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## Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success

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PERCEPTIONS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES RELATED TO  
RURAL HISPANIC YOUTH ACADEMIC SUCCESS

by

Jill A. Goedecken

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Science

Major: Child, Youth, and Family Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Yan Xia

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2013

PERCEPTIONS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES  
RELATED TO RURAL HISPANIC YOUTH ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Jill A. Goedecken, M.S.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Adviser: Yan Xia

Understanding the struggles rural Hispanic youth face academically, learning more about their perceptions of positive youth development experiences relating to their academic success connects the essence of the two experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore rural Hispanic youths' perceptions of positive youth development experiences as they relate to their academic success. The phenomenological design was chosen to explore the essence of the shared experiences of positive youth development experiences among rural Hispanic youth in the Columbus, Nebraska, community. To understand a possible perceived connection between positive youth development experiences to academic success, 28 Hispanic youth from Columbus, Nebraska, participated in focus groups. Study participants suggest a link between being involved in positive youth development opportunities and their academic performance, specifically in a positive way. Results from the study suggest rural Hispanic youth understand the skills needed in order to be successful. Additionally, they describe positive youth development experiences as a method to gain such skills, using terminology reflective of their experiences.

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## Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success

Jill A. Goedeken, MS

University of Nebraska, 2013

### **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Census Bureau predicts there will be 128.8 million Hispanic residents in the United States of American by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2013). The Hispanic population in the U.S. increased by 1.1 million people between July 2011 and July 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2013). Hispanic immigrants have found a niche in industries where there is a need for low-skill workers such as meat processing (Saenz & Torres, 2003), dairy farms (Gouveia, 2006), egg processing facilities (Gouveia, 2006), and construction (Gouveia, 2006; Cromartie & Kandel, 2004), which are traditionally found in rural parts of the U.S. Saenz & Torres (2003) indicate that the majority (37 percent) of rural Hispanics are younger than age 18, translating into rural school systems and programs servicing this ethnic group. While there is research available regarding educating Hispanic children, there is a lack of information available on rural Hispanic youth. Specially, there is a lack of information regarding how rural Hispanic youth perceive positive youth development experiences as it relates to their academic success. While we know the children of these rural Hispanic immigrants often lag considerably behind their peers educationally (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012), there is a gap in the research to determine how positive youth development programming can benefit Hispanic youth academically.

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore rural Hispanic youths' perceptions of positive youth development experiences as they relate to their academic success. The study focused on what are the perceptions of the benefits for being involved in out of school activities for rural Hispanic youth in rural Nebraska. The study explored positive youth development programming as a catalyst for improving rural Hispanic youths' academic success. Since many rural areas of Nebraska are economically supported by industries that rely on a diverse workforce, the study is of value to rural educators in both formal and informal settings. Educators in both formal and informal settings located in rural settings may find it difficult to attract Hispanic youth into their programs. Understanding the phenomenon of Hispanic youth experiences could lend to understanding their level of involvement in experiences being offered in rural communities.

### ***Key Terms***

#### **Hispanic**

Hispanic is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as “1) of or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain or Spain and Portugal, and 2) of, relating to, or being a person of Latin American descent living in the United States.” This broad reference of this growing demographic is general tied together by the Spanish language, while other characteristics of the culture such as music, dress, cuisine, customs and beliefs, remain different from one geographic area to another. Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (2010) note



the United States Census Bureau is required to abide by guidelines set forth from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which utilizes self-identification as the method used in gathering census data. Race and ethnicity information is gained through two separate questions, resulting in distinct differences between Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. In terms of determining ethnicity: “Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2010, p. 2). Carranza, Knoche, and Carranza (2004) note the differences in self-labeling can involve multiple factors including gender, age, use of language, place of birth, how long they have lived in the U.S., and even religion. Given this knowledge, it is imperative to understand individuals who consider themselves as either a Hispanic or Latino and researchers of this demographic and ethnicity interchange the two terms. Hispanic youth in this thesis refers to individuals who label themselves as being Hispanic, either born in their native country or in the United States. Using the term Hispanic in this thesis was purposeful due to the usage of the term in Northeast Nebraska.

### Rural

Rural can be defined in many ways. Defining the term for the purpose of this study is centered on the idea of distance from urbanized area, as opposed to the number of people in a given area. In 2006, school district categories were updated by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), (Office of Management and Budget, 2000). All categories (fringe, distant, or remote) related to describing rural school districts are census-defined as being as close (fringe) to an urbanized area as 5 miles and as far

(remote) as 25 miles from an urbanized area (Office of Management and Budget, 2000).

In this thesis, the term rural is used to describe the Hispanic youth who reside in a rural Northeast Nebraska community which fits the definition of rural as defined by the NCES.

### Positive Youth Development

Borden, Keith, Perkins, and Villarruel (2003) define “Youth development, either positive or negative, occurs as youth interact with all levels of their surroundings, including the other people in their environment such as family, peers, other adults, and members of their communities”(p. 6). Huebner (2003) further conceptualizes the process and field of youth development by including not only the relationships built between adults and peers, but also the providing youth an opportunity to build competencies or skills as a result of this development. When referencing positive youth development throughout the context of the thesis, the focus will be on the interaction and relationship building that occurs between caring adults and youth as they participate in programs geared towards youths’ opportunity to build skills. The context of this development is primarily taking place during out of school time, however, some of this development could also take place during school hours in a traditional school setting, as well as in an alternative school setting.

### Caring Adult

The National 4-H Council defines the role of a caring adult as “an advisor, guide, and mentor” (2009, p. 32). In relation to working with youth, the role of the caring adult could be identified as an advocate, friend or supporter (National 4-H Council, 2009).

Additional characteristics of a caring adult include helping youth determine appropriate expectations for themselves (National 4-H Council, 2009).

### ***Significance of Study***

The relatively small amount of research is available to youth development and educational professionals regarding the impacts of exposing Hispanic youth to intentional positive youth development programming opportunities. The existing research has primarily focused on recruiting and retaining Hispanic youth into programs. This information is essential to any youth program; however it remains unknown if participation in such positive youth development programs will increase academic success. The importance of the study is further confounded by understanding the complex struggles rural Hispanic students face in the United States educational system.

### ***Limitations***

The qualitative method was chosen for this study because of the researcher's desire to explore the perceptions of rural Hispanic youth about youth development experiences, as they relate their academic success, as opposed to determining possible cause and effect relationships between the two experiences. Additionally, the researcher desired to obtain more anecdotal information regarding rural Hispanic youth perceptions of positive youth development as a way to increase participation in the Columbus, Nebraska, community.

The boundaries of qualitative data collection were not determined by preset questions, leading to potentially more in depth information from research participants,

however, there are some limitations to research of the qualitative nature (Anderson, 2010). Given the qualitative nature of the study and the small sampling size of participants in the study, the results of the study cannot be generalized throughout a wider population (Anderson, 2010). Additionally, qualitative research collection can be influenced by the skill level of the researcher, as well as the researcher's personal biases may sway the analysis of the results, discussion, and conclusions (Anderson, 2010).

Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) indicate a limitation of qualitative research includes information that is left unanswered by the study participants. Specific limitations in this study may include the lack of information gathered regarding participants' parental involvement in their education or positive youth development experiences. The study did not focus on the youths' relationship with classroom teachers and other faculty in the educational institution where they attend school, the length of time spent in the U.S. education system, if they attended pre-school before entering Kindergarten, their classification as an ESL or ELL student or participation in alternative school options. Another limitation of the study could be that only bilingual youth will be recruited.

Cultural responsiveness, in regard to positive youth development, is also a limitation of the current study. Literature describes how the positive youth development field uses a culturally responsive approach in order to recruit and retain Hispanic youth into their programs. A limitation of this study is that questions reflective of using a culturally responsive approach in positive youth development experiences were not asked during the data collection process. Additionally, current research lends a focus to gender roles in the Hispanic culture. Another limitation of this study is data relating to specific

gender roles including household assignments as possible reasons rural Hispanic youth do not become involved in out of school activities were not collected. Furthermore, it is also important to note that participants were encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable sharing. Thus, some valuable findings may not have been discovered during the data collection process due to the participants' comfort level of sharing their experiences or perceptions.

The researcher's professional role lent to relationship building with rural Hispanic youth in the Columbus, Nebraska, community, as the population that was recruited from for the study. The researcher took on the cultural broker role, leading to reliability and validity of the study. The professional role of the researcher lent to almost daily interaction with rural Hispanic youth in an informal educational setting. This relationship further developed an appreciation for the Hispanic culture, including a deeper understanding of their role in the community. Furthermore, the community has become to rely on the Hispanic residents as a viable workforce and a source of intelligent, excited youth who add vitality to the schools and community.

The qualitative nature of the study was essential in exploring the research question of the study. Specifically, utilizing the focus group method allowed the opportunity for participants to expound upon and share their views and perceptions about positive youth development experiences. This allowed for the true meaning of positive youth development experiences, as perceived by rural Hispanic youth, to be explored. The only way to learn about the viewpoints of rural Hispanic youth was to ask them about their perceptions.

Internal validity was established through a variety of ways. The triangulation of bracketing personal bias of the researcher, performing member verification, and the researcher gaining the trust of focus group participants was used.

### ***Knowing Thy-Self***

The framework of the study was based on the researcher's lens. The researcher experienced limited interactions with rural Hispanic youth until 2011. While the researcher values all ethnicities and diversity in general, growing up in a rural community surrounded by White families involved in production agriculture, there wasn't much opportunity for involvement with the Hispanic culture. At the conclusion of each focus group, the researcher conducted a reflective memo, noting her personal and professional thoughts, beliefs and experiences throughout the focus group interview. The intention of the reflective memo was to implement an internal validity strategy, as well as clarifying the researcher's bias assumptions of Hispanic youth.

### ***Delimitation***

The delimitations of this study are of particular interest to the researcher both personally and professionally. The boundaries of the current study include recruiting only rural Hispanic youth for participation in the study, as well as their perceptions and experiences in youth programming. The study was limited to rural Hispanic youth in a rural Northeast Nebraska community, as a way to better understand positive youth development programming opportunities in rural Northeast Nebraska, as a way to reach underserved audiences. Programming to rural Hispanic youth audiences has proven to be

difficult in some geographical areas of Nebraska. It was appropriate to perform a study of this nature, with a specific pool of participants in mind, in order to better understand the challenges associated with programming to rural Hispanic youth. The audience selected as participants for the study was chosen for practicality reasons as well.

The reasoning behind exploring the perceptions of rural Hispanic youth, as opposed to taking a quantitative approach was to better understand how and what the youth consider to be important to them. The researcher found this approach to be appropriate in order to describe the youth perception of the experience and the benefits due to their involvement.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In 2012, the Hispanic population in the United States reached 53 million, accounting for 17 percent of the entire U.S. population and the largest ethnic or racial minority in the country (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2013). Focusing on the Midwest and specifically rural portions of the United States, the growth of the Hispanic population is two-fold. Cippoletti, Kahler, & Valentine (2005) note the migration rate of Hispanics to the United States is the largest of any other cultural group when compared to White and Blacks combined with the trend of families in the Hispanic culture tend to have more children. Castro (2012, November) cites large families to be common within the Hispanic culture, contributing to the significant increase in the population of Hispanics. Conversely, the birth rate for Hispanic immigrants has dropped 19 percent between 2007 and 2010 (Castro, 2012). Castro (2012) attributes economic downturn in the United States to cause the decrease in birth rates during this time. Given the recent change in Hispanic birth rate, the migration of Hispanics to the United States is still significant.

Carranza, Knoche, & Raffaelli (2004) and Saenz & Torres (2003) imply little research has been published regarding the rural Hispanic population. To date, researchers know this demographic has grown exponentially, however, little is known regarding rural Hispanics population, particularly in the Midwest (Carranza, Knoche & Raffaelli, 2004). Specifically, there is little research regarding rural Hispanic youth's interest in participating in youth development experiences presented in their communities.

Multiple factors are considered when reviewing information regarding Hispanics' decision to locate themselves in rural areas of the country. For example, employment



opportunities and immigration enforcement along the borders of the United States and Mexico combined have increased the Hispanic population in rural areas, particularly in the South and Midwest (Cromartie & Kandel, 2004; Saenz & Torres, 2003) and specifically the nonmetropolitan, or rural, parts of these regions (Saenz & Torres, 2003). Rural parts of the South and Midwest have seen an increased need for low-skill workers in industries mostly related to agriculture, such as meat processing (Saenz & Torres, 2003) (p. 59), timber harvesting, construction and oil drilling (Cromartie & Kandel, 2004). Gouveia (2006) also cites immigrants from Latin American countries can be found working on dairy farms, egg processing facilities, livestock operations, retailing and small manufacturing. Looking at urban areas, members of the Hispanic workforce can also be found in construction, landscaping, housekeeping and other lower-wage positions (Gouveia, 2006).

The focus of this thesis is on gaining the perceptions of rural Hispanic youth toward positive youth development experiences as they relate to their academic success. In order to understand the areas of the focused research, gaining some base knowledge on the culture and how they interact with their rural White counterparts is imperative.

Family structure, gender roles and religion are all significant in understanding the factors that may encourage or prohibit rural Hispanic youth's involvement in positive youth development experiences. This information lends to the mindset that rural Hispanic youth may turn toward their families to gain experiences outside of school, whereas other youth may be more inclined to look into their community for other opportunities to gain experiences outside of school. Religion is held with high importance in Hispanic families

(Skogrand, et al, 2005). While Catholicism is the wide spread practiced religion, Hispanics may practice the faith differently, depending on which Spanish speaking country they are from (Skogrand, et al, 2005).

Due to the significant increase in the Hispanic population over the last few years, the effect of the country's evolving ethnic make-up is inevitably going to mean changes for our society. The Hispanic population can expect challenges in how society absorbs this culture into the U.S. educational system, political landscape, labor force, economic scheme, and every facet of how the country operates.

### **Challenge of Educating Hispanic Children**

Given the information presented thus far, what does it mean to rural school districts? Saenz & Torres (2003) indicate Hispanics living in rural communities are relatively young. According to the U.S. Census data, 37 percent of rural Hispanics were under the age of 18 and only five percent of this ethnic group living in rural parts being 65 or older.

Quality education is one of the largest challenges facing the Hispanic community (Saenz & Torres, 2003). Rural schools have the tasks of appropriately meeting the education and cultural needs of Hispanic children and their families (Garcia, 2001; Dalla, et al., 2006). Additionally, due to the United States vast growth in the Hispanic population, this ethnic group will be relied upon heavily for economic stability in the future. This will create a very important role in educating Hispanic children (Saenz & Torres, 2003; Nevarez & Rico, 2007), so they can become a well-educated and skilled

workforce in the future. The time and energy spent on educating Hispanic youth will be an investment to the future of communities (Garcia, 2001) (p.104). Carlo, Carranza, and de Guzman (2000) note that academic success for this demographic has not progressed at the same rate as the population.

A snapshot portrayed by de Guzman and Plata-Potter (2012) of education regarding the Hispanic population in the U.S. reveals this ethnic group is considerably behind their peers, resulting in serious consequences given the rate of growth expectations for continued increases in the Hispanic population. Additionally, given the lack of education credentials, Hispanics are poorly represented in professional fields (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). It is important to understand that Hispanic children and youth may be experiencing a gap in opportunity, in addition to the known gap in academic achievement. The work in this thesis will help define the anticipated lack of involvement in opportunities presented for Hispanic children and youth.

The role of educating children is often considered to start before formal education begins in formal school or preschool settings. When evaluating the effectiveness of Hispanic parents in regard to educating their children, assessment studies have shown data on this stage of life for Hispanic children (Owens, et al, 2006). Hispanic parents were less likely to read to their children and facilitate supplementary literacy activities, as compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts (Owens, et al, 2006). Additionally, in Spanish- speaking only households, this rate was considerably lower than White families. Economic, educational, and social resources are all factors in the practice of performing literacy activities and reading to their children (Owens, et al, 2006). Oral storytelling

may be the culturally preferred literacy practice, but not the common measure of literacy and language assessment.

Espinosa (2005) suggests culture can influence children educationally and socially in order to ultimately become literate and a user of the language. Exposing children from culturally and linguistically diverse groups to a variety of early literacy practices may not encourage literacy development relating to the generally agreed upon practices to boost academic learning and achievement in the U.S. school system (Espinosa, 2005). For example, storytelling in a native language is a positive activity for children; however, it doesn't necessarily encourage learning and speaking of English. Regardless of language spoken, resources available to the family play a large role in the practice of doing literacy activities in the household. The lack of these activities has been shown to escalate later in life in regard to reading ability and social and educational development.

### Preschool Attendance

In regard to preschool attendance, three-year-old Hispanic children were less likely as compared to their White and Black counterparts to attend preschool, approximately 20 percent compared to 42 percent of Whites and 44 percent of Blacks, respectively (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). However, by age four, children of Hispanic ethnicity begin to catch up to the standards set by their other ethnic groups (Owens, et al, 2006). Researchers cite the lack of preschool participation by Hispanic families is related to their cultural beliefs, cost, transportation, availability of health care to receive the

required immunizations for enrollment and lack of knowledge regarding the positive results from attending preschool (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

It is also important to note that even though Hispanic parents may realize the value in giving their children these experiences, living in rural areas may lead to a scarcity of opportunities. For example, this could include attending preschool, going to a local library, tutoring, and other related functions to grow their children's literacy and learning functions.

In addition to exposing Hispanic children to the English language, as well as social and cultural norms in an educational setting, this form of early schooling has shown to increase success on future achievement testing and even future job related success (Owens, et al, 2006). A federal program that is designed to assist economic disadvantaged children, Head Start, has increased the number of Hispanic children being enrolled in a pre-school related setting (Owens, et al, 2006). However, due in part to the lack of presence of Hispanic children in a preschool setting, they are often behind their Black and White counterparts academically. Furthermore, Hispanic students infrequently reach the same academic level of their peers (Carranza, et al, 2000).

When Hispanic children reach Kindergarten they are considered to be behind their non-Hispanic counterparts. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 confirms this notion of Hispanic children, along with American Indians, whose parents speak another language other than English at home to have low reading proficiency scores (Owens, et al, 2006). A reported 42 percent of Hispanic Kindergartners were in the lowest reading quartile. (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

### Hispanic Children Entering Kindergarten

Researchers conducted an analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 and found that teachers' perceptions of the Hispanic students' abilities were reported lower than the students' actual ability (Owens, et al, 2006). However, the gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students closed as teachers gained a more accurate perception of student ability over time (Owens, et al, 2006). Instructional differences altered for Hispanic student success could also be a reason for closing the gap (Owens, et al, 2006). Given the initial perception by teachers', students held lower expectations of themselves at the beginning of their educational careers may hinder their success in the formal education setting and result in overall underperformance (Owens, et al, 2006).

Espinosa (2005) notes that when children come from culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it is imperative for teachers and administrators to develop methods for working with them effectively. Espinosa (2005) expands upon this idea by suggesting teachers "to become *cross-culturally competent*, to develop the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity" (as cited in Hanson & Lynch 2003, p. 50).

### Education Gap

The education gap between Hispanic students and their peers followed them well into their elementary school years and continued throughout their educational careers. Hispanic students have the lowest graduation rate, when compared to the high major

ethnic groups (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). In 2004, 58 percent of Hispanic students graduated from high school (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). The national high school graduation completion rate was 85 percent in 2004 (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). Reasons behind the low graduation rates are attributed to a poor academic and non-supportive school environment, as well as a lack of cultural understanding (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

The Kids Count in Nebraska report (2012) reports 74.28 percent of age appropriate Hispanic youth in Nebraska graduated from high school in 2001, as compared to the 85.95 percent graduation rate of all age appropriate students in Nebraska. Underrepresentation of Hispanic students at post-secondary institutions is a result of the low graduation rate of this ethnic group (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

Underrepresentation is blamed on lack of knowledgeable regarding the admissions/enrollment processes and lack of financial resources available, not that Hispanic students are failing the requirements for admission into post-secondary institutions (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

#### Relationship with Teachers

Academic success for Hispanic students is tied to several factors. Owens, et al, (2006) indicate strong relationships between Hispanic students and their teachers are essential. The Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development studied Mexican American students specifically, noting the students who participated in the study were happier and believed their expectations were being met when they were not with their teachers (Owens, et al., 2006). The participants in the study also noted that when their teacher was in their presence, they believed their teacher favored other racial/ethnic

students over the Mexican American students (Owens, et al, 2006). The study also found white students to be relaxed, comfortable, and feeling challenged while in the company of their teacher (Owens, et al, 2006). Additionally, the white students felt like the work they were doing in school was important to their future goals (Owens, et al, 2006). The black student participants expressed similar results as the Mexican American students in regarding to their teacher being present, however, the black students believed their teacher provoked higher levels of challenge in them (Owens, et al, 2006).

A weak educational relationship between teachers and Hispanic students can result in students becoming disengaged and even withdrawn from activities in the classroom (Owens, et al, 2006). Hispanic students may lower their expectations if they believe their teachers do not care about them (Owens, et al, 2006). Ultimately, the Hispanic students will not realize the value of what is being taught and the implications the material has for future educational or occupational careers (Owens, et al 2006).

Due to the direct correlation between Hispanic student success and their relationship with their teacher, mentoring of Hispanic students is a large area of opportunity for school systems. Creating and maintaining a positive academic partnership between Hispanic students and their teachers fosters a mentoring experience yielding in success for all parties, including the student's family (Carranza, et al, 2000).

In contrast, when Hispanic students can relate to a teacher or administrator due to their racial or ethnic background, the educational relationship can aid greatly in student success (Owens, et al, 2006). Urban and rural Hispanic students alike can benefit from having role models at school who share the same cultural differences (Owens, et al 2006).



There is research available regarding Hispanic's viewpoints on education and the amount of importance they place on the subject. Many comparisons can be made between success in school and home life, particularly family dynamics. Owens, Martinez, and Schneider (2006) cite risk factors in determining success of Hispanic students early in the educational careers. Research is mixed in regard to Hispanic children being exposed to a language other than English in the home. Conversely, quality dual language instruction can mediate these negative impacts. Having a single parent family, living in a low-income household, and having a mother who has less than a high school education are all also considered to be factors in determining the success of students (Owens, et al, 2006). Success at school becomes much more challenging when exposed to more than one risk factor.

### **The Role of Hispanic Parents' in their Child's Education**

Several factors combined create the societal stereotype that Hispanic parents do not value education for their children. Traditionally, Hispanic parents consider the teacher and school to be experts in regard to educating their children and are not inclined to question their authority or interfere in any way (Shatrova, Smith, and Stern, 2008; Berube, 2000). Researchers have discovered this common thread among the Hispanic culture, which contrasts from what the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development discovered where Mexican American students, specifically, felt happier, better about themselves and more excited when their teacher was not present (Owens, et al, 2006).

Lack of knowledge and low socioeconomic status may also be contributing factors to this stereotype due to a lack of resources. Hispanic parents who lack knowledge of the educational system (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012; Marquez & Weaver, n.d.; Shatrova, et al, 2008), work several jobs, and are not proficient in the English language will give off the appearance that they do not value education (Marquez & Weaver, n.d.; Shatrova, et al, 2008). Additionally, combining several of these factors together creates less likeliness of Hispanic parents becoming involved in their children's education (Owens, et al, 2006). For example, if parents have less than a high school education and struggle with the English language, they will be less able to help with their children with homework and advocate for them at school (Owens, et al, 2006). It is important to note that the cultural views that may impact Hispanic parent involvement are not necessarily a deficiency, rather a lack of knowledge.

Hispanic parents who lack knowledge of the U.S. educational systems is likely due to the significant differences between the schools they are familiar with from their country of origin and the U.S. schools their children are now attending (de Guzman and Plata-Potter (2012). Furthermore, this lack of knowledge from experiencing the U.S. school systems themselves, may prohibit Hispanic parents from providing support to their own children's academic endeavors (de Guzman & Potter, 2012).

Shatrova, et al, (2008) also cite another possible factor in the absence of parental involvement in the Hispanic culture, which is their immigration status. Parents holding illegal immigration status will be even less likely to become involved with the school (Shatrova, et al, 2008).

Despite the Hispanic culture's viewpoint on education and the importance placed upon the teacher's role at school, the language barrier between Hispanic parents and American schools remains as one of the largest obstacles in educating Hispanic youth. Shatrova, et al., (2008) found translation of school documents to be done in a poor manner resulting in confusion and miscommunication for both parents and students. If translations were not available, parents were unable to read the information or respond in any manner (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). Furthermore, parents tend to utilize their own children as interpreters, creating a potentially already difficult situation for confronting teachers and/or advocating for their children (Shatrova, et al., 2008). Berube (2000) notes that sensitivity to cultural beliefs and practices is a necessity when schools are attempting to improve parental involvement of minority parents. This is found to be a delicate situation especially in rural or small school settings where the nonminority population is unfamiliar to a different cultural perspective (Berube, 2000).

Hispanic parents do in fact, place much importance upon their child's education (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012), even though their lack of involvement would indicate otherwise. Reasons for this outcome include lack of education themselves, language barrier, logistics, and lacking knowledge of how the educational system works in the United States (Shatrova, et al., 2008). However, Behnke, Diversi, and Piercy (2004) found that U.S. immigrant parents are moving their families to this country for hopes of a higher quality education for their children.

### Parental Involvement

While the reasons cited above regarding Hispanic parents' lack of involvement in their child's education are consistent among many research efforts, a comparison can be made between the Hispanic culture and the environment fostered in American schools. Hispanic children may be receiving mixed messages between home and school (Shatrova, et al., 2008). The Hispanic culture places importance on the well-being as a family as a unit, whereas individual achievement and a competitive environment is often encouraged in American school settings (Shatrova, et al., 2008).

Stark contrasts are also evident between schools in one specific Spanish-speaking country, Mexico, versus the United States. Making the comparison between this specific country, when the Hispanic population in the U.S. originates from several Spanish-speaking Latin American countries is significant due to a substantial amount (65 percent) of the Hispanic population reported Mexico as their home country in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2013). According to the phenomenological study performed by de Guzman & Plata-Potter (2012), noteworthy differences between the two educational systems include fees, expectations of parents and students, and language barrier of parents and students. In the United States, public schools are free to students, while Mexican schools require their families to pay "quota payments" (p. 97), as well as provide other tangible efforts (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). Given the culture of the U.S. educational systems, where students are highly encouraged to remain in school, families in Mexico are faced with the decision of keeping their children in school or sending them to work to help the family financially (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). The level of academic expectations were lower in the United States than in Mexico for

both parents and students, causing Hispanic parents concern of their child's education and lack of standards (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). Additionally, this specific concern regarding educational expectations was a concern to the parents of this study, as their children may be behind their peers if they returned to Mexico (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). While the language barrier remains a multifaceted issue between U.S schools and Hispanic parents, it goes beyond simple communications between the schools and parents themselves (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). Parents who participated in the study indicated that if their child demonstrated slight English proficiency, they were transitioned into the mainstream of students. The students found themselves not comprehending the material taught at the same efficiency as their peers, still leading to a language barrier (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). A general feeling of "ineptness" was reported from the parents in the phenomenological study; whereas they were confused regarding policies and procedures related to the U.S educational system, which translates into the parents being less equipped to support and assist their children (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). In summary of the study performed by de Guzman and Plata-Potter, Hispanic parents realize the their children are given many educational opportunities, however they are associated with struggles. The language barrier between the two educational systems remains the largest obstacle, often creating new and unforeseen challenges when schools try to provide solutions to this challenge (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012). Hispanic students' success academically will be largely impacted by the ability of schools and parents to work together in order to overcome these hurdles (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012).

Cooper, Denner, & Lopez (1999) indicate high hopes are held by immigrant students when they begin their educational careers. Parents of these children are hopeful that their future education and careers will be greater than their level of education and in many cases, their blue collar careers (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999). This optimism for educational and career achievement is often squelched by parents' confusion regarding which careers require college education and college entry information (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999). Furthermore, even before students reach the point where college decisions are at bay, they are faced with a pivotal transition from childhood to adolescence (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999). At this crossroads, parents of Hispanic children are faced with challenges of keeping their children on the correct moral track, which is very important to their culture (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999). Cooper, Denner & Lopez (1999) suggest academic achievement is part of the moral upbringing, which is valued by the Hispanic culture.

### **Educating Rural Hispanic Students**

Rural communities have experienced record growth in Hispanic students. Saenz & Torres (2003) indicate that the majority (37 percent) of rural Hispanics are younger than age eight (Saenz & Torres, 2003; Gouviasa, 2006). In many cases, Hispanic students have poor literacy skills in their native language that must be improved before English-language skills and instruction can be introduced (Saenz & Torres, 2003). Holes in Hispanic students' education can leave them lagging behind even more than their classmates (Saenz & Torres 2003).

Hispanic students have the potential to have a label placed on them upon entering the United States school system. Berube (2000), a common label to some students is LEP (Limited English Proficiency). The LEP label is used by educators to identify students who are limited in a full English classroom setting due to their background and inability to communicate (speaking, listening, reading, writing) (Berube, 2000). Another label, ESL (English as a Second Language) can also be used to identify students who speak another language besides English (Berube, 2000). While there can be an argument made for several labels in regard to Hispanic students and their ability to become active and effective learners in the English classroom, LEP remains the universal term (Berube, 2000).

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA) (2006) in their report *Resources About Rural Education* suggest finding and keeping teachers with professional training and additional qualifications to meet the needs of ELL (English Language Learners) students is difficult. The NCELA (2006) also indicates in the same report that rural school superintendent list a number of reasons for this shortage including isolation and the effects it has related to opportunities both professional and personally, low salaries, housing issues, and school facilities that are in need of upgrading. The use of technology or distance learning has been implemented in multiple cases to increase the effectiveness for professional development for teachers and learning for students, alike (NCELA, 2006).

### **Effects of Rural Hispanic Population on Rural Nebraska Schools**

Nebraska has witnessed significant increases in Hispanic immigrants, namely in rural communities across the state. This influx of immigrants has produced a complex issue of rural school districts attempting to provide adequate services to the children of these Hispanic immigrants. Nebraska has seen a 1,000 percentage increase in LEP students in the past decade (Dalla et al., 2006). In the 2011-2012 school year, 6.47 percent of Nebraska students were English Language Learners (ELL) (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012). Another measure of immigrant student growth in *The State of Schools Report 2011-2012*, reports there were 49,331 Hispanic students during the 2011-2012 school year (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012). Hamann and Reeves (2008) indicate that as the number of Hispanic students continues to grow, the number of Hispanic teachers does not. Dalla et al. (2006) indicate this issue is not isolated to Nebraska or even the Midwest, but is a nation-wide issue in regard to meeting academic achievement levels.

The data that implicitly leads to Hispanic students' performance is the state wide writing assessment given to 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, & 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, as it is the only assessment data that also reports race and ethnicity, in addition to performance (Hamann & Reeves, 2008). The data indicates that an overwhelming 27.50% of Hispanic 4<sup>th</sup> graders, 21.61% of Hispanic 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 22.61% Hispanic 11<sup>th</sup> graders failed to meet the writing assessment standards in the 2005-2006 school year (Hamann & Reeves, 2008).

Hamann and Reeves (2008) also suggest that while Hispanic students are not guaranteed to excel academically if instructed by a Hispanic teacher, however, a teacher's ability to know, understand and appreciate a student's cultural background is essential if



teacher and student backgrounds differ. If Nebraska schools do not have an influx of Hispanic teachers to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic student population, how do teachers become prepared for this challenge? Hamann and Reeves (2008) report that teacher education, namely at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, fail to equip teachers for the dramatic changes in the school district demographics. Limited professional development opportunities have been created in response to this need (Hamann & Reeves, 2008). The only formal response to date is the creation of the English as a second language (ESL) endorsement, which is not required for all teachers in school districts of Hispanic students (Hamann & Reeves, 2008).

Communities in Nebraska have demonstrated mixed reactions to the influx of English as a second language (ESL) and students labeled as English language learners (ELL). Many rural school districts have struggled to provide enough qualified teachers and facilities to serve the ESL programs and the Hispanic student population in general (Gouvias, 2006). In response to the significant increase in ESL programs in rural school districts, local colleges began to offer certification classes for teachers to gain knowledge needed to facilitate these programs (Gouvias, 2006). The Nebraska Department of Education has responded to the increase of ESL students by offering more technical assistance to the districts (Gouvias, 2006).

The struggle for additional funds to educate ELL students has shifted from a specific school district issue to a state wide legislative matter (Gouvias, 2006).

### **Positive Youth Development Opportunities for Rural Hispanic Youth**

It is known that Hispanic students lag behind their peer academically due to a number of factors. One of the factors behind Hispanic students' lack of academic success is their parents deficiency in understanding the educational system in the United States (de Guzman & Plata-Potter, 2012; Weaver & Marquez, n.d.; Shatrova, et al, 2008). High school drop-out rates for Hispanic youth have proven to increase, as a result from their consistent academic performance below that of their peers. A stark example of the effects of academic deficiency for Hispanic youth is exhibited by the United States Department of Education's Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2010), citing almost 33 percent of 16 to 24 year olds Hispanic young adults who were born outside of the United States were labeled as high school drop-outs in 2008. Glennie and Stearns (2002) attribute the drop-out rate of Hispanic students to academic, family, and employment reasons, as well as unknown reasons. Hispanic students who drop-out of school due to moving and without other indication of them continuing their education in another location are categorized as unknown (Glennie & Stearns, 2002).

However, Hispanic youth who were born in the United States showed lower drop-out rates, with "first generation" Hispanic youth recording a 10.5 percent rate of not successfully completing high school coursework, while the "second generation" Hispanic youth recorded a 10.8 percent (United States Department of Education NCES, 2010). The economic consequences of this number are substantial, when taking into consideration the amount of money lost by school districts from which the Hispanic students are enrolled in such programs and ultimately remove themselves from school as well as the

potential vocational loss of uneducated and unskilled employees when these youth begin to enter the workforce (Behnke, Diversi, and Piercy, 2004).

School districts, both urban and rural, who may find themselves unprepared to educate the growing Hispanic student population, have since implemented programs to help bring balance between Hispanic students and their peers on the academic playing field. The drop-out rates for Hispanic students demonstrate these programs may not be the academic answer for each Hispanic student struggling in the United States educational system.

Existing research fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of which resources would aid rural Hispanic students to overcome the academic obstacles they face in the United States educational system. One resource that has not been explored in much depth is positive youth development programming in assisting rural Hispanic youth's academic success. Rural Hispanic youth are subject to a unique set of educational hurdles that separate themselves from their white counterparts even before entering the U.S. school systems. Examining how positive youth development programming can improve their academic success can prove useful for professional in the youth development field, as well as teachers, administrators, and supporters of youth development programming.

Some youth development professionals have begun to increase the involvement of Hispanic youth in their existing programs. Those working in Extension, particularly with the 4-H program, have begun to integrate Hispanic youth by reflecting their programming efforts to respect the Hispanic culture's values, beliefs and traditions (Hobbs, 2004).

Many Extension staff members who work with Hispanic youth and families have

discovered that using a family approach and integrating the Spanish language to delivering programs is key, as valued by the Hispanic culture (Hobbs, 2004).

Anguiano (2001) highlights a program called Planting Seeds Family Enrichment Program (PSFEP) in which rural Hispanic families in North Carolina participate in an extensive one day program focusing several areas including wellness, skills in community development and leadership, as well as building strong families. The outcomes of the event focused on the need for many resources, including bilingual dietitians, facilitators, available child care and transportation and a focus on families (Anguiano, 2001).

Another successful example of integrating Hispanic youth into youth development programs is demonstrated by the Oregon 4-H Latino Outreach Program. Hobbs and Sawyer (2009) report the hallmarks of a successful Hispanic youth development program are focused on staff being culturally responsive. In order to build a program that was responsive to the Hispanic culture, programming staff spent a great deal of time with youth in which they shared their dreams and visions for the future (Hobbs & Sawyer, 2009). In return the staff portrayed how 4-H could play a role in achieving those interests (Hobbs & Sawyer, 2009). The report of the Oregon 4-H Latino Outreach Program also notes that personal invitation, after staff spent considerable time getting to know the prospective youth, was the most effective way to recruit Hispanic youth into the program (Hobbs & Sawyer, 2009).

Using a culturally responsive approach to recruit and retain Hispanic youth in positive youth development programs builds on the Hispanic culture's focus of

familismo, or a belief system of loyalty, reciprocity, and unity towards all members of the family (Asencio, Carlson, Harwood, Leyendecker, and Miller, 2002). It is also important to note Hispanic families have larger social networks containing more family members than European Americans (Asencio, et al, 2002). These combined reasons can have influence on a Hispanic youth decision to participate in positive youth development experiences.

Some youth development professionals have attempted a family based delivery approach to their program in an effort to become more cultural responsive. In regard to adjusting to a family based delivery approach, there are more members of the family that would benefit from the programs that Extension, in particular could offer. Rural communities have attracted Hispanic immigrants due to the industries requiring low skill workers such as meat processing (Saenz & Torres, 2003), dairy farms (Gouveia, 2006), egg processing facilities (Gouveia, 2006), and construction (Gouveia, 2006; Cromartie & Kandel, 2004). Anguiano (2001) indicates Hispanic immigrants have begun to be more involved in local economies versus simply fulfilling a need for low-skill workers and more in roles of small business owners and active community members as the Hispanic immigrant population continues to grow.

Hispanics already lag behind their peers, which can lead to significant consequences to their academic performance over the duration of their academic careers. Nonetheless, some examples of programs are emerging that have utilized specific techniques to make the programs more viable for Hispanic audiences. Additionally, plenty of research describes the complex nature of educating Hispanic youth; however

more is needed regarding rural Hispanic youth specifically. The information presented in the literature review section of this thesis presents a variety of situational characteristics to describe rural Hispanic youth. However, still what is lacking is the information regarding the role of positive youth development experiences and how these experiences could enable rural Hispanic youth to perform better in traditional educational settings.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### *Study Design*

The study focused on what are the youth's perceptions of the benefits for being involved in out of school activities for rural Hispanic youth in Columbus, Nebraska. Qualitative approach was used in this study, utilizing a phenomenological research design. Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) describe the phenomenological research design as the method used by the researcher to collect information in order to learn about and describe key characteristics of a single phenomenon experienced by several individuals. In this study, perceptions of positive youth development experiences of rural Hispanic youth contributed to their academic success were explored through focus groups. Particularly, the pivotal data focused on rural Hispanic youth's experience, or the perceived experiences of others, related to developing skills led by a caring adult and how these experiences affect their attitudes, participation, and academic performance.

Grbich (2013) describes the phenomenology design as combining what is present or actually happening with what is perceived as happening, in order to determine possible meanings between the combination of both real and perceived experiences. Understanding the combination of both real and perceived experiences is important in this study, since it was not a requirement to have participated in a positive youth development opportunity in order to participate.

The phenomenological design was chosen to explore the essence of the shared experiences of positive youth development among Hispanic youth in a rural Northeast

Nebraska community. Youth participants shared their positive youth development experiences and how these experiences could aid them to achieve academic success. The knowledge gained from this study would inform youth professionals why Hispanic youth in rural Nebraska were involved in out of school programs and how the involvement in positive youth development programs benefits Hispanic youth in their academic success and further informs why offering additional academic assistance to rural Hispanic youth is important.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Permission to conduct the study was applied for and approved from the Institutional Research Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). Approval for the study was granted in June of 2013. The IRB approval number for the study is 20130613490EP. See the approval letter in Appendix A.

Focus groups were used for the data collection because the goal of the research was “to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2010, p. 258). The focus groups allowed for the sharing of non-sensitive information, in groups of up to eight Hispanic youth. Additionally, the focus group style of data collection enabled the researcher to ask general questions about thoughts and perceptions from the entire group. The researcher ensured the participants in the focus groups understand that there was no right or wrong answer. Confidentiality was emphasized as an important ground rule. The researcher emphasized the importance of understanding that what was said during the focus group was not guaranteed to be kept confidential. However the specific identity of participants



was kept confidential by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher also emphasized the necessity to respect other participants' comments and willingness to share during the focus group. A focus group protocol form can be found in Appendix F. A total of five focus groups were conducted as part of the study. All focus groups took place in public elementary, middle school, and junior/senior high schools in a rural Northeast Nebraska community. Permission was sought and granted from administration at each respective building. Parental consent (see Appendix C) and youth assent (see Appendix D) were both secured prior to the youths' participation in the focus groups. The parental consent form was translated into Spanish for non-bilingual parents (see Appendix E). The focus groups were conducted during a 10 week period, beginning in June of 2013 and ending in September 2013.

### ***Participants***

Participants were recruited through two approaches. The homogenous sampling approach and snowball sampling approach of purposeful sampling as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) were implemented to identify study participants. The focus groups were open to all Hispanic youth ages 11-16 years of age, regardless of their current involvement in youth development activities. Participants were required to be able to speak English, returned the signed youth assent and parental consent forms, as well as live in the rural Northeast Nebraska community. See Appendix F for a sample of the recruitment flyer. Participants were identified utilizing the recommendation of teachers, school administration, adult leaders of youth development organizations, and peers to recruit participants.

Once participants were identified and permission to contact them was given from their teacher or administrator, the researcher met with the students to explain the study, the benefits to them for participating and what would be discussed during the focus groups. Students who were interested in participating were given the parental consent form and the youth assent form to take home and return the day of the focus group. The initial meeting with potential focus group participants generally took place one day prior the focus groups. Funding was secured from UNL-Extension Northeast Extension and Research District's youth development fund. The funds were used to provide food and drinks to the participants during the focus group.

Approximately 200 rural Hispanic youth ages 11-14 (grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>) who reside in the targeted rural Nebraska community, were presented with the opportunity to participate in the study. About 100 of the potential youth participants expressed interests in participation and took a parental consent form to be signed. Finally, 28 of the recruited youth returned signed parental consent forms and participated in the study. These youth were recruited through teachers and administrators at the local schools. A total of 28 Hispanic youth, i.e. 12 boys and 16 girls, participated in the study. Age, gender and socio-economic status (SES) information was gathered via a demographic survey. The survey was completed by the focus group participants immediately prior to beginning the focus groups. A sample of the survey can be found in Appendix G.

Table 1 provides a summary of participants' self-identification, which was also collected via the demographic survey. Participants had the option of seven different self-identification choices provided on the survey. Additionally, participants were asked if

they were involved in any activities outside of school. Ten participants self-reported being involved in activities outside of school and 18 participants reported not being involved outside of school.

Table 1

*Demographic Summary of Participants*

Ethnicity	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
South American	1	4%
Mexican/Mexican American	23	82%
Multi-Racial	1	4%
Other	1	4%
Declined to report	2	7%
Total	28	100%

Age information from the participants was also gathered via the demographic survey. Table 2 provides a summary of the age groups represented in the focus groups. The average age of participants was 12 years of age, the mode age was also 12 years of age, and the stand deviation of participants was 1.05.

Table 2

*Age Summary of Participants*

Age	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total Focus Group Participants
11	6	21%

12	12	43%
13	6	21%
14	3	11%
15	1	4%
<hr/>		
Total	28	100%
<hr/>		

### ***Focus Group Questions***

The qualitative research performed in this study explored the Hispanic youth perception of positive youth development experiences for rural Hispanic youth and their academic success. The research question was how rural Hispanic youth in a rural Northeast Nebraska community, view their positive youth development experiences and how these experiences improve their self-perception of their academic performance in school.

The major questions, along with sub questions, reflected a semi-structured data collection with discussion focused on the youths' perceptions of positive youth development experiences. Questions examined during the focus group process included:

- 1) What is positive youth development?
  - a) What examples of positive youth development can you share?
  - b) What opportunities are in the Columbus community for youth your age?
  - c) Have you been recruited by these groups?
- 2) What skills are important for youth your age to learn?
  - a) How do you learn these skills?
  - b) How are other kids gaining these skills?

- c) Why or why not are you involved in some of the groups that other kids are involved in?
- 3) What has been the most influential out-of-school experience for you? Why?
  - a) What specifically do you like the most about positive out-of-school experiences?
  - b) Do you participate in school sponsored activities, where the majority of your involvement happens during out-of-school time? Why or why not?
- 4) How has your out-of-school experience changed your success in school?
  - a) How do your grades change when you are involved in such activities?
  - b) How do you think this would be different for you if you lived in a bigger city?
  - c) How do your parents or other adults in your life support your involvement in out-of-school activities?

### ***Data Analysis***

Both typological method as described by Hatch (2002) and opening coding Grbich (2013) were used for the data analysis of this study. Preset categories such as positive youth development, skills, and academic performance were determined based on the current literature. Meanwhile, open coding allowed for detecting new codes.

### **Bracketing Personal Experiences**

The data analysis procedures included steps taken by the researcher prior to analyzing the data, as well as the actual data analysis. The first step in the data analysis procedures was to “bracket my own experiences” (Grbich, 2013, p. 96). Bracketing personal experiences and viewpoints allows the researcher to “focus on the learning from the participants” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p. 239). This was necessary to achieve

placing the central phenomenon at the center of the qualitative data analysis. Bracketing experiences for the researcher included setting aside personal perceptions regarding rural Hispanic families, specifically the relationship between parents and their children. Prior to the study, the researcher had the understanding that Hispanic parents, in wanting to stay true to their Hispanic culture, would not encourage their youth to become involved in any activities outside of the mandated school day. Another perception set aside was that rural Hispanic youth simply did not desire to be engaged in such activities. Setting aside these personal perceptions allowed for the researcher to learn as much as possible from the focus group participants, particularly during the data analysis process. The focus group participants were not asked to bracket their own experiences, rather this was a process done by the researcher only.

### Coding

The data collected from the focus groups was analyzed in order to identify significant findings related to the phenomenon. Since the major and sub questions asked in the focus groups were semi-structured to gather information around four topics:

1. meaning of positive youth development experiences,
2. opportunities of positive youth development experiences
3. influence of positive youth development experiences on school performance, and
4. parents' support.

These topics were the preset categories as broader codes. Open coding was also used as new codes were developed while the research was coding the data. Using the process as described by Grbich (2013), transcribed data from the focus groups were analyzed line by line in order to explore how the participants describe their experiences and understanding associated with positive youth development in their own words.

## ***Methods for Verification***

### ***Trustworthiness***

Member checking was the one of the chosen methods of verification of the study results and interpretations. Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) define member checking as the process of the researcher going back to the study participants with the findings of the study and asking them to determine if the “themes are accurate and the interpretations are fair and representative” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p. 287). The member checking process was initiated by asking for volunteers at the end of each focus group to review the information in person. After the open coding process was completed, focus group participants who agreed to review the findings were emailed via their teacher or school administrator, or were presented with the findings in person. They reviewed them and their teacher or school administrator emailed back their comments. For the participants who were presented with the data in person, they provided their verbal feedback immediately. A total of 10 participants participated in the member verification process and each participant found the findings to be consistent with the comments and observations discovered during data collection. The participants volunteering for the member verification process approved of the study findings, however, did not offer any extensions of the data.

Establishing trustworthiness between the researcher and the Hispanic youth participants was another method of verification. This is an important aspect of verification in the study, so that the Hispanic youth felt comfortable sharing their reflections of positive youth development experiences. The researcher established

trustworthiness with the participants by being genuinely interested in their perceptions and not disregarding their comments and observations as not being important.

Bracketing was the other method of verification used in this study. The data analysis process of bracketing, or allowing the researcher to “focus on the learning from the participants” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p. 239) proved to be essential in order to achieve placing the central phenomenon at the center of the qualitative data analysis. Personal observations and anticipated observations of the data collection lent the researcher to believe that rural Hispanic students were not involved in positive youth development activities due to the close knit family structure within the Hispanic culture, as well as the belief that rural Hispanic youth generally were not as involved in such opportunities as their same age counterparts.

Another personal belief of the researcher, and supported by literature on recruiting Hispanic youth to become involved in positive youth development opportunities, is that professionals in the area have to take a different approach. Hobbs (2004), suggests those working in Extension, particularly with the 4-H program, have begun to integrate Hispanic youth by reflecting their programming efforts to respect the Hispanic culture’s values, beliefs and traditions. Additionally, many Extension staff members who work with Hispanic youth and families have discovered that using a family approach and integrating the Spanish language to delivering programs is key, as valued by the Hispanic culture (Hobbs, 2004). However, observations from the focus groups did not suggest that family based approaches or programming related to the Hispanic culture values and traditions were necessary in order to gain participation from rural Hispanic youth.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### *Initial Codes*

The open coding process was performed immediately following each focus group, as Grbich (2013) recommends. The open coding process was chosen to develop an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. Grbich (2013) indicates the open coding process to be a detailed process, in which the focus is placed “word-by-word, line-by-line analysis” (p.83). For the purpose of this study, the open coding process was performed looking for specific comments and observations reflective of the semi-structured questions asked during the focus groups. The set by the major and sub questions asked during the focus groups.

The coding process began with notes from the audio tape transcriptions and personal reflections from the researcher. All data was reviewed carefully, line by line, looking for repeated words and short phrases, or in vivo codes (Khandkar, 2009), which were used at least twice in reference to the three pre-defined themes. The in vivo codes are considered to be the raw data for this study. These were recorded on a separate piece of paper.

The foundation of the coding process, the in vivo codes included “good health, good friendships, benefits of being involved, community service, because I don’t like it, because I like it, sports, friends, fun, entertained, parents, learn to be respectful, resistance to peer pressure, not being rude, polite, stay out of trouble, cooperation, drawing, math,

soccer, football, reading, getting good grades, doing good in school, eligibility, depends on effort, studying”.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, emphasis is placed words and meaning behind the in vivo codes shared during the data collection. This emphasis is important to focus on moving through the coding process. After all in vivo codes reflective of the positive youth development experience were recorded and no new repeated words were found, the open coding process was stopped.

In order to arrange the in vivo codes from the participants, a systematic order was used to better reflect the three pre-defined categories. This step involves taking the in vivo codes and reflecting upon the researcher’s observations. Additional attention is given to these words in order to discover patterns in the data, as well as develop overall meaning of the experience shared by the focus group participants. This discussion is an example of how in vivo codes became sub categories. This specific example reflects how the in vivo code of “Because I don’t like it” was interpreted from the context in which the Hispanic youth shared his views on personal preference, which is the sub category.

Researcher: Others have mentioned they play midget football. Can I ask why you don’t play?

Participant 1: Because I don’t like it.

Researcher: Okay, that is fine. Any other reason?

Participant 1: I got other things to do.

At this step, sub categories developed from summarized words. The sub category codes provide a more refined and explicit look into the meaning behind the in vivo codes. The step of assigning sub categories for existing codes is important because it became evident the coded data required further enhancement to better reflect the entire meaning

behind the initial in vivo codes. This process required additional coding, or re-coding, in order to include a more in depth perspective to the first round of coding.

The sub categories serve as a bridge between the in vivo codes to the categories. The in vivo codes are very explicit detailed comments and observations as shared by the focus group participants. The sub categories attempt to group meanings together.

The sub categories provided the researcher the ability to interpret the context in which the vivo codes were shared and viewed.

Sub Category: Benefits

- In Vivo Code: "Good health"
- In Vivo Code: "Good friendships"
- In Vivo Code: "Benefits of being involved."
- In Vivo Code: "Community service"

Sub Category: Personal Preference

- In Vivo Code: "Because I don't like it"
- In Vivo Code: "Because I like it."
- In Vivo Code: "Sports"

Sub Category: Life Skills

- In Vivo Code: "Learn to be respectful"
- In Vivo Code: "Resistance to peer pressure"
- In Vivo Code: "Not being rude"
- In Vivo Code: "Polite"
- In Vivo Code: "Staying out of trouble"
- In Vivo Code: "Cooperation"

Sub Category: Practical Skills

- In Vivo Code: "Drawing"
- In Vivo Code: "Math"
- In Vivo Code: "Reading"
- In Vivo Code: "Soccer"
- In Vivo Code: "Football"

Sub Category: Goals

- In Vivo Code: "Getting good grades"
- In Vivo Code: "Doing good in school"
- In Vivo Code: "Eligibility"

Sub Category: Focus

In Vivo Code: “Depends on effort”

In Vivo Code: “Studying:

The categories resulting from the sub category codes conceptualize the abstract meaning behind the in vivo codes shared by the focus group participants. The sub categories were grouped into general categories based on their abstract meanings. General themes about Hispanic youth positive development experiences began to emerge from further analyses of the categories.

Table 4.1 visually displays the detailed process from the specific to the general. The table visually depicts how the coding process occurred. Reading from left to right, the in vivo codes are actual quotes from participants during the focus groups. The sub category codes represent patterns developed from what the participants said in the focus groups, as a way to move the in vivo codes as the perceived experience to an abstract description of the Hispanic youth experience in general.

Table 3

*Summary of Coding Process*

In Vivo Codes: The Youths' Words	Sub Categories Codes	Categories
“Good health”	Benefits	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Good friendships”	Benefits	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Benefits of being involved”	Benefits	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Community Service”	Benefits	Positive Youth Development Experiences

“Because I don’t like it”	Personal Preference	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Because I like it”	Personal Preference	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Sports”	Personal Preference	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Friends”	Entertainment	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Fun”	Entertainment	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Entertained”	Entertainment	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Parents”	Entertainment	Positive Youth Development Experiences
“Learn to be respectful”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Resistance to peer pressure”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Not being rude”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Polite”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Stay out of trouble”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Cooperation”	Life skills	Important Skills
“Drawing”	Practical skills	Important Skills
“Math”	Practical skills	Important Skills
“Soccer”	Practical skills	Important Skills
“Football”	Practical skills	Important Skills
“Reading”	Practical skills	Important Skills
“Getting good grades”	Goals	School Success
“Doing good in school”	Goals	School Success
“Eligibility”	Goals	School Success

“Depends on effort”	Focus	School Success
“Studying”	Focus	School Success

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### *Categories*

The categories resulting from the coding process include school success, important skills, and positive youth development experiences. The categories are similar to the four main topics emphasized in the major and sub questions asked during the data collection. The researcher discovered the differences between the pre-defined topics and in vivo codes Hispanic youth shared, leading to the categories. The following section describes how the categories reflect the discussion between the researcher and Hispanic youth during the data collection.

#### School Success

The first category, *school success*, is also the essence of the central phenomenon explored in the study, relating to perceptions of positive youth development opportunities as they may possibly be tied to academic success for those youth involved in such activities. The two sub category codes under the school success category are goals and focus. Patterns developed from in vivo codes reflect the context in which participants perceived their performance in school as connected to positive youth development opportunities. The in vivo codes of “getting good grades”, “doing good in school”, and “eligibility” reflect participants view on their school work, specifically literacy related topics. For example, focus group participants described “doing good in school” as:

Researcher: What does doing good in school mean?

Participant 1: To read and write.

Participant 1: To learn how to multiply and divide and all that.

Participant 2: To speak correctly.

Researcher: To speak correctly. What do you mean by that?

Participant 2: Like grammar, English.

In this example, participants' have defined doing good in school in relation to a particular content or topic area in school, which could have important educational implications considering the target population of the study.

The sub category of focus developed from the in vivo codes of “depends on effort” and “studying”. The title focus was given to this sub category due to the meaning of what is required of Hispanic youth in order to perform academically. The context supporting these in vivo codes reflect the youth emphasis on setting goals and focus required in order to participate.

Focus group participants shared a variety of observations regarding a potential link between out of school activities and school success. Generally, focus group participants did not make the connection between involvement in specific out of school activities and the academic benefits received. Rather, they made the connection through their own viewpoint of what positive youth development means to them. This following quote is a reflection of the skills Hispanic youth deem important and a way in which to obtain them.

Researcher: So far you have said it is important to have reading, writing and math skills. How can you get those skills?

Participant 1: In school.

Researcher: Another example that someone mentioned was manners, as another skill you think you should have. How do you think you can get manners?

Participant 2: By cooperating.

Participant 1: By practicing.

Researcher: Is there something you can do to get manners?

Participant 3: Help clean the community.

However, a small number of participants shared personal stories relating to the connection to specific positive youth development experiences. These stories are a result of participants' reflection on their own experiences and being willing to share with the group. One focus group participant reflected on her past involvement in the Girl Scouts program:

Researcher: When you were involved with Girl Scouts, were your grades better?

Participant: Ummm, yes.

Researcher: Why do you say that?

Participant: I started Girl Scouts in the After School Program and then joined on my own. Then I started going on my own. When I started, my grades go higher and higher because Girl Scouts teaches me about math and all that. Just because of them I had higher grades.

Another youth participant contributed her grade going up to positive youth development opportunities.

Researcher: While you are participating in an activity, do your grades go up, or down, or stay the same?

Participant 1: Up.

Researcher: Why up?

Participant 1: Um.....

Participant 2: If you are involved in an activity after school, you can't have a failing grade.

Existing research indicates higher academic performance is among the benefits to youth who participate in positive youth development opportunities (Brown, 2007). The participants who shared these stories perceived a link between their involvement and their success in school. If other participants made the connection, they did not share their



personal stories in the focus group setting, or did not perceive their school success to be connected to their involvement in positive youth development experiences.

### Parental Involvement

Hispanic youth parents also have a role in their child's involvement in out of school activities. Focus group participants provided consistent observations regarding their parents, or other adult figures, such as coaches, regarding their involvement in the youths' participation in positive youth development opportunities. While the in vivo code of parents is used in the context of factors playing a role on the youths' participation in out of school activities. It is imperative to understand that this title has a wider interpretation for the purpose of the results section of this thesis. Carlo, Carranz, and de Guzman (2000) note the emphasis placed upon family within the Hispanic culture, whereas more than a traditional immediate family structure is together in one household. It is possible, for the purpose of this study, for the mention to parents also including extended adult family members in this role as well. This discussion indicates how parents and extended family members influence Hispanic youth involvement:

Researcher: Do your parents or other adults in your life encourage you to do out of school activities?

Participant 1: My uncle wants me to go out for football so I can get buffer.

Participant 2: Yes.

Researcher: (To Participant 2) You said yes, what's the reason behind that?

Participant 2: It's important to our family.

Researcher: Do you have an example?

Participant 2: Like a lot of our family plays instruments.

Researcher: Is that why you are in band?

Participant 2: Yes

No focus group participants reported their parents or other adults in their life discouraging them regarding becoming involved in positive youth development activities. Rather, focus group participants observed their involvement in such activities beginning with them approaching their parents with the idea first, versus the initial encouragement coming from the adult. One participant reflected to their reasoning behind their parents' encouragement to being involved "they want me to do sports to get out of the house and stay entertained", "they want me to get involved in stuff", "they want me to try something new". Another participant shared this story regarding their interaction with their parents regarding joining the junior high football team:

Researcher: How do your parents or other adults in your life support your involvement in out of school activities?

Participant 1: Yes.

Participant 2: Sometimes.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Participant 2: Some of my friends pick a sport and like it and they get signed up, but their parents don't like that sport, so.....

Researcher: Oh.

Participant 3: I just tell them I want to do this.

Researcher: And they are okay with it, typically?

Participant 3: Yes.

### Important Skills

From Hispanic youth's perspective, positive youth development included learning *important skills*. Focus group participants suggested youth of their age needed to know academic related and sport-specific skills, as well as life related skills. The in vivo codes relating to this category include "learn to be respectful, resistance to peer pressure, not being rude, polite, stay out of trouble, cooperation, reading, math, drawing, soccer, football". The sub category codes under this category include life skills and practical

skills. Focus group participants were asked which skills they thought that youth their age should know. Consistent responses included skills relating to school and sport-specific skills, such as “math”, “drawing”, and “soccer”. Additionally, participants also responded with general comments such as “Hanging out with the right people”, “Not hanging out with bullies” when asked how to gain such skills, participants associated interactions with friends and family, as opposed to other opportunities such as formalized positive youth development opportunities. Participants cited interactions with friends and family such as “birthday parties”, “going to McDonalds”, and “hanging out”. Participants viewed their peers as obtaining these important skills in the same manner they do, without drawing additional conclusions to their peers’ involvement in other activities.

The youth participants associated gaining sport-specific skills with positive youth development opportunities. Participants described learning sport-specific skills from school or club sponsored sports teams. Participants also described involved in community organization sports, specifically soccer. For example, the participants identified “soccer” and “football” as skills, rather than specific skills needed to play the sport. They related the life skills reported to the general functions of positive youth development opportunities, such as “not hanging out with bullies”, versus the specific opportunities or organizations which support those experiences.

It is important to note it is through skill identification the study revealed how Hispanic youth view positive youth development, as the skills identified were the basis for their understanding of the experiences and how they describe positive youth development experiences. Their terminology was different from how the youth

development field would describe the term positive youth development. Hispanic youth view other ways to gain these skills. Examples of such skills include “learn to be respectful”, “resistance to peer pressure”, “not being rude”, “stay out of trouble”, “math”, and “football”.

Hispanic youth participants described ways to gain life related skills through spending time with reputable people, describing them as “not hanging out with bullies” and “spending time with good people”. Participants shared quotes such as “not being rude”, “resistance to peer pressure”, and “learn to be respectful” to reflect life skill development from spending time with their peers. Life skill identification is consistent with literature, which explains the emphasis placed on building trust and respect amongst each other within the Hispanic culture (Escott, 1996).

The ability to make the connection from important skills and positive youth development experiences to was not unusual, rather anticipated due to some of the reasons participants reported they were not involved in out of school activities. The reasons are discussed in the section of positive youth development experiences below.

### Positive Youth Development Experiences

Hispanic youth participants of this study described *positive youth development experiences* in terms of benefits, personal preference and entertainment (sub category codes). A portion of the data collection was based on lack of involvement in positive youth development activities, in which consistent responses reflected these sub categories. It was not required to be currently participating or have previous involvement

with positive youth development experiences in order to participate in the study. The participants who were not involved in these experiences reflected their decision to not become involved to their own personal preference.

Conversely, when focus group participants were asked why they did participate in positive youth development experiences available in their community, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, religious groups, Youth for Christ, consistent responses included “It is something my family does”, “For fun”, “For entertainment”. This conversation reflects a portion of a focus group discussion between the investigator and two participants:

Researcher: What do you like about being involved in soccer?

Participant 1: It’s fun.

Researcher: Why else?

Participant 1: It’s something to do.

Participant 2: You meet new people.

This is another excerpt from a focus group:

Researcher: Not everyone in this room is involved in soccer or football, correct?

Group: Yes.

Researcher: Why not? Why doesn’t everyone do these activities?

Participant 1: ‘Cause sometimes they’re boring.

Participant 2: Not everybody likes the same thing.

Participant 3: I don’t like the rules.

Participant 4: It doesn’t entertain us.

Researcher: What would it take for you to try something new?

Participant 2: Um....peer pressure.

Participant 5: Another friend does it.

Participant 1: You’d have to learn how to play and keep trying and never give up.

Participant: 3: You’d have to hear good comments from other people.

Researcher: What would you have to hear in order to try it?

Participant 3: That it was fun.

The above discussion reflect scenarios of the participants’ experiences in their decision making process to become involved in positive youth development experiences. It appears that being fun and entertaining is a determining factor for participants and their

peers to make decisions as to whether or not to participate in the out of school programs. It also shows that the program activities have to be culturally appealing to Hispanic youth. Culturally appealing When recruiting, programs will be more successful to recruit Hispanic youth in group than individually.

### ***Emerging Themes***

The emerging themes of the current study are school success, important skills, and positive youth development experiences. The study explored the positive youth development experiences from the perspective of rural Hispanic youth and several themes emerged from the focus group data. To Hispanic youth participants in this study, positive youth development was perceived as a method to support their success in school, gain necessary skills and spend time with their peers. The Hispanic youth participants in this study described positive youth development in their own words, yet different from the terminology of the youth development field.

While a small portion of the participants viewed participation in positive youth development could result in higher success in school, the importance of their participation is that Hispanic youth benefit from the experiences, rather the ability to articulate the experiences.

Youth participants identified skills they would like to learn through the participation of positive youth development experiences (i.e “resistance to peer pressure”, “stay out of trouble”). These are the skills targeted by the programs in the youth development field. The Hispanic youth identified such skills as “learn to be respectful”,

“stay out of trouble”, “football”, and “soccer” that are important to them. The discussion during the data collection is reflected in this example:

Researcher: What skills do you think are important for kids your age to learn?

Participant 1: Soccer.

Participant 2: Math.

Participant 3: Reading.

Participant 4: Science, social studies.

Researcher: So, school type skills. What else?

Participant 2: Like...attitude skills.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by that?

Participant 2: Um...how to respect people.

Researcher: What else?

No responses.

Researcher: Let's focus on attitude and respect, how do you think kids learn how to have a good attitude or how to respect others?

Participant 3: By, um, starting to listen to parents and the counselor.

Researcher: Is that how you have learned those skills?

Participant 3: Uh huh.

The skills identified as being important by the Hispanic youth participants are reflective of life or practical skills gained through positive youth development experiences as will be discussed in the next section.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The current study lends to three significant findings. Hispanic youth connected their success in school to their involvement in positive youth development experiences. Skill identification by Hispanic youth reflects the functionality and goals of positive youth development. And, decisions affecting their involvement in positive youth development experiences are based on the level of enjoyment associated with the experiences, as well as personal preference.

The findings support the original intent of the study, which was to explore rural Hispanic youth perceptions of positive youth development experiences, with a specific focus on their academic success. The Hispanic youth participants shared how their involvement in positive youth development experiences has benefited them academically. The findings suggest rural Hispanic youth involvement in positive youth development experiences can help increase school success. Participants perceived involvement in activities such as soccer, football, and Girl Scouts required them to maintain high grades and allowed opportunities for them to interact with reputable, responsible peers and adult role models. . This is important to the youth development and education fields, and deserves to be examined further to determine the specific reason why youth choose these



activities, as well as their specific attributes in increasing the academic performance of youth participants.

School success described by the Hispanic youth in the study is a key component of competence, one of the “five C’s” described by Lerner (2002). Competence is described as relating to academic, social and emotional competence (Borden and Perkins, 2003). Academic competence is an important aspect of the “five C’s” and youth development since youth spend a considerable amount of time in school. The “five C’s” have been identified as important components for youth to learn through involvement in youth programs (Borden and Perkins, 2003). The “five C’s” include competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner, 2002).

The study explored positive youth development programming as a catalyst for improving rural Hispanic youth academic success. It is vital to recall the gap in the literature available regarding rural Hispanic youth school success being connected to involvement in positive youth development opportunities. The study provides new understanding of how, according to participants, they felt their involvement in positive youth development experiences can encourage success in school for rural Hispanic youth.

The school success findings of the current study are relative to the achievement motivation and school engagement assets under learning component of the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2007). The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets includes an emphasis on learning, as an internal asset indicator of healthy development for youth ages 12-18 (Search Institute, 2007). Notably, the findings indicate Hispanic youth in the study connect their positive youth development

experiences to their success in school, which is important to their development described by the 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2007). The specific findings of the study revealed “doing good in school” as important to Hispanic youth. The importance placed on school performance was also reflected in the important skills the Hispanic youth participants deemed necessary, such as “math”, “reading”, and “drawing”. Life skills were also reported as necessary, such as “cooperation” and “learning to be respectful”.

Closely related to school success is the important skills Hispanic youth perceived necessary. The findings demonstrated the perspective Hispanic youth have on acquiring important skills they identified throughout the data collection process. The skills identified are accurate descriptions of the positive youth development field, in terms of the benefits of being involved, through the perspective of Hispanic youth. Specifically the life skills examples participants provided such as, “learn to be respectful, “not being rude”, “cooperation”, and “resistance to peer pressure” are accurate examples of skills to be important to Hispanic youth in future job capacities (Borden et al., 2006).

The skills Hispanic youth in the study considered important are linked to several of the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets. The skills are paired to the Developmental Assets of Caring, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility, Restraint, and Interpersonal Competence (The Search Institute, 2007). The implications between the skills Hispanic youth in the study view as important to the number of Developmental Assets these skills relate to is positive for the future of Hispanic youth. The research behind the model “has consistently demonstrated that the more Developmental Assets

young people acquire, the better their chances of succeeding in school and becoming happy, healthy, and contributing members of their communities and society” (The Search Institute, 2007). Pittman (2000) identified a “sixth C” to add into the original “five C’s” of positive youth development. Contribution is the sixth C (Pittman, 2000). The skills identified by the Hispanic youth in the study indicate what the youth perceive to need in order to contribute to their communities, families, and schools. Additionally, the skills identified in the study are similar to the fourth C, character (Lerner, 2002). Skills such as “learn to be respectful”, “not being rude”, resistance to peer pressure” are examples of the fourth C, character being reflected by the Hispanic youth in the study.

The literature describes the academic challenges rural Hispanic youth may experience such as attending a rural school district with restricted resources (Gouvias, 2006) or lack of parental involvement (Owens, et al, 2006). In this study however, Hispanic youth reflected how their parents’ were generally agreeable to their involvement in positive youth development experiences. It is important to note that in most cases, the youth, not the parent initiated interest and opportunity in participating in the activity.

The findings regarding parenting practices in the study has implications from Calderon-Tena, Carlo, and Knight (2011) research on Mexican American adolescents and parenting behaviors regarding prosocial behaviors, such as positive youth development experiences. Calderon-Tena, Carlo, and Knight (2011) found that Mexican American adolescents having higher perception levels of “prosocial parenting practices are related to both adolescents’ familism values and adolescents’ prosocial behavioral tendencies” (p. 104). Hispanic youth involved in prosocial behavioral development opportunities,

such as positive youth development experiences, are reflective of their cultural and family values, as well as their inclination to become involved. The findings of the study, such as skill identification, parenting influences, and cultural aspects reflect the research by Calderon-Tena, Carlo, and Knight (2001).

Furthermore, the findings explore school success and important skill development as results of being involved in positive youth development experiences through the lens of rural Hispanic youth. These findings are the self-perceptions of positive youth development experiences, as reported by the Hispanic youth.

New to the positive youth development field is the focus on the level of enjoyment and personal preference regarding rural Hispanic youths' decision to become involved. Research regarding recruitment and retention of rural Hispanic youth in to positive youth development experiences focused on a culturally responsive approach (Hobbs, 2004). The current study refutes previous studies' focus on culturally responsive approach to recruitment and retention of rural Hispanic youth. Participants in the study perceived the level of enjoyment from being involved in the experience and personal preference to take precedence over cultural features of the experience.

Described as a limitation in the current study, the lack of focus on incorporating a cultural approach to rural Hispanic youth's involvement was not discovered. The overwhelmingly consistent implicit findings regarding positive youth development experiences related to the perceived enjoyment of the experience and personal preference.

### ***Implications for the Future***

Several implications are relevant to future research and practice to the education and youth development fields. Hispanic youth and their involvement in positive youth development research have many possibilities as a result of this study.

### Implications for Research

The significant recommendation for future research focuses on both the qualitative and quantitative views relative to the findings of the current study. Future research can use both focus groups and observational data to explore further how Hispanic youth participating in activities ‘experience’ positive youth development. Research can examine how to raise Hispanic youth awareness of the benefits of being involved in positive youth development activities. Topics to be explored include educating rural Hispanic youth about the benefits of being involved in positive youth development activities, why the skills learned in such opportunities are important, how they prefer to become involved, exploring potential cultural implications regarding the level of enjoyment youth have through involvement in activities, and their parents’ support of their involvement. The target audience of recommended studies would be similar to the current study; rural Hispanic youth ages 11-16.

A complimentary study of quantitative nature will further promote understanding the essence of the phenomenon. Quantitative data collection in the form of a survey could gather further information regarding the current study. A larger pool of participants in a complimentary study of this nature would provide more ability to generalize the findings into a larger population. Additionally, a quantitative study could feature more confidential data collection methods, such as a survey or individual interviews, may

further the findings of the current study because participants may feel more comfortable sharing more information.

The findings of the current study found that Hispanic youth view their level of enjoyment to be highly important when considering opportunities to become involved with. Similar to the current study, another qualitative study focusing on the phenomenon of the level of enjoyment Hispanic youth have as a result of their involvement in positive youth development experiences would provide a better understanding of what contributes to the level of enjoyment Hispanic youth have through their involvement. Additionally, a qualitative study of this nature would also explore any cultural implications to the level of enjoyment Hispanic youth experience.

Future research resulting from the positive youth development experiences category would enable researchers and youth development professionals to become more effective in their efforts to recruit and retain rural Hispanic youth. Literature suggests a culturally responsive approach is needed to attract Hispanic youth into such activities successfully. The findings from this study suggests program recruitment and retention models of this nature are not required in order to secure participation from rural Hispanic youth.

Relating to the important skills and positive youth development experiences categories, the role of a caring adult deserves further research. The participants in this study briefly mentioned their relationship with the caring adults who lead and coach the opportunities they are involved with. Additionally, another avenue to explore related to this study and the relationship with a caring adult, is the mentor and mentee relationship

between caring adults and rural Hispanic youth, as a nontraditional form of positive youth development opportunities.

Future research relating to the relationships associated with positive youth development experiences could also be designed following the current study. Exploring the relationship between youth, caring adult, school staff, and family relating to involvement in positive youth development experiences and school success would also be beneficial to the youth development and education field. Additionally, recruiting academically successful Hispanic youth with the intention of reflection on past experiences would also be insightful.

#### Implications for Practice

Implications from the study are also evident to the education field, particularly relevant to middle and high schools. The findings of the study discovered how Hispanic youth perceive school success and skill development. The simple act of explaining to Hispanic youth about the academic benefits of being involved in positive youth development opportunities combined with general encouragement to become involved by teachers and school administration may be effective. However, teachers and school administrators need to understand the connection first. The strategy of recruiting youth into these activities could help their success in school, as well as provide the youth with additional practical and life related skills. This is important to youth development professionals working with programs such as 4-H. If teachers and school administration understand the implications of rural Hispanic youth being involved in positive youth development experiences, there is a possibility for a relationship to form between them

and youth development professionals for the betterment of the youth. As explored in the findings of the current study, parents of the Hispanic youth would benefit from this information as well.

### Conclusions

This study will provide insight to positive youth development experiences to professionals working with rural Hispanic youth, specifically relating to recruitment and retention strategies. The importance of the findings is relative to the current study. Fourteen percent were actual participants in the study, from the approximate 200 Hispanic youth recruited for the study. Using the findings of the study relative to Hispanic youth recruitment and retention strategies, more participants may have been recruited. Furthermore, addressing the retention strategies that surfaced from the findings could prove successful in recruiting Hispanic youth. Emphasizing the level of enjoyment may also help recruit additional participants.

Additionally, the study provides insight to professionals regarding the terminology Hispanic youth associate with positive youth development experiences. Practical and life skill identification are important according to the Hispanic youth in the study. Articulating positive youth development experiences in terminology Hispanic youth are familiar with can also be useful to youth development professionals.





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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



June 17, 2013

Jill Goedeken  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies  
2610 14th St Ste 15, Columbus, 68601

Yan Xia  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies  
251 MABL, UNL, 68588-0236

IRB Number: 20130613490EP  
Project ID: 13490  
Project Title: Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success

Dear Jill:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). Your project was approved as an Expedited protocol, category 6 & 7.

Date of EP Review: 05/27/2013

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 06/17/2013. This approval is Valid Until: 06/16/2014.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- \* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- \* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- \* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- \* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- \* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Julia Torquati, Ph.D.  
Chair for the IRB



## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FORM

### Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success

Primary Researcher: Jill A. Goedecken

Focus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

	<i>Participant Pseudo Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Positive Youth Development Experiences</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

*I want to thank each of you for the time you take today participating in the focus group. Our environment today will be very informal and relaxed, but I will ask that you remember to respect each other by having one speaker at a time and respond to questions and comment respectfully to all members in the group. While I anticipate that the information shared today will not be sensitive information, I would still ask that the information shared today remain confidential. And, you should only share what you are comfortable sharing with the entire group.*

*Please know that none of your responses will be shared with your teachers or adults who work with your out-of-school experiences. I will be taking notes and also audio recording the focus group today so I will remember everything from today.*

### Questions

***Before we begin with the questions for the focus group, we will begin by turning on the audio equipment and going around the room to introduce yourself by indicating your pseudo name you have chosen for today's focus group.***

- 1) What is positive youth development?
  - a) What examples of positive youth development can you share?
  - b) What opportunities are in the Columbus community for youth your age?
  - c) Have you been recruited by these groups?
- 2) What skills are important for youth your age to learn?
  - a) How do you learn these skills?
  - b) How are other kids gaining these skills?
  - c) Why or why not are you involved in some of the groups that other kids are involved in?
- 3) What has been the most influential out-of-school experience for you? Why?
  - a) What specifically do you like the most about positive out-of-school experiences?
  - b) Do you participate in school sponsored activities, where the majority of your involvement happens during out-of-school time? Why or why not?
- 4) How has your out-of-school experience changed your success in school?
  - a) How do your grades change when you are involved in such activities?
  - b) How do you think this would be different for you if you lived in a bigger city?



- c) How do your parents or other adults in your life support your involvement in out-of-school activities?

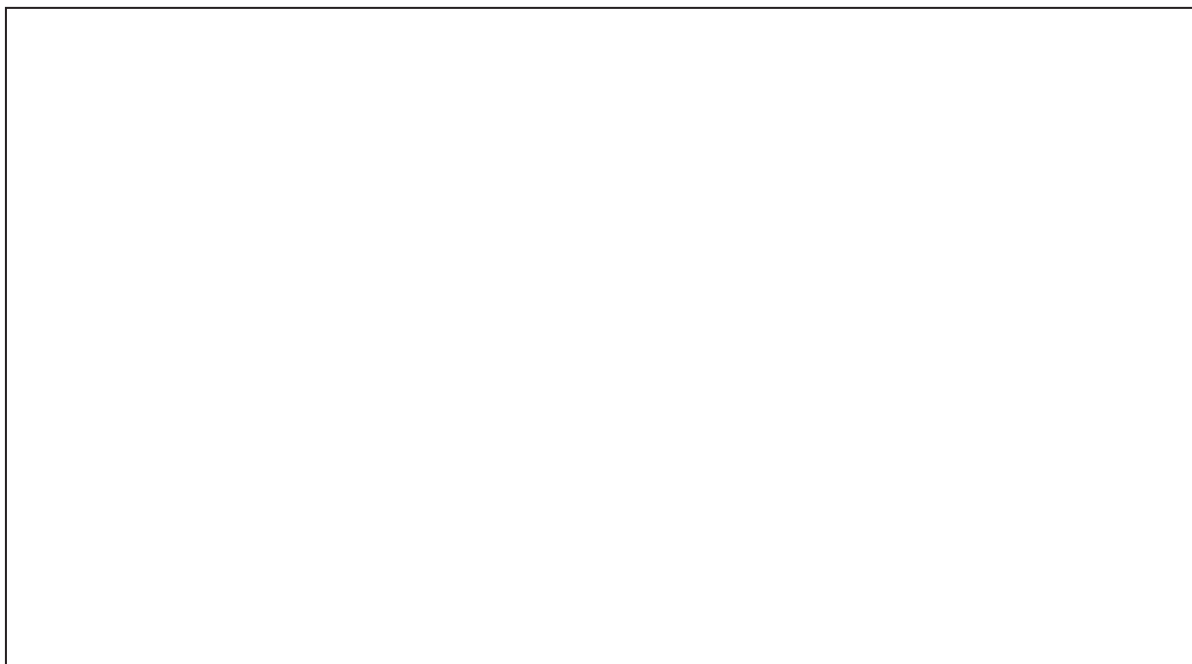
*Thank you for your help today, I appreciate it very much! Are there any additional comments you would like to include at this time?*

*Are any of you willing to review the findings of the study in a few weeks from now?*

**Researcher Notes:**

General comments (body language of specific focus group members, group dynamics, particular things to remember)

Diagram of seating arrangement from the focus group:





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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

## **APPENDIX C: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

### **Parent/Guardian Consent Form**

#### **Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success**

You are invited to permit your child to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to allow your child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your child is eligible to participate in this study because they have identified themselves as a Hispanic youth, between the ages of 11-16. The purpose of the study is to discover the Hispanic youth perception of positive youth development experiences. The results of this study may be useful to school administrators, teachers, youth development professionals and other who work closely in educating and providing programming opportunities for rural Hispanic youth.

The research study will consist of your child participating in a focus group, with 6-7 other Hispanic youth, whose parents have also given consent for their involvement with the study. The group will answer some basic questions related to their involvement in out-of-school activities. Participants in the focus groups will be reminded that they should only share what they feel comfortable sharing, as I will not be able to ensure everything shared in the focus group will be kept confidentially. The focus groups will take in community or school space, as space is available. Youth in the study will be notified of the specific location and time. Youth in the study will receive a free meal during the focus group. The focus groups are expected to last no longer than a couple of hours.

You may ask any questions regarding this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to your child's participation in or during the study by calling me at (402) 563-4901. You may also contact me via email at [jill\\_goedeken@hotmail.com](mailto:jill_goedeken@hotmail.com). If you would prefer to

contact my graduate school academic school advisor, you may contact Dr. Yan Xia at (402) 472-6552 or rxia2@unl.edu.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

- You may wish to talk someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant
- To voice concerns or complaints about the research
- To provide input concerning the research process
- In the event the study staff could not be reached

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide whether or not your child can enroll in this study. Your child can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers/the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, your child's school or their involvement with out-of-school activities. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled should you decide to withdraw your child from this study.

### **DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

You are voluntarily making a decision to allow your child to participate in the focus groups of this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

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**Child's Name (Printed)**

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**Parent/Guardian Signature**

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**Date**

#### **INVESTIGATORS**

Primary Investigator:

Jill A. Goedeken

Office: (402) 563-4901

Secondary Investigator:

Ruth Xia, PhD

Office: (402) 472-9154




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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

## APPENDIX D: YOUTH ASSENT FORM

### Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success

Dear Participant,

We are inviting you to participate in a focus group for Hispanic youth, between the ages of 11-16. The focus group is meant to find out if being involved in out-of-school activities makes a difference in how well you do in school.

The focus group will take no more than 2 hours to complete and will ask you and others in the group about your experience in out-of-school activities and how well you do in school. Snacks will be provided during the focus group. You will also receive a \$5 gift card for participating.

We will not ask for your name. Your identity and all of your answers will be kept completely confidential. The people you work with in out-of-school activities or your teachers others at your school will not receive your responses to the questions in the focus group. However, you will be encouraged to share only what you feel comfortable in front of the group. I will be including the responses in a written report, but your identity and your responses will be totally confidential.

We will also ask your parents/guardians for their permission for you to do this study. Please talk this over with them before you decide whether or not to participate.

If you have any questions at any time, please ask one of the researchers.

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**Signature of Participant**

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**Date**

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**Signature of Investigator**

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**Date**

#### INVESTIGATORS

Primary Investigator: Jill A. Goedeken

Office: (402) 563-4901

Secondary Investigator: Ruth Xia, PhD

Office: (402) 472-9154



## **APPENDIX E: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM IN SPANISH**

### **Forma de Consentimiento de Padre/Tutor**

#### **Percepciones de Desarrollo de Experiencias Positivas Juveniles Relacionadas con el Éxito Académico de Jóvenes Rurales Hispanos**

Usted esta invitado a permitir que su hijo participe en este estudio de investigación. La siguiente información se proporciona para ayudarle a tomar una decisión informada para decidir si, si o no usted permitirá que su hijo participe. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, por favor no dude en preguntar.

Su hijo es elegible para participar en este estudio, ya que se a identificado como un joven hispano, entre las edades de 11-16. El objetivo del estudio es conocer la percepción de los jóvenes hispanos de experiencias positivas de desarrollo juvenil. Los resultados de este estudio pueden ser útiles para administradores escolares, maestros profesionales del desarrollo de los jóvenes y otros que trabajan en estrecha colaboración en la educación y brindar oportunidades de programación para la juventud hispana rural.

El estudio de investigación consistirá en que su hijo participe en un grupo de enfoque, con otros 6-7 jóvenes hispanos, cuyos padres también han dado su consentimiento para su participación en el estudio. El grupo va a responder a algunas preguntas básicas relacionadas con su participación en actividades fuera de la escuela. A los participantes de los grupos focales se les recordará que sólo deberán compartir lo que ellos sientan a gusto compartiendo, ya que no podré asegurar que todo lo compartido en el grupo de enfoque se mantendrá confidencial. El grupo de enfoque será en la comunidad o en el espacio escolar que este disponible. Los jóvenes en el estudio serán notificados de la ubicación y la hora específica. Los jóvenes en el estudio recibirán una comida gratuita durante el grupo focal. Se espera que los grupos de enfoque solo duren no más de un par de horas.

Usted puede hacer cualquier pregunta con respecto a esta investigación y que esas preguntas sean contestadas antes de aceptar la participación de su hijo en el estudio llamándome al (402) 563-4901. También puede contactarme a través de email a [jill\\_goedeken@hotmail.com](mailto:jill_goedeken@hotmail.com). Si prefiere contactar a mi asesor académico puede comunicarse con la Dra. Yan Xia al (402) 472-6552 o [rxia2@unl.edu](mailto:rxia2@unl.edu). Por favor, póngase en contacto con la Universidad de la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Nebraska-Lincoln al (402) 472-6965 por las siguientes razones:

- Usted podría desear hablar con alguien que no sea del personal de investigaciones para obtener respuestas a las preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en la investigación
- Para expresar sus preocupaciones o quejas sobre la investigación.
- Para proporcionar información sobre el proceso de investigación
- En caso de que el personal de investigaciones no pueda ser localizado

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. usted es libre de decidir si quiere o no que su hijo se inscriba. Su hijo puede negarse a participar o de retirarse en cualquier momento sin dañar su relación con los investigadores / de la Universidad de Nebraska-Lincoln, la escuela de su hijo o la participación en actividades fuera de la escuela. No habrá sanción o pérdida de beneficios a los que usted tiene derecho si decide retirar a su hijo de este estudio.

### **DOCUMENTACION DEL CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO**

Usted está haciendo voluntariamente la decisión de permitir que su hijo participe en el grupo de enfoque de este estudio de investigación. Su firma certifica que ha decidido participar después de haber leído y comprendido la información presentada. Se le entregará una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para que la mantenga.

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**Nombre de Niño/a (Imprenta)**

---

**Firma de Padre/Tutor**

---

**Fecha**

**INVESTIGADORAS**

Primera Investigadora: Jill A. Goedeken

Oficina: (402) 563-4901

Segunda Investigadora: Ruth Xia, PhD

Oficina: (402) 472-9154



## **APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT FLYER SAMPLE**

We are looking for groups of 6-8 youth to participate in a focus group during the week of July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Youth can sign up individually or with a group.

Youth must be:

- ✓ 11-16 years of age
- ✓ Hispanic
- ✓ Speak English
- ✓ Live in Columbus

Youth will be asked open ended questions about what they think about activities they can spend their time doing when not in school.

Each youth participant will receive a free meal!

Youth must have signed parent consent form to participate. Parent consent forms will be available in Spanish. Youth will also have to sign a waiver saying that they agree to participate.

After signing up, youth will be notified when and where the focus group will be held. All focus groups will be held in Columbus.

To sign up or for questions, please contact Jill Goedeken at 402-276-5838

P.O. 880236 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0236

(402) 472-2957 / FAX (402) 472-9170



### **Appendix G: Demographic Questions**

#### **Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Experiences Related to Rural Hispanic Youth Academic Success**

Please fill out the questions below. This will be completed prior to beginning the focus group questions.

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_ male or \_\_\_\_ female    How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What year (grade) are you in school? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes you? (Please circle below)

- a) Cuban/Cuban American
- b) Central American (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- c) South American (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- d) Mexican/Mexican American
- e) Puerto Rican
- f) Multi-Racial (Please specific: \_\_\_\_\_)
- g) Other (Please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Are you involved in any activities outside of school?

\_\_\_\_ Yes    or    \_\_\_\_ No

If you are involved in activities outside of school, please list them:

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