperson.

New board members shall be invited to serve by mutual agreement among members.

Board members may resign by notifying the chairperson in writing.

ARTICLE VI THE NUESTROS HIJOS PROGRAM

The Nuestros Hijos program shall consist of six 2-hour discussion sessions covering nutrition, education, health, developmental skills, communication, role of the father, basic parenting skills, expectations of the parents, and culture.

ARTICLE VII TRANSPORTATION

Transportation shall be arranged by the Nuestros Hijos Board.

ARTICLE VIII BABYSITTING

Babysitting shall be arranged by the Nuestros Hijos Board.

ARTICLE IX AMENDMENT OF BYLAWS

These bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the board.

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