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Interview with Jose Garcia

Interviewers: Erin Loving and Chris Mithsada

Interviewing: Jose Garcia

Time: Friday, May 21, 2004

Background: Jose Garcia was once head of Washington County's migrant school program and was later promoted to be in charge of the statewide migrant program. He first started teaching in Texas and later moved to Oregon for the berry season and his family decided to stay.

CM: What school did you teach at ~~you~~?

JG: I came to Oregon in 1967, I just came to for the summer. I was gonna go back to Texas I was just teaching in Texas. I was teaching math at the high school level. I came in 67 and I taught at JW Poynter from 67-69 two years. And is that all you wanna hear or do you wanna hear more?

CM: You can keep going.

JG: I uh...I decided I needed to get a fifth year... Well, I was told I needed to get a fifth year. In Texas it was four years for a college degree. Oregon requires five. So I knew I had to get a fifth year. So I had an opportunity to get my masters degree through a grant and I got my fifth year at the same time. So I left after two years. I um.... So that's all I did in Hillsboro in the teaching profession. I got my masters degree and I started looking for a job and guess what I ended up in Hillsboro again wearing a different hat.

CM: (laughs)

JG: I was an administrator...I became the director of migrant education for the Washington County and Yamhill County and after that...after six years of doing that I was offered well...I interviewed for a job at the state department of education doing the same thing only doing it statewide. And I spent eighteen years as a state Director of Migrant Education. One of my duties was to monitor schools for migrant students. I was responsible for the migrant population in the counties of Oregon. I have to say that migrant meant any child who's parents worked in agriculture either in harvesting, or farming or anything related to agriculture. Which includes all kids period. Includes not only Mexican kids but includes Chinese kids, Vietnamese kids, Russian kids, black kids, white kids. So that's what I did for my career. I retired ten years ago...I've been out of the loop for ten years. You need to know that. So other interviewees probably have more up to date information than I would, but I can tell you what I did during those twenty-six years while I was here in Oregon period. Working as a teacher or administrator. Is that pretty...

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EL: Yeah

CM: Yeah

JG: okay

CM: Yeah that's good

JG: okay ok

CM: Can you tell us about any programs that were designed to help Hispanic students?

JG: All our programs in migrant ed. were designed to help migrant kids. Obviously in Oregon about 85 to 90% were Mexican American kids. So that most programs were designed for them, and the school would sign off when they received the money. It's all federal money. So the school would sign off on an assurance to the state. That they would develop a program for migrant students. Most of which were Mexican American kids, but there were other kids like I said before. So most of the programs were designed for migrant kids. And most of the population that came to Oregon at the time were minority kids primarily a few white kids, but not too many. A few Asian kids, but not too many. A few black kids but not too many. Okay

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early programs

CM: Did you get a lot of support from these programs or people supporting these programs?

JG: Support can have many different definitions. I was supported by administrators whom I worked with primarily. Because I worked with administrators in the administrative field. And there was a reluctance always because that meant the school had to make changes and there was always a reluctance in several cases, but then there were others other administrators other people that were very supportive and wanted to help all kids. So there was a mix on that. One of my responsibilities was to head a summer school for migrant children. Sometimes it was difficult to use a building...a school building because it was being remolded because it was being painted...you know. And I'm talking about where the migrant population was. In some cases it was true the stuff they had to do. In some cases they didn't really want the program there. So yes there was support, but no there wasn't sometimes. I got a mix of both. I decided to go with churches sometimes...for daycare primarily. And churches were more receptive; I can only remember one case where I made a presentation to the counsel. I'm not gonna say which church. And I was told that they had to discuss the matter privately basically ask God and see if it was okay. And I waited outside and then they came and called me in and told me that God had said no. So we basically couldn't have our program there and I said well my God is different from your God. And anyway again that was an isolated case. Did I answer the question or part of it?

anecdote for early programs

CM: No, you answered it all.... What type of feedback did you receive from the students attending these schools?

JG: The feedback that I got was usually from parents. I met with parents and administrators. I had an advisory committee...a state advisory committee made up with people from all over the state. Those were the people I met with. I never really met with students when I was an administrator. The parents basically told me that their kids were dropping out of school. And the primary reason they were dropping out of school is

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dropouts

because they were either behind a grade level or they felt like they were being treated as foreigners. And nobody likes to be treated as a foreigner. You'd like to be welcomed as a student and this is my school and I belong here. And kids did not have that feeling from teachers, administrators, whoever. And those were the reasons I received as feedback. My job was to meet with to meet with the administrators and let them know that. So there's been kind of a...resistances especially for migrant kids who are behind a grade level or don't speak the language or are new to the state. Strange things happen when you go to a new place. I'm going to Korea for example I'll be totally lost when I get there. If my son wasn't there I would be lost. So I have somebody there that knows the area. Same thing with kids and families that come to Oregon. They come and they really don't know the area and the language and that becomes complicated and very difficult to deal with. So human nature says you take the route of least resistance and the route of least resistance was to drop out of school if you're sixteen. That's what happens if you take the easy road out. A few remain and stay and graduate high school and some go to college. I see Oregon like I saw Texas when I was a kid. When I was a kid there was no Latino teacher at all. When I started teaching high school I was the first Latino teacher teaching there. Sixty thousand people lived in that city and 99% of those people...let me rephrase that 95% were Latino families and 5% were non-Latino mostly Anglo. They were the teachers, they were the administrators and you know this was the 1960's. When I left Texas seven years later...I thought there seven years. When I left Texas there were more Latino teachers teaching. I attribute that to the war the Korean War and WWII where GI's went to the army came back got the GI Bill went to college got a degree. That's how I got my degree. If it wasn't for the war I'd probably be picking cotton well not cotton because they got machines to do that now.

CM and EL: (Laughs)

JG: So I attribute the success of Latino teachers in Texas to the war. In Oregon most people that came here are migrant families they wanna work, they wanna make money to raise their families that's the American dream. I don't see too many teachers coming in fact we've recruited teachers when I was at the state level. I said you know we need Latino teachers because kids were dropping out of school. So we went to Texas we went to California we imported some teachers. We promised them if they came here we would send them to school to get a masters degree because most only had a bachelors. So we promised them a masters degree if they came and they had to be here for two years. Well some came. They came got their masters did their two years then went home. So then we decided that wasn't working obviously. So we decided that we would make our own teachers. So we looked at kids who did finish high school kids that succeeded you know not dropping out of school the survivors. We got those kids and sent them to college for four years. The regulations the federal regulations allowed us to use money for staff development. We thought that sending high school kids to college to become teachers was you know using money legally. So we started that program at Eastern Oregon College from the grant. We had about forty-five kids that we had up there that we sent to get degrees we paid for everything. The government came in the auditors came in and said that's illegal.

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Staff
quotes

Programs

EL: oh no....

JG: They agreed that it was a good program because we explained to them that we were spending staff development monies to develop teachers to teach migrant kids. And their interpretation was staff development is for teachers already teachers that take extra courses to become better teachers. So we had a difference in philosophy and interpretation of the law. So they basically came in and told the state the state was needy. I was the state you know because I was responsible for the program. So they told me that I had to stop the program and that I had to pay some money back. I told my superintendent this is what happened and they want some money back and they don't want federal money they want state money. So we kinda worked back and forth and I had to go to Washington D.C. several times to argue the case and we finally settled for a lesser amount we didn't have to pay the full amount they were asking. So...the superintendent supported me on that paid the government and phased the program out. But those teachers are teaching here today in Oregon because their families are here and to this day some of them are still here, but some of them are retired now, but anyway that was back in 1976,77,78.

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CM: Have any of the issues you faced backed in the seventies changed over time?

JG: Like I said I've been out of the loop for ten years. I see.... When I first came to Hillsboro in 67, there were five families...Latino families that I knew. I met them right away. Being Latino and being the first Latino teacher in Hillsboro they all found out about it. And I use to go to church, so...I met all the five families. Thirty-seven years later I see the population booming. I mean more kids. Way more kids than I was surprised to see. So I'm sure the issues were still there, but I'm not sure to what extent. The issues ten years ago when I retired hadn't changed as much. So I don't know if it has improved or not improved in the last ten years.

CM: So in the past you said there weren't really many Latino teachers.....

JG: no.no...I hired...when I was at the county level I hired several of them. Well, I hired most of the ones that got their masters degree, but they all left two years later so I had to hire other teachers. There was a competition between directors...I was the director of Washington County. There was a director in Marion County; there was a director in ~~Mount~~ Mount ~~Hear~~ Hear County. So whenever we found out about a Latino teacher...we'd all compete for them...we'd run out there and grab them and tell them to come with me and not with them. And there was a lot of competition because there was not that many, but I was successful in getting some here to Washington County. You know I think I was a little more aggressive than any of them were. The biggest competition I had was Woodburn because Woodburn has always been a bigger population. I think today we had administrators which back then we didn't have at all before and we have more teachers. I'm a firm believer that if you have somebody to role model your kids are gonna stay in school. If he made it I can make it sort of speak. And uh that's true in Texas today. When I go back there to visit my two brothers.... kids are speaking more English than when I was a kid. And I went to class and the teachers spoke English and I heard, but I never

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participated. So consequently I was fifteen years old and I couldn't speak English and common sense told me that I would never graduate. I just knew I wouldn't graduate I just couldn't speak the language. I could understand it, but I couldn't speak it so I dropped out of school. And you know my dad was very upset with me and so was everyone else, but hey I wasn't the only one all the other kids were doing it. And so I started working when I was sixteen then I went into the army in 51 and I was twenty years old. We went to basic training and then after basic training the sergeant put me in charge of nine guys and these guys did not speak Spanish and I did not speak English. And I told the sergeant in my own broken English I can not speak English sarg. And he looked at me and said I don't care how you do it you're the squad leader. Within two months I was speaking English and I had these guys under my control and I wanted to know where they went, when they were born, who their parents were, I knew everything about them. I learned a lot of curse words too, but I was their squad leader for two years. I learned English and that's where I learned it...I didn't learn it in school. Came back determined to finish high school and got my G.E.D. I was married already then...I got married young. I had children and I had to get a job, but I had school at night. So I did that full time go to school, go to work, go to school. And that's how I broke through what I thought was difficult you know I survived. And that degree opened up many doors for me and I decided to go back to my hometown because I owned a house down there. I thought seven years in Texas before I came to Oregon. Teachers didn't pay really much in Texas, in 67; teacher's pay was half as much as an Oregon teacher's pay. So when I got here. I brought my whole family in a pickup they were gonna make a lot of money picking strawberries. And I was just gonna come and look at the Northwest because I've never been here before. But then I found out that teachers paid twice as much here as they did in Texas. So I immediately went to Hilhi and I went to look at the salaries and he had one math opening. And he wanted me to sign the contract right away and I said no no no I need to go back and talk to my family. Went back talked to the wife and she said no were going home and my oldest daughter she was a junior in high school said she wanted to go back and graduate with her peers. I convinced them through a lot of persuasion that we're not gonna break the family that we're gonna stay one year and if things don't work in one year then we all go back. And you know one year by then my oldest daughter found a boyfriend and my wife was starting to like it because the weather was nicer here and the kids had friends. And so we decided to stay a second year then a third year and so on. I wished everybody would have that kind of opportunity. My opportunity started with Uncle Sam the provided my tuition because I couldn't afford it. I was talking to some kids a while ago like in high school. And I said I hear today's young folks they get married and they have one child and they tell me they can't go to college because they have to support the child. Let me tell you something I says, when I got my bachelors degree I had five children, a full time job, and going to school full time. And I says not only that, but when I got my masters degree I had nine children. A kid in the back said it's a good thing you didn't get your PH. D and I didn't expect that you know, but there are some wise guys in high school. But nothing is difficult as long as you reach for it. You gotta get focused like I was focused and that's how you go make a living and in your older years live comfortably. So...I moved here 3 months ago and my wife died two years ago...no place to go so I come here. Lots of friends I'm fairly happy. I go to Texas once a year just to get a shot of the culture and the music and I don't have to worry about nothing. (Referring to Rosewood Retirement

Home). So anyway what's your next question?

CM: Do you know of any of the migrant schools offering classes to the parents to help them out?

JG: When I started the program, for the state back in 1976, well 1970, see I was the director of the Washington County for 6 years, from 1970 to 1976; there was a lot of federal money in the bank. I had to return some money back because the schools wouldn't spend the money. So there was lots of money. Today, it's just the opposite. There is no money now, I mean, it's all going to Iraq. (laughs) So I think you're asking me if there's money to be spent on parent involvement and so forth? I would say that probably a little bit but not much. The money started to run out so... But I used to have a parent conference with the parents and the state. Bring all the parents from all over the state - not all but - so they could witness where the school would stand. We would get them all together and talk about the issues you know. And then later on, I'd bring the teachers and the administrators that worked with migrant kids and we'd have an exchange of ideas. So I'd have two conferences every year in Salem, primarily, usually. Sometimes we'd go to Bend, for example, because it was the center for most people...bring in consultants that knew things about migrant kids and so forth. And we did that and then uh, the money started running out so we couldn't do that anymore. So yeah, we did bring parents together, but that was the state and you know we had the money to bring people together. I'm not sure if that's what answers your question. I've been out of the loop for 10 years.

IV
Early programs

CM: What were some of your tactics and strategies and policies of like, how to help the Hispanic and Latino students?

JG: We came up with a lot of strategies. We started by training teacher aides; the problem there was that we were training teacher aides and then they went back to the teachers and the teachers had a different idea, so I mean that didn't work very well in the classroom. Because here we're telling teacher aides one thing but the teachers didn't agree with it, and so we stopped that. We brought in teachers and aides together so that they could, you know, conform affective new strategies and work together instead of fighting you know. We did that. We would have people in the homes. They were called home school consultants. And every program that submitted a grant to the state had to have a component, whether they would have an outreach person that went to the homes and talked to the parents, you know, and get some feedback from the parents, and that program...we basically brought teachers together and brought materials that we thought were affective for migrant kids. By in large, they accepted them, and implemented them. Years ago, they bought a lot of hardware stuff before the computers came in, had weird names for stuff. Anyway there were gadgets that somebody would develop that you know on a one to one basis how to learn, how to do math, and so we spent money on that. But we found out that hardware wasn't really effective, and that people were better because you get a very sensitive feature like the teachers can help them with their problems you know and so we stopped buying machines; we felt that machines didn't work very well. They were good for repetition, but that's real learning. That's how they're gonna learn.

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Early programs

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We wanted kids to think. So that's where we brought teachers in instead. We had a lot of credit sessions because like I said when the program started we had a lot of money to do training, effective training and so forth. You know, but when the money started running out, everything kind of came to a screeching halt. We brought teachers from California, teachers didn't like California. They had a lot of experience with kids in California, so they would come here, we'd always meet with them first, and say "whatever you do, don't tell Oregon teachers that you came from California, because if you do, they're gonna think you're a pre Madonna. You know every thing about migrant kids and they don't." You can't tell a teacher here that they don't know nothing. I hired one teacher who was Latina, and she had 9 years experience. And, the only problem was that I didn't find out that these 9 years were at 9 different schools. That teacher couldn't get along well with other people. That was a big mistake. There were very few Latina teachers. Here was one, but the public relations weren't very good, but anyway. But we did bring teachers from other states that spoke Spanish and could relate to kids, and were able to bring them up to a level at which they could function. You know I guess that a lot of people are against bi lingual education. The program, migrant education was not a bi lingual program. But we used bi lingual people to help bring kids from Spanish to English, make the transition. A bi lingual program teaches kids English until they get to high school, ok, side by side, which takes twice as much money. So migrant education brought Spanish speaking kids to make the transition into English. And that worked well I didn't have that when I was a kid. I was thought in English and for nine years I didn't learn one word in English. You know just listening to a language you don't learn it, you can listen to me all day speak Spanish for 10 years and I can bet you that you still won't be able to speak Spanish because your just listening and not participating and that's how you learn the language you interact. And if you don't do that you're in trouble... I spent nine years sitting in a chair and listening and I could not carry on a conversation. Until that sergeant got a hold of me. But that guy did many things for me more than anything else. Not only did he make me speak the language, but he also taught me another thing. I thought that because I grew up in a poor neighborhood and I couldn't speak English I always thought that these people who spoke English were smarter than I was. I just didn't have it up here you know. I just knew it they were smarter because they spoke English and they function and they could keep jobs and my people couldn't do that. My people had to work in fields so... I grew up with the philosophy that I couldn't do it that there was something wrong with me. That sergeant turned me around you know. After I got out of the army I came out feeling that I was just as smart or even smarter than everybody else. So that guy did two things for me he taught or forced me to speak English and he changed my philosophy is now that I can do just as good or better than anybody else. And I carried that philosophy through college. You gotta have the feeling yes I can do it I can do it if I focus on it I can do it. We found out that kids that attended school in Mexico and came here to Oregon to attend the primary grades they come in here with a foundation of the abc's and can make the transition to English faster than the kids who were born here and taught in English all their lives. Because those kids that were born here don't have the foundation in their own language that's what we found out. A kid who comes from Mexico learns their abc's has the foundation to read how to study and the kid that grows up here in this country don't have a foundation because the parents don't teach them because they didn't go to school. Who knows fifty years from now it'll

IV challenges

be like Texas everybody will speak English. Even though they live like mile away from the border. I grew up one mile away from the border and everybody spoke Spanish. I had Weavers and Johnsons and they spoke Spanish and these were non-Latino kids. In Oregon it's different because there is a bigger need for English. In Oregon I see that people segregate themselves you know. White people over here and Hispanic people over here they don't interact and that's the problem. There are some intermarriage, but not a lot. But until the two cultures come together until everybody comes together they're gonna grow old. That's sad.

CM: What would you say was your biggest obstacle at the migrant schools?

JG: The biggest obstacle was finding the personnel for the schools that could do the jobs. I think people were well in need and teachers were also in need, but they needed more. They didn't know how to motivate them and get them going and to believe. That was the biggest obstacle. Some schools sent teachers to Mexico for like four weeks or so, but what are you gonna learn in four weeks. Like me going to Korea I'm not gonna learn Korean I'm gonna do some sight seeing. And so I think that was the biggest obstacle. We start with Spanish, but we need to make the transition. It's been difficult in Oregon you know. But I see families that first came here in Oregon and now their kids can speak perfect English.

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