

CHAPTER 4

THE MESOSYSTEM CASES



CASE 4. LUNCHTIME AT SUNNYDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: WHAT DO FIRST GRADERS NEED?

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Characters

Rosa and Maria, first graders
Beatriz, Rosa and Maria's grandmother
Tish, Maria's 16-month-old sister
Lena, Maria's mother
Linda, Sunnydale Elementary School principal
Matty, cafeteria worker
Mary, PTA parent

As you read the case, consider applying the following theoretical perspectives in your analysis:

- **Social Executive Functioning:** How is the family acting as an executive functionary in this case? How is the school acting as an executive functionary? How can better coordination be achieved between the families and the school?
- **Family, School, and Community:** What is the nature of parent participation in decision making to effect schoolwide change? How can it be improved? How can the school and existing parent groups develop the emerging leadership potential of immigrant parents?
- **Ethnic and Racial Diversity:** What are the different perceptions of development in middle childhood expressed in this case? What are examples of acculturation and cultural mismatch? How can the principal and the parents develop greater awareness of their own culturally based expectations of children?

Beatriz, Rosa and Maria's Grandmother

Beatriz Hinojosa worried that her granddaughters didn't get enough to eat at school. Rosa, the 6-year-old, had asthma and was small for her age. Rosa's cousin, Maria, was 5 and a half; they were in the same bilingual first-grade class at Sunnydale Elementary School. On weekdays, the grandmother was responsible for Rosa, Maria, and Tish, Maria's 16-month-old sister, from early in the morning when the girls' mothers set off for work until they returned at dinner time. Beatriz's daughters were both single mothers in their mid-20s. They and their children shared an apartment a block away from the apartment where Beatriz lived with her son and his wife. Early each morning, Beatriz picked up her three granddaughters and drove to the school, aiming to get there by 7:30 a.m. so that the girls could participate in the free breakfast program.

Maria and Rosa were so little that their grandmother wasn't comfortable just dropping them off. On the first day of the school year, she began a routine of parking the car and, with the toddler in tow, guiding the girls through the school, across the upper playground, and into the small portable building that housed the school cafeteria. A parent volunteer organized the orange juice, cereal, and milk and stood to the side as Beatriz helped Maria and Rosa prepared their bowls

and chose where to sit. The atmosphere felt rushed, and one time a group of older kids threw food. Maria and Rosa often dawdled, eating only a few bites before the bell rang. After the bell, Beatriz said goodbye to her granddaughters as the parent volunteer guided them and the other younger kids toward their classrooms in the main building. Then Beatriz drove home and took care of Tish until 2:45 p.m., when it was time to return to the school to pick up Rosa and Maria.

Two weeks into the school year, when Beatriz pulled into the pick-up area, Rosa and Maria hustled into the car, full of news. "When we got our lunches today, some big kids shoved us around," Rosa said. "Yeah, they shoved us, and I was so scared, I nearly dropped my tray," Maria added.

The girls had even more to tell: Their classroom had been moved from the main school building and into a portable across the playground. The only bathrooms were in the main building, and if one of them had to go during the class period, she had to choose a partner, get a pass, and walk across the playground to the bathroom and back again. This bit of news startled Lena, Maria's mother, and she observed, "Little kids shouldn't be allowed out on their own like that; it would be easy for one of them to wander off." The three adults talked it over and agreed that the grandmother, who was the family's main connection to the school, should find out what was going on.

The next day Beatriz and Tish went to the school at noontime. They walked alongside Rosa and Maria in the first-graders' queue as it slowly moved from the portable, across the playground, up the stairs, and into the cafeteria. When they finally got inside, Beatriz watched as the girls pointed to their names on the free lunch roster, got trays, and reached for prepackaged food items and cartons of milk. The grandmother leaned over and pointed out that they were supposed to choose between pizza or a cheese sandwich. Then she looked around the crowded room and squeezed her granddaughters and herself (with Tish on her lap) onto the bench at one of the tables.

It all felt noisy, chaotic, and hurried. Young kids take a long time to eat, but the bell was already ringing, and other kids were standing up to leave with their lunches only half finished. Beatriz didn't think her granddaughters were eating enough. And when they walked across the busy playground toward the portable classroom, they had to skirt around bigger kids who were playing jump rope and kickball and just hanging out. Rosa said that the day before, when she got a pass and was walking to the bathroom with Gloria, some big kids were out at recess and almost ran into them. Beatriz grew more and more perturbed. Didn't the teachers care about the safety of the little ones? What would happen if one of her granddaughters got hurt or somehow wandered out of the school yard?

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