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FEATURE

**Ending up Ahead:
The Case Study of a Highly Able Hispanic Student**

John Wesley Taylor V

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY — This case study focuses on Juan, a highly-able Hispanic student. At the time of the study, Juan had lived for approximately fourteen months in the United States, and was enrolled in ninth grade at the public high school of a small town in Virginia. Previously, Juan had lived with his three siblings in Mexico, while his father and at times, his mother labored as a migrant worker in the United States.

In Mexico, Juan had distinguished himself as a high achiever, receiving diplomas of merit for being the top student in his grade. Since his arrival in the United States, he has received several awards for his accomplishments. Juan's academic strengths seem to lie in the areas of math and art, although his teachers have been amazed with his facility for acquiring the English language.

While Juan seems to have displayed a strong resiliency in the academic arena, his social dimension appears to be vulnerable. He gives indication of cultural isolation and estrangement. Other important themes in his life include the centrality of family, a zest for learning, respect for social order, and a strong desire for upward social mobility.

Projecting towards the future, the dominant motif seems to be a desire to continue his studies, obtain a career, and "end up ahead." These sentiments are echoed by his parents and teachers, who believe that Juan will continue to strive and that he will succeed.

Well, I don't like to talk too much, to too many people. I like to study. And have friends. But I don't like to have bad friends, that get themselves into trouble. I hardly speak any English. I really don't like to speak English. I prefer to speak Spanish. And I am pacific. I hardly ever say any bad words, nor do I like to fight, or any of that. I try to

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get the best grades that I can, the very best scores. I try to do my best in my classes.

This was Juan's description of himself at the beginning of our first interview. Juan, a ninth-grade Hispanic student, attends the public high school of a small town in Virginia. Juan is also a Mexican, and had lived in the United States for approximately fourteen months at the time of this study.

Method

The regional director of the migrant aid program, as well as the "English as a Second Language" (ESL) coordinator for the school district, had referred Juan to us as a potential participant in a study of highly able students. Having decided to incorporate Juan in the study based upon an initial profile, we requested and obtained permission from his parents, from the administration of his high school, and from Juan himself to proceed with the case study.

In Juan's case, the research methodology encompassed interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researcher interviewed Juan in the school setting, at his home, and in a third, more neutral, context. Interviews were also conducted with his father, mother, and siblings, and with his ESL, Spanish, English, art, and math teachers. Observations included visits to Juan's home, to his ESL, English, art, and math classes, and to the playing field. Documents providing evidence for the study included Juan's academic records from the previous school year, grade reports from the year in progress, and samples of his academic work.

Content analysis was employed to process the raw data proceeding from these sources, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the evidence. In presenting the information for this report, the quoted excerpts which originate from Juan or from any of the members of his family have been translated from Spanish into English, retaining as closely as possible the original sentence structure and meaning. This procedure became necessary, as the interviews with these individuals had been carried out in Spanish. Juan, his parents, and siblings having expressed a strong preference for keeping communication in their native language. As the interviewer was fluent in Spanish, it was deemed most appropriate to employ the language in which the participants would be most comfortable and thus feel at greater liberty to express their thoughts and feelings.

Background

Juan's parents are from the state of Michoacan in Mexico — a mountainous region of small farms and of artisans, making handicrafts such as ceramics, wood carvings, hand-woven textiles, and metalwork. His father, who grew up on a subsistence farm, sees his own parents as having been quite traditional and, at times, almost inflexible.

I grew up, you might say, in poverty. Therefore, I do not want the same thing for them [my children]. I was not able to go out and visit a friend, because my parents were very strict. They still live, and I must go and see them. But they would say, "No, you must not go out of the house, because someone might hurt you." My father was one of those who grew up in the olden days, when there were feuds and quarrels about things that don't make any sense. Well, all this is what I am trying to avoid happening with my children.

Juan's father was able to attend school only through the sixth grade. The truncation of his learning experience was primarily due to economic factors. As he observed, when discussing his own opportunities for schooling: "Well, in Mexico it is much more difficult. Out there in the country, we always lack the economic resources to study, to buy shoes for school. It is very difficult for poor people to obtain an education."

A similar situation confronted Juan's mother as a child. Although she expressed having had a deep longing to continue her studies, the socioeconomic situation that her family experienced forced her to abandon school at fifth grade.

I didn't have much opportunity to study. . . . I and my brothers, we all sold something or other in order to have food to eat. I only studied until fifth grade. That's as far as I got. But I always liked school. More than anything, I'll tell you, I liked to write very much, and draw. But I wasn't able to study much. Many times my head would hurt. So that was a problem. But I liked to study. To this day, I like to write a lot. I write letters, and, sometimes, I write songs. You know, what one does to pass the time. And sometimes I draw houses, trees, and flowers. That is what I mostly draw.

Juan was their first child. When he was born, his father was twenty years old, and his mother was thirteen. Although she expressed that she had no particular aspirations for her child before he was born, it appears that she devoted considerable time and attention to him as a child.

When my son Juan was born, they told me that he was born very lucky. And that belief I have carried with me. And at least until now, what I have seen is that it has gone well for him. What I did was to take care of him. I fed him beans. He played in the dirt. He got muddy. Every little while he was filthy, and I had to clean him up. But he seemed like a bright child. When he went to school, I would tell him that he needed to do the assignments, do his homework, and how he needed to make his letters. . . . The things that he didn't understand, I would help him.

I would take his hand, and tell him, "Look, this is the way that you do it."

A little over a year after Juan's birth, a second son was born. Then a year later, a daughter. And finally, two years later, a second daughter to make up a family of four children. While Juan's father had previously worked in Mexico as an agricultural day laborer, he began to find it necessary to look elsewhere for work in order to sustain his family.

You know how we Hispanics are, always looking for work. If there is work here, we work here. If the work runs out here, we look for work somewhere else. Those who want work have to move. Well, I say that about me. I have been in various places. In California, in Texas, in North Carolina, and in the other part of Virginia.

At various times, he worked as a cook, or a carpenter, or pruned trees. Meanwhile, his family stayed in Mexico. They lived in an adobe house, near to his parents. The children cared for the goats, assisted their grandfather on his plot of land, and helped their godfather harvest his corn. During this time, because his father was often away from the home, Juan seems to have related most closely with his mother. In fact, Juan became quite accustomed to his father's absence. As he remembers it, "My father would be away some three times a year. He would come back for a couple of months, and then he would go away again. I never went with him. But I didn't miss him too much, because I was used to it."

At times, however, Juan's mother would accompany her husband to find work in the United States. At such times, the children would remain in the care of a relative, usually one of the grandparents. During this period, the children had started their schooling. As there was no public transportation for the children, each day they walked to school and back. This is how Juan described his school:

At the school in Mexico, there were not many teachers, and it was smaller than this high school [in the United States]. It wasn't all under a single roof. The classrooms were separate buildings. And there wasn't a cafeteria. Some subjects, like math, were different, too. There we had mathematics, here we are taking algebra. And that is quite different. We didn't have that subject at our school. Here they always use calculators, and there they were not permitted. There were no computers, or any of that. Here the classes have all that we need like in art. There the teachers didn't have any materials. We also stayed in a single classroom, and the teachers moved from classroom to classroom. But here each classroom has all of the things that it needs, and we move from classroom to classroom.

He remembers his teachers as "very kind and of a good nature. Some of them, sometimes, would become angry because someone had done something wrong. But they almost never reprimanded me, because I almost always tried to do the things the best that I could."

A number of experiences stand out in his mind from that period. One was a trip that his family made to the beach. Juan remembers being enthralled by the ocean, as well as having a wonderful time with his siblings. Another experience concerned his desire to learn about computers. "In Mexico I really wanted to learn about computers. But you had to pay, and it cost too much. That is why I couldn't enroll." His father also recalled the incident.

Juan has been wanting me to buy him a computer. He says that he likes that, ever since we were back in Mexico. When I was there, and he was studying seventh grade, he wanted to enroll in a computer course. Not at the school. But it was very expensive. It was over a thousand five hundred pesos [about \$500 dollars], and I was only earning thirty pesos [about \$10 dollars] per day. To earn that much, would have taken me forever. So I told him, "Maybe later on I can help you solve that problem." But it is a good idea, so that he can practice and learn.

By the time that Juan had turned thirteen, his parents had decided to bring the entire family to the United States. Already several of his uncles on his mother's side of the family were living in the United States with their families. And it just seemed to be the most prudent thing to do. As Juan's father clarified,

It seems better to me, at times, that they study here [in the United States], so that they can speak two languages and know many more things. Here they have more privileges, and more help moral help, because I am with them. And if they are with me, I can see if they are needing a pair of shoes, and I can say, "They have paid me now, let's go buy the shoes." But if they are in Mexico, what will I know? Nothing. I won't even know about the friendships that they are forming.

In the United States this time, Juan's father found work as a "waterman" at a nursery/greenhouse operation in a Virginia town. His wife also works at the nursery, at minimum wage. At first, the family lived out in the country, quite a distance from town. The house, however, was in poor condition and the rent seemed high. His father summed it up, "Last winter was very hard for us. Terrible." Many days that winter, there was no opportunity to work at the nursery. And the other days, Juan's parents worked outdoors, in the rain and cold. With the arrival of spring, the family decided to move into town, and rented a small apartment.

As soon as Juan's family had arrived in the United States, they had enrolled their children in school first in a rural elementary school, and then with the move that spring, in an elementary school in town. During that first school year, a volunteer came to their home two or three times a week to give the children special English classes.

Over the summer, Juan helped his father with his work at the nursery. With the start of the new school year, Juan enrolled in the ninth grade at the public high school in town.

Evidences of High Ability

It appears that Juan has given certain evidence of high ability since he was quite young. Juan received high marks at his school in Mexico, frequently receiving recognition as the top student in his grade. On several occasions, he was presented with diplomas of merit for his high levels of achievement. And once, he was to receive a government scholarship awarded to exceptional students. Juan remembered the incident quite poignantly.

Well, I obtained nearly always the highest place in the other school that I attended [in Mexico]. And I always was the top student in my class. And, there in Mexico, they were going to give me a scholarship, money I mean, because I was one of the best. And because we hardly had any money there in Mexico, they were going to give me a scholarship. Only, they didn't hand in the paperwork in time, so they couldn't give it to me.

Juan's teachers in Mexico and the principal of his school seem to have valued his abilities. Juan observed that his teachers would often give him pointers as to how to best understand something that he was particularly interested in learning. His father, when referring to Juan's academic attainments while in Mexico, remembered a conversation that he had with the principal of the school.

Studying is one of his virtues. From Mexico he has liked to study. Since he was small. In fifth grade and in sixth grade, he was the top student in his class. And in seventh grade, he was the number one of his group. When I was going to bring him with me [to the United States], I went to pick up his papers and diploma. And the director of the school told me that he was very sorry that I was taking him, because he was the best student that he had in that classroom. He told me that I should let him continue to study. And I told him that I would try to see to it that Juan continued his studies.

Since coming to the United States, Juan's abilities have again been noticed by his teachers. During his first semester, he received the "Students with Awesome Talent" (SWAT) award for outstanding progress in learning English and all-round academic attainment. Two areas in which he seemed to demonstrate exceptional ability were his ESL and math classes. The comments on his first three ESL progress reports were as follows:

Period 1: Juan tries very hard to understand what is going on in the classroom. He copies any English that I put up on the overhead, and he watches other students to see what he needs to do, where he needs to move, etc. When I attempt conversation, he shrugs and looks away, or shakes his head. He uses a Spanish-English dictionary and works hard to pick up any English he can.

Period 2: Juan is a very good student and continues to make good progress in English. His vocabulary has increased greatly. His speech production has subsequently increased. He is beginning to read some books in English. I really enjoy my work with Juan. Grade A. Good job!!

Period 3: Juan is a hard worker and a good student. He is speaking more and more English as his vocabulary increases. He is doing a good job!

Evidence of Juan's ability in math was evident when he transferred from the rural school that spring. His final grade was "A+" and his teacher, furthermore, had penciled in a "100" beside the grade.

At the new school in town, Juan continued to have the same ESL teacher. On his first report card, she noted, "Juan is a bright and hard working young man. I am impressed with the rapid progress he has made." His final ESL report for the year gave him an "excellent" rating in each of the evaluated areas listening, speaking, writing, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. His ESL teacher recalled an interaction that she had with two other teachers after Juan had turned in a written project to one of them.

The English teacher came to me to tell me how wonderful it was. How impressed she was and she showed it to the... I guess he had a Reading and an English teacher, so she showed it to the other teacher, and they were both really impressed.

Evidence of another area of ability emerged that spring. Juan was awarded the "1994 Best Dragster Design Trophy." He mentioned it once in an interview, "They gave me a trophy at the school last year because I made a race car out of wood, and it came out as the best one." The model car was carefully carved, with considerable attention to detail. Final grades at the end of that first school year in the United States were as follows: an "A" in Math, Spanish 1 (taken at the high school), and

Technical Education; and "B" in English, Health & P. E., Arts, and Reading & Writing.

When Juan enrolled for ninth grade at the public high school, he was placed initially in the "non-academic" track, as a foreign student. Fortunately for Juan, the high school also employed the same teacher for its ESL classes as Juan had while in the eighth grade. She recalled the events as they transpired at the beginning of the school year.

Juan showed me the schedule, and he had Math 9, which is your regular math for non-academic kids. He didn't have English 9, but another maybe reading resource, or something like that. I can't remember. So I just came to talk to the counselor and I told him that I thought that he should be in academics. "I have no idea why he is in Math 9. He was taking pre-Algebra. He should be taking Algebra." So everything was changed to the way I told him and he's still fine. He's great. Of course, I checked with Juan first. I wanted to make sure if it is O.K., you know. "What are your goals? Do you want to graduate from high school? Do you want to go to a vocational school? Do you want to get some kind of training?" He said that he would like to go to college, and, you know, that is one of his goals. He hasn't decided what to do once he gets to college, but he's focused on that. And if he keeps faith in it, I think he'll do it.

So Juan was now enrolled in Art, Algebra I, Earth Science, Academic English, Health & P. E., and Spanish II, in addition to his ESL class.

As Juan had suggested in an initial interview that his easiest subjects were Algebra, Art, Earth Science, and ESL, and that his most difficult subject was English "because we have to write in that class", it seemed appropriate to include evidence from both extremes. Additionally, he had also shared that his ESL and Spanish teachers probably knew him better than anyone in the school. "The other teachers don't know me very well." These individuals, therefore, were also interviewed in reference to Juan's abilities.

Regarding the Algebra class, Juan had said, "Math is very easy for me. Back in Mexico it was also very easy for me. I understood it very well. It's not hard. Almost always I understand everything very well; in other words, how to do it." His Algebra teacher gave this report:

Juan seems to be a very bright student. In fact, he scored 100 on the last chapter test. Frankly, I think that he would do well in an honors class. He is capable of doing an honors class. He does very well at the board explaining. He always turns his work in. I just wish that all

students were like him. I would really hate to lose him as a student. But I feel that we are going much too slow for him. On Altair designs, utilizing geometric patterns, I have been very impressed with his artistic flair. And his peers have been very much impressed. His work was outstanding. Totally different.

As students would finish working through a set of algebra problems in the class, the Algebra teacher would give her students Altair designs to work on. While most students on this particular design had formed flowers, stars, or other geometric shapes, Juan had utilized the existing lines in the design to create the portrait of a young Hispanic male, complete with tie and sunglasses. It truly seemed to be quite a novel and exceptional production.

This talent area came through quite strongly in the interview with Juan's art teacher:

He's artistically gifted. He is better than the better than average. He is very good. Juan seems to understand the concept like on perspective, he gets it. I feel that he understands me. He has a high degree of potential. Everything is well done, even his thumbnail sketches. Some are just elegant. I think he could do very well in the graphic arts, as an architect, or in whatever area he would like. I'd like to see him blossom. I just think the world of him.

Juan's picture of a three-dimensional sphere utilized lighting and perspective quite effectively. The art teacher noted that he had drawn freehand the circle which denoted the border of the sphere. It was hard to tell. Another picture showed a Mexican cliff diver in mid-fall. The action depicted in the drawing was quite tangible, as it was in a drawing of a startled Santa Claus bursting through the ceiling and already finding presents under the tree. He had also drawn a portrait of his sister based on a photograph.

In an interview with Juan's English teacher, the instructor noted that while this was an "academic" English class, Juan "seems to have held his own." He further observed that:

Juan rarely speaks up. He has an accent, but it does not seem to bother the other students. His assignments are always on time, and he brings his pen, paper, and books. He is beginning to participate a little more. Occasionally, he will raise his hand and contribute. But he does not use the language barrier as an excuse. He has an excellent attitude and manners. On tests he does a lot better than average. In terms of attendance, he has only missed once during the last six weeks and none this period. His writing ability is average and above. Sentence

structure is good. His work is neat and legible. When I call on him, he generally has an answer. He is slow to initiate things on his own, but he is beginning to volunteer more.

On a recent English chapter test, which the teacher said was representative of Juan's achievement, Juan had scored 87%.

The Spanish II teacher indicated that Juan was a high "A" student, around the 98% mark. While noting that at times he has some spelling problems, she found him "willing to learn. He never says, 'We don't say it that way in Mexico.' And he turns in assignments on time." She concluded that "Juan definitely has college potential. And I would hope that he would have that opportunity."

The ESL teacher described Juan as "my best student," and believes that he will probably not need ESL next year. "I think he will do fine on his own." The characteristic that has impressed her most is the ease with which Juan seems to learn. "I would mainly say, and I've said this a few times, how easy it is for Juan to understand anything that I explain to him.... So I think that really makes Juan different from the other kids. He's smart."

Those close to Juan have attributed his achievements in a number of ways. His ESL teacher believes that his present success is due, at least in part, to prior schooling and personal organization.

I started working with Juan over a year ago and he came to us without any English at all. He has never had any English instruction and I was really amazed how in a few months he was able to do the work in the class.... He knows how to use his Spanish. He knows his relation between the Spanish and the English. The grammar is very similar. So if you do have a good background in your Spanish, it is going to help you in the English. You know, a lot of kids just can't relate that, but Juan can. So that makes it really simple. He's a great student. And he's very organized, extremely organized. I mean, he knows exactly where all the papers are. He's just very organized. Math, English, Science all the papers are always there. A lot of kids say, "Oh, I don't know where my papers are. I left them at home." You know, Juan is not like that. I don't think he has ever forgotten a book, any paper, or any assignment. So I think that is really impressive.

Juan's father maintains that a prime ingredient for his attainments lies in the realm of effort. For example, in discussing Juan's proclivity for art, he stated:

Juan really likes to draw. Since he was small, he has enjoyed it. He tries to draw anything. In fact, there are pictures that he likes and he will just look at them and draw them, and it looks very much the same

Perhaps it is a gift that he has, I don't know. At any rate, he puts a lot of effort into it.

Again, in commenting on his son's academic achievements:

Juan is the only one [in our family] who has always come out ahead. In Mexico, he received diplomas, including ones for high achievement. And I feel proud of him, because he applies himself very well. I'm not sure where it comes from. Because I and my wife, you would say that we don't know much. Not even how to write [in English]. But he does. He just seems to put a lot into it. That is what I like.

His father, however, did make an interesting observation regarding one of his own brothers, implying the heredity may play a role.

I have a brother that is very much like him. Very intelligent, very serious, and very studious. They both, in fact, have the same name. People have told me that it seems like Juan is his son, rather than my son. They say that because Juan is very serious and likes to study. But we are brothers, he and I.

Juan's mother also believes that some of Juan's ability may be linked to genetics. In commenting on his artistic interests, she wondered about this possibility. "I have some brothers that like to draw as well, or even better, than Juan. I don't know, but it seems to me that it must come from heredity." One might acknowledge that there do seem to be certain common traits, even in the immediate family. All of Juan's siblings, for example, expressed that their favorite subject in school was Mathematics.

On his most recent report card, Juan received an "A+" in Art and Earth Science, an "A" in Algebra I and Spanish II, an "A-" in the Health & P. E. class, and a "B-" in English. He was rated as "Excellent" in his ESL class. Overall, he certainly seems to possess notable areas of high ability.

Settings

Most of Juan's activities take place in three settings: at home, at school, and in certain extracurricular environments. In order to better understand the themes and issues which characterize Juan's life, it is important to examine these three contexts.

Home

Juan lives with his parents, three siblings, an uncle, and a grandfather in a two-bedroom apartment, on the upper floor of a quadplex. When all are at home, quarters are very tight. With a chuckle, his father described his home in this way:

The family is something else. When they are all together, it is like a war zone. But that's the family. But in everything that is something serious, each one does his part. They are very loving with me, and I with them. My wife gets along very well with the children. My daughters help her, which is what they need to learn. And I think that I am happy with my family. Of course, I am not a model father. I am like any person, with virtues and defects. But I try to do the best for my family.

Family ties and relationships seem to be an important dimension in the home. The walls of the small living room are covered with pictures of various family members. Behind the worn sofa, for example, a set of photographs from the previous Christmas have been arranged on the wall. Although Juan's father had mentioned that the financial situation had been particularly strained that previous winter, presents are piled high around the tree. Juan's dragster trophy and his soccer trophy, as well as the soccer trophy belonging to his brother, are prominently positioned on top of the television set. Although the house was not immaculate, it was tidy on each visit.

The children treat their uncle and grandfather with respect, often including one or the other in their activities. As their father noted,

With the grandfather here, the children are very loving. I tell them, "Children, you must respect your grandfather. You must love him, because he is the father of your mother." And they do. It's "Grandpa here," and "Grandpa there." And "Grandpa, let's go skating." Of course, Grandpa is not fit to go skating, but he says, "O.K., let's go." They are his grandchildren. What else can he say? And they get along very well. The old man likes living with us.

Sometimes, the children do things together, although certain differences come through quite clearly at times. In describing his siblings, for example, Juan delineated some of these differences.

My brother is very mischievous. He doesn't like school very much. I don't think that he likes to study much. Sometimes I help him with his assignments, or we go together to the library. Or we play together, or go to the parks to play. My sisters do like school, but they sometimes don't get very good grades. Sometimes, I also help them with their

homework. Sometimes the four of us will talk together, with my mother and father. Or we will all go to the library or watch television together sometimes with our parents, and sometimes alone. During the day, as they are often not here, we watch it by ourselves. Actually, sometimes we don't get along too well. They sometimes get into discussions or arguments about one thing or another. But I rarely argue or fight with them. Whenever I'm not in the library, I will go into my room and lie on the bed, and start to read. And they are in the living room, watching television or having a discussion. I do think that I should help them and watch out for them, so that nothing happens to them. Or help them with things they need lend them a hand, and share things with them.

Juan reported that his parents have told him that he is responsible for the well being of his brother and sisters while they are at work. Also, that he should make sure that they all keep the house clean and tidy. Additionally, during the summer, Juan has helped his father at work and enjoyed the experience. But during the school year, his primary responsibility becomes school. This seems to be a family arrangement. His father, for example, outlined his expectations:

This past summer Juan helped me at work some days. And he liked it. But now he is in school, and I leave him to do his homework. He takes care of his studies. I just tell him, "Your job is to study." And I think that he is doing well.

Juan's mother agrees. "We don't take away Juan's time for studying. As long as he can, and we can give it to him, let him continue to study."

The lives of both the mother and father appear to center on their children. As their mother quite frequently stated, "We work for the sake of our children, not for ourselves or others." And on another occasion, "We always try to do everything that our children need." Similarly, Juan's father says that he works the six days each week so that his children can have a better life. He believes that his parental example should be to take life seriously, and to all work together and help one another.

Decision-making often incorporates the whole family. Juan's father, for example, described the move to town as a shared process.

When we were thinking about moving over to this house, I talked with the children. "Look, children, what do you think. We are thinking about moving. My job is too far away. And here it is not the most convenient place for you to study. The school is not nearby. What do you think?" And they said, "First, let's go see where we will be." So I

brought them over. I told them, "This is the apartment. We are close to the center of town. You can go to the park." "Yes, let's move over here," they said. And so we moved. I ask them for their opinion, so that they won't feel bad about the move. After all, they are the ones who will be living here, and I take that into account.

In their home, the family has preserved the Mexican culture. Everyone rises early and retires early at night, as is common with many rural Mexican families. Icons of various saints are placed throughout the house. And the food is typically Mexican. As the older sister explained, "Here at home, we don't eat American food. We make our own Mexican food. Only at school do we eat American food."

School

The home context, however, has but little contact with the school setting. Juan's father says that he has not gone to the children's school because he is embarrassed that he might not know what to do. "Frankly," he admitted, "I'm afraid to go in, because I don't know anything about that at all. Things are different here, this thing and that thing. And I don't understand any of it." His mother says that she went one time to the school, but that she keeps in touch mostly when one of the teachers that talks Spanish calls her on the phone.

Juan's ESL teacher endeavored to describe from her perspective the relationship between the home and school settings.

They [Juan's parents] can't be very involved because they are not educated, but they are supportive. If he needs a pencil or paper, they'll give it to him. If he needs a pair of sneakers, he'll get that. But his apartment is really small, so sometimes I know he can't spread out his schoolwork with a lot of people living in the apartment. It's a family of six, with a grandfather and an uncle also, and it's a two-bedroom apartment. So he really doesn't have a place to study. It is a small place, and there is a lot of noise. If he does have a lot of homework, I tell him to go to the library. So a lot of times I don't know how he gets his work done, but he gets it done. If he needs to be in the library, his father will take him.

Juan attends the public high school, located on the main street of town. It is a three-story brick building that houses some seven hundred students. Of these students, three are foreign two Mexicans, one of which is Juan, and a Chinese. There are several other students of Hispanic background, but they have lived in the United States for quite some time and have adopted many American ways and customs. Juan, however, frequently dresses in Mexican style. One day, for example,

he wore a long-sleeve, loosely-fitting white shirt, with buttons down one side. On another day, he wore a wool-lined leather jacket, although few of the other students that day were wearing any type of jacket or sweater.

In the ESL class, the teacher worked individually with each student. The students worked separately, each at his own table. Little interaction took place between students. Juan seemed to work diligently, with little need of direction from the teacher. There was a computer at the back of the ESL classroom. After finishing his assignment, the other Hispanic student sat down to play a game on the computer. Juan never used the computer during the entire double period. Reflecting later on the incident, Juan remarked that, although he was not very familiar with the machine, the real reason for not utilizing it very much was that he was not particularly interested in the games.

I hardly ever sit down at the computer [in the ESL classroom]. Sometimes, I do try it out, and I try to play some games. But nobody has ever taught me about computers, nor have I taught myself. I don't know very much at all. But I think that I would like computers I just don't know how to use them. Sometimes, I try them out there at the library, but I don't know how to use them very well. There are different disks, and I don't know which ones to use. At the ESL class, we can use them just before we leave. But they only have games. That is all.

In the Algebra class, Juan sat near the front of the room and took notes continuously throughout the lecture and demonstration. Few of the other students did. When given the assignment, Juan worked on it with concentration, and was one of the first students to complete it. A number of students were reprimanded by the teacher for conversing with one another. Juan, however, never spoke to another student throughout the whole class period. All of the students seemed to have calculators, Juan included, although he used it rather infrequently. Later, in discussing the use of a calculator for math classes, Juan presented his opinion on the matter:

I sometimes use a calculator whenever there are large numbers, like multiplication in the hundreds or thousands. It is simply faster. I use it sometimes, but not very often, because most of the numbers are small. Back at my school in Mexico, they didn't let us use them. Actually, I think that one gets more practice with calculations when you do them just with your mind. But for long calculations, it's better to use a calculator because that way it can be done more quickly.

A similar scenario, as had taken place in the Algebra class, occurred in the academic English class. Juan was attentive, but uninvolved with other students. He

was again seated toward the front of the room, this time on the front row. In an interview, the teacher commented that Juan had chosen that front seat, as seats were not assigned in his class. Juan later elucidated his preference for locating at the front of the class.

Well in some classes, they assign you seats. But in the other ones, I do sit up front, because in back it is very solitary. And up front you can hear better and pay better attention, and so understand things more.

In the English class, Juan had opted to read a thick and rather difficult book for one of his assignments. When asked why he had chosen that book over an easier one which the teacher would have approved, he explained, "I choose that book because it catches my interest more as I follow all the things that are happening. And the more I concentrate on something, and the more I read it, the more I come to understand."

The art class was less structured than some of the other classes observed. Students sat in groups at low tables. Samples of student art hung on the walls and from the ceiling. Again, Juan was attentive and clearly on task. Some interchange, however, was observed between Juan and another student. The following excerpt constitutes a portion of the field notes taken during that class period.

There are eighteen students in this class – twelve White, four Black, and two Hispanic. The Hispanics are the Mexican students from the ESL class. Juan does not sit with the other Hispanic student. He sits at a long table with several Caucasian students. They sit on one side of the table. He sits on the other. Juan initiates no conversation, but smiles or laughs when a boy or girl in close proximity does so. He watches the teacher quite intently during instructions. Only two others in the class seem to be doing so. . . . Juan looks up from his work and smiles as the teacher compliments a student across the table. . . . Juan has been constantly on task. This is not true for most of the students. Many engage in occasional banter, including the other Hispanic student who is on task less than 30% of the time. . . . While most of the other students have picked out a Christmas card on which to base their drawing in ten to fifteen seconds, Juan spends nearly three minutes looking through the box of cards before making a selection. . . . While a number of students (nearly half of the class) are still working on a previous project, Juan immediately starts working on the project for next week. . . . Juan responds when a student (male) across the table talks to him, but rarely, if ever, initiates conversation with him. Right now, they are looking together at one of that student's drawings, and seem to be talking about it.

In a subsequent interview, Juan clarified this situation, "He is not a friend of mine. But he almost always talks to me when we are in class. He asks me which drawing looks better. Things like that. And I tell him which is better, or what each thing looks like, or how it would turn out best."

In each class observed, Juan was attentive, on task, and seemed to genuinely enjoy the learning experience. No evidence was found of boredom or distraction. There appeared to be a certain personal satisfaction derived from the experience. In Juan's view, "I like to go to school. That way I make more friends, and learn how to do things better. And if I didn't go to school, I would be bored." His attendance record seems to corroborate this perspective. Since the beginning of the current school year, Juan has been absent from school only one day.

In each of his classes, Juan appeared to grasp concepts quickly. "School isn't really difficult, except for the language part because I can't communicate very well, or because they don't understand me very well. That has mostly been the problem." In comparing his classes here in the United States to those in Mexico, he remarked, "When I first arrived here, I thought that the classes were more difficult than in Mexico, because of the language. But now I think that they are easier." His siblings separately voiced the same opinion.

Whenever Juan does have a problem, or doesn't understand an assignment, he will often ask his teacher or a classmate. "When I don't understand something, I usually ask the ESL teacher. If it was in class, I would go and ask the teacher to explain it to me, so that I could understand it better and do it right." In fact, when describing the way in which he learned best, Juan replied,

I think that by asking other people for help. Like other students there in the class. Or to work in groups so that I can know how others are doing it so that I can try to do it that way as well. Or ask the teacher for help.

On another occasion, however, he added a further dimension to his preferred learning style. "I think that I learn best when the teacher explains something and then we write. Also, when we read something and then do exercises. Then we practice it and can do it better." As one might perhaps expect, Juan sees homework as an important part of learning, although not without complication.

I think that it is good that teachers give homework, in part. That way you can practice at home, and if you have any question, you can ask your parents so that they can help you. But it is a problem, on the other hand, because if neither you nor they understand it, the teacher is not going to be there to teach you how to do it. And you can end up doing it wrong.

On a personal level, Juan and his teachers seem to hold each other in high esteem and appreciation. Juan expressed, "My teachers help me in my classes. Things that I don't know, they tell me. About how to do it. They hardly ever ask me to read because they know that I still can't read very well." Since Juan's arrival in the United States, his teachers have also rated him highly as a student. On his eighth-grade year-end report, for example, three teachers indicated that he was "a pleasure to have in class," one that he was a "cooperative student," and one, an "enthusiastic student." On his most recent report card from the high school, three teachers gave comments regarding positive attitude, four teachers on his excellent work, three teachers on outstanding behavior, and only one teacher (English) indicated that classroom participation was needed.

Extracurricular

The extracurricular context involves three facets: art, the library, and sports. When Juan has free time, he often draws.

I like to draw, and make key rings. Draw animals, almost always animals. And horses. Mostly I draw horses, or sometimes dragons, or fish. I like to draw dragons because I can make them in many different ways, or put different things on them. Like if they are swimming, or flying, or if they are with other dragons, or chasing something. I try to make them like snakes, with part like a horse. Or like I have seen in some pictures.

Perhaps because Juan does not own any books, the public library has assumed an important extracurricular role, both in terms of books and videos. Some days, after school, Juan will go to the library and check out a book or video with which to spend the evening. The same holds true for days on which there is no school.

On weekends or vacations, I usually watch television or read. Sometimes I go to the library. Because we don't have cable [TV], we usually watch videos that we get from the library. Sometimes videos about the same books. Usually science fiction, or comedy, or sometimes westerns. But I don't like romantic movies. I like things like when they are going to other planets, or looking for extraterrestrial beings. I like to read science fiction, as well. Or terror, or any book that is interesting, such as an adventure. For English class, we are doing a report about a book in English. It is about terror, or something like that. About adventure. I like things that have suspense and that have action. When you are reading them, there are many things that you can imagine, and that catch your attention. There are things that you are

imagining, and when you read them, you find that you were imagining them a different way. You can imagine things, see, in different ways.

When Juan reads a book, he will read it from start to finish, in order. At times, even at a single sitting. Juan's parents have noted their sons' apparent love for reading, whether it be books, magazines, or the newspaper. His father observed,

On his own time, he likes to study and learn, more than anything. He sees a book and he says, "I really like this." And he starts to read. We have a card from the library, and we go and take out three, four, or five books and he starts to study them. That is what he does at night, read. Books, novels, stories, who knows what. You see, I don't know anything about books. He takes them into his bedroom, and reads.

Similarly, his mother described his interest in periodicals. "Whatever newspaper he sees that interests him, he will take it and read it. And magazines that catch his eye, he will take them and study them."

Although he enjoys reading, Juan is considerably less enthusiastic about writing. When presented with a make-believe scenario of someone asking him to write about anything he wished, Juan responded,

I would write about an adventure, like looking for hidden treasure, or something like that. Maybe in the jungle. And I would have interesting things to catch the attention of the person who was reading. But really, I don't like to write much. I like to read books, but I wouldn't like to write a book. I'm not into inventing stories, nor can I do it very well.

The third extracurricular component is sports, and more specifically, soccer. Juan would exude excitement when he talked about it, his conversation becoming animated. Recently, both Juan and his brother were members of the champion team in the Fall Tournament of their Division. The whole family attended the final game, although his father had to leave for work before it was over.

Juan's parents clearly approve of his affinity for soccer. His mother declared emphatically, "Juan just loves to play soccer. Oh, how he likes to play. And I think that is good, so that he can associate with others." In a similar vein, his father stated,

Juan likes sports. In his heart, he is a soccer player. That is good, because instead of wandering the streets, or hanging out in the pool halls, he can go and play. And that stimulates him. It is a good activity. He is very enthusiastic about his soccer team. I wouldn't say that he is the best player, but he is probably one of the better players.

In an interview, Juan spoke about his relationship to soccer. He pointed out that the most important thing for him was not winning, but rather enjoying himself and meeting other young people.

Researcher: What do you like best about the sport?

Juan: What I like best is not so much winning, although we did win the tournament this time, but rather enjoying myself and having a good time with the other members of the team. I am able to meet other young people there. Last year I was on a team that we lost all of the games. This time we won all of the games. We just lost one.

Researcher: And how did you feel about it last year?

Juan: Well, not too good. But it really wasn't too important to me. What was important was to enjoy myself and have a good time.

One day at school, Juan decided to play basketball instead of eating lunch. He commented that he often did this. While he seemed to enjoy the basketball game, he appeared less sure of himself, perhaps because he was considerably less experienced in this sport, than with soccer. Excerpts from the field notes depict some of the events that day.

Juan walks over to one of the courts. Two young men are choosing team members. Juan is not chosen for either team. He crosses over into the second court where another group is forming. This group seems less structured, and Juan begins to play with the others.... Juan is mostly playing defensive, from the middle of the court to under the opposing team's basket. He very rarely crosses the centerline of the court. None of the other players seem to operate under this restriction. . . . The game has been going on for about 15 minutes now. I have not observed any of Juan's teammates pass him the ball. However, when he captures the ball (most attempts are unsuccessful), he quickly passes it to a teammate. . . . Juan has played the game until the bell has rung. (Many of the others have dropped in and out of the game.) He has played hard and persistently, although not with great success. He did score one basket, and attempted another shot which failed. As I think of it, I never observed Juan speak to or smile at any of his teammates.

It would seem that while one of the reasons that Juan engages in sports is to associate with other young people, the language barrier, or perhaps his personality or a combination thereof makes it difficult. Nevertheless, he does seem to quite thoroughly enjoy himself when engaged in a sport.

Themes and Issues

In analyzing the data in this case study, a number of patterns seem to emerge. These themes include (a) feelings of cultural isolation, (b) the centrality of family, (c) a zest for learning, (d) respect for social order, and (e) a desire for upward social mobility.

Cultural Isolation

One of the most frequently recurring themes that surfaced throughout the interviews with Juan, and, to a certain extent, with his parents and teachers, was the issue of cultural isolation. Although the move from Mexico seems to have been rather traumatic for each of the children, Juan seems to have suffered and continues to suffer most acutely.

Many cultural differences, perhaps, have contributed toward feelings of disconnectedness. Juan noted several points of unfamiliarity, "Things just aren't the same. The foods are not the same, nor the games, nor school. All that has changed." Cultural isolation, however, appears to primarily involve interlocking linguistic and social components. As he emphasized in an interview, "One of the most important things for me is to be able to communicate with other people. And to have friends, that I can talk to."

Of these two aspects, the language barrier seemed to be the greater problem initially. As Juan recalled, "The hardest thing was not being able to communicate with other people and with other students." The first few weeks and months were a most trying ordeal.

At first, when I got here, I could hardly talk any English. I felt totally lost. I hardly had any friends, none of that. When I arrived, everything seemed very strange. It was all very different for me the school, the houses, the stores. It is very different back there in Mexico where we lived. In school, sometimes, things became very difficult for me in the classes. But now that I can talk more, things are getting easier. At the beginning when I arrived, I didn't know any English, and now I can talk some, and read, and write it.

Juan's prior attainments as a student seem to have only compounded the frustration. His ESL teacher noted how difficult it would be "when you are in your country and you're number one in your class; and then you come to a foreign country, you don't know the language, and you are at the bottom of the class." Juan hinted at this sudden loss of academic status and efficacy when he recalled discovering, upon his arrival at school in the United States, that he could not even read or write.

At the beginning, everything was very difficult. Basically, because of language. I didn't know anyone, and no one talked to me. Lately, I have begun to know others more. But I still don't talk to them much. And in my classes, it was very difficult. Sometimes the teachers helped me a lot so that I could receive somewhat acceptable grades. The only class that was easy was Spanish. The others were harder. I couldn't do many things. At the beginning, I couldn't even read or write. I didn't understand anything at first. Now I understand much more.

Nevertheless, Juan's ESL teacher maintained that, even now, "He's not going to talk because he's still afraid that people are going to laugh at him." This reticence to communicate may, in fact, have aggravated other dimensions of cultural solitude such as social estrangement.

While linguistic differences were an initial jolt, the social component of cultural isolation soon assumed greater prominence. The issue of friendships assumed center stage, perhaps because of the importance that friends had occupied in Juan's life up to that time, or perhaps, because of a basic longing for fellowship. "Friends are very important to me because I can share with them the things that happen to me, or we can just talk. Or they can help me with things that I don't understand, and on which I need help."

In Mexico, Juan seems to have been well-liked by teachers and students alike, and to have made many friends. Together with his friends, he would talk about classes and soccer, or go to the movies on weekends.

In Mexico, I had many more friends than I have here. I had friends in almost the whole school. Here I have hardly had any friends. There we used to have good times together, talking together almost all of the time. Here I almost never talk to anyone. There, sometimes after school, we would do homework together. Or other things.

While noting that few of his current teachers know him very well, Juan spoke fondly of his relationship with his teachers in Mexico.

In Mexico, my teachers knew me very well. Sometimes I would talk with them, during lunch break, or after school. But not here. And often, they would give me pointers on how to come out better in my classes. Here my teachers just tell me to keep on like I am, that I am doing well, and to keep on doing well.

The social picture changed dramatically when the family moved to the United States, and Juan found himself in a totally new environment. "Here I hardly have any friends. That's why I hardly ever talk with anyone. Nor do I have hardly any friends at school. I have a few near the house, but we hardly ever talk, or any of

that." But he added that "sometimes I try to talk to other students, trying to be friends."

Juan's teachers have noticed the problem. The ESL teacher recalled that when she had asked Juan to write about things that he would like to change about himself, he had written down, "I would like to make more friends." She believes, however, that Juan has not made any close friends and that making friends seems to be "very difficult for him." His English teacher, while having observed that Juan is often in the lobby with a group of boys before school starts, stated, "I don't feel that he has any real friends." His Algebra teacher noted that "he doesn't really interrelate with other students, although he will smile if someone says something funny." The Art teacher was somewhat more hopeful, "He's made some friends, perhaps that's not the right word, he has some social interaction. You can see humor passing between them."

When asked for possible explanations for Juan's apparent lack of friendships, his teachers pointed to a number of factors. His Spanish teacher suggested, "He is very reserved, very quiet, very serious about his schoolwork. He keeps to himself. Paired activities are no problem, but he probably would choose to work alone given the option." His Art teacher viewed the matter as a developmental stage of shyness.

He is a little quiet, perhaps he's basically shy. He'll ask, though, if he needs help. He's not too shy for that. I don't think that his quietness is an indication of a lack of self-confidence. I think it's fine. He does need to be a little stronger in his personality, but it may just be a matter of his age.

The English teacher, however, maintained that the problem was grounded in a lack of self-confidence.

Juan is very quiet, and unsure of himself. As a result, he has little interaction with other students. He is very kind-hearted, however, willing to loan things such as a pen to fellow students. But he will never ask a question in front of the whole group. Sometimes, he will ask in private.

The Algebra teacher saw the social issue interrelating with the linguistic problem: "He is very good-natured, although very quiet. While he answers all the questions that I ask him, he is rather short and brief in conversations. That may be the difficulty."

While recognizing that Juan is "kind of a loner," the ESL teacher interpreted the phenomenon to be primarily a matter of estrangement.

I would just mainly say that he is still really homesick, and he doesn't really feel comfortable in the school here yet. He is still struggling with that. You know, whenever you talk about Mexico, his eyes light up. And it is always going to be... Well not always, but, you know, I think the more he stays in the United States, it is going to get better. But still that's a problem with Juan. He is still very homesick and you know it is going to be hard for him to make friends.

She also believed that this situation had come about because there were so few Hispanic students at the high school. "I think it has to do with the fact of being different. If you're in high school in a small town in Virginia where there are not going to be a lot of foreign students I think there are only four or five, that's hard." Juan, himself, seems to have commented on the situation. As the ESL teacher noted,

He'll complain that there are not enough Mexicans in the school. So I think, you know, that you want to have some people that look like you, who are like you. And it is kind of hard when there are just not that many. Especially in a town where they are not used to foreign students. It is hard.

At home, Juan's mother seems to be well aware of her son's difficulty in forming friendships. Indeed, she has tried to console him.

When we arrived here, the children said that they didn't like it here. Because they couldn't talk. Juan cried, when we first arrived. He wanted to return to Mexico. That he didn't have any friends here. That he didn't know any English. That they laughed at him in school. I told him, "My son, don't listen to them. You will end up knowing more than they will, because you will know two languages. And they will only know one." And so, little by little, he has begun to pick up words. But he says that he's not very happy here. He would like to return, because he says that there he has his grandparents. And that is true. He has much family, and many friends. And here he keeps asking, "I wonder where we'll end up next." And I tell him, "Well, we are just going to endure a little longer, to see what we will do."

Juan's father, also, seems to be cognizant of the problem. "The oldest one [Juan] is just very serious. Others try to be friends with him, and he is friendly with all, but, in reality, he does not like to relate to others very much. He is very timid." The father, however, does not seem to have become as directly involved in the issue. When asked in an initial interview how he might describe Juan's friends, he replied:

Well, I don't really know. He doesn't introduce them to me. He hasn't said, "Father, here is a friend." I've noticed that others sometimes greet him. And I ask him, "Who is that young man?" And he tells me, "Just a classmate." And he doesn't tell me anything more. He knows if he has friends and what they are like. He hasn't brought any here to the house. Nor does he go out with friends. He just comes home, and sits down. Sometimes he watches videos that he brings home from the library, sometimes he studies, sometimes he reads books. That's what he does. In fact, some girls that go to Juan's school have told me, "No, Juan is very shy. We sometimes greet him, and he answers us, but it is like he is embarrassed."

In fact, the father believes that Juan is quite happy with his experience in the United States, including the social dimension.

At first, Juan and Antonio would tell me, "No, let's go back to Mexico. We don't understand anything here." But I told them, "No, sons, you must learn." One month went by, two, three, and then they started to have friends. And by and by, they began to understand. One year went by, and I asked the two older ones, "Well, shall we go back to Mexico?" "No," they said, "we are doing fine here." They more or less had some friends, and would play.

It seems quite clear that Juan's father does not seem to be fully aware of his son's longing for his friends and extended family, and of his desire to return to Mexico immediately, if possible. Only once did he allude to this possibility, albeit without involving the social dimension: "Juan has told me that he would like to go back to Mexico, but I'm not sure why. Sometimes he has told me that the classes in Mexico are better. Maybe that is the reason." In essence, he believes that his children "are young, and they will adapt."

Juan, however, stated, "I would like to go back right now." His ESL teacher concurred, "Oh, yes, he wants to go back. He'll go right now if he could. He's still homesick, very homesick." Juan explained why he wanted to return.

I want to go back because I have family there. And there I can understand better, because it is my language, and I can comprehend things better. And I can talk with more people. Besides that, I had more friends there than here. Sometimes I think of my friends back in Mexico when I feel lonely. When I wish I could talk to someone, or do something with someone.

Interestingly, Juan does not communicate with his friends back in Mexico, nor can any of Juan's teachers recall that he has ever mentioned any of his friends

from Mexico. If he were to return to Mexico, Juan does not believe that returning to Mexico will require much of an adjustment on his part.

I do believe that I will be different because I will know many things that are different than what they know. But I believe that it will not be too difficult to relate to them. I will talk with them more, and share my experiences with them, and all that.

While initially experiencing similar feelings, Juan's siblings seem to have largely resolved the issue of social isolation. His younger brother, for example, would now prefer to remain in the United States.

When I first got here I was very lonely. I couldn't talk with anyone. I didn't understand any English. I didn't like pizza. Almost for the whole year I wanted to go back. Back there I had my cousins, my uncles, and my family. But now I don't want to go back to stay. Just to visit. I really like it here. I would rather study here. We don't know everything in Spanish that we need to know anymore. And now I like pizza. I like it just as well as the tortilla.

His sisters stated their views similarly. The youngest sister said that she doesn't like Spanish anymore, and that she has "more friends than I did in Mexico." The older sister maintained that in Mexico she didn't like the other students very much, "because some kids say nasty things and fight; but here I can play with my friends." Juan seems to recognize that his siblings have resolved this issue, at least to a degree. He noted, "My brother and sisters have made more friends than I have. And they feel more at home here than I do."

Juan's mother, while satisfied with her present location, is concerned, nevertheless, about her children's adjustment particularly in Juan's case. She stated:

I am happy here, and I like it here. I also have family here, and I am satisfied. But sometimes, I don't know what to do because my children are not satisfied here. Juan especially. But I think that with time, they will understand why we have to be here.

Centrality of Family

Against the backdrop of Juan's feelings of cultural isolation, it is significant to note that another recurring theme concerns the centrality of his family, both immediate and extended, in his own life. When responding to the question, "Who are your heroes?", Juan responded quite simply, "My father. And my uncle Victor, on my mother's side. They are the only ones." In each case, he admired the individual because "he always tries to do the best that he can." Of anyone, however, Juan said that he would feel most comfortable talking over a matter with his father.

In describing his family, Juan spoke of its closeness and of the support that he received from his parents.

My family is very united, and we get along well with one another. In whatever we try to do, our parents will support us. They lend us a hand. They give us advice as to how to do things better, about how to fix things. Sometimes they help us with something that we have to do.

And again, "My parents always encourage me and lend me a hand in all that I need." In this line, Juan's Art teacher had commented that she felt that there must be strong family support and "some very good upbringing." Speaking of his parents, the ESL teacher believed that Juan "feels very close to them." She noted that:

They have called me at home with questions. They are very interested in getting involved with the kid.... Every time they see me they want to know how are things going "let me know if there are any problems, what can we do." So they do put a lot of emphasis in education. Both mother and father.

In response to a hypothetical situation in which another young person might come to him with a problem, Juan further revealed the importance that he placed on parents. "I would tell him to also ask his parents for help, because they would know better than I would about that problem. And they could help him more."

While Juan indicated that he communicated quite freely with his father, he noted, nonetheless, that "my mother and I hardly ever talk. But she tries to do the best things for us. Because she is hardly ever at home, we don't talk much. But sometimes, she also gives me counsel." Both mother and father, however, stated that they were very proud of Juan, and felt that they had a good relationship with him.

In reference to his siblings, Juan believes that his role in the family assumes added dimensions as eldest child. "I think that I should always help my brother and sisters, and lend them a hand in whatever I can. Give them advice in what I can. And care for them, so that they don't get into trouble."

In terms of the extended family, Juan seems to hold his grandparents, uncles, and cousins in special regard. During his childhood years, his grandparents and a cousin lived nearby. Other relatives lived a little farther away. When asked to recall any especially unforgettable experience in his life, Juan remembered an incident with a member of his extended family.

One time, my cousin, who lived with my grandparents, was about to choke to death. She couldn't breathe. She had swallowed a seed, and she couldn't breathe. They had to take her to a hospital. She had a cough for a long time, but it finally went away. That was more than five years ago. She lived there close to us, and was always with us, playing and doing other things.

Zest for Learning

Another prominent theme in Juan's life concerns his zest for learning. This is evidenced in a thirst for knowledge and understanding, and a commitment to personal excellence.

His teachers have noted his internal drive for learning. The Spanish teacher, for example, described Juan as "very school oriented, and very mature for his age." His Art teacher observed that she believed he had "a deep sense of pride and self-respect. I think that his motivation goes deeper than getting a good grade. He believes that things should be done well."

Some of the strongest teacher evidence, however, came from his ESL teacher, who has worked with him for over a year. When asked to describe Juan as a student, she characterized him in this manner:

I think he loves school. He loves to learn. He wants to learn, and I don't think he can envision his life without going to school. He knows that he loves to do that and that's what he wants to do. And he's going to work on that. I think if he quits and just starts working, he's not going to be a happy person. He loves to read; he likes to learn. He loves to do his homework; he loves to get a good grade. So he's told me, you know, when we are talking about his scheduling... I said, "If we do this, you need 21 credits to finish high school, if you want to go the academic way. If you want to go this other way, you'll only have to have 18 credits. But then you are going to have to go to a vocation school, or get some kind of training. Which way do you want to go?" And he didn't even think about it. He said, "This one. I want 21 credits." So I said, "Well, that's great, then we'll do it." And it is working out well.

She noted several instances that seemed indicative of a desire to learn and grow.

A lot of times, if he's waiting for me to finish with the other kids, he'll get a book out. Right now, he's reading an English book and he's

reading a Spanish book. And the Spanish books he's reading, they're not easy.

Another incident involved Juan's desire to learn about computers. "He keeps telling me, 'I would really like to learn how to do that.'" Still another example involved Juan's choice of a difficult book over an easier book. Additional evidence involves Juan's personal commitment to excellence. Juan had indicated, for example, that "Whenever I write something, I take it to the ESL teacher to see if it is O.K." His ESL teacher added further detail.

He always likes me to check his work, too. He really likes that. So a lot of times before turning in something, he'll come to me and he'll say, "Can you check this?" And not just because he wants to get it right, but I think he also wants to learn how to do it right. Because a lot of times I'll say, "Do you want me to check?", and he'll say, "No, I think it's O.K." So he feels comfortable now by not having me check everything.

She also recalled a project that Juan had prepared the previous school year.

Last year he was doing a research paper on cocaine and that was, I guess, in May, May or June and he worked so hard. And he'll do exactly what I tell him. I say, "Go to the library and get the resource books you need." And you know that's hard for someone who hasn't been in this country very long. He went to the library, and got a library card just like I told him. He got all the books he needed on cocaine. Then he brought them to me. I said, "You have to read this." And he did. "Then we have to do an outline." We did that and I checked it. And he was just... You know, a lot of kids would say, "Aw, do I have to do it again?" He won't tell me that. He'll do it. I think we did it maybe three or four times. It was great. It came out really nice. He wants to succeed. He wants to do it well. He likes that.

In terms of motivators, the ESL teacher was asked whether she thought that Juan was trying to please her as a teacher, or was trying to please his parents primarily. She replied, "I think he's doing it for Juan. I think he wants Juan to make it because he knows he has the potential. He knows that so he's trying his best to do that." She agreed, however, that the desire to bring home a good report card to his family would also prove motivating.

A good report card will motivate him. He was so proud of that. When I came in when he got his report card, his report card was already on the table. He wanted me to see. That was the first thing he wanted me to see. He said, "Here". He was just so proud of that. And it was

great. It was a great report card. I was really proud of him. I think he likes to please his family, too. By being the eldest, I think his siblings look up to him.

Beyond grades, however, there does seem to be a deeper stimulus the love of learning. His father mentioned this aspect on a number of times.

Really, Juan is like any child, except that he puts everything into whatever he does. I like that about him. He really puts his heart into his schoolwork, and invests a lot of effort in it. Juan loves to study, that is a fact. He loves to learn, to know. That's what I like about him. He always wants to know this thing, and that thing. And he puts his whole heart into it. He has asked me to bring him some books from Mexico when I go there next time. Trying to improve himself. I really like that.

Similarly, his mother has noticed this trait in his love of art.

My son likes to draw a lot, and to study. He just likes to draw. Last night he drew a picture of his grandfather, my father. He was sitting there in that chair. And he started to draw him. It turned out... Well, the important thing was that he tried. He has always liked to draw, ever since he was small, when he went to kinder.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence, however, comes from Juan's own perspective on learning. "One of the most important things for me," he declared, "is to know how to do things better." When asked what he believed the conditions of success to be, the first criteria which he mentioned was "to try to do one's best." In response to an inquiry as to which factor he viewed as most important for doing well in school—family support, personal effort, or the help of your teacher, he replied,

My own effort, I think. Because if I don't try to do things the best that I can, and even if my parents and teachers try to help me, it would be worthless. If I am not doing my part, paying attention and all that, it won't benefit me at all.

Juan views grades in school as indicators of attainment and of learning, assuming their rightful place whenever one focuses on gaining understanding.

In Mexico, I tried to do the very best that I could in order to get ahead, to have good grades. When one gets good grades that says that you know more than the others, and that you are doing well. That you know something and that you are learning something of all that they are teaching you. I don't believe that one should just go to school and get grades just because someone is sending you to school to study.

He also believes that he has done something well "when other people tell me that I have done well, or when I see that I tried to do my best the best that I could. I think that for me, that is well done."

While Juan values formal schooling, he has also pursued self-instruction in a couple of instances. "No one taught me to draw, back in Mexico. Here they are starting to teach me more about that. And I learned how to write in cursive. They didn't teach that in my school. So I learned it myself" Perhaps, it is the area of art that best illustrates Juan's zest for learning.

Since I was very young I have always liked to draw. That's why I enrolled in the art class [at the high school], so that I can learn to draw better than before. And so I'm developing the habit of drawing things. I draw in my notebooks, but sometimes I don't like the way that they turn out and I throw them away. But I really like to draw. I like to learn more than I already know, so that I can draw better. And, besides, it's fun. Probably, I would like sculpture, too. But I haven't tried it yet.

Respect for Social Order

A fourth theme that emerged from the data concerned Juan's respect for social order. Juan stated, "In school, I have never gotten myself into problems, or anything like that." On another occasion, he added,

If someone wants to have a quarrel with me, I just tell him that I do not want to have problems, or I tell him that I will tell the principal. If it's here at school, I just leave it at that. But really, nobody tells me things. And I get along well with everybody. That's why I don't have those problems.

A remark made by his mother is enlightening in the context of this statement. It illustrates that the respect for social order appears to be a family value.

When he [Juan] went to school, I would tell him that he needed to do the assignments, do his homework, and how he needed to make his letters. That he shouldn't fight with the other boys at school. That if they wanted to quarrel with him, that he should tell the teachers, and just leave it alone. That was what I would tell him.

His siblings agree that Juan avoids enmeshing himself in trouble. They observed that he "does not like to be in the street because the young men there fight too much. When he goes out, he goes alone, not with them. He is calm."

Juan's teachers have noticed Juan's exemplary behavior. "Juan is a real gentleman, with excellent manners," affirmed his Art teacher. The English teacher asserted that he "is extremely cooperative. He seems very conscientious, well-groomed, and neat. His attitude has been wonderful." His Spanish teacher reported that "he is very nice. I never hear of a problem with another student or teacher. No silliness." Noting that Juan is "an easy student to work with, pleasant, and never complains," the ESL teacher further observed that "he won't argue. You know, a lot of kids will argue, or won't do the work. And I don't have any problems with that."

A little while into the school year, another Mexican student moved into the area and joined the ESL class. The teacher described what transpired.

When [that student] first came to me, I thought, maybe Juan and [he] will be friends. I thought maybe Juan would be a good influence on [him]. But Juan kept his distance from [him] because he knows [that student] is trouble. He gets in fights. He's always in some kind of problem with the principal, or the assistant principal. So Juan knows that, so he'll keep his distance. Now in my class they are pleasant to each other, they talk, but I would not say that's a good friend of his.

This perspective was corroborated when Juan later stated that the other Mexican student was not really a friend of his because "he gets into fights and doesn't like to study."

Further evidences of Juan's respect for law and order came when he buckled his seat belt immediately upon sitting down in the car, when he called home upon being detained a few minutes past the expected time, in his statement that "I always try to have [my assignments] turned in on time," and in his descriptions of the persons that he most admired. Juan stated that he likes his uncle Victor because:

He doesn't like to get himself into problems. He knows how to share and how to get along well with people.... He doesn't like to go to wild parties. He does attend parties, but doesn't associate with bad persons. He doesn't drink, or smoke, or any of that. Nor does my father.

At home, Juan appears to uphold the authority structure of the family. His father observed,

Juan is very serious. He doesn't like to raise a ruckus. He doesn't like to get into trouble with another person. He is a good son to me. I tell him, "Son, let's do this." "O.K.", he says. And he does it. Sometimes he says, "I'd rather not; I'm tired." "But son, we need to do this." And he gets up and does it. In other words, he doesn't answer back.

When queried as to conflict resolution strategies in the home, the father again reiterated that Juan is cooperative and obedient, even when his personal inclination may lie in a different direction.

Yes, sometimes there are disagreements. But I always give them a reason for what I am doing. In fact, sometimes I will tell him, "Juan, you need to help your mother." "Father, ask the girls." "But son, here we all have to help. We all work." He doesn't say anything. He goes and does it. And I ask him after he finishes, "Are you upset?" "No," he says. I just explain the situation to them. "I come home from work, your mother comes home from work. Sometimes we need to do these things, like sweep or make the beds." And they do it. They understand me, and I understand them. They help me, and I help them or at least try to help them.

Interestingly, the home seems to be structured around inter-member responsibilities, rather than a set of rules. Juan and his parents all agree that there are no rules in their home. (His younger brother, however, stated that they do have one rule "Do not fight.") Juan clarified that, in the home, each member of the family has certain responsibilities and that his parents hold certain expectations.

Sometimes my parents do tell me that I need to do something. Sometimes I go to the store for something, or I help clean the house and make my bed. Sometimes we will all start cleaning the house, the four of us that are there, so that it will look better. Or because my mother is not there, my sister will make the food.

Juan's siblings remarked that each had certain duties the younger brother washes dishes, the older sister makes tortillas, and the youngest sister has to sweep and straighten her room.

Additionally, there appears to be an expectation of informing the parents of one's whereabouts. The father alluded to this expectation:

Juan is a good son. When he goes out, I ask him, "Where are you going?" And he says, "I'm going to the library, or I'm going to see the soccer match." And I know that he doesn't go somewhere else. Sometimes, in fact, I have gone in the car to see, and there he is. I appreciate the fact that he lets me know where he is going. Or he leaves me a note, or calls me on the phone.

Another expectation involves parental honor and respect. The mother's comments concerning her relationship with Juan were insightful in this regard.

My relationship with Juan, as mother to son, is to respect him and that he should respect me. I help him to see what is good and what is bad. Because that is one's duty. As his mother, I tell him, "This is bad for you." But only to a certain point. "And this is good for you." I don't play around with them [my children] so that they will respect me. Because many times, as a result of that, children lose their love for their parents. I try to have them respect me, and to respect their elders. That is how I relate to them. Juan sometimes tries to play with me but I tell him, "No, no, no." He says, "But, mother..." "No." I respect them, and they respect me. I tell them, "If you want something, tell me, but don't play around with me." But, while he likes to play around, he speaks to me respectfully. He recognizes me as his mother.

Juan, perhaps, summed up the "respect" motif best when he explained how he would react if one of his parents asked him to do something that he really did not want to do. "Well, I just do it, because they are my parents and they have cared for me since I was very small. And they have the right to tell me what I must do."

Desire for Social Mobility

A strongly recurring theme in Juan's life is the desire for upward social mobility. To be fair, however, one must acknowledge that this seems to be a dominant chord throughout the whole family.

Juan's mother phrased the concept in terms of her children, expressing a wish to strive to place them in a more advantageous position than that in which she found herself.

We have always tried, by any means possible, to end up ahead with our children, for the sake of our children. What we do is for them. So that they won't have to live like we have had to working outside, in the cold. Because we can't do anything else. We don't know anything. I don't even know any English. If I knew some, maybe I would find a better job. That is what I tell them. That they need to learn something so that they won't have to live like we do.

Time after time, his father would also refer to this concept, emphasizing that the "better life" lay yet ahead.

I tell them, "Sons, you must study. That is what you came here to do. In a little while, you will learn more, and will be able to get a better job and earn better wages, and live a better life." And I think that they understand.

Like I tell them, I work for you, not for myself. I work so that you can live better, and learn more. That is what I try to do, and my wife too.

This outlook, and the almost overwhelming desire for upward mobility may be largely due to the conditions under which the family is forced to live.

Juan and his brother see how we live, with problems. And there is no one to help us. If we don't pay the rent, they kick us out of the house. Last winter was very hard for us. Terrible. The house we were renting was rotten, and the cold came in from all sides. And I work at the nursery, and during the winter sometimes there is no work. Some weeks I work only one or two days. And when my children say, "I need this," I have to tell them, "I don't have it now. Maybe in a couple of weeks."

The ESL teacher, in fact, seemed to have picked up on the same idea.

I think maybe the father will say, "I want you to study since I wasn't able to do it." He wants Juan to succeed. Juan also knows that he can do it. He knows he's smart enough to do it. So he's going to try.

When asked to describe what he liked about his father, Juan replied that a very important characteristic was "that he always tries to get ahead, and help us to get ahead as well.... And he always encourages us so that we will come out ahead."

The leitmotiv of "getting ahead" or "coming out ahead" was frequently repeated. Juan seemed to use it over and over again. This is a sampling of those occurrences.

My grandparents would tell us about how things were before, and about how my father was when he was small. They would also tell us about how they used to live, about how they were poorer than now. And about how they tried to get ahead.

My parents always try to lend us a hand, and help us come out ahead.

My mother tries to help us get ahead. And she tells us that we must come out ahead.

In Mexico, I tried to do the very best that I could in order to get ahead, and to have good grades.

I think that it's important to help one another. And when somebody has problems, one must help the other person get ahead, giving support in whatever way possible. Always help that person, even if he is a drug addict or an alcoholic.

Speaking about what advice he might give to another student from Mexico who was coming to study in the U.S., Juan stated "I would tell him to give it all that he has, so that he can come out ahead." And when asked what he thought one might need to do in order to be successful in life, he declared "Try to do all you can to end up ahead. You have to break down the barriers that get in front of you in order to get ahead."

Synthesis of Case and Literature

In essence, Juan appears to be a highly able student, especially in the areas of mathematics and art. Furthermore, he is characterized by high levels of understanding and achievement. His life, at this time, seems to interweave the dominant themes of cultural isolation, centrality of family, love of learning, respect of social order, and the desire for social mobility.

Juan seems to be driven by a passion for learning, an inner urge to acquire knowledge and skill. This internal quest for knowledge, for instance, appears to have overcome any shame that Juan may have had in requesting assistance from teachers and other adults. Such traits may, in fact, denote personal resiliency. Kobasa (1979) has noted, for example, that internal motivation is an essential ingredient in the development of resilience in children. In a similar line, other research (Garmezy, 1983; Rutter, 1987) has reported that resilient children are more likely to ask for assistance from adults. Juan is also deeply committed to his schooling and seems to have positive feelings about his academic experiences characteristics which parallel those of other intellectually gifted students (Kames & Whorton, 1988; Purkey, 1978; Whitmore, 1982) and may also point toward a resilient personality. Hannah and Morrissey (1987) have observed, for example, that a vital component of personal hardiness in adolescents is their commitment to school and to academic activities. This personal hardiness, in turn, seems to serve as a buffer against adverse reactions to stressors which the individual may encounter (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984; Orr & Westman, 1990).

While Juan has demonstrated himself to be quite resilient in the academic sphere, he appears, nevertheless, to be vulnerable within the social arena. Compas has noted that the degree to which personal coping is effective may depend "on the goodness of fit between the child and the environment" (1987, p. 394). This fit tends to be in jeopardy, however, when a child enters a new school setting. In this scenario, adjustment issues often arise, one of the most important of which is establishing and maintaining friendships (Ladd, 1990). This may, at times, present itself as a more significant problem for the gifted child. Research findings, for example, indicate that a significant minority of highly intelligent children reported greater numbers of problems making friends (Janos, Marwood, & Robinson, 1985). In Juan's case, however, the problem is compounded by language barriers. This fact

assumes added prominence when one considers that adolescents frequently equate friendship with communication (Rawlins & Holl, 1987). Although family appears to have been a stabilizing and perhaps compensating factor for Juan in this initial period of adjustment, it may prove less effective as Juan moves through the adolescent years. Wallander and Varni (1989) have noted, for instance, that adolescents begin to place more importance on the support they receive from friends and peers than from their parents. Peer acceptance and support, in turn, seem to be related to the development of adequate interpersonal skills and healthy social self-competence (Cornell, 1990; Kurdek & Krile, 1982).

Given his cultural heritage, however, family will most likely continue to be very important facet in Juan's life. When asked what goals he hoped to achieve during the remainder of the school year, for example, he answered, "To get the highest grades that I can, and to help my family." The family, in turn, seems to have developed hopes for the future that include making whatever sacrifice is necessary so that Juan and all of the family members together might "get ahead." Although the vicarious derivation of family pride and social status through the child's accomplishments has been reported for families with gifted children (Cornell, 1983), the desire for upward social mobility in Juan's case seems to also have become a burning, personal ambition. When asked about his life goals, Juan seemed a bit unsure regarding career choices. Before he finished his reply, however, his life direction became quite clear.

Well, I really haven't thought about that very much. I don't know yet which career to take. I think that as I get on ahead, I will be thinking about that. I think that I would probably like to get married, and have a family. And try to end up ahead.

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