

SEEKING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE: PERCEPTIONS OF LATINO FAMILIES IN A  
RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE MIDWEST UNITED STATES

A Dissertation by

Lance D. Stout

MA, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, 1997

BS, University of Oklahoma, 1992

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RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE MIDWEST UNITED STATES

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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Linda Bakken, Committee Chair

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Jean Patterson, Committee Member

---

Kim McDowell, Committee Member

---

Ken Jantz, Committee Member

---

Ron Matson, Committee Member

Accepted for the College of Education

---

Sharon Iorio, Dean

Accepted for the Graduate School

---

J. David McDonald, Dean

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the community members of Liberal, Kansas. Liberal continues to grow in size and also in the number of Hispanic citizens that reside within the city. I hope that this work will show the importance of effective communication with one another and that all residents in this community are equal and all have valuable insight and input to be shared.

I also dedicate this work to the students and staff of Unified School District 480. This school system has made remarkable growth in terms of student academic performance in the last two years and I truly look forward to the future and the many good things that will occur. I hope that this work will further assist school leaders, board members and teachers in how to work collectively in serving the youth of our community.

## DON'T QUIT

When things go wrong  
As they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging  
Seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low  
And the debts are high,  
And you want to smile,  
But you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you  
Down a bit—  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Success is failure turned inside out,  
The silver tint  
Of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell  
How close you are,  
It may be near  
When it seems afar,  
So stick to the fight  
When you're hardest hit—  
It's when things go wrong,  
That you must not quit!  
Author Unknown

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## ABSTRACT

The Latino population represents the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Schools across the U.S. are experiencing growing numbers of Latino and mixed ethnicities. School districts are being challenged to provide English language resources to assist all children in obtaining quality learning experiences. In addition, the need for cultural support and advocacy from their public schools is necessary. By learning how to better understand Latinos, school districts can strengthen their relationships with this culture by considering how these families interact with the schools. In an attempt to better comprehend the worlds that Latino families negotiate daily, the Funds of Knowledge framework served as a lens to understand every day practices and ways of knowing what occurs in Latino family homes. Social Capital was the second theoretical lens used in order to view and understand the social networks utilized by Latino families on a regular basis. This study indicated how schools have a unique vantage point and obligation in understanding children and families that they serve. The findings clearly showed the significant funds of knowledge and social capital needs found within three Latino households in southwestern Kansas. First, Las Familias was the most impressive factor; these families possessed an intense attitude of togetherness. Second, the Latino parents understood English quite well but were too embarrassed to speak it. And last, the young people from these families navigate two worlds every day. At home, the Mexican culture is present; outside the home, American values and customs are everywhere.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Advanced Placement
AVID	Advancement via Individual Determination
CKH	Capturing Kids Hearts
ELL	English Language Learner
LACF	Liberal Area Coalition for Families
USD	Unified School District
ZPD	Zones of Proximal Development

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The United States is a country made up of many immigrants, with the Latino population representing the fastest growing ethnic group in the country (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). More startling is the fact that this same population also accounted for one-half of the nation's growth from 2000-2006 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). With the Latino population growing at such a rapid rate, more and more public schools are becoming highly diverse, multi-ethnic settings. Schools are forced, as a result, to scrutinize past practices and focus on how to accommodate large populations of English Language Learners (ELL) in order to be successful in educating students who have issues in their learning that were not present one generation ago.

As a result of this demographic transition, noteworthy changes affecting the social make-up and organization of public schools are taking place (Trueba, 2004). Latino students are the highest among all students in public schools in both dropout and graduation rates. According to a study using the National Center for Education Statistics data (2003), the Hispanic dropout rate was shown to be 28%, higher than the 7% for Whites and the 13% for Blacks. More alarming is the fact that 44% of Latino students born outside of the United States drop out of high school, or never attend, which adds to the rate of failure (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

### **Background**

Today, the most urgent challenge facing the American educational system has a Latino appearance. Although Latinos are the most rapidly growing ethnic minority in our country, they lag far behind academically (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). These growing numbers of students

of minority and mixed ethnicities need not only English language resources, but also cultural support and advocates from their public schools who understand their issues and speak up about making the changes that are needed (Bennett, 2008; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999). In order for schools to educate all children, the relationship between the student, school, parent and community is of utmost importance if schools are to adapt and students are to succeed (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, Jones, 2001). Schools can learn more about these students and their families by strengthening the relationships with them (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). By building relationships, the way to make academic adjustments, both at school and in the homes, can emerge. Building relationships is especially important, since the Latino culture is built on values of family, collective action, community, and relationship building (Stanton-Salazar, 2001)

### **Latino Community Context**

Although Latinos may come from numerous nations and have various racial backgrounds, they are bound by a shared language and to some extent a shared cultural heritage (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Individuals of Mexican origin make up 64 % of all Latinos in the United States, followed by Puerto Ricans, the next largest subgroup, who comprise 9% of the Latino population (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Many studies of Latinos and education do not disaggregate statistics by subgroup. The Latino culture and context can be described as richly textured and multi-dimensional communities, consisting of first, second, and third immigrant populations coupled with families whose family roots may extend back several generations (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

## **Definition of Terms**

**Confianza** -- The Spanish word for mutual trust

**Funds of Knowledge** -- Are intellectual, social and emotional resources that allow modest income families to survive with pride and respect (Gonzalez et al., 1995). The analysis of what is called the *funds of knowledge* assumes that there are positive, cultural values in households, especially in cultures in which families are such a strong and vital force in the community.

**La Familia** – Spanish term meaning *The Family*

**Quinceanera** – Spanish word meaning the celebration of the girl's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in Latino Families. This birthday is celebrated differently than other birthdays as it recognizes the transition from childhood to womanhood.

**Social Capital** – Refers to connections between and within social networks. Social capital emphasizes the value of a relationship that provides support and assistance in a given social situation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

**Local Community** – Refers to Latino neighborhoods

**AVID** – A college readiness system providing *students in the middle* the support to achieve well in high-rigor coursework and preparing students toward a college degree.

## **Rationale for Study**

The purpose of this study was to assist a rural school district in the Midwestern part of the United States understand that Latino households possess funds of knowledge which are cultural wealth and practices to make sense of their world (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In addition, I examined the social capital that exists in these homes, including the value of various

relationships between families and institutional agents in the community, such as teachers, schools and churches (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). By understanding Latino epistemology (ways of knowing), educators in the schools can understand how to build on their cognitive and cultural resources by integrating community practices into the classrooms. Moll (1992), an anthropologist, suggests that when teachers understand the rich sources of pedagogical activities that can be brought from the homes of Latino families and transplanted into the classrooms, learning and teaching can become a reciprocal and purposeful activity for both families and school members alike because the school work is based on the students' cultural epistemology. The school would also know that enhancing the relationship between the school district and its significant Latino parent base is important. This study was set in a medium-size school district that consists of 4,773 students, with 3,436 Latino students (Liberal USD 480 Public Schools). The researcher wanted to concentrate on gaining insights into how Latinos perceive the world and understand from Latino parents how the school can strengthen these relationships throughout the school. This is especially important between the teachers and classrooms and these parents for the purpose of improving student performance, school culture, and overall responsiveness of schools to the community.

### **Statement of the Problem and Significance**

In Liberal, Kansas USD 480, over 70% of all students are Latino. In addition, over 70 percent of all students come from low socio-economic homes. In the schools, personnel hold negative assumptions and perpetuate stereotypes about Latino parents; especially that Latinos do not value the educational system. Literature supports that in many regions of the United States,

educators believe that Latino families are not involved in their children's education in U.S. public schools (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lopez, 2001). This lack of connection with the community becomes a concern when we look closely at the number of Latino immigrants entering the United States. Nearly 1 out of every 4 people in the United States in 2008 was an immigrant or the child of an immigrant (Immigration Policy Center, 2010). Two-thirds of Latinos were immigrants or children of immigrants. In Kansas, 1 in 9 citizens are Latino or Asian (Immigration Policy Center, 2010). Thus, while educators continue to dwell on the belief that Latinos do not value the education system in the United States (Gandara & Contreras, 2009), more and more Latino families are entering the United States with their children attending public schools. It is important to understand why or how this lack of understanding of the cultural norms has come into play.

In the Latino culture, teachers are highly respected (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Lopez, 2001) and, as such, Latino families may view that any interference from parents is rude and discourteous (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Thus, teachers often view parents from their own cultural view point and assume that parents seeking input on assignments and grades as being interested and caring for their children's education. Latino parents, however, may view this kind of questioning as a sign of disrespect (Trumbull, et al., 2001). Cultural differences and norms are misinterpreted because there is not enough direct communication to move past these differences.

The importance of relationships in growing to understand cultural differences can be seen in other ways. Often times, teachers and school staff members misinterpret a lack of involvement



to show a lack of caring (Lopez, 2001). They assume that since these families are not present at school functions, they do not care about their children or the educational experiences of their children. Phrases such as “those that need to come don’t come” and “I just don’t understand why *those other parents* won’t even show up” (Finders & Lewis, 1994) are often heard in the workrooms and teacher lounges of public school buildings in the United States.

Latino parents can experience confusion and frustration with the educational system that misunderstands their cultural values and also seems to place additional barriers that hinder their involvement in their child’s schooling (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Often, the times of the school functions are inconvenient or meetings will not provide translators or childcare, both services which may be needed for full involvement by the parents at school functions in the evenings.

First generation Latino families may demonstrate support for their children’s education in ways that differ from what the dominant culture expects (Valdes, 1996). These parents highly respect teachers and feel that talking with teachers will be construed as an interference from them or other parents and it is disrespectful (Trumbull, et al., 2001). Their views do not always match the role envisioned by the teachers and administrators. Lopez (2001) discusses a migrant Latino family, the Padillas, which viewed involvement in a radically different way than educators looking through a traditional academic lens. Rather than being involved in PTOs, booster clubs and in classroom settings, the Padilla family understood involvement in a broader sense and taught their children to appreciate the value of their education through the medium of hard work. The family felt that their role was to instill in their children a respect for education

and its importance in living a good life. The lessons of hard work in the migrant fields translated into lessons of working hard in school settings with a hope that their children would seek options outside of the migratory work force. The Padillas felt that instilling a strong work ethic and values was enough to support their children.

The Padilla family may not have realized how many obstacles were present in the schools for their children. And teachers unaccustomed to teaching second language learners may not know why students appear unresponsive. How are these contradictions and gaps bridged? What can bring the schools' practices and the families' support to change in ways that help the students succeed? What role does a different home language contribute to the unresponsiveness between the families and schools? There are likely several factors that are inherent within the Latino culture that contribute to their educational values and, by taking a closer look into what factors are esteemed and why this is so, will provide a better understanding of how to effectively engage Latino families within public school settings.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching questions that guided the proposed study were:

1. What values and strengths do Latino parents share about themselves and their children?
2. What impedes parental involvement within the Latino community at school settings according to Latino Parents?
3. What can enhance parental involvement within the Latino community at school settings according to Latino Parents?

These questions focus on gaining information about Latino families and the strengths in the way they perceive their world. Also, how can schools better serve these families and their children in spite of the many challenges, including language barriers, they typically meet and face head on with honesty and graciousness, especially since Anglo-Americans may be seen as abrupt and rude to this culture (Lopez, 2001). In fact, the gracious and accepting mannerism may be another reason why the real needs are not communicated to the schools.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review is an organized way of researching a chosen topic. The literature review is defined by Machi & McEvoy (2009) as “a written document that presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study. This case establishes a convincing thesis to answer the study’s questions” (p. 4). The literature review will begin with an examination of two theoretical frameworks, *funds of knowledge* (González et al., 2005) and *social capital* (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), utilized by the researcher. Following thereafter, supporting research that has been conducted on each of the two theories with specific interest to this study will be also be shared.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is a central part of any dissertation, as it informs the way the problem is perceived and the way in which the data are collected. It is the underlying structure, scaffolding and frame of the study (Merriam, 2009). This section explains the theoretical framework used to steer this qualitative research project as it focused on gathering funds of knowledge from Latino households in order to provide more enriching educational experiences for their children. This theoretical perspective seeks to provide an understanding of the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives (González, et al., 2005). When relationships are activated, it enables Latinos to accomplish their goals or empower them in a meaningful way (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Further, when the relationships are established, the social capital is

generated to enable the families to connect to the proper channels to effect the changes they need for their children.

### **Funds of Knowledge**

The analysis of what is called the *funds of knowledge* assumes that there are positive, cultural values in households, especially in cultures in which families are such a strong and vital force in the community. By looking at these family structures and strengths, there can be new understandings for how educators can connect school practices with classroom instruction and practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Funds of knowledge are intellectual, social and emotional resources that allow modest income families to survive with pride and respect (Gonzalez et al., 1995). This framework is particularly important in dealing with students whose households are usually viewed as being *poor*, in an economic sense, but rich in values and quality experiences for the child (Gonzalez, et al., 2005, p. 71).

In Latino households across America, these families represent a plethora of untapped funds of knowledge capable of providing enhanced educational opportunities for their children in school settings. According to Gonzalez and Moll (2002), the funds of knowledge theoretical conception facilitates a systematic and potent way to represent communities in terms of resources, the where-withal they do possess, and a way to harness these assets for classroom instruction.

**Family and cultural context.** The concept of funds of knowledge is based on a straightforward principle. That principle is that people are competent and have knowledge, and through their life experiences they have gained that knowledge (Gonzalez, et al., 1995; L. Moll,

1992). The funds of knowledge perspective provides a broad prospective for understanding Latino populations in the United States by examining household patterns, habits, and relationships. Understanding strengths, or the funds of knowledge, from the Latino community can provide the underpinnings for understanding the cultural systems of students and families from these communities (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992).

**Classroom and school focus.** Education is the single most effective way to integrate the rapidly increasing population of Latinos into the United States economy and society (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Thus, if the high dropout rates and low educational achievement and performance levels are not turned around, the likelihood of creating a permanent cultural generation without hope of integrating into the mainstream is likely and quite sobering. Too many times in schools across America today, Latino students are looked upon as lacking skills such as language and knowledge (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). This emphasis on *disadvantages* has provided rationalization for lowered expectations in schools and inaccurate portrayals of the students and their families (González, et al., 2005; Gonzalez, et al., 1995, p. 445). The basis of this deficit view stems from the concept of “familial deficits” (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 83). This concept suggests that Mexican Americans do not hold education in high esteem, thus leading to inadequate household socialization for academic competence and contributing to school failure for their children.

**Local community.** The local community in this context refers to neighborhoods made up of primarily Latino populations. Understanding the local households and the social networks that are present among them is important for various reasons. One main reason is that the funds

of knowledge model involve looking at Latino families and the neighborhoods that they reside within with respect and appreciation for the abundant knowledge and multiple skills that they possess. “Such funds are not only found within households, but they also are part of the repertoire of information contained within the clusters of households where younger generational cohorts learn their substance and have the opportunity to experiment with them in a variety of settings” (González, et al., 2005 p. 53,54).

Understanding these cultural systems through social capital theory, specifically the institutional funds of knowledge perspective, allows vital construction of relationships, called networks, between teachers, students, and parents that are needed to improve the quality of teaching in Latino communities to occur.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is a useful theory for understanding the experiences of first, second or third generation Latino family members. Social capital emphasizes the value of a relationship that provides support and assistance in a given social situation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Just like a fifty-dollar bill represents a form of capital that can be converted into a desired service or product, a network of relationships also represents forms of capital that can be transformed into socially valued assets and opportunities (e.g., emotional support, privileged information, access to opportunities for mobility). In simple terms, social ties and networks possess the potential to create valued resources (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). According to social capital theory, networks of relationships can aid students in managing an otherwise unfamiliar environment (Attinasi, 1989).

Social capital is an appropriate theoretical lens for the researcher to view this project through for various reasons. Some Latino parents have limited access to information to help them understand the educational process (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Valenzuela (1999) states, “social capital is especially appropriate for addressing the structure of relationships among immigrant and non-immigrant youth, as well as highlighting the effects of breakdowns or enhancements in the flow of school-related information and support” (p. 27). Not only is there an opportunity to have an impact on Latino students’ aspirations to do well in school and prepare for college but there is a great need as well.

**Institutional funds of support.** Stanton-Salazar (1997) has developed a social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children. Through social networks and having access to institutional resources children and youth learn to overcome exclusionary forces and to gather valuable and highly productive social capital. It is capital in that capacity accumulates and can be transported and exchanged similar to economic capital. It is social to the degree that such accumulation can only exist and have value within the context of social networks (Arriaza, 2003; Coleman, 1988).

The importance of possessing quality relationships with institutional agents (those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities) in the social development, school success and status attainment of children is referred to by Stanton-Salazar (1997) as institutional support. He talked about how this type of support allows young people to become successful



consumers and entrepreneurs within mainstream settings, which lead to implementing greater control over their lives and futures.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) noted, however, that institutional support within schools and other institutions could be problematic for young people because of ideological expectations from those working in the institutions. Middle class networks in such places allow people to move about the complex mainstream network easily. He states that in many ways, they function as pathways of privilege and power. Stanton-Salazar goes on to state that a fundamental dimension of social inequality in society is that some are allowed and able to use these freeways while others are not. Stanton-Salazar conceded that a major vehicle that allows for use of the freeways mentioned previously is an educational experience that is strategic, empowering, and network enhancing.

**Overcoming borders and barriers.** Socialization serves as the most central mechanism through which social capital is negotiated, grows and accumulates (Arriaza, 2003). It is how young people learn to participate in multiple and simultaneously existing worlds. Exiting one sociocultural world and going to another entails crossing borders. Borders serve to alert people to the necessary rules and requirements for effective participation within the respective world or social setting (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Borders can be neutral, allowing movement between social worlds to occur with ease or they can be stressful. Often for minority children movement is difficult and adapting to the new terrain can be challenging. Navigating through borders is indeed possible for young people to learn, however without adequate intervention the personal costs of crossing stressful borders can be significant (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

**Bridging the school and the community** For minority children and youth, the ability to cross borders and overcome barriers has to do with developing resiliency through supportive ties with protective means within the home and community (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Stanton-Salazar stresses that for these minority children, being able to access the mainstream institutions effectively, they must develop resiliency through family and local community-embedded relations and they must also learn to decode the system. Decoding the system involves multiple, simultaneous forms of action; however, in this context it entails “knowing which actors and organizations in the social universe control key institutional resources and which actors and organizations are the most predisposed and committed to the empowerment of low-status individuals and communities” (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 39).

### **Literature Review**

This literature review discusses research conducted on the funds of knowledge theory with specific focus on family and cultural contexts, the classroom and school focus and on the importance of the local community. The literature review concludes with a discussion of the research on social capital and how the cultural context and the community can be bridged in an effort to benefit the student in his/her school setting.

#### **Funds of Knowledge: Family and Cultural Context**

The following research explicitly addresses the funds of knowledge regarding family and culture. Gonzalez et al., (2005) states “how information is transmitted to children in U.S.-Mexican households suggests that such knowledge is passed on through culturally constituted

methods, that these methods have emotive implications for the self-esteem of children, and that they are possible sources of cultural conflict in the schools” (p. 61).

In order to understand the multiple strengths of a family household, Moll (1992) has recommended an understanding of family and work histories, childcare practices, and then interactional patterns within a neighborhood and local environment. This knowledge can help schools more effectively understand the inner workings of the families that send their children to these local settings. If the school learns about the family and vice-versa, then this learning creates an interactive network in which both systems can learn and support the other. Institutional funds of knowledge are created. Ties with the institution (the school in this case) are enhanced, providing diversified, essential resources which ultimately leads to children’s success in schools (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Classrooms, as a part of the school’s system, can be seen as a cultural setting and in this way, can also benefit from the funds of knowledge perspective. A reason for the interaction between the school and household is so classrooms can deliver their information in a different manner. Teachers become aware of student’s funds of knowledge and in turn apply teaching techniques and appropriate lessons that tap into this knowledge base.

### **Funds of Knowledge: Classroom and School Focus**

Researchers have determined that parental involvement is extremely important in the education of a child; unfortunately far too few parents actually get involved with their children’s school lives (Elias, Patrikakou, & Weissberg, 2007). Sometimes, parents do not get involved with the school because of cultural and language barriers (Valdes, 1996). These parents often

experience confusion and frustration within an educational system that does not understand their cultural values and place additional barriers that impede full involvement in their child's schooling (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Valdes (1996) describes a first generation Mexican-origin family in which the communication between the family and the school was nearly non-existent and, when Saul, a first grade student, was recommended for retention, the family was upset, frustrated, and confused. Learning English at an acceptable pace was not the concern for retention; rather it was due in part to the "fact" that the parents were not "involved" in his education. Sadly, in this particular instance, the parent's lack of involvement was due to a total trust in the school to educate their child and to family medical issues, which prohibited the parents from frequently visiting the school.

Schools need to focus on the Latino students and their families and use that as a foundation for their learning. Funds of knowledge are available in these households regardless of the families' formal years of education or focus on literacy. These funds are not possessions or traits; rather they represent social capital and a positive perspective to engage these families. Yet, these funds of knowledge and their transmission rarely make it to the classroom in an effective way (Gonzalez, et al., 1995; Moll, et al., 1992).

Levykh (2008) suggest that if teachers use an inquiry method in their classroom, as anthropologists do in the field, then there can be a continual process of growth and development by both the teachers and students. The funds of knowledge theory builds and evolves from ideas developed by Vygotsky regarding zones of proximal development (ZPD). These zones refer to the actual developmental level with assistance from peers or educators as opposed to

developmental gains produced without the aid of either peer or educator. The focus in the classroom must move away from the perceived lack of skills or deficits that these children have and instead integrate the abundant funds of knowledge that these children possess into classroom instruction.

### **Funds of Knowledge: Local Community**

When looking at the local community, the primary emphasis of researchers such as Gonzalez et al. (2005), is understanding the local households historically. The history aspect focuses primarily on the labor history of the home, which reveals some of the accumulated funds of knowledge of the households. A key finding from their research has revealed that these funds of knowledge are plentiful and diverse. Knowledge about a multitude of matters such as trade, business and finance are typically uncovered.

Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg (1992) found from their research that when these interviews take place, the major focus is how the families develop social networks that connect them to their environments, especially with other households and how the social relationships aid the development and exchange of resources, or funds of knowledge. A significant characteristic of these exchanges is their reciprocity. Gonzalez, et al., (2005) note in their research that the reciprocal exchanges establish obligations built on mutual trust or *confianza* which is supported by each exchange which leads to long lasting relationships. These exchanges build trust and the more exchanges that are made, the more information is shared and knowledge is dispersed and environments are created in which learning can occur.

The local community and the established networks provide ample institutional funds of support. However, gaining access to mainstream institutions and the support that they can provide is also important to these minority children and their families. Gaining a better understanding of what these institutions represent and how to access them will be discussed in the next section of this literature review.

### **Social Capital: Institutional Funds of Support**

Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes how the funds of knowledge, along with five other forms of institutional support, is a key form of institutional support for social integration and success within mainstream institutional spheres including school systems.

From his research, he identified the following as a list of skills that students, especially those who are disenfranchised, can learn from those in the system acting as agents who facilitate learning:

1. Institutionally sanctioned discourses (i.e., socially acceptable ways of using language and communication)
2. Academic task-specific knowledge (e.g. subject-area knowledge)
3. Organizational/bureaucratic funds of knowledge (knowledge of how bureaucracies operate – chains of command)
4. Network development (i.e. knowledge leading to skillful networking behavior; e.g., knowledge of how to negotiate with various gatekeepers and agents within and outside of the school environment; knowledge of how to develop

supportive/cooperative ties with peers who are well integrated in the school's high-status academic circles)

5. Technical funds of knowledge (e.g., computer literacy, study skills, test-taking skills, time-management skills, decision making skills)
6. Knowledge of labor and educational markets (e.g., job and educational opportunities, requisites and barriers to entrée; knowledge of how to fulfill requisites and how to overcome barriers)
7. Problem-solving knowledge (i.e., knowing how to integrate the first six knowledge forms above for the purpose of solving school-related problems, making sound decisions, and reaching personal or collective goals. (pp 11 – 12)

Stanton-Salazar emphasizes from his research that institutionally sanctioned discourses deserve special attention due to the fact discourses are socially accepted ways of using language and engaging in communication. For low-status children, opportunities for acquiring institutional discourses as well as other funds of institutional knowledge, which lead to acquiring social capital, is not automatic and can even be difficult. Coleman (1988) states that ideology and social structure may work against or even destroy social capital. Another example deals with parent education being a significant predictor of student performance due to the fact it is related to class status. Class privilege is tied to social capital – access to power and authority, to the understanding of “the system” that allows those with privilege in society to maintain it (Gandara & Contreras, 2009, p. 51).

Creating social networks to, or tied to, institutional agents such as schools is critical to the social development and empowerment of ethnic minority children and youth because these ties represent consistent and dependable sources where they can learn decoding skills and from which they can attain other key forms of institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). When these institutions explicitly transmit support to ethnic minority children, the impact is extensive to even possibly being life-altering. However, when the institutional agencies do not act on a specific agenda, the role of initiative on behalf of the children to engage assistance from supportive agencies takes on a much more important role. Utilizing both family and social networks is important and becomes a necessary means of support in order to gather necessary institutional support needed to assist these children in finding not only success in school but in their everyday lives.

### **Social Capital: Overcoming Borders and Barriers**

There are four barriers that Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to when discussing how borders can become obstructive and impede people's access to social capital.

1. The first refers to sociocultural barriers which represent cultural hierarchy. One culture is deemed better than another and this can be extremely burdensome for children and adults alike.

2. Socioeconomic barriers come into play when children come to school dressed a certain way or can't participate in extracurricular activities due to not having enough money to do so. Sadly, many times people are treated differently, inappropriately, when socioeconomic barriers are noticeable.



3. Linguistic barriers frequently are present in educating minority children. They represent a message that is sent stating that one's primary language is not worthy or it is a problem. In many instances, schools send this message by not allowing the native language to be spoken by minority children.

4. Structural barriers represent those things that schools lack to adequately engage and teach all children. Examples could include lack of tutors or English as a Second Language programs and teachers. Each of these barriers creates problems for minority children to access the institutional support and resources that they must have in order to be successful. (p.24)

Research clearly shows that parental levels of education and familiarity with the U. S. education system play a significant role in their involvement and ability to access resources to help their children navigate through the educational system and onto post-secondary education (Attinasi, 1989; Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009).

### **Social Capital: Bridging the School and Community**

Putman (2000) showed in his research that if a child or individual entrenched in a local community or social circle chooses to access new forms of capital or information, the child must branch out to other institutions or social circles or communities to retrieve it. This would entail creating a link between two social circles and, when this occurs, *bridging* social capital takes place. Putman suggests that bridging social capital is the key to mobilizing community resources, acquiring a wider variety of resources, and sharing diverse information. Without bridging, social circles are forever secluded and independent of each other (Lin, 2001). Thus, it is clearly evident that being able to access numerous institutional agents and bridge strongly to

them, minority children can have access to necessary information and support that will be needed to improve and advance as they progress through school and beyond. And when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better and stay in school longer (Barton, 2007).

## **Summary**

### **Funds of Knowledge**

Research centered on the funds of knowledge clearly shows that Latino households possess many assets. When schools engage these families and become better informed of the inner workings within these homes, the children that live within often prosper. In addition, Latino households have rich histories that provide ample information on how they engage others in their community with matters such as trade, business and finance and understanding how these networks function and with whom they interact provides significant information about these families and ultimately how children in these homes can benefit educationally as a result.

### **Social Capital**

The research that has been conducted which supports how social capital in Latino households and communities is created, developed and expanded upon in addition to understanding the social networks that already exist, is important for the context of this study. Coleman (1988) suggests that social capital is not an intrinsic attribute of social networks; rather, it comes into being whenever social interaction makes use of assets dwelling within the web of social relationships. Understanding the borders and barriers that Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to in addition to gaining a perspective regarding how families and children access new

information, or capital, and bridge strongly to them (Putnam, 2000) is important when looking at minority families that typically don't speak English as a primary language.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This research study was conducted within a qualitative research tradition that emphasizes the funds of knowledge as a means to better understand Latino students and families. The best known representatives of qualitative research studies and those that most embody characteristics that are rich in describing people, places and conversations are those that employ the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Conducting in-depth interviews and observing family members in their natural setting was the means in which data were collected in this study.

According to Merriam (2002, pp. 4,5) there are four key characteristics that cut across the various interpretive qualitative research designs: (a) researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis; (c) the process is inductive (researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypotheses to be tested); and (d) the product of qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive. As the researcher, I attempted to embed all four of these characteristics into this design.

#### **Researcher Positionality**

This in-depth research of three Latino families in a mid-sized rural community was carried out by a doctoral student at Wichita State University. I am a middle aged, Anglo American male that has a high interest in this study for a number of reasons. My hometown has seen a significant increase of Latinos move into it since I moved there 20 years ago. My

hometown has transformed into a community that is labeled a *minority-majority* community and county in 20 short years; that is, the Latino population, once a minority, now represents the majority of the population. As a result, understanding the Latino culture is an area of high interest to me. I am also the superintendent of the school system in the community in which I reside. Our local school district has 70% of our students come from Latino homes, and being able to effectively engage these students and their families is of utmost importance. It is also worth noting that in Kansas there are four counties that have been identified as having minority-majority populations. Three of the four counties are located in the southwestern corner of the state where my home is located. The fourth county is Wyandotte County, located in the northeastern corner of Kansas (LJ World.com, 2009).

It should be noted that I do not speak Spanish. It was critical that when I worked in the homes and conducted all 12 interviews, I had a translator present in order for me to communicate effectively and accurately with the family members that I interviewed. More important is that the Latino voices are heard in a context that accurately portrays what they wanted to say. The translator was a Latino male with a master's degree who is a building principal in the local school district. The translator assisted by communicating my questions to the family members in their native language when necessary. He also made sure what was spoken by the Latino family members was translated into the English language with accuracy. I tape recorded all twelve of the interviews and transcribed them. It must be noted what I transcribed were the English responses provided to me from the interpreter. He listened intently to the responses from the family members, recited what they had said in Spanish and provided their response to me in

English. Mr. Rito, the translator, and I traveled back into the homes once all interviews were transcribed and we allowed for member checking to occur. All interview candidates were satisfied with their responses that were read back to them in an attempt to check for accuracy.

Finally, it was important that I work with an open mind. The research site was highly diverse and it was important for me to possess an unbiased mindset in order to better understand the families. I take great pride in my job and in the position I serve in. I am an advocate for all children in Liberal, Kansas and I understand that my job is to ensure that all students have quality learning opportunities. As I gathered data for this research project it was imperative for all family members to understand that all of the conversations would be held in confidence and in no way would this affect their children in school. The role I served while conducting the interviews was as a graduate student from Wichita State University with the sole purpose of gathering important data and information.

### **Research Site and Context**

The site of this study took place in Liberal, Kansas, located in Seward County, nestled in the far southwest corner of the state. Seward County has a population of 23,013 with 51.3% of those citizens coming from Latino origin. This is much higher than the state average of Latinos, which is currently 9.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The average household income in Seward County is currently at \$41,290, which is significantly lower than the state average of \$50,174 and the national average of \$51,425 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Liberal USD 480 is one of two public school districts located in Seward County. USD 480 has 4,700 students comprised of richly diverse populations including 70% Latino origin, 20% Caucasian, 3% African American

and the remaining 7 % coming from “other” ethnic groups. Seventy four percent of all students qualify for Free/Reduced meals and 46% are English Language Learners.

USD 480 is comprised of 15 schools, including one preschool, 7 elementary schools (grades K-3), two intermediate schools (grades 4-6), two middle schools (grades 7-8), one high school (grades 9-12) and two alternative schools (Liberal Unified School District 480 Public Schools, 2011). The school system employs 767 staff, including 352 teachers and 29 administrators to serve their nearly 5,000 students. At Liberal High School, the Latino students scored 70% proficient in reading compared to 87.6% of the White students on the 2010 Kansas State Assessments. In math, the White students outperformed the Latino student’s as well with scores of 87.6 % vs. 71.3% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008). This is one example of concern: these scores impact whether or not a school makes Adequate Yearly Progress in a given school year.

Currently, USD 480 South Middle School, comprised of 81% Hispanic students, has been identified as a Tier I school resulting from ongoing low performance over the last three years on state assessments. This school received \$1,800,000 as a federal grant to transform the entire school prior to the 2010-2011 school year. USD 480 had to agree to implement significant reform to the recently identified Tier I middle school in order to receive the financial assistance being offered by the federal government (Kansas State Department of Education, 2010). This is another example of how significant it is that the researcher gains a deeper understanding of Latino families and their perceptions and tap into their funds of knowledge in order to provide quality data to the local school board so that all students are served adequately.

## **Participant Selection**

It proved challenging to consider how to select families to interview and who would be interested in participating, especially since some families are illegal and would not ordinarily come forward for research. Further, since I am an Anglo male, from another culture, and I am also the superintendent of the school district, there are further sensitivities to consider when attempting to select families who would be interested in participating.

Recently, a school official in USD 480 was asked to help publicize an event held by the community nonprofit group, Liberal Area Coalition for Families (LACF), created to facilitate community development. In this way, he came to learn of several Latino families who had recently participated in a team building/communication/skills development program called Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH). There were a total of thirty-six Latino parent participants who were trained in two different sessions in techniques for working with their children, understanding the circumstances their children may be facing in schools, and creating and implementing a social contract to be utilized in the home. The trainings, provided by a community institution, created a bridge between the school and these families.

The CKH program mirrors a program in which a number of school teachers and administrators from USD 480 have participated in for the purpose of building relationships with their students. While the Capturing Kids Hearts program sought to train parents and schools on communication skills for helping to understand and work with children of all ages, this population in Liberal presented an initial challenge for trainers that was unexpected. Despite having a bi-lingual, Latino presenter who understood the numerous challenges of entering new



communities for families with foreign status, he was not prepared to work through the parents' feelings that they had done something wrong to be invited to this meeting. The parents thought they had made a mistake in their interactions with the schools and believed this was the reason for being chosen. They thought that they were sent letters because they were perceived as not having good rules in their homes for their children to abide by. With a good deal of explanation from the trainer on the first morning of training, the parents came to understand they were invited with the hope this could be a positive session. Since the program is popular with teachers and students, and these parents have participated in a similar version of this training, families were selected from this session. I was interested in speaking with these family units since they had at least one positive interaction with the school. The study wanted to look at the family within its natural environment and seek to understand ways in which the schools can benefit from this knowledge and from the fact that the families have also shown an interest in the school. Drawing from this population provided me with a Latino family pool of candidates that have shown interest in bridging towards the school and community.

In narrowing the 36 Latino citizens down to three for the purpose of this study, Gonzalez and associates (2005) recommend there be flexibility in selecting the families to interview. The most important consideration is the family be willing to participate. For the purpose of this study, it was relevant that the families being studied have children in the local school system. I mailed letters (Appendix A and B) to the 36 Latino citizens that participated in the CKH training. One family contacted me and stated that they were interested. After waiting another week without hearing back from other families, I began calling families that had participated in the

most recent CKH training. I had a female translator with me as we called their homes. After visiting with the first two families that we called, they both agreed to be a part of the study. Both families had received the information letter that I had sent to them explaining the purpose of my study. One family had been out of town and had not had a chance to respond. The other family was not sure what the letter and study was about. After these initial steps had been taken to reduce the initial pool of 36 potential candidates, I utilized purposive, quota sampling techniques, mentioned above, to reduce the interested participants that have children attending USD 480 schools to a final group of three.

### **The Three Families**

In the following paragraphs I will briefly describe each Latino family that I conducted interviews with. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of each family member. In doing so, I've followed through with my promise to each family member assuring them that their stories would be shared but confidentiality will be assured.

The first interview was with the Rodriguez family. Alicia participated in the CKH parent training offered by the Liberal Coalition for Families. Alicia is married to Jose and they have two beautiful daughters Maria, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student at Liberal High, and Ana, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at South Middle School.

Alicia is an interior decorator and she also organizes big parties such as Quinceanera's and weddings. Alicia also takes pictures at these big events. She is self-employed. Her home was beautifully decorated and clean. Alicia was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and moved to the United States with her husband after they were married. She and her husband initially moved to

Denver, Colorado before coming to Liberal, Kansas 15 years ago. She enjoys walking, planning for big events such as Quinceaneras and spending time with her husband and two daughters.

Jose works in the oil field for Trinidad Oil Company. He is a supervisor and travels frequently with his job. Often times, his family during the summer months will join him in Oklahoma or Texas in a small trailer on the work site. His colleagues often tease him about his family joining him on site and staying with him in his small work trailer. Jose is proud to have them with him for a week on the road, according to his oldest daughter.

Maria is a junior in high school. She is a lovely young lady that is highly involved in many activities at school, including participating on the quiz bowl team, science club, year book staff and debate team. She also has just begun working part time after school. Maria was born in Johnson, a small rural community in southwest Kansas but has grown up in Liberal. Maria loves to read. She loves self-motivation books written by Dave Ramsey and Rhonda Byrne. She also enjoys watching movies, traveling and trying new foods.

Ana is in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at South Middle School. She is more reserved and shy than Maria. She looks up to her older sister and she loves spending time with her.

The second family that I interviewed was the Ortiz family. Jessica Ortiz is married to George and they have four children: Omar, Luz, Sylvia and Sarai. Jessica has lived in Liberal for 10 years. She has been in the United States for 17 years. Prior to living in the United States, Jessica was born and raised in Chihuahua, Mexico. She initially moved to Hobbs, New Mexico prior to living in Liberal. Her husband's sister introduced her to George who was living in Liberal and working at National Beef while Jessica was living in Hobbs. Jessica enjoys taking

walks with her entire family in the evenings once her husband gets off work and the two older children return home from school. She also enjoys watching Spanish speaking TV shows.

Omar is Jessica's oldest son from a previous relationship. He is 14 years old and a freshman at Liberal High School. Omar enjoys playing sports and playing in the band. Last year in middle school Omar participated in football, track and cross country. He also enjoys playing with Legos and he loves art class.

Jessica's husband is George Ortiz. I did not meet George; however, he has worked at National Beef for 22 years according to his wife. They have three other children besides Omar. Luz is 8 years old and in the second grade at Southlawn Elementary School. Sylvia is 4 years old and Sarai is 2 years old. The two youngest daughters were always present when I interviewed Jessica and kept themselves happily entertained playing with each other while I was in the home.

The third family that I interviewed was the Borjas family. Molina Borjas was the participant in the CKH training and the primary focus of my interview sessions. Molina was born in a small rural town called Satevo near Chihuahua, Mexico. At six years old she moved into the large city of Chihuahua. Molina married her husband, Abel, while living in Mexico. They learned of a job opportunity in Liberal from a cousin and decided to move to Liberal so he could work at the packing plant. Molina is a home maker. She is very proud of the fact that she has recently passed her GED. She had read about the GED program being offered at the Colvin Center in a local Spanish newspaper and it took her 4 months to complete the GED program.

Molina and Abel have three children: Israel, Norma and Daniel. They have lived in Liberal for 16 years.

Abel Borjas works at National Beef. He, along with his wife and children, are all very involved in the Assembly of God Church, an all Hispanic congregation. Abel plays guitar at church and he teaches their children to play music as well.

Israel is 12 years old and in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at West Middle School. He enjoys playing outside. His favorite subject in school is mathematics. Israel is very shy and quiet and when I interviewed him he was soft spoken and gave very short, simple responses to my questions.

Molina and Able have two younger children besides Israel. Norma is in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and Daniel is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and both of these children attend Cottonwood Intermediate School.

### **Site for interviews**

The interviews were conducted in the homes of three Latino families living in Liberal, Kansas. It is important that when conducting qualitative research that the natural setting be considered for conducting research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state, “The researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know them and earns their trust, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed” (p. 2). There were three interviews with each family; in addition, there was one interview conducted with the oldest child from each family, for a total of 12 interviews. I worked with a translator to ensure that what was being spoken was represented accurately in the English language. I gave the informed consent (Appendix C and D) to the mother of each family in the three households. The mother in each family was the participant in the Capturing Kids Hearts training. Since these parents

have already made a gesture on their own, it makes sense that the school researcher would now visit their home site. Further, a great deal can be learned by simply visiting people in their home and native environment.

### **Data Collection Plan**

For this study, I planned to seek the three Latino families' funds of knowledge through in-depth interviews and observations within the family home. The research approach that I employed as a model is based on understanding households, identifying cultural themes and it is qualitative in nature. I employed what Gonzalez and associates (2005) have developed when entering the field (local households) by utilizing a combination of careful observations and open-ended interviewing strategies that, when combined analytically, accurately portray the complex functions of households within their socio-historical contexts.

Gonzalez and associates (2005) recommend three students and their families to interview. They stress that over time, more interviews can add to the insights of the community, but one cannot underestimate the power of engaging only a few families in a long-term, sustained relationship. The timeline for the interviews took place during July through September of 2011. I conducted three interviews with each family and then I also interviewed the oldest child in each family for a total of 12 interviews. The interviews lasted between 1-2 hours on average.

I interviewed the three Latino families and I structured the visits and interviews around the three tasks researchers Gonzalez et al., (2005) outlined, so as to capture the nested aspects of their life, in their natural environment in what they call capturing the *funds of knowledge* or knowledge and values of these family systems.

The three tasks or goals as described by Gonzales and associates (2005, p. 91) is to draw on the knowledge and additional capital found in local households for the development of classroom practice. These researchers summarize the three major project components as follows:

1. Community: Using careful observation, taking note of funds of knowledge in local households in a predominately Mexican, working-class community. This component focuses on understanding the historical makeup of the local household with a particular focus on the social history, which includes the labor history of the families, which reveals some of the local household funds of knowledge.
2. After-school study groups: Settings created to enhance collaboration between researcher and teachers. I utilized a translator, who is a Latino male and also a school principal to share ideas with.
3. Schools: Accessing classrooms to look at existing methods of instruction and implement possible new strategies related to the funds of knowledge that had been identified in household visits. I plan on identifying emerging themes and sharing these units with the school board, building principals and the administrative school district directors in an attempt to utilize the identified funds of knowledge in school settings. (p. 91)

I utilized these components as the model for the three interviews with the different families. The three interviews each had a different focus. I shifted the focus of the interviews as modeled by Gonzalez and associates (2005) and the questions fell into this order and were

joined with an understanding and interpretation of the social capital theory with the specific focus on bridging and institutional funds as well.

The first interview focused on establishing rapport with the family, attempting to create a mutual trust or *confianza* (the Spanish word for trust) with the family is very important. Velez-Ibanez (1983) claims that *confianza en confianza*, trust in mutual trust, is a major cultural intersection for Latino populations. This also allowed me to seek the social networks that are present in each of the households. Possible scenarios that were discussed in the first interview revolved around the children of the home, school projects, labor history and or life history in order to get a good feel for the family history. The questions were open ended and I welcomed stories about their families.

The second interview went into more depth than the first interview. It was more open ended than the first interview but attempted to capture the routine practices of the home (Gonzalez, et al., 2005, p. 13). Seeking information such as what activities do the children participate in at home (e.g., gardening, home improvement, child-care and various hobbies) took place in this interview. The third and final interview focused on understanding the social networks that these families have. Typically the third interview is the most complex and is usually the most revealing. I found it to be amazing how much these families increased their trust in me over the course of the three interviews. By the time I entered into the homes for the third and final interview, the family members were meeting me at the door with smiles on their faces and shaking my hand. This was much different than when I visited their homes the first time. I took cakes to each of the families on the third interview and they were very appreciative



and thanked me. In the third interview, the parents were asked questions about parenthood, raising their families, and what it is like being a parent. Parents were also asked to share stories about their school experiences and how those experiences were similar and/or different from their children's. They were also asked to describe their relationships to schooling, neighbors, churches and other community organizations in which they are a part of.

I also interviewed the oldest child in each of these families, with their permission (Appendix E and F), so as to gain the student's perspective, since that child moves between the home and school. The students were interviewed after the third family interview had taken place. The manner in which the students were interviewed was comparable to the adults. Whereas the content or questions were similar for the interview process, I asked the students to provide their answers in a semi-structured format, realizing that sometimes children are less likely to give lengthy, open-ended responses. This helped to keep the child focused and attentive to what was being asked.

## **Observations**

Observation is one of the primary ways of collecting data in qualitative research. It provides a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviews and document analysis, allows for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being examined (Merriam, 1998). It is highly emphasized in the funds of knowledge approach to collecting data that the researcher pays particular attention to the surroundings.

Careful observations entail "focusing on respectful talk between people who are mutually engaged in a constructive conversation" (González, et al., 2005, p. 8). It is essential that the

observer pay close attention to detail not only to what is being spoken, but also to what is being observed. It is important to evaluate the surroundings not only in the home, but also in the local neighborhood, the surrounding area and identify the external markers that can define the neighborhood. Gonzalez and colleagues suggest that looking for material clues to possible funds of knowledge in gardens (botanical knowledge), patio walls (artist knowledge or masonry knowledge), restored vehicles (mechanical knowledge), tools laying around in the home or yard (craftsmen knowledge), or ornaments that are openly visible (made by whom) are all examples of careful observations.

Through observations, I strived to notice how little we know about the schooling of different groups of children (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), including differing ethnicities of children. By observing the families in their home setting, I strove to appreciate the interaction of individuals not just with others, but with the culture of the society in which they live (Merriam, 2002). These observations were strategies I used to collect data about the social order, setting or situation that is being studied (Merriam, 1998). The context of this research focused on the Latino culture; thus, observing the families in their home setting helped me understand their culture and cultural practices.

### **Open-Ended and Semi-structured Interviews**

In conducting qualitative research, some of the data and on occasion, all of the data, are collected through interviews (Merriam, 1998). For the most part, interviewing in qualitative studies is more open-ended and less structured (Appendix G). Semi-structured interviews are similar to open-ended interviews; however, they utilize prepared questions that are more flexibly

worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Finally, all interviews need to extract some specific information from the participants and in some portions of the interviews, highly structured questions were asked (Merriam, 1998). When the necessary, although limited, specific information has been gathered, the remainder of the interviewing sessions involved open-ended questions asked by the researcher.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

The in-depth interviews that I conducted are sometimes called life histories because they ask for background information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To be consistent with the term used by Gonzalez and associates (2005) utilized in their data collection terminology, I will describe the techniques under the heading of in-depth interviews. As a research technique, the study of how humans experience life is told through stories (Merriam, 1998). The emphasis is not only on what is said, but how it is said. With the funds of knowledge theoretical lens as the overarching framework being employed, I paid close attention to the stories that were told in the Latino households and I focused on the cultural intricacies and nuances that might not be easily seen or observed in schools or the American society while collecting the data. The in-depth interviews will allow these families to be heard in an authentic and comprehensive process (Perks & Thompson, 1998).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, observations and other materials that enable you to come up with your findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, dividing

them into meaningful units, coding them and identifying similar patterns. Analyzing data in a qualitative study is not an easy process to conduct. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998) data analysis is probably the most difficult aspect of qualitative research to teach or communicate to others because it is not a fundamental process. Rather it is a process of inductive reasoning, theorizing and thinking.

In this project, the interviews from the families were audiotape recorded, translated and then transcribed. The interviews were transcribed and member checked for reliability, the data were coded and analyzed for patterns and themes that emerged in the language. The interviews were used to help create an understanding of the social capital development system of the families. The following considerations were made with regard to the data.

Once all of the interviews had been translated into English and transcribed, and observations recorded and documented, organizing these multiple data components was of utmost importance. I read through the notes and certain themes or words or patterns of behavior began to stand out. Qualitative researchers use codes to label these major, repeating themes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.173) call this “coding categories” and emphasize that this is a means to sort and physically separate the collected data based on similar topics. I utilized the File Maker Pro and Microsoft Excel computer programs to capture and code the data. I have used these programs in two previous field studies and have familiarity with how to manage the database. It is worth noting, however, that although the computer program is a great asset in organizing the data, it is the researcher, not the computer program, coding and categorizing the data (Creswell, 2007).

## **Research Quality**

Researchers want to provide valid and reliable results in an ethical manner. Merriam (2002) states that to ensure high quality data, methods such as triangulation of data, member checking, peer review of the data, researcher's position and using thick, rich descriptive terms be utilized in this study.

Triangulation of data in a qualitative research study requires using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging themes. Three Latino families provided multiple data sources for this study.

Member checking entailed taking back the transcribed interviews and observations and making sure that the family members who were interviewed believed the transcriptions were plausible. This ensures not only quality but trustworthiness which leads to reliable results. All three families were very appreciative of the fact that I shared their recorded responses with them, and they confirmed that what was on paper was a true representation of what they had stated in the actual interview process.

Peer review sessions with colleagues and professors regarding the process of study and the emerging themes were necessary to ensure tentative interpretations by the researcher are accurate and credible. I met with the translator, a building administrator, and college professors to review data and emerging themes while writing this dissertation and found their insight and input most helpful.

Researcher positionality was discussed in detail earlier in this chapter. It was important that I conduct a self-reflection regarding assumptions, biases, and relationship to the study and

realize the potential of how it may affect the investigation and secondly, be cognizant of power differentials in the research process.

Rich, thick descriptions describing the context of the study was important in order that readers will be able to determine the extent their situation matches the research context and whether or not findings can be transferred.

### **Reliability and Trustworthiness**

I proceeded to go to the selected families' homes for the first visit in order to observe the family in their natural environment and to begin gaining trust from the participants. Gonzalez and associates (2005) stress that establishing *confianza*, a mutual trust, with Latino families goes a long way in having a productive working relationship. I stressed the importance of confidentiality to the participants, as one example, in order gain their trust. I also employed some of the CKH terminology and skills that these families have been trained in to build trust. In addition, I found that having a Latino male who is well known as a community leader, serving in the capacity of a translator for this study, was extremely helpful in gaining initial trust in all three family homes.

Reliability relies heavily on the dependability of the data and the trustworthiness of the notes. In making sure that the in-depth interviews were reliable, all were audio recorded, translated and transcribed for an accurate portrayal of what was stated. Establishing trust must occur at the onset of the interviews and then carefully articulating what was said and how it was said creates sound, reliable evidence. I did visit the three Latino homes one last time once I had all 12 interviews transcribed. In each of the homes, member checking occurred and the Latino

family members were confident with their responses that had been recorded. They were also appreciative for the opportunity to provide input to this study. Member checking is an important component to qualitative research in ensuring that the study is reliable. In order to ensure validity, I looked closely at what the parents said, what the children said and what I observed in the homes. Taking into account all three of these perspectives was important to establish validity to this research project.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A *good* qualitative study is one that has been carried out in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2002). The ethics of the researcher have an impact on the reliability and validity of the study. Ethical dilemmas likely arise in research studies and although one can follow manuscripts, books or guidelines to govern one when these instances occur, the burden of producing a research project that has been conducted in an ethical manner lies solely with the investigator.

Approvals were secured from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Wichita State University as well as approvals from the USD 480 school board of education. Additionally, the researcher sat with all of the participants and informed them of the risks and benefits of participating prior to the first interview, so as to assure that the participants volunteer of their own accord and are protected as to their interests as individuals and community members of the school community, Liberal, and the larger society. The participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their participation was not required or in any way would affect their child's participation with the school, except in a way that would benefit all parties involved. These practices ensured their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data analysis is a process of systematically searching and assembling the interview transcripts, field observations and other materials that is collected and allows the researcher to come up with findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In qualitative research, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity (Merriam, 1998). Ongoing synthesis of what is heard, seen and studied in the field plays a crucial role in qualitative research projects. The collection and analysis of qualitative data in this study allowed for Latino voices, in their natural environment being their homes, to be heard.

#### **Las Familias**

The importance of family, *Las Familias*, is important within the Latino culture. Gaining a perspective about each family's history, labor history and the raising of their children were sought out during the first interview in an attempt to establish rapport, earn trust and begin identifying social networks that are present within these homes.

It was a pleasure spending time with the Rodriguez, Ortiz and Borjas families and having the opportunity to sit in the living room of each of these homes on several occasions over the course of nearly two months and interact with family members from each home. Two of the families had the wives parents living with them. All three of these families lived in small, clean, simple homes. All of their homes had outside fences encompassing either all or part of the yard. Two of the three homes had white picketed fences surrounding the entire front yard. Gib Rito



(Personal Communication, the Spanish translator) pointed out that in Mexico, fences represent borders and signal to others that this is *my territory*. He went on to explain that many homes in Mexico have metal/iron fences with sharp pointed edges or cement block fences with broken glass on top for protection purposes. As Latino families have traveled to the United States, they typically have metal picket fences surrounding their front yards that represent a sign of territory and pride rather than safety. As I drove around the neighborhoods that the Rodriguez, Ortiz and Borjas families lived in, it was a stark realization, one that I had not observed in 20 years while living in this small community of 20,000 people, that most of these small, quaint homes did indeed have white metal picketed fences surrounding their front yards.

I also observed the simple, yet clean, interior makeup of each of these three homes. All three homes had floor tile throughout. I did not see any carpet in any of the three homes. The Rodriguez home did have a wooden floor in the dining room and that was the only observed exception to tile in any of the three family homes.

The Rodriguez family home was decorated beautifully with plush leather furniture in the living room, rich oak trim around doors and cabinets, many healthy, green plants visible throughout and gorgeous paintings observed in the living and dining rooms.

The Borjas home was partially bricked on the outside. As I first entered this home, I noticed what appeared to be three bullet holes splintered into the large porch window. Inside, however, it was clean and quiet. Each time I was in this home I was amazed by how quiet it was; I asked Molina during the first interview if children were in the home and she indicated that her three children were indeed present. In this home, there was a big wedding picture of Molina

and Abel located on a central wall in the living room. The furniture in the living room consisted of two couches and a chair and all were covered with a light cloth fabric and a wooden curio cabinet.

The Ortiz home was the most simple of the three. White floor tile was located throughout the entire home. There was a computer located in the living room. There were a few simple decorations observed hanging on the living room walls. This home was clean in spite of two very little girls, ages two and four, running around all the time and it often smelled like fried food. This home was decorated similar to the Borjas home with the living room furniture being covered with cloth material and it possessed a curio cabinet filled with small trinkets.

### **La Familia Rodriguez**

Alicia Rodriguez is a remarkable woman. She was born and raised in the small town of Parral, Chihuahua. She moved to Denver, Colorado as a young adult where she met and married her husband, Jose. The young couple then moved to Ulysses, Kansas where Jose had an opportunity to work in the oil field. They did not like the small town, so they moved back to Denver where they knew lots of family. Work was sparse in Denver, so they moved to Liberal, Kansas, located an hour southeast of Ulysses. Liberal was not near as big as Denver; however, it was much larger than Ulysses and had ample oil field work opportunities for Jose. Alicia and Jose have resided in Liberal for the last 15 years and are raising two beautiful daughters.

Alicia Rodriguez is self-employed. She is known in Liberal as the lady that wears many hats. She takes pictures at big events such as weddings and quinceanera's, a Latino custom that celebrates a girl turning 15 years old and thus becoming a young woman. Alicia also supplies

party items for the many quinceaneras, weddings and parties that occur on weekends throughout the year. Alicia told me that she has always had it in her to be a saleswoman. As a child, she lived on a farm with her family and they had fruit trees on their land. She would take the fruit and sell it unbeknownst to her mother and father. Alicia would keep the money earned from selling the fruit in a jar and one day her mother found the jar and asked where the money had come from. Alicia then told her mother what she had done.

Alicia has a wonderful relationship with her two daughters. They are very close. Throughout my interview sessions, Alicia would sit across from me in a chair that she would pull away from the dining room table and Maria and Ana would sit beside us on a couch. They would always dress very nice as if they had just come from church. Alicia is very proud of both of her daughters especially when it comes to what they do in school. “What they have accomplished academically” is what Alicia said she is most proud of.

At the conclusion of the first interview I asked Alicia if she could describe some of the challenges she has faced in raising her two daughters. She said other than the typical arguments that occur in the home nothing came to mind. She went on to say that they used to go to Mexico to visit grandparents but currently it is too dangerous. Now, the grandparents come to Liberal and visit the family.

### **La Familia Ortiz**

Jessica Ortiz has lived in Liberal for ten years and in the United States for the past 17. Jessica is married to George who has worked at National Beef Packing and lived in Liberal for 22 years. Jessica was introduced to George by his sister when she was living in Hobbs, New

Mexico. They were married in Liberal ten years ago and she has remained in Liberal with her husband since then. Jessica had a son named Omar Hernandez from a previous relationship. She and George have since had three daughters join their family.

Jessica was raised in Chihuahua, Mexico. She was from the capital of Chihuahua and it is called Chihuahua as well. According to Jessica, it is a large city of at least one million people. Jessica talked about attending school in Chihuahua and how the school day was split into two shifts. One shift went from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and the other from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. The split schedule was created around the parents work schedule. Once the children were old enough and didn't need to be taken care of it really did not matter which shift you attended. Jessica said that up through sixth grade she attended the second shift in the afternoon. After sixth grade, she attended the morning shift. Jessica explained that she changed shifts because the bus route did not come close to her home and it was better to go to the elementary school in the afternoon. The secondary school was close to home and thus she began going to the first shift as a result.

Jessica talked about some factors that are better with American schools versus Mexican schools. One is feeding the students. Having air conditioning and a heater are also significant advantages.

Jessica's oldest son is Omar. Omar is exceptionally active in school. During the summer he gets up at 5 in the morning and gets ready for weights. Since Omar does not drive, he typically walks to weights at the high school, located two miles away, or his mother will drive him. Weights began at 6:30 a.m. Omar then participates in marching band practice and cross country practice. He then typically attends a church activity at the First Southern Baptist Church

daily. Omar is very active in church. One major mission that he participated in this past summer was traveling to Joplin, Missouri and Louisville, Kentucky to help tornado victims.

Luz Ortiz is the eight year old daughter of Jessica and George. She is in the second grade. Sylvia and Sarai are only 4 and 2 and stay with their mother at home during the day. Sylvia is getting ready to begin attending Head Start.

Jessica told me that one of the daily highlights with her family is taking walks together in their neighborhood. They eat their evening meal together and then George will play with the kids outside in the yard. He will also sit outside and visit with Omar. Jessica said that the family also enjoys watching a TV show in Spanish. Jessica stressed that when the family is in the home together, they all speak Spanish, although both Omar and Luz speak fluent English. In fact, Jessica tells the two older children, “when you are here, speak Spanish.”

### **La Familia Borjas**

Molina Borjas was born in the very small town of Satevo, Chihuahua. At six years old she moved to the city of Chihuahua. She later married Abel in Chihuahua and together they moved to Liberal because Abel had a cousin that lived there. They have resided in Liberal, Kansas for 16 years. Abel has worked at National Beef Packing for the entire time that they have lived in Liberal.

Molina and Abel have three children. Molina stated that one of the great things about raising her children in Liberal is the fact that they have learned English. The two oldest children speak, read and write both English and Spanish fluently. The youngest child, Daniel, has a more difficult time speaking Spanish.

Molina shared with me how challenging it was when she first moved to Liberal from Mexico. She came a month after Abel because he had to begin work early. When she arrived, she only knew Abel's cousin. Nobody else. Molina stated specifically that leaving behind family in Mexico was difficult. She then began working at the Gateway Inn. Molina began having her children shortly thereafter and as a result stopped working. Currently she does not work as she is a full time stay-at-home mother. Molina told me how she was accustomed to people walking around in a "happier environment" in Mexico and when she arrived in Liberal everybody stayed in their homes. At first she really noticed this change. But then she became acclimated to it. Molina also spoke of going to Wal-Mart. She said, "It is almost a past time here whereas in Mexico, it's only whenever you need something." Molina talked about how dangerous Mexico has become. Where people use to always be outside and walk around in the open, now they don't because of the danger.

Molina's typical day begins by getting her children up and fed and then taking them to school. She returns home to clean the house and pay bills. She will then go to the grocery store and get food and run errands. Then, usually, the kids are ready to be picked up from school. In the evenings, they eat dinner together as a family. Molina also mentioned that she had been doing homework in the evenings and recently received her GED in May. She was very proud of this accomplishment.

Molina plans to open a day care someday. The language barrier concerns her and she believes that her clientele will have to be only Latino people. She told me, "I understand a good deal of it (English) but speaking it is another thing because I don't practice it." Molina also

talked about how her family enjoys camping together at a couple of nearby lakes. She also talked about attending church together as a family.

### **Summary of Las Familias**

The first interview with all three families was enlightening to say the least. Within all of these homes, the importance of family, La Familia, resonated from within. I observed extended family members working diligently at the kitchen table preparing shrimp cocktail in the Rodriguez family home. I saw Sylvia and Sarai playing happily together in the living room of the Ortiz home. Walking together every evening as a family was stressed by Jessica Ortiz as something that she looks forward to daily. Molina Borjas talked about camping with her family and attending church with them as highlights to her day and weekend. By far and away, the importance of family was observed in all three households.

Speaking the Spanish language occurred in all three homes. Although the children in each of the homes could speak both English and Spanish, Spanish was spoken solely among parents and children and parent to parent. All three mothers that I interviewed spoke Spanish. They were reluctant to speak English although each of them had a good understanding of it. All three of the families interviewed have been in Liberal for a total of 41 years. On average, they have resided in Liberal for a little over 13 years each. Remarkably, all of the parents understand English but rarely do they speak English. They felt embarrassed to speak English when around me or other English speaking counterparts despite living in Liberal for several years. The children in these homes that were of school age spoke English fluently, without any accent or hesitation, when they were not in their homes or when talking to English speaking citizens

visiting them in their homes. These children remarkably navigate between both environments with ease and effectiveness.

Concern about how Mexico has become so dangerous was also noted in all three homes. Grandparents are now coming to Liberal and travel from Liberal to Mexico is no longer encouraged and rarely occurring.

After completing the first interview with all three families, I felt more trusted and welcome as I left the homes. I had spent 45 minutes, on average, with each of the families and the aim of establishing rapport and *confianza* (mutual trust) had been successful.

### **Theoretical Findings**

I have analyzed the data through two theories; the funds of knowledge theory and social capital theory. Under each of these theories, I concentrated specifically upon three dimensions that I found to be relevant to this research. Within the funds of knowledge theory, I focused precisely on the family and culture context, classroom and school focus, and the local community (referring to neighborhoods made up of primarily Latino populations). Within the social capital theory I concentrated on institutional funds of support, overcoming borders and barriers, and bridging the school and the community as specific focal points of interest.

The second and third interviews with each of the three families as well as the oldest child's interview was analyzed according to the funds of knowledge and social capital theories. I have summarized my findings in the following paragraphs.



## **Funds of Knowledge**

In order to understand the many strengths and resources of a family household it is important to understand family and work histories, childcare practices and interactional patterns within the local neighborhood (Moll, 1992). This knowledge can assist school districts better understand the students that they serve and it can also create an interactive network which leads to mutual trust, or *confianza*, being established. These exchanges between home and school build trust and the more exchanges that are made, the more information is shared and knowledge is dispersed and environments are created in which learning can occur (González, et al., 2005).

**Family and culture context.** The importance of family was overwhelmingly evident in all three homes that I visited. All three families that I interviewed were two parent homes. In two of the three households, extended family members were living in the homes. The Borjas family was the only exception. However, in all three homes, the mothers shared with me that spending time with family was important. I sensed that it was more than that; it was indispensable. It was what all other things in the day revolved around. Meals together, all family members leaving the home every morning on good terms, taking walks together as an entire family at the end of the day, attending church and taking family vacations together were all examples of how these families found time to spend with one another.

Here are some powerful examples from the three mothers I interviewed indicating the importance of family in these homes. Jessica Ortiz stated, “Yes it’s very important. In fact, especially when one’s far away either to make an effort to get with the family. And if not, by phone. It is important that the little ones see that it’s important to keep the family together.”

Jessica also talked about the time that her husband spends with their children once his work day is complete. “When he (her husband) gets home, we will eat and then he’ll play with the kids outside. And he’ll sit outside and talk to Omar.” Alicia Rodriguez stressed the importance of getting along with one another, especially in the morning before the family leaves the home daily. “Leaving the home every day with everybody on good terms is important. Otherwise their minds are not going to be on what they should be thinking. We produce a lot more with the right mind.” And Molina Borjas shared highlights of how she and her family spend time together. “We enjoy camping together as a family and eating together at the end of the day.”

The children in these homes also talked about their families and their significance. Maria Rodriguez summed it up nicely when she said, “Everybody cooks here to eat at our house to get something. Even for us, our Christmas gatherings are not in the house, we have to rent someplace because we always try to get people. Like we want you down for New Years, we have to rent a place because we have family from Fort Worth, from Denver, from here. So it’s very, very important. Always invite them. It’s the basis for everything.” Maria also shared this comment with me after admitting that her mother, unbeknownst to her or her younger sister, called me stating she would participate in this study. “She just did it. I’m thankful she did, but it was kind of like a family – this is kind of family stuff and she did not tell us. It was just unexpected.”

***Language.*** The use of the Spanish language in all three homes was not only used among family members, it was the expectation. The only exception was English, on occasion, being spoken among the school aged children in the home. When the children were in school or

outside of the home, English was the only language spoken. All of the school aged children that I interviewed had great command of the English language and possessed no accents.

In the parents own words, here are examples shared with me indicating the importance of the Spanish language being spoken in the homes. Molina Borjas stressed the expectations she and her husband have for their children, “I tell them to speak Spanish (in the home). But, not too long from that point they start going back to English.” Jessica Ortiz commented, “His (Omar) father has never spoken English to him.” She went on to say, “In fact, I tell them (my children) when they are here (in our home), speak Spanish.”

The adolescents interviewed shared similar perspectives on the use of Spanish in their homes. Maria Rodriguez commented, “Mom understands English, but she does not speak it. My sister and I talk English. It is like my mom said, it is more like Spanglish. We will speak three words in Spanish and two words in English. Like we just mix it up. It is like oh, yeah, how are you, Como Esta. When are you going to work (Spoke in Spanish).” She also talked about her father assisting her with homework. “If he’s going to help me on a problem or something, he’d tell me in Spanish.” Omar, Jessica Ortiz’ son, stressed to me what his mother had already mentioned, “My father has never spoken to me in English, only in Spanish.”

**Work.** The significance of work was another observed family and cultural value. All three fathers worked in either oil or agricultural fields. Two of the fathers worked at National Beef Packing in Liberal. The other father worked as a foreman for Trinidad Oil. Only one of the three mothers interviewed worked full time. Alicia Rodriguez was self-employed and she kept very busy planning and preparing for weddings, quinceaneras and weekend parties. Jessica Ortiz

worked sparingly at a candy store and could do so because her mother was currently staying with her and could watch the children when Jessica left on occasion to work part time. Molina Borjas was not working anywhere but aspires to open a day care in the near future.

Perspectives indicating the status of work shared by the parents interviewed were noted. Abel Borjas talked about how important Saturdays are for him and his family socially, but work is a priority. “It is a very busy week. Saturday is a social day for my family. Though, Saturdays I work a lot of times and some Sundays too. Really it comes down to the day before and we find out if production requires us to work the next day or we get it off (referring to Saturdays or Sundays).” Jessica Ortiz shared this, “My husband (Omar Ortiz) has worked at National Beef for 22 years.” She went on to state that the reason she moved to Liberal from Hobbs, New Mexico was “because he had a good job.” And Alicia Rodriguez echoed those sentiments by stating, “We use to live in Denver because we had lots of family there. But my husband had worked in the oil fields near Garden City before and that is what brought us to Liberal.”

Maria Rodriguez, a junior in high school, shared this powerful testimonial with me, “And my dad, he works for an oil company, so even then we follow him, too. In the summers we go for a week. We’ve gone two weeks to stay with him. Even at the rig, at the location, like, we stay with him. It is often hot and dirty, but we sleep in the small work trailer on the floor. We just make it work, I guess.” This statement clearly indicates the importance of work and families. The family is central to all things in these homes and if work is necessary on a weekend or a day designated for the family, this family makes the most of it.

**Church.** One other point that is worth mentioning regarding the family and cultural context is the value of church and faith (I will discuss in more detail in the institutional funds of support section of this paper). Two families interviewed were active in their respective churches. The Borjas family attended multiple days and evenings at the Spanish speaking Assembly of God congregation. The Rodriguez family attended the Spanish mass at the Catholic Church. The Ortiz family did not attend church; however, Omar, the oldest son, was very active and involved at the First Southern Baptist Church and had even been on a summer mission trip to Joplin, Missouri and Louisville, Kentucky this past summer assisting tornado victims and is planning on going to Russia next summer.

**Summary.** The family and cultural context was richly evident in all three homes that I visited. Specifically, La Familia was abundant and vibrant in all of the homes. The value of the nuclear and extended family relationships along with the work commitments and the use of the native tongue, Spanish, being spoken in the homes was evident and plentiful.

**Classroom and school focus.** Research has shown that often times minority parents do not get involved in their children's schooling because of language and cultural barriers (Valdes, 1996). Yet, education is the most effective way to integrate the rapidly increasing population of Latinos into the United States economy and society (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In this research project, my aim is to focus on the abundant assets and skills that these families possess rather than focus on their perceived lack of skills. One example, speaking both English and Spanish is an excellent asset that can be utilized in classrooms, schools and in our local community. The children in these homes could speak both English and Spanish beautifully.

**Reading.** The value of reading in these homes was remarkable. In all three homes family members stressed how reading was essential in their daily lives. Not all of the family members enjoyed reading, but all of them understood its importance to being successful in the American society that they are living in. Not all of the family members read in English. Again, similar to the use of language among family members, the adults interviewed read primarily Spanish texts whereas the children read English texts.

Another fascinating point that I observed was that reading led directly to increased social capital within the family homes. The most evident example observed was Alicia Rodriguez along with her daughter Maria and how their love to read self-motivation books have changed their lives. They referenced Dave Ramsey as an author of many books they've enjoyed reading and also a book titled *The Secret* by Donna Byrne. Not only did these books give both the mother and daughter self-confidence and motivation; the books transformed how they navigate in this world. Alicia read these books in Spanish while her daughter read them in English. Both were motivated by them. Alicia has applied what she has gained from reading these motivational books to managing her multi-faceted business. She now possesses the confidence needed to grow her business ventures. Maria, whom I will stress, is only a junior in high school, loves to read and has the self-confidence and support of her mother and father to travel across the country and enjoy communities like Orlando, Florida with her cousin from Denver. She shared with me how she loves trying new cuisine, sightseeing and frequenting museums. These ideas were planted in her mind by reading. She also had the self-confidence to follow through with this

ambitious adventure. Maria is currently saving her money to go to New York next summer before beginning her senior year in high school.

In addition, two of the mothers interviewed had completed their GED and one is working towards completing it. They all expressed how challenging it was in obtaining and pursuing their GED and reading was instrumental in this process.

I have summarized several of the comments from the parents regarding the significance of reading in their homes. Jessica Ortiz shared, “I enjoy reading to the kids. Neither me or my husband truly like to read, however.” When I then asked her about her two children that attend school, Jessica replied, “Omar likes to read and Luz likes to read as well.” Abel Borjas talked specifically about having to read because of necessity. “Not so much the newspapers because the English is hard to understand, but we do read.” However, Mr. Borjas was quick to point out, “It was in the newspaper that we found out about Colvin.” The Colvin Learning Center is where Molina attended classes and received her GED in three months’ time. Abel Borjas also discussed what he and his family read. “We enjoy reading the Bible.” Alicia Rodriguez commented, “I enjoy reading self-motivation books.”

Here are comments shared with me from the children in the homes regarding reading. Omar Hernandez, Jessica Ortiz’ oldest son, also talked about his desire to read. “I like having my mom take me to the library so I can check out books in the summer.” Maria Rodriguez shared her passion of reading. “My mom and I enjoy reading. Just for the pleasure of reading.” She went on to explain that when she was her younger sister’s age (when she was in middle school) “I would check out twelve books, like chapter books, per week and then I would go back

the next week.” Maria went on to explain her and her mother’s reading interests. “She likes more psychology things, more like, I guess like dealing with problems. More real life things like that. And I read more fantasy. I like *The Secret*, the thinking, motivation kind of thing. She loves that too.” Maria went on to say, “My mom and I both read a lot of self-motivating books. We both read a lot.”

Maria shared with me a story from school in which her business class had an assignment dealing with nuclear concepts. Students were required to list three goals or dreams. Maria explained, “A lot of these girls, especially the Hispanic, it made me so sad because they are like, ‘My goal is to get married right after high school and have a family.’ And on dreams: ‘Well, my dream would be to go to California or something, but I know it won’t ever come true.’ Or it’s like ‘Oh, I want to go to the Pyramids. I would love to go to Egypt, but I know it won’t come true.’ And it was always the Hispanic people and it made me really sad.” Then Maria shared how the class asked her about her dreams and goals and after sharing some things that she had done, including taking a trip with her cousin by themselves to Orlando, Florida last summer, she was asked, “Well, how do your parents let you? Why would they let you go by yourself to a different town?” Maria responded to her teacher and classmates by saying, “My mom reads a lot of self-motivating stuff. Anything is possible.”

Not all of the children, however, thought that reading was easy or was it their favorite subject in school. Israel Borjas said, “Math is more simpler because reading, it takes, like, work. Math is just learning and it goes by fast.” Ana Rodriguez, Maria’s younger sister, did not enjoy



reading as much as her mother and sister did. She commented, “I like reading, but I’m just not really good at reading. I started the Harry Potter books, but I did not finish the first book.”

***Mothers in schools.*** An important observation that I made while analyzing the data indicated that the mothers in all three homes took an active role in making sure that their children got to and from school and they also were the parental representative at school functions. The fathers rarely attended school functions nor did they provide transportation. The primary explanation for this was that they were busy at work.

Comments shared with me from the parents regarding their involvement in schools are as follows. Alicia Rodriguez talked about a time she visited Sunflower Intermediate School. “When Ana was going into Sunflower her grades went down. I visited with the teacher and they talked about part of Ana’s eyesight, not being able to see; so they moved her to the front of the room. I went back later and visited again and things were better.” Alicia went on to explain, “Dads are a little more passive than moms. One reason is work and the other is that I am here more so.” Molina Borjas shared a highlight to her day as, “being able to pick them up, drop them off and pick them up.” Mrs. Borjas also discussed her frustration with an office staff member at a school and her preference of working with the non-Spanish speaking secretary. “I preferred working with Janet; the only problem was that she did not speak Spanish.” Molina knew these two ladies in the school and who she needed to work with to get things taken care of, although it was somewhat frustrating to her. Jessica Ortiz commented, “The schools that I’ve been at, I have always felt welcome.”

Maria Rodriguez also commented on her mother's involvement at school. I asked Maria if her parents go to parent teacher conferences. She responded, "Yeah, she goes, like, every time. Even if I told her not to, she would still go." Maria went on and said this statement which I found interesting, "Like if I lived with my dad by myself and I told my dad, 'No, I don't want you to go to parent/teacher conferences,' he wouldn't go." Maria went on to explain how her father's attitude when dealing with a situation at school is typically one of complacency rather than assertiveness, like her mother's attitude is. "Dad is the one that tells them, 'just deal with it. Do it. Just do it, deal with it.' But mom's more like 'Well, I have to go talk about it. The more I talk about it.' Dad's more, 'do it.'"

***Relationships/Communication.*** The value of quality relationships was seen as significant when applying the classroom and school focus regarding funds of knowledge. The children and their parents shared occurrences with me that made them feel welcome and valued and this was stressed many times throughout the interviews that were conducted. Not only do relationships play an important role in bridging the school and community to the family (this will be discussed later in this chapter), but the essence of embracing the value of relationships is essential. The importance of family continues to resonate throughout this study and sensing the willingness of these family members to bond with others is a very central focal point that can enhance both classrooms and schools.

In the parents own words, here are examples of how relationships are viewed as evidence of funds of knowledge and how these funds represent a positive perspective to engage them. Alicia Rodriguez stressed how comfortable she has felt when going into a school with translators

readily available to assist her. “I like knowing translators are there, but for me it is not necessary.” Jessica Ortiz talked about the house visits to her home that took place the previous school year. “The porch visits were good. The information that they gave me and the questions that they asked was helpful.” Mrs. Borjas shared that an office staff member at her daughter’s school did not make her feel welcome. “She spoke Spanish but she doesn’t have the mannerisms or the social skills to be approached.” Molina went on to explain that there was an AVID form that required teacher signatures, and the office employee said, “Well, we’re out of time.” She was frustrated because she initially understood that the office staff member would get the forms to the teachers and later found out it was her responsibility.

The children also shared with me how important relationships were to them and to their success in school. Maria Rodriguez stated, “My mom feels more comfortable talking to a teacher that speaks Spanish and they, like, talk to them about my other teachers.” Valarie, Maria’s fourteen year old cousin that lived with the Rodriguez family during the summer before returning to Mexico, replied, “I want my mom first and secondly no racism,” when I asked her what would assist her in transitioning into a school here in Liberal. Maria also shared with me who her favorite teacher was and why. “The ones I like best they are very, they talk to you very easily. Very good communication. Like I know they are not my friend. But they are still there, they are not, like, too uptight or anything. I like that.” She provided me with specific examples of teachers that she said were outstanding and stated, “If they see you somewhere, they are like, ‘Oh, hi, Maria.’” The fact that they were easy to talk to and approachable is what stood out in her mind. Omar Hernandez talked to me about his favorite teacher, “Well, she was always there

when I needed help. And if I had any problems I could just talk to her.” Israel Borjas shared the following when explaining his favorite teacher; “He would do some examples of people and he made learning fun.”

**Summary.** In analyzing funds of knowledge in the context of classroom and schools, it was apparent that reading was a pivotal asset to these family members. Not all admitted to enjoying reading, but clearly, the potential for increasing and enhancing social capital was noted and observed.

Second, mothers play a huge role in their children’s education. They were the transporters of children to and from school and they were much more active in their children’s education as opposed to their husbands. Their attitude of being involved and willing to seek out answers as opposed to the fathers’ passiveness on school-related issues or their lack of involvement altogether was noted.

Finally, the power of relationships and communication cannot be ignored. Face-to-face visits were well received from school personnel. When people were not willing to work with these families or communication was poor, frustrations grew and tension ran high. The children all expressed what qualities stood out to them regarding their favorite teacher and the common thread was how effectively that teacher communicated with them and that they cared for them. It was more than student and teacher co-existing in the same room; they (children) felt part of a valued relationship.

**Local community.** The local community in this research project focused on the Latino neighborhoods and the families living within. As I’ve previously mentioned, the homes in these

neighborhoods were not large, by most standards, but they were neat, inside and out, most had white picketed fences (made of cast iron) surrounding their yards, and several new cars and SUVs were observed parked in the driveways and on the streets in front of the homes. Gaining an understanding of the local households, as well as the observed social networks within their local communities was important as I attempted to identify funds of knowledge.

***Neighbors.*** Interaction between neighbors living close to these three families was more casual and distant than close and tight knit. These families were much more involved with their own family members that lived in Liberal and far away than they were with neighbors living in close proximity to them. However, communication occurred between family members in each of these households with neighbors living close by and gaining perspective on these interactions was insightful.

The following comments were shared with me from the parents interviewed regarding their relationships with their neighbors. Abel Borjas shared, “We know them. However, it’s more of a cordial ‘hi.’ And then if we go help or if we need help here, they will come and help.” Abel went on to talk about his religious convictions and how that has created some awkward moments. “What makes this difficult is because of, basically, the church building. If we get together, the beliefs, if we start talking about church, it’s almost like pushing our church on the neighbors and that’s why it becomes a problem. But, nonetheless, they are good neighbors.” Jessica Ortiz commented about her relationship with her neighbors. “I know some of them. I know two of them and visit with them more.” I asked her if she and her family had cookouts or meals with any of them and Jessica replied, “Not necessarily. There is one of the ladies that

comes over sometimes and we eat breakfast together or I will go over there.” Alicia Rodriguez stated, “I use to work with another family and I would take the high school students (to school) and the other parent would take the elementary students.” Mrs. Rodriguez also mentioned, “There is an older man and we say hi from far away. On this side (of the block) , at first when the lady moved in, I would say hi to the mom, the lady, the dad and the son and daughter, but she would never answer. So the dad would and the kids would. And since then, after awhile I noticed, well, she doesn’t say hi to me, why do I keep saying hi. But she doesn’t do me any harm and I don’t do anything.” When I then asked Alicia if the neighbor she was referring to was White, Black or Latino, she replied, “White”.

One of the children interviewed also commented about the neighbors living close to them. Maria Rodriguez mentioned, “We do have, like, a neighbor next to that and she’s Hispanic and they are very good friends (referring to her mother and this neighbor). And, like, mostly all my friends, we get along with our neighbors on the block, though, but mostly it’s with Hispanic families more. I then asked Maria if they typically have any of the neighbors over for a cookout and she replied, “Not necessarily coming together to talk, but an occasional hi.”

**Hobbies.** Seeking an understanding of the hobbies that these family members enjoyed was important to me as I attempted to uncover diverse and abundant funds residing within the local neighborhoods.

The parents talked about their hobbies with enthusiasm and high interest. When I asked Alicia Rodriguez what were her hobbies, she stated, “Reading and walking.” She also said, “I enjoy going to parties too. So it is work, but it’s also truly enjoyable. It’s the best of both

worlds.” Jessica Ortiz stated, “I enjoy getting out and go walking.” The Borjas family talked about their interest in music as a hobby. Abel Borjas stated, “We practice here at home. Whenever they need somebody in church, then he has somebody. For example, next Wednesday, they (his children) are going to play in church.” Mr. Borjas added, “My wife likes to sing. She does not play any instruments.” Molina Borjas mentioned family vacations as a hobby when I posed this question to her. “Visiting family or just as a family on vacation”, was her direct response to my question.

The children in these homes and local communities also shared many hobbies that were of high interest to them. Israel Borjas talked about working with his father on a car as his hobby of most interest. “I sort of help my dad, like, mechanic.” Israel added, “We are working on a red car.” When I asked him if his father is teaching him, he responded, “Yeah.” Omar Hernandez talked about his interest in Legos and art. “I have a vivid imagination. I can just put anything and just draw and make sculptures. It’s my idea and not somebody else’s.” When I asked Omar what was something he had always enjoyed doing, he replied, “Yeah, I had Legos and when I was a kid I would just build anything I had in my mind.” I then asked him if he still played with them. His response, “Yeah.” Maria Rodriguez talked about her hobbies by saying, “I like to read, I like to watch a lot of movies, too. And, like, I’m not very much a sports person, but I like to travel a lot. Anywhere I like to travel. What I do with my money, I save it up and go somewhere. Like this last time, I worked all summer so I could go to Orlando with my cousin. So this year I’m going to save up for New York.” Maria then added, “And we like a lot of museums. We’re very nerdy.”

**Home Owners.** After making a special visit to the Rodriguez family home (it was my fifth visit to this home) to introduce my professor and wife to this wonderful family, I found it interesting that they were moving. In my first and only conversation with Jose Rodriguez (it was 8:30 at night when we visited the home and therefore Jose was at the home), he shared with me that he was in the process of buying a new home in the north part of town. I told him that I was very happy for him and his family. He talked about the kitchen, where his family spends nearly all of their time together, being too small, and he therefore wanted a bigger kitchen for his wife. Alicia simply smiled when he told me this. She was actually serving tamales to my professor and my wife who had joined me for this visit. Jose talked about his good credit and that he had visited the bank for a loan for a large sum of money so he could buy his new home. He was very proud.

In fact, all three families were home owners. This was an “ah ha” moment for me. I realized that quite possibly the reason these homes and neighborhoods were so tidy, neat and well-kept was due to the fact that these families were home owners. The pride I sensed from Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez that night I spent in their home was sincere and evident. Jose Rodriguez clearly understood his good credit was allowing him to purchase his family’s dream home.

**Summary.** The local community, or Latino neighborhoods, that I visited in Liberal were neat, clean and the homes had fences serving as borders to their property. I also observed nice vehicles in driveways and in the streets in front of the homes. In addition to gathering information about what these local neighborhoods looked like, I discussed how these families interacted with their neighbors. The interactions were present, although they were not like



family gatherings. These families knew their neighbors on a casual basis only and not much more.

Looking closely at family labor histories also provides rich information about the local communities. Since I had covered this topic in detail under the family and cultural context portion of this chapter, I chose not to discuss it further for fear of redundancy. However, it is worth noting again that all three fathers worked in agriculture and oil fields.

Identifying special hobbies provided quality information about both the parents and children residing in these neighborhoods. Walking was important to two mothers. One child, Israel Borjas, talked about his interest in being a mechanic like his father and how much he enjoyed working with his father. Omar talked about playing with Legos as a child and still enjoys doing so today. Maria shared how she loves to travel, watch movies and read.

All three families were home owners. They have networked out to banks and borrowed money with their good credit and purchased their own homes. The pride of the Rodriguez family was remarkable. Sharing with me the fact that they were buying and building their dream home was something that I will not soon forget.

### **Social Capital**

The Social Capital theory lends itself extremely well to this study because it provides a lens for identifying the valuable relationships and networks that provide support and assistance to Latino families. Gaining an understanding of these relationships is necessary in order for new social networks and relationships to be built.

**Institutional funds of support.** The importance of gaining access to useful relationships with institutional agents such as churches, schools and banks is necessary in order to provide quality assistance to Latino family members who are likely to have limited resources and knowledge when residing within a community. The following paragraphs are an examination of the institutional funds of support that these families possess.

***Church Involvement.*** As I have mentioned previously, two of the three families attended church services regularly. By far, the Borjas family was the most active and involved, followed by the Rodriguez family who regularly attended the Spanish mass at the local Catholic Church. The Ortiz family did not attend services as a family, but the oldest son, Omar Hernandez, was very active at the First Southern Baptist Church. It was also noted the two families that attended church together as a family, attended Spanish led sessions. Omar, however, attends the First Southern Baptist Church where only English is spoken.

The parents shared some of their experiences regarding attending church and the importance of doing so. Molina Borjas shared, “We go to church. We go as a family. We attend on Sunday in the morning and in the evening, and then on Saturdays, the activities for the children.” Abel Borjas went on to add, “On Wednesdays we also have church.” He also talked about some of the positives that have resulted from attending church. “In the time that we have been here, like in our church, we have met a lot of people and a lot of American people who have been very supportive at the same time. And some of them speak Spanish.” I also asked Abel about his reading interests and he replied, “In the Bible. We (my family) are more interested in the Bible.” Alicia Rodriguez shared this interesting fact about her daughters’ Catechism, “When

she did her Catechism, she did hers in English because of the understanding (referring to Ana, the youngest daughter). She didn't understand everything in Spanish. Maria (the oldest daughter) did all of it in Spanish."

The children also alluded to their involvement in church. Omar Hernandez mentioned, "I am involved in a lot of church activities." When I asked him which church he attended, he replied, "First Southern Baptist." I also asked Omar if he went with his family to church and he replied, "No, it's just me." Omar talked about the mission trip he was involved with at his church, "We went to Missouri first. We had a friend of ours, he has a family there that we just dropped off and slept at their house and then went to Kentucky. Some people (in Kentucky) put out a paper because they can't fix their house inside or outside, so there's like ten houses on the street, people from all over the country. My group, we finished at least three or four houses." Omar also talked about making new friends as a result of the mission trip and staying in touch with them. "I made a whole bunch of new friends. I email them sometimes." Israel Borjas talked about his involvement in his church. "Actually, I like, one time helped them with fliers of telling the word about God." Maria Rodriguez talked about her involvement in the community and stated, "Taking pictures at parties with my mom. Or at church, too. We have to do confirmation and things like that and communion and we volunteer and stuff like that."

**Schools.** Twelve schools in Liberal are frequented by nearly 5,000 students daily. Over 3,400 of these students come from Latino homes. Gaining a perspective from these three families regarding their involvement in the schools is necessary and important in understanding the relationships that currently exist.

The parents shared the following information with me regarding their involvement with their children's schools. Alicia Rodriguez stated, "I feel welcome both at South Middle School and the high school." She did refer to the one time when she went to Liberal High School because she was frustrated Maria could not understand the teacher. She had also heard several other parents were concerned as well. "I went to the school and they said they had about 50 parents that also wanted out so they couldn't make the change (teacher placement change)." Alicia was upset because there were so many people concerned and yet the school would do nothing. When I asked Alicia specifically what the school district could do to make her and other parents feel more welcome, she replied, "One way would be to motivate the students. Some students just don't tell the parents (referring to school activities or events)."

Jessica Ortiz made some insightful remarks when she shared with me how things are taught differently in the United States than in Mexico. "As they get older (her children), it's hard to help them because I don't know what they are teaching now. At least the concept is new to me. But also there's some material that they have been taught that I was taught differently. So, math, division, that's a different process of getting it done here than there." I then asked her what would be helpful for schools to do to make homework a smoother transition and she replied, "When you send a problem, send an example. So, normally the student shows up with a problem, but no example and it's hard to, so now we are basing it on what the student is showing us. But if we saw the example of how it's being taught, that would make it a lot easier." I went on to ask Jessica if she felt welcome in her children's schools and she replied, "yes."

One suggestion that Mrs. Ortiz provided me with was, “One thing that would help tremendously would be explaining how to read the report card. I need to know which is the first quarter, second quarter. I was looking at the wrong number and so when I thought it was okay, in reality it was not. So, you know how it was first quarter, second quarter and then both quarters combined. Then third quarter, fourth quarter and then everything combined. So better explanation of the report card”. One thing that I was really excited about during my third interview with Jessica Ortiz was that she asked me a question regarding the school system and her son that participated in sporting events. Her question was, “Whenever students are gone for sports or for activities that have to do with the school, is it against the child or not?” I shared with her how sports are a part of the school and when Omar is gone to school sponsored events, he must get his work done. I also told Jessica about a couple of tutoring programs. She was thankful.

Molina Borjas shared the following regarding her involvement in the schools. “I have been treated well at McKinley.” She did share the concern about the Spanish speaking office employee at Cottonwood as a concern (which I discussed in detail earlier in this chapter). Overall, she said one way for the school to make improvements, the office staff member at Cottonwood needed to be better. However, regarding the teachers, “When it comes to the teachers, they are not the problem. Really, it came back to that one employee, because she was the one that spoke Spanish and she doesn’t have the mannerisms or the social skills to be approached.”

Children from the three homes also shared their insights with me regarding their involvement with the local schools. When I asked Israel Borjas what he liked best about school, he replied, “The best thing about school is math, because I kind of enjoy it. It’s like, I just enjoy learning about math.” I then asked him what would be one thing that teachers could do to help him learn better and he responded, “Like, try to make it easy for me to understand. I would tell them to explain it more to me.” I then asked Israel if he could change one thing about school what would it be and his comment was, “I would start school later.” I suggested 9 a.m. and he replied, “Yeah. Not so early.”

When I interviewed Omar Hernandez he mentioned his teachers as the best asset about the schools. “I just like the teachers, to get help. For me, It’s just if I need help, I can just go to any teacher.” I then asked Omar what would be a suggestion that he could give his teachers to help him learn better and he responded, “If they have, like, after school, if you can stay after school help.” I then asked Omar if any of his friends enjoyed attending school and his response was, “Some do, some don’t. The ones that look forward to school, just like, meet all their friends, getting to know new friends and some of them, they just like being in band and choir and art and all that. That’s what they look forward to”. I then asked him why some of his friends did not like school and Omar replied, “None of them really hate it. But some of them just could take it or leave it.” I then followed that up by asking Omar where he placed himself in the spectrum of liking school versus not liking school and he stated, “I look forward to school, like, this year, my freshman year.”

Maria Rodriguez commented on what she liked the most and least about attending school. “I think the best thing about school that I like is that all my friends, freedom and stuff. Like I notice that with some of my family that lives in other towns or cities and stuff, they have to wear uniforms and stuff. I like the freedom. And also the worst thing, I guess it’s the worst thing but not really, it’s getting up early in the morning I guess.” I asked her if beginning at 9 a.m. would be a better start time for school to begin. Maria replied, “Yeah, or even 8:30.” I then told her if we began school later we would have to go later into the day and Maria’s response was, “Actually, yeah. I just like those extra 30 minutes.”

**Summary.** It was apparent that the two most significant institutional funds of knowledge that were shared with me involved the church and school system. Two of the three families were active in church services on a regular basis and Omar Hernandez was very active in church from the third family. The Rodriguez and Borjas families attended services that were led in Spanish and this was important. It was also noted that in these two families, both indicated that the American influence was present in their church services and this was also appreciated. The Rodriguez family indicated that their youngest daughter even had her catechism in English because she understood it better.

The school system was an another institution in which these families had strong ties. Although parental involvement within the school did not take place regularly, children were dropped off and picked up daily. In addition, all three mothers were familiar with their children’s schools and had frequented them on numerous occasions. As true with all relationships, there were a lot of positives noted, including how the parents felt when they

entered the schools. They all said that they felt welcomed. However, there were some items discussed where the parents felt the school could be better. The Spanish speaking office employee at Cottonwood was not welcoming nor did she possess quality social skills according to Mrs. Borjas. Mrs. Rodriguez was frustrated that her daughter and several other students could not change teachers because there were too many of them that had this same concern and the school could not accommodate the large number of concerns. Jessica Ortiz shared that the report cards sent home from the schools were confusing. She had misunderstood them and she would like to see a better explanation of the report cards when they are sent home to the parents.

All three students interviewed indicated that they enjoyed attending school. Israel Borjas was the most reserved in his comments regarding his enjoyment of school. Maria and Omar both clearly enjoyed school and the many activities that they were involved in. Two of the three children interviewed indicated that beginning school later in the day would be helpful to them. All three of the students also indicated that seeing friends at school was one of the best things about going to school every day.

### **Overcoming borders and barriers.**

Socialization is necessary in order for social capital to be transferred, grown and accumulated (Arriaza, 2003). It is how young people learn to participate in multiple and simultaneously existing worlds. Exiting one sociocultural world and going to another entails crossing borders. Phelan, Davidson & Yu (1993) along with Stanton-Salazar (1997) have identified four barriers when discussing how borders become obstructive and impede people's access to social capital. These barriers are sociocultural, socioeconomic, linguistic and structural



in nature. I did not observe or have many conversations regarding sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers. Thus, I will focus on two barriers that I did observe. They are linguistic and structural barriers or those things that schools lack to adequately engage all children (and their families).

***Linguistic barriers.*** As I spent time in the three Latino households it was apparent that the parents in these homes had a good working knowledge of the English language. They had resided in Liberal for many years and although they were reluctant to speak English to me, I knew that they understood most of what I was saying. However, they were embarrassed to speak English because they felt that they would possibly be made fun of or looked down upon for not speaking it adequately.

The parents in these homes talked about the linguistic barrier that they deal with daily and they provided me with great insight as to why it exists. When I first met Alicia Rodriguez, I asked her how long she had lived in Liberal, she replied, "Fifteen years." Her next comment to me was, "I'm embarrassed for not speaking English." I told her not to be embarrassed. I shared with her that I had lived in Liberal for 20 years and I could not speak Spanish. She smiled. I later asked Alicia Rodriguez a question regarding what schools could do to get better parent participation and she shared why the participation is sparse, "Part of it's fear and part of it's the language." Jessica Ortiz shared the following with me when I asked her what barriers exist preventing her from being involved in her children's education, "The language. It would be the language. Sometimes one feels ashamed that they cannot communicate so it just doesn't feel comfortable." Jessica also talked about the stress of going to a school and not knowing who is

going to be present. “When I show up, who’s going to be there and will I understand? And also the discomfort, am I the only one that’s going to be there that only speaks Spanish?” Molina Borjas stated that one of her goals is opening a day care in the near future. I told her that she could work with teachers, they are always looking for good day care providers. Molina’s response to me was, “I would like to work with teachers. The only concern would be the language. And because of that, it’s working with Hispanic people because of the language barrier.” She went on to say, “I understand a good deal of it, but speaking it is another thing because I don’t practice it.”

The children in these homes also talked about the linguistic barrier and how it impacts them and their families. Maria Rodriguez shared these thoughts with me. “My mom feels more comfortable talking to a teacher that speaks Spanish and they, like, talk to them about my other teachers I guess because they don’t feel comfortable with the English barrier type of thing. Or they feel embarrassed or something. It’s more of the English barrier, I think. Or like the mind-set how it used to be in a different country or just scared to approach that.” When I asked Omar Hernandez if his parents helped him with school work, he replied, “Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don’t understand the questions, though.” I then asked if it was due to the difficulty of the problem or because of the language barrier and he responded, “probably both.”

***Structural barriers.*** Through multiple conversations with family members in the three Latino households, I identified multiple structural barriers that impede Latino family members and their children from fully engaging in our schools and in classrooms. Some of the structural barriers that I have noted and will discuss include: fear of retaliation, lack of translators in

schools, parental perceptions that the school is going to do what it deems appropriate no matter what they (Latino parents) say or suggest, an unwelcoming staff member, and excessive homework.

The parents talked about various structural barriers that they have had to deal with while living in Liberal. Alicia Rodriguez shared this concern with me after I had asked her about getting parents to come into the schools and their willingness or lack thereof to do so. “Part of it’s fear and part of it’s the language. In part, it’s that a parent’s afraid if a question is asked for their child that perhaps something is going to be, for lack of better words, taken out on the kids down the road.” Alicia believed that if she asked a question that a teacher did not appreciate, there would be repercussions on her child. She added, “Sometimes it’s a fear that the teacher herself, maybe her personality.” Jessica Ortiz talked about possibly advertising that translators will be in schools for functions such as parent teacher conferences and if translators are indeed present, parents will show up. “Because we know if we go (with translators present), we’re going to understand. I have a friend that says, ‘Why go? I’m not going to understand anything.’” Molina Borjas stated that the unfriendly employee at Cottonwood Intermediate School was a barrier. It led her to working solely with the other office employee who was nice and genuine, but could not speak Spanish. This definitely created a structural barrier for Molina and her family.

The children also shared with me some structural barriers that are currently present in our community. Maria Rodriguez talked about Latino parents’ perceptions on how the school handles various situations. She commented, “They (Latino parents in general) probably don’t

think they can do anything about it either. Like, they are probably like, ‘Oh, what am I going to do? What am I going to say? They are not going to change it.’ That’s what they think because they think because, like, my friends’ parents, I’ve heard, yeah, that’s just how it’s going to be. That’s how they do it. It’s not going to change. It’s like, that’s how it is.” Maria then added, “Because it’s always been a majority superiority, I guess, so they feel, like, inferior.” Omar Hernandez commented about homework and a challenge he had while in middle school. “My first year was great, but I had a problem with Mr. Amos (pseudonym), just the way he taught and way he gave his homework out, that’s the one I could not finish every day. If you give, like, two or three times a week, two days of review and three days homework days, I thought that would have been great.” Omar went on to state, “He (Mr. Amos) was a great teacher, but just the way he taught, I was confused. I spent some time on history and he taught me a different way because he’s from a different state.”

**Summary.** Overcoming barriers and borders is necessary in order for social capital to permeate throughout local communities. I have discussed two barriers that were clearly evident in Liberal according to family members from three Latino households. Linguistic barriers were obvious and discussed frequently. The three parents shared that, although they understood English, for the most part they were either embarrassed to use it conversationally or chose not to use it due to lack of practice. The children in these homes who all spoke English very well alluded to the fact that their parents were ashamed and not comfortable using English to communicate with others while out in public or in their homes.

Structural barriers that impede social capital were also shared with me. The parents mentioned the fear of retaliation, lack of translators in schools and unwelcoming staff members as barriers that they have come up against while living in Liberal. The children in these homes shared with me the fact that some Latino families don't believe they have a voice or that it will not matter what they say when there is an issue at their children's school. These perceptions, unfortunately, can easily permeate throughout the Latino community and create a barrier leading to an unwillingness to attend school events.

**Bridging the school and community.** For the Latino children and their families in Liberal, Kansas, there are many bridges that need to be traveled as they proceed through the school system. There can be bridges between their schooling now and after high school. There can be bridges between parents and teacher, school and community. There can be bridges of understanding in a learning community. Being able to cross borders and barriers effectively entails creating resiliency through supportive ties (bridges) with protective means within the home and community (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). I have identified four bridges that are making a positive difference in our schools and community.

***Translators.*** The importance and necessity of communicating in both English and Spanish in schools was mentioned several times. The parents shared the following comments with me regarding translators in schools. Jessica Ortiz commented, "The parent nights that I attended at South, there was a lot of staff as if a lot of people are going to show up and only six families showed up that night." Gib Rito, the translator for my interviews and also the principal at South replied, "We assume that people know there's going to be a translator." Jessica then

responded, “Knowing that there will be translators present is important because we then know that if we go, we’re going to understand.” She added: “The schools that I have been at, there’s always been a person that translates, so that’s been a good thing.” Alicia Rodriguez commented, “Yes, it does help,” when I asked her about having translators present in the schools. Abel Borjas talked about the importance of translators by stating, “When there’s an American that speaks Spanish within the environment of students that are Hispanic students, that’s a great asset. Not only are they role modeling, but students themselves are surprised, ‘Wow, they speak Spanish.’”

The children also shared their views on the importance of translators in the schools. Although they were not in need of a translator, they could see a need based on other family members requiring assistance. Maria Rodriguez stressed that her younger cousin Valerie, from Mexico, who had stayed with her family this summer would want language support in the classroom. “The biggest (thing) in coming here to school is not knowing the language. But what would help is to have teachers that understand the language and to help the transition.”

***Porch visits.*** Porch visits was a new initiative that began at South Middle School last year. The porch visits occurred at the beginning of the school year in an attempt to enhance parental involvement as well as providing school and community awareness. Having teachers and staff members take a bag full of information about school and community services as well as welcoming the family to the school is a positive means of increasing social capital. Jessica Ortiz received a porch visit last year and shared the following information, “The information that I received and the questions that were asked was good.” Maria Rodriguez commented about the

new porch visit initiative that recently began at her former school, “Oh yeah, I think that’s very helpful. Because even now I feel comfortable (referring to my visit to her family’s home).”

***AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination).*** AVID is a college readiness system providing *students in the middle* the support to achieve well in high-rigor coursework and preparing students toward a college degree. AVID is in its fifth year in USD 480. It has grown significantly in its short duration in Liberal Public Schools. What began in 2007 with one freshman class has grown to serve 206 students in grades 7-12. Of those, 156 are Latino students. In addition, USD 480 was the first school district in the state of Kansas to implement AVID at the elementary school level. AVID Elementary is serving over 1000 students in two intermediate schools. Its basic premise is that students in the academic middle need to be pushed. Enrolling in classes of academic rigor such as AP and honor’s classes are required of these students. When these students are provided with tutors and other support pieces including organizational and note taking skills and exposed to numerous colleges and universities they will aspire to go to college and be prepared to do so. Maria talked about some of her friends in AVID. I asked Maria if any of her friends seek to go to college and she replied, “Yeah, the ones that are in AVID. Like all of them, basically. But, yeah, it was just because of AVID. Yeah, they aspire to go to college.” After school began this year, Maria shared with me that she had been accepted into AVID. She was proud and excited to tell me this.

Mrs. Borjas also referred to AVID when she talked about the importance of gathering teacher signatures in order for her child to be considered as an AVID student candidate. She shared the following with me, “Do you know how in AVID students have to get

recommendations from teachers?” Molina went on to explain that the Spanish-speaking office staff member at Cottonwood mis-led her by saying she would get the signatures and when the date came due, she did not do so. This upset Molina. She wanted her child to be considered for AVID. People in the community see the significance of AVID and it is becoming competitive for students to enter into as a result.

***Trust (Confianza).*** It was evident throughout all of my interviews that establishing trust was necessary for quality, in-depth discussions to occur. When I first entered the three Latino homes, the parents, although they knew I was coming because I had called explaining my project and the time I would be at their homes, were reluctant to open up their doors to me and Mr. Rito. I waited on the porch for a couple of minutes at two of the houses until the door was finally opened. Conversations initially were very short and questions that I asked were answered in a few words or less. One of the mothers peeked through the window curtain before allowing me into her home. However, as I shared stories with these family members about me and my family and opened up to them I sensed that I was gaining their trust. By the time the third interview had been conducted and especially after the fourth visit (the member checking visit), I was met with smiling faces, handshakes and laughter and the dialog was genuine. I was also offered food and/ or drinks in all of the homes during the second to fourth interviews. Homemade tamales and fresh squeezed lemonade were my favorite, although the shrimp cocktail was delicious as well!

Here are some of the parent comments regarding the value of trust. Abel Borjas talked about me coming into the home, in essence my porch visit. “I want to be honest with you.



These are difficult times and we bring you in because we know you. This information is welcome because it might help my children as well as our community.” Jessica Ortiz asked me during the member checking visit if I would mind sharing some of her son’s interview with her. I was at a crossroad. Do I share with Omar’s mother some of his interview or do I not? I decided at that moment to share some things from his interview that I felt would be well received by her. I also believed strongly that Jessica trusted me and it was only because she trusted me that she felt compelled to inquire about her son’s interview. I hated to break her trust. I did not want to be perceived by Jessica as a person who came in and got the information he needed for his research project and then refused to provide her with a simple request. So I decided to share a couple of simple, neat things that I felt Omar would not mind me sharing with his mother. As I shared this information with Jessica, she smiled and nodded her head and even laughed at one point. I realized that she did indeed trust me and this made me feel really good.

In a special fifth meeting with the Rodriguez family where I introduced my wife and professor to them, trust was evident. When I first arrived that evening shortly after 8:30 p.m., Alicia was the only family member at home. So, as the three of us entered into Alicia’s home, she smiled and said “hello.” This was the first time I had heard her speak English. She cautiously and quietly said (in English) that her husband and two girls would return shortly as Jose was picking them up from work and church. I complimented her on her English. She thanked me and she stated that she rarely speaks it because she is embarrassed. We stressed to her that she should not be embarrassed. Alicia did an excellent job of communicating with us in

English. There was no doubt that, since trust had been established as a result of getting to know Alicia over the course of two months, she felt she could speak to us in English that evening.

**Summary.** I have identified several bridges that are making a positive impact on Latino families in Liberal, Kansas. Translators present in schools, porch visits to homes and AVID, a program in the schools that emphasizes academic rigor and college awareness, are three bridges I saw making a positive difference in these homes. Ultimately all three bridges merged into trust. Without trust all of these social bridges lack substance. The significance of trust was paramount in both family circles and social ventures.

Trust, the final bridge identified, must continue to be built. When trust is established many wonderful things occur. The parents I interviewed did trust the school. Initiatives such as AVID and porch visits have helped build trust. Having translators in schools also builds trust and allows for effective communication to occur. Indeed, there were some instances in which all three families had confrontations with school staff. However, all stated that their children did enjoy going to school and they welcomed me into their homes knowing not only was I a student at Wichita State University, but I was the superintendent of schools where their children attend. I benefited from the trust gained as a result of conducting four interviews in each of the three homes. I also benefited from having a Latino male translator with me. After each interview I felt the families were more at ease. I saw the power of earning trust and how it resulted directly with me gaining more details and more data after each interview. Most importantly, I gained new friends!

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Chapter 5 presents conclusions, implications and considerations for future research. I will begin with a brief review of the problem and then specifically address the three overarching questions that were asked and how my findings answered the three research questions.

#### **Review of Research Problem**

The Latino student population in Liberal Public Schools represents over 70% of the student body. During my twenty years in Liberal this percentage has grown over 40%. Although Latinos are the most rapidly growing ethnic minority in our country, they lag far behind academically (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and are the highest among all students in public school dropout rates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). Additionally, engaging Latino families has been an ongoing challenge. Many school personnel and people in the community believe this is due to a lack of interest on behalf of these citizens and the fact that they do not value the educational system.

However, research has clearly shown that in the Latino culture, teachers are highly respected (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Lopez, 2001). They trust the school system and believe that their children will benefit. How are these contradictions and gaps bridged? What can bring the schools' practices and the families' support to change in ways that help the students succeed? What role does a different home language contribute to the lack of unresponsiveness between the families and schools? There are likely several factors that are inherent within the Latino culture that contribute to their educational values and, by taking a closer look into what

factors are valued and why, will provide a better understanding of how to effectively engage Latino families within public school settings.

The research for this project addressed three specific questions. These three questions guided this project and also drove why I chose to utilize the funds of knowledge and social capital theories. Chapter four addressed how the findings supported the two theories. For chapter five, I will discuss how the findings answered these three overarching questions. The next section will discuss the three questions that were asked and my findings.

### **Research Question 1: What Values and Strengths Do Latino Parents Share About Themselves and Their Children?**

From the multiple interviews with the three Latino families, there were many strengths (or funds of knowledge) that I observed. First and foremost, the most consistent strength was the family itself. In all of these homes, family was *the* sense of pride. Extended family members were observed living in two of the homes; the fact that family interactions, even with extended members living afar, were more closely woven than relationships with neighbors living next door indicated this significance. In Ned Crouch's (2004) book, *Mexican and Americans: Cracking the Cultural Code* (p.92), he concluded that Mexicans think in terms of "we" unlike American's who think in terms of "I." Latino family members are not likely to separate themselves from their family especially if it will upset the coherence of the family unit, church or their workplace. Additionally, Gonzalez and colleagues (2005) found that Latino households "invest considerable energy and resources in maintaining good relationships with their members" (p. 59). One way they do this is through family gatherings such as birthdays, baptisms, weddings, Christmas

dinners and quinceaneras. My research supported these notions. These families made no excuses for coming together daily for family walks, meals and playtime in the front yard. One family shared how they rented a large facility during the holidays in order to bring their entire family together and how important this was to them. I was more than impressed with the sense of belonging and caring and the attitude that *our family* is the most important thing in this world.

It was also noted that all three of the fathers worked in both oil field and agricultural related jobs. They were all hard workers and put in many hours daily in order to provide for their most precious commodity, their family. Only one of the mothers worked full time, but the other two kept busy raising young children and keeping the house clean. The fact that these family members were hard workers was seen as a family and cultural strength.

Focusing on the school and classroom, reading in these homes was a key strength. It provided self-confidence, motivation, assistance in passing the GED and pleasure to numerous family members, although not every family member admitted to enjoying reading. It was evident that reading both English and Spanish texts was a helpful strength in all three Latino homes. The most striking observation I noted involved Alicia and Maria Rodriguez. Both ladies read self-motivating books on a regular basis. The mother and her daughter had clearly increased their social capital as a result of reading Dave Ramsey and Rhonda Byrne books. Alicia's business ventures had grown as a result and Maria's willingness to travel across the United States and fulfill her dreams was impressive. The self-confidence gained by Alicia Rodriguez as a result of reading, not only provided her the ambition to grow her business, but also the confidence to go into both her daughters' schools regardless if they wanted her to or not.

Although she did not speak English this did not slow her down from visiting the schools and as multiple research has shown, parental involvement is important in the education of a child (Epstein, 1995; Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007).

It was also noted that mothers were involved in their children's schools. They took their children to school daily and picked them up. All three mothers shared with me some of their experiences, both good and bad, that they had been involved with at the schools. Within the Latino home, the mother ranks highest regarding family matters (Crouch, 2004). This was evident in the three homes I visited. The mothers were in charge of meals, cleaning the home and making sure that their children were taken and picked up from school.

The local community, or Latino neighborhoods, also possessed valuable strengths. The fact that all three Latino families were home owners was inspiring. It is not uncommon to hear comments to the effect that Latinos do not own their own homes and thus pay no property tax. That myth was dispelled based on the fact that all three of these families were homeowners. As a result, the sense of pride was evident in all three well-kept homes and yards. What I found most interesting was that relationships with neighbors were respectful, but distant. Unlike the social exchanges between households being a provider to individual access to historic funds of knowledge and a provider for understanding relationships in a *Mexican* way as described by (González, et al., 2005 p. 65), I found that the kinship with the family solely made these exchanges relevant. The influence of neighbors was nonexistent, to minimal at best, whereas the influence of family members living in the home and afar was impactful.

## **Research Question 2: What Impedes Parental Involvement Within the Latino Community at School Settings According to Latino Parents?**

From the interviews I did observe linguistic and structural impediments-- the most significant being the language barrier. Although the adult family members had a good grasp of understanding the English language they were embarrassed to speak it. These adult family members had lived in the United States for many years, yet they were ashamed to speak English to others. Stanton Salazar (1997) identified linguistic barriers as significant to Latino families' access to social capital and I did observe this to be accurate. Additionally, it is worth noting that in all three homes, Spanish was solely used in dialog between the parents and between parents and children. School-aged children in the homes would speak a mixture of English and Spanish between themselves. Parents wanted Spanish spoken in the homes.

Second, many of these adult family members did not realize that schools in USD 480 provide translators. This became a perceived structural barrier that Stanton Salazar (1997) identified as an inhibitor to adequately engage families and teach children. The thought shared by interviewees was that there were no translators present in schools and this led to minimal attendance by Latinos at parent teacher conferences. The three mothers were involved in their children's education, but they referred to friends and even themselves initially with the concern of having somebody available at the schools to translate. One of the mothers highly recommended that the school advertise the fact that translators are readily available at any school in USD 480. Latino parents must know that translators are present (according to my notes) in order for them to feel it will be a worthwhile venture when they do indeed go and visit.

Other barriers identified included mention of unfriendly staff members working in schools and fear of retaliation. Another barrier cited was that the school system would do whatever it wanted regardless of input from others, including Latino parents. According to Stanton-Salazar (1997), schools lacked, to some extent, a welcoming environment with genuine, sincere, friendly workers which indicated a structural barrier. Phelan and associates (1993) research regarding cultural diversity in American schools indicated that structural barriers are “features in school environments that prevent, impede, or discourage students from engaging fully in learning – social or academic” (p. 59). The unfriendly staff member, fear of retaliation and the notions that schools made decisions regardless of considering outside input were seen as *features* present in USD 480 that discouraged parents and students.

### **Research Question 3: What Can Enhance Parental Involvement Within The Latino Community at School Settings According to Latino Parents?**

Porch visits had begun in USD 480 with parents of children attending South Middle School. These face-to-face interactions were received positively. Not only do the parents receive quality information about the school and their abundant services, they also receive information about many services and organizations available in the community. The porch visits represented bridging social capital. Putman (2000) showed in his research when social circles are expanded and children branch out to other institutions, new social links, or bridges, are created. This is meaningful because social capital is then gained which leads to increased institutional support and resources for these children. Jessica Ortiz commented about her porch visit and indicated she welcomed the visit and she did receive “good” information. This finding



made me aware that porch visits represent an example of bridging social capital. In this instance, rather than the child or family branching out to the school, the school branched out to the family. Bridging social capital creates broader characteristics and reciprocity and according to Lin's research (2001), without bridging, social circles are independent of each other and forever isolated. I would argue the most important benefit of the porch visit was the face-to-face interaction that occurred. Trust begins in small exchanges such as the informal, quick porch visit and, based on my experiences during this research project, multiple visits will lead to greater trust and enhanced involvement in the schools.

Although I listed reading as a strength that Latino families possessed, reading was also seen as a bridge, or an important factor that can lead to enhanced parental involvement. Reading leads to knowledge which leads to social capital. I have learned from these interviews that reading of self-motivation books inspires adults and children alike. The Rodriguez family was an example that reading books written by authors such as Dave Ramsey and Rhonda Byrne lead to self-confidence and the notion that anything is possible. Not only was Mrs. Rodriguez' business capital expanded as a result of her reading these books, but so was Maria's self-confidence which led to her traveling to Orlando last summer and plans to travel to New York City this upcoming summer. These positive attitudes can grow and become contagious and schools must tap into this potential resource in order to involve more Latino families.

AVID was also noted as a social bridge between the Latino families and the school district based on two pieces of evidence. First, Maria Rodriguez told me that all of her friends in AVID do plan on going to college after high school. Second, Molina Borjas was upset at a

building office employee because there was a mis-understanding on who was responsible for gathering teacher signatures which were required as a pre-requisite for consideration into the AVID program. Mrs. Borjas was aware of the multiple advantages of a child in the AVID program and wanted this opportunity for her son. AVID stresses the importance of academic rigor and it focuses on students that perform in the academic middle. These students are not gifted nor are they failing. Typically these students make B's and C's in school; however, they must have good attendance and possess a good behavioral record. AVID also emphasizes the importance of attending college. AVID requires parents of children in the AVID program to attend informative meetings twice a year in the school. Minority children and their families must be able to access mainstream institutions effectively in order for social capital to grow and expand (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Typically, the AVID meetings in USD 480 include providing a pot luck meal that is enjoyed by all of those in attendance. This creates an environment that enables families to come to the schools. Parents and students alike are educated on why college is so important and the many scholarships that are readily available, especially to minority students. By doing this, as Putman (2000) indicated, the sharing of diverse information took place, including scholarship and college awareness materials, leading to bridging social capital. In USD 480, the number of students in the AVID program has grown considerably over the last 5 years. As a result, more and more parents are becoming involved in the school system.

Effective communication is essential. Jessica Ortiz suggested to me that all schools in USD 480 advertise the fact that translators are readily available. She stressed that some parents don't attend school functions or visit the school due to them not knowing translators are there.

The school system must utilize the Spanish radio stations and Spanish newspapers to communicate to its Latino citizens. The fact that the school system does indeed have an abundance of translators present to assist Latino families is absolutely necessary in order for effective communication to occur. The school system must do a better job of communicating to the public that this service is readily available.

Finally, trust must continue to be built between the Latino families and the surrounding community including the school system. I spent nearly two months in the homes of three Latino families and learned firsthand how important multiple visits are in building trust. Clearly, multiple interactions among Anglos and Latinos do lead to trust being established. I benefited from this experience. Porch visits are one way to build trust. They allow for the face-to-face interaction to occur. In addition, they occur in the safety of the home. AVID is another way to build trust. AVID requires families to be involved in the educational process and again, face-to-face interactions occur. When parents trust the school, they are much more willing to become involved.

### **Implications**

This research shows the significant funds of knowledge and social capital needs found within three Latino households in Liberal, Kansas. Identifying the strengths or funds of knowledge, within each of these homes and also the social networks that these families interact with on a regular basis can influence schools in how they work with these families and in how they teach Latino children.

*Las Familias* was the most impressive thing I took away from this research project. These families possessed genuine love and care for one another as well as an attitude of togetherness. The sense of family, the love for one another (even to the extended family level) and the pride that resulted was unparalleled to anything I had witnessed before. How do schools recognize and embrace this powerful influence? It is extremely challenging for schools to do this effectively because of the work schedules that primarily the fathers are committed to. One suggestion is for schools to look at Saturdays or Sunday afternoons as days to welcome these families and host family oriented events. These are two days most likely to capture the entire family. Schools could dedicate an hour or two to share information with the families. Schools could prepare snacks and have day care providers present to take care of the younger children. Perhaps they could have a family reading center located in the library or in classrooms with headphones for English and Spanish text to be heard. Indeed, there will still be times when the fathers will be busy at work. But, Saturdays and Sundays are the best time to potentially engage the entire family and it is critical that schools tap into this wealth of support and love in order to build trust and share the responsibility of providing excellent educational opportunities for our children.

I am perplexed by the notion that the Latino parents I interviewed understood English quite well yet were too embarrassed to speak it. In my fifth meeting with Mrs. Rodriguez, I did converse with her in English only because her family was gone and I did not have a translator with me. She had grown to know and trust me and in order for us to communicate with each other, she had to speak English. She did a fantastic job. I told her so. I could tell that she was

happy that I complimented her on her English speaking skills. The possibility of hosting a class in which Latino women could participate in without feeling ashamed or embarrassed is worth looking into. These women could meet regularly and simply practice speaking and listening to English. Self-confidence would increase and social capital would grow. USD 480 could offer the class on a Saturday morning or once a week during an evening for an hour or two. The school district could advertise this on the Spanish radio station and in the Spanish newspaper. Not only would Spanish-speaking parents get the practice necessary in order to speak English well (as Mrs. Borjas admittedly stated she lacked), they would receive external praise and self-confidence as a result. This could lead to more parents involved in the schools because there would not be the reluctance to go due to the language barrier issue.

It was both rewarding and fun interviewing the children from the three Latino homes. These young people navigate two worlds every single day. At home, the Spanish language and culture are omnipresent. Outside of the home, English is spoken and American values and customs are everywhere. Expectations outside of the home are that these children will conform to the American values. As these children grow older in America and eventually get married and have children of their own, what will become of their heritage? I sensed with all of the parents how important their culture is to them. Parents confessed, however, that Mexico is a dangerous place to visit today and all admitted to not visiting family there due to this heightened concern. Parents wanted Spanish spoken in the homes and even got onto the children when they heard English being spoken by them. But the reality is that these children are attending American schools that are preparing them for a future in this country. The children that I met seemed well

equipped to progress through the remainder of their education in USD 480 and even onto college if they desire. They should do well in life after school. I believe these children have a great gift. They speak both languages flawlessly and are certainly aware of both cultures. My hope is that they never forget where they came from as they grow older and become active, significant, contributing members to an American society that was built upon immigrants from many nations. I recognized these children's parents want the same thing that I do.

It is important in Liberal, Kansas that the schools recognize the Latino culture and history. Not necessarily setting aside a week window or a prescribed amount of time; rather, schools simply able and willing to welcome and celebrate Mexican customs such as Cinco De Mayo is important. Over 70% of the students attending school in Liberal are Latino. I believe it is relevant for students in this community to be reminded of the Mexican customs and history as a perspective to where many of these children came from. It is also important for them to understand the rich, immigrant American history and traditions as well because, after all, this is where these families are now residing and making a living.

Translators are present in all twelve of the schools. Making sure that viable communication takes place is critical. The fact that the majority of the students in Liberal come from Latino homes makes it necessary to have translators in all school buildings. However, it has been pointed out that all parents do not know and understand that translators are present. By doing a better job of promoting this information, it was suggested that this will lead to increased attendance at events such as parent nights and parent teacher conferences.

Porch visits are occurring at homes of children attending South Middle School.

Teachers, administrators and parent coordinators, in groups of two, go to the home and provide the parents a bag of information, including school calendars and schedules and also community information (e.g., local dentists and eye care providers with coupons). The parent who had a child attending South last year was appreciative of the visit and commented that the information she received was good. Expanding the porch visit initiative into more schools impacting more parents is warranted. Providing both school and community information is essential to assist Latino families develop their social capital. Meeting face-to-face with the parents also builds trust.

AVID is a system that emphasizes academic rigor with the academic performing middle-of-the-road students. It exposes students to colleges and universities and provides outstanding support pieces such as college tutors for these students. AVID has grown significantly in its five years in the school system resulting in many students being positively impacted. Parents are also aware of AVID as Mrs. Borjas talked about the importance of obtaining a teacher's signature on her child's AVID request form in order for consideration to be given for her child to enter the AVID program. Ensuring that Latino families know and understand how to apply for AVID is necessary to guarantee the fidelity of this process. There is growing enthusiasm regarding AVID in USD 480 and also in the local community and assuring that Latino parents understand how their children can apply is of utmost importance.

Reading can and should be stressed and enhanced while Latino children attend school. Reading should also be promoted to their parents as a means to incorporate them into the schools

and create a welcoming environment. As seen in this research, reading led to self-confidence, pride and knowledge. Having parent reading nights at schools where the child and parent enter and read together is important. This does occur on occasion in USD 480, but providing this opportunity more frequently and making sure that it is advertised in all media venues, including the Spanish newspapers and radio stations can make a positive impact.

Ultimately, trust must continue to grow in this community. If Latinos come to trust the Anglos and vice-versa, then many possibilities exist. Foreseen examples might include Latino citizens being elected to school, county and city boards; native Spanish speakers not being fearful or embarrassed to speak English in public venues and Latino parents frequently visiting schools without fear of retaliation or concern about whether a translator will be there. Creating mutual trust, *or confianza*, is important. Velez-Ibanez (1983) has shown that in the Mexican culture, *confianza* is the single most important go-between in social relationships. I saw firsthand the power of trust in three Latino households based on the strength of relationships and openness of conversations. I also experienced tremendous gains in being trusted over a two month period that led me to realize how critical it is to get to know these families. The three families knew that I could be asked anything and I would do what I could for them and I certainly knew that I could ask them a favor knowing they would likewise do the same. The perfect example came when Mr. Rito, the translator, asked Mrs. Rodriguez if she would be willing to sit on the site council at South Middle School. She had a daughter, Ana, that was going to be a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at South this year where he is the building principal. She became acquainted with Mr. Rito and felt honored that he asked her to serve. She said that she would



and when I spoke to Mr. Rito recently, he told me that she is now an active member of the South Middle School site council. This demonstrates the power of trusting relationships.

### **Limitations**

Ultimately, I wish I could have interviewed every Latino household in Liberal that had children attending the public school system. Unfortunately, this was not a realistic option for me as I did want to complete my dissertation in a timely manner. I did interview three Latino families and although this might seem like a small sample, I did invest a lot of time in these three households over the course of two months and I gained valuable insight into what occurs in these homes on a daily basis. In addition, I did set up this process similarly to González, et al. (2005) interviews.

The interviews took place in the homes with a translator interpreting all questions in Spanish. If I had to do this process over again, I would insist that the translator repeat verbatim what was said by the interviewees. There were times when the interviewee's responses were very lengthy and the translator would allow the entire response to be spoken. As a result of some responses being so long, he summarized what was said. Overall, however, I felt comfortable with the feedback that I gathered. I did go back into the homes to conduct a fourth interview for member checking purposes. As a result of this process, I left their homes extremely confident that the data taken in was accurately represented in the transcribed interviews. All three families stated that the responses given were truthful with the exception of two minor spelling corrections. All three of the Latino mothers that participated in the Capturing Kids Hearts

training as well as in my interviews were all appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of this study.

The three Latino mothers that volunteered for this study had participated in Capturing Kids Hearts, a school district and local community initiative. As a result of participating in CKH, these women had exposure to the schools and community. I am not sure how typical this *reach out* attitude is among Latino families. Only 36 Latino citizens have gone through the CKH training and, in a community of 20,000 where over 50% of the citizens are Latino, obviously most did not reach out for this professional development opportunity.

The three families that I worked with were all homeowners. They were proud of their families and homes. There are, however, many citizens in Liberal who do not own their homes. They rent or live in mobile homes. There are 18.2% of the residents in Liberal who have an income level indicating that they live in poverty, compared to 12.2% statewide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Thus, many residents are poor and lack the sense of pride or social capital that these three families possessed. Obviously, their perceptions and values could be quite different than those three families that I met.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

There is an untapped resource of insightful information that can be gleaned from the Latino children's perspective. I did conduct one interview with the oldest child in each family and was intrigued by their feedback. Their input, although limited, was valuable to my research. However, gathering more input from more children will give a broader perspective to understanding how they perceive their world and further identifying their funds of knowledge

and the social capital that they possess. It was evident to me that Latino children navigate two worlds. One being the home, in which they often speak Spanish and they interact in an environment in which the Spanish culture and customs are strongly evident. The second world they reside in daily is the school and social world in which they speak, read and interact with others in the English vernacular. The expectations and values in this second world vary from their first world, their homes, and how they navigate between both worlds is potentially a powerful research study in waiting.

Reaching out to all Latino families is another suggestion for research. Seeking input and visiting homes of poor families that do not own their own homes and have never reached out to American ways of life is relevant and potentially significant in better understanding the multiple family dynamics of Latinos living in Liberal and across the United States. Gaining perspectives from individuals who are faced with different challenges such as sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers could add valuable insight to this study. Children living in more dire circumstances could potentially be better engaged in public schools by additional and different means of support. Quite possibly, their funds of knowledge would look different than what was gathered from the three homes I frequented. Again, the families I worked with did not mention either of these barriers as being significant.

AVID is a powerful initiative that is thriving in USD 480. It emphasizes academic rigor with students that are in the educational middle (not gifted, nor remedial). It would be fascinating to track the success of students exiting USD 480 that have participated in the AVID process a minimum of four years. It is evident that more and more Latino children are now

going to college as a result of AVID. Since 2009, the number of middle school and high school Latino students taking AVID in USD 480 as an elective has grown from 70 to 157. Seeking how successful they are at *bridging* to the university or community college that is far from home would be purposeful. Do these students graduate from college? What is their grade point average compared to non-AVID students attending college? How many of these students transfer elsewhere or drop out of college? These are all questions that I would love to find answers to. Additionally, interviewing AVID students in college and inquiring about their experiences, preparedness, funds of knowledge gained and newly acquired social capital would be intriguing. It would also provide helpful information and guidance to the AVID students attending school in Liberal. AVID provides tools and support for students in an attempt to prepare them for college and following the AVID students while in college, especially with a focus on Latino students, would provide rich information for both the local school district and the national AVID organization.

Another future research consideration focuses on the Latino mothers and the reasons why they are embarrassed and ashamed to speak English although they do understand the language. Conducting in-depth interviews with a cohort of economically diverse Latino women could provide valuable insight into further reasons why this occurs. It could also provide potential solutions to this sad dilemma. I found trust, or lack of trust, to be a legitimate factor as to why these mothers did not speak English in public. Once I had developed a trusting relationship with Mrs. Rodriguez after my fifth visit in her home, she spoke to me in English. I am confident that there are a multitude of reasons why Latino mothers do not speak English and finding plausible

solutions could be meaningful to not only the non-English speaking citizens, but to schools and other social institutions that legitimately need to communicate effectively with them.

### **Conclusions**

I have worked in this school district for twenty years and as I've pursued my doctorate degree in educational administration, I am compelled to seek an understanding of the funds of knowledge that are present in the numerous Latino homes in my community so that we can build on this wealth when we make policies for the district. In turn, I want to share their stories with the school board, principals and the entire school community in an effort to better serve all children in the classrooms.

I chose to use the funds of knowledge and social capital theories to direct my qualitative research project for personal reasons. First, looking at Latino family households with a positive perspective and in terms of identifying the many delightful resources located within these homes rather than using a deficit model resonated strongly with me. I have always been a person who sees the glass half full rather than half empty when observing any situation and the funds of knowledge theory is based on this rationale. Second, understanding the relationships that provide support and assistance to Latino families was important to me as I attempted to qualify what these valuable relationships are and to whom they are connected.

I so enjoyed getting to know the Rodriguez, Ortiz and Borjas family members. These families are truly remarkable. The love that they have for one another within the nuclear family in addition to their aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces and nephews was unique and unparalleled to anything I had seen before. The pride within each family was easily seen and felt. Their

homes were clean, tidy and attractive. Their yards were fenced in and well maintained. These kind people were hard workers that worked hard at loving one another when the work day was over.

Personally, I have gained a great deal as a result of writing this dissertation. I learned to persevere. Although I would say I have always been good at persevering, nothing comes close to this type of perseverance. I see this as strength, or a *funds of knowledge*, of mine. I am full of pride as a result of persevering and working hard to complete this qualitative research project. I also gained trust in the families I interviewed. I, like them, was nervous to begin with simply because I had no idea who these people were. Over time, however, I learned to trust each of them and as a result, I will now go out of my way to say hello when I meet up with them in the community. *Confianza* had been built.

I also personally expanded my own social capital. Jose Rodriguez and I have visited on the phone twice since I last left his home. He had asked me to stay in touch with him if I came across anybody needing to buy a home. I recently came across a young lady looking to buy a home and I contacted him. I allowed Jose to visit with this lady as she and her husband are moving from Satanta to Liberal. Jose recently called me back and asked for Gloria's phone number so he could have a follow up conversation. They are in touch and I hope it works out for both of them.

As the superintendent of schools I've identified many powerful pieces of information, contained within this document, that can assist USD 480 in becoming better at engaging Latino families and also better at teaching Latino children. Certainly, recognizing the love shared

within the Latino families and embracing that pride and the entire family is important. Schools must become creative and think outside of the box as they attempt to engage the whole family. Opening up schools on Saturdays or Sundays is a possibility. Meeting parents on their front porch with school and community information in hand and taking time to say hello is another. AVID is in place in 5 schools and this initiative continues to build support from the entire community including the Latino parents. Growing this initiative is important as the school attempts to engage families and prepare students for college. Providing school related information on the Spanish radio station and in the Spanish newspaper is obligatory. This communication mode along with others must continue to be supported and enhanced. Once these families are all engaged and involved, I am most confident that their children will aspire to do well in school and parents will become more acclimated to our schools and community. We can become bound tighter as a community as a result-- hopefully emulating the *confianza* found within Latino homes.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Parent Information Letter



### **Superintendent Lance Stout**

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### “Dedicated to Excellence”

My name is Lance Stout and I am the superintendent of schools in Liberal, Kansas. I am also a graduate student at Wichita State University. I am doing a research project that is about gaining perceptions and ideas from Hispanic families in an effort to better serve all students in Unified School District 480. My plan is to interview three Hispanic Families on three different occasions. Each interview will last approximately 1 – 1.5 hours in duration. I also plan on conducting a child interview (with parent permission) following the last family interview session to gain their perspectives on living in Liberal and also attending school in USD 480.

I am interested in meeting with family members that participated in the Capturing Kids Hearts training that was hosted by the Liberal Area Coalition for Families. USD 480 utilizes Capturing Kids Hearts in classrooms throughout the entire district and it is encouraging to me that you, as a community member, participated in this wonderful character education program. I thank you for participating in this training!

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please call me, Lance Stout, at 620-626-4062. If more than three families show interest in this research project, I will purposively select the

## **APPENDIX A (continued)**

final three families based on how many children they have that attend school in USD 480 and how old they are. This research project is strictly on a volunteer basis and if at any time you do not want to continue being interviewed the interview sessions will stop. I will provide a \$25 gas card for each of the three families that participate once the three interviews have been conducted to thank them for their time.

A Consent form will be provided before the first session begins. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 620-626-4062. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Lance D. Stout



## APPENDIX B

### Spanish Parent Information Letter



### Superintendent Lance Stout

---

#### “Dedicado a la excelencia”

Mi nombre es Lance Stout y yo soy el superintendente de las escuelas en Liberal, Kansas. También me gradué de la Universidad de Wichita State. Estoy haciendo un estudio que se trata de ganando percepciones e ideas de familias hispanas en un esfuerzo para servir mejor todos los estudiantes en el distrito unificado escolar 480. Mi plan es entrevistar tres familias hispanas en tres diferentes ocasiones. Cada entrevista tardara aproximadamente 1-1.5 horas en duración. También estoy planeando en conducir una entrevista con un niño de cada familia (con el permiso de los padres) siguiendo la última sesión de entrevistas familiares para ganar sus perspectivas sobre viviendo en Liberal y también sobre atendiendo escuela en USD 480.

Estoy interesado en conocer familias que participaron en el entrenamiento Capturing Kids Hearts que estaba dirigido departe de Liberal Area Coalition for Families. USD 480 utiliza Capturing Kids Hearts en los salones en todas partes del distrito y es alentador para me, como un miembro de la comunidad, participar en este fabuloso carácter de programa educacional ¡Les agradezco por participar en este entrenamiento!

Si usted está interesado en participar en este estudio, por favor llámame, Lance Stout, al número (620) 626-4062. Si más que tres familias enseñan interés en participar en este estudio, Yo voy a decidir seleccionar las tres finales familias basado en cuántos niños ellos tengan que atienden escuela en USD 480 y cuantos años tengan. Este estudio es estrictamente voluntario y si algún tiempo no quiere seguir adelante con la entrevista la sesión de la entrevista será subtenida. Yo voy a proveer una tarjeta de 25 dólares de gasolina para cada una de las tres familias que participen ya que las tres entrevistas hayan sido completadas para agradecerlos por su tiempo. Una forma de consentimiento va ser provista antes que la primera sesión

## **APPENDIX B (continued)**

empiece. Si usted tiene alguna otra pregunta, por favor llámame al número (620)626-4062. Espero en oír de usted pronto.

Sinceramente,

Lance D. Stout

## APPENDIX C

### English Consent Form

#### Consent Form

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a study involving parent and student perceptions regarding their community and school. I hope to learn what can be done in order to provide positive outcomes of strengthening connections between home and school.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you participated in a community-based training program provided to Spanish speaking parents in Liberal, KS.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in series of three interviews conducted by Lance Stout, a doctoral student from Wichita State University. The interviews will take place in the summer and fall of 2011. I anticipate that the interviews will last between 1 hour and 1.5 hours in duration. The interviews will be audio taped for the purpose of assuring that the researchers clearly understand what will be stated by the subjects being interviewed. A Spanish interpreter will be present at all interviews to assure that the interview runs as smoothly as possible. The interpreter will be used only if the participants cannot speak English. Once the audiotapes have been transcribed, the audio tapes will be kept at the home of Lance Stout and then destroyed after three years.

**Discomfort/Risks:** As your identity will not be revealed we do not anticipate any adverse consequences resulting from your participation. You may be slightly inconvenienced due to the time and location constraints affecting participation.

**Benefits:** You will help Liberal School District improve how they communicate with and involve parents. Parental involvement has been shown to improve student achievement. Also, I believe that you will learn more about the schools and you can feel free to ask me questions about schools in Liberal if you would like.

**Confidentiality:** Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect you or your family's future relations with Wichita State University and/or Liberal school district. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Lance Stout, Superintendent of Schools in Liberal, KS and doctoral student at Wichita State University. My phone number is 620-604-1012. You can also contact my professor, Dr. Linda Bakken, Ph.D, Educational Leadership Department, 104 Hubbard Hall, 316-978-6996. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### Spanish Consent Form

### Forma de Consentimiento

**Propósito:** Invitación a participar en un estudio para determinar las percepciones de los padres y estudiantes relacionados con su escuela y su comunidad. Mi propósito es aprender que puede hacerse para obtener soluciones positivas para reforzar las conexiones entre el hogar y la escuela.

**Selección de los Participantes:** Usted ha sido seleccionado como posible participante en este estudio ya que participo anteriormente en un programa de entrenamiento basado en la comunidad que se proporcione a padres de habla hispana en Liberal, KS.

**Explicación de los Procedimientos:** Si usted desea participar, se le pedirá que participe en una serie de entrevistas conducidas por Lance Stout, un estudiante de doctorado de Wichita State University. Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo durante el verano y el otoño del 2011. Se anticipa que las entrevistas tendrán una duración de una hora a una hora y media. Las entrevistas serán audio grabadas con el propósito de asegurar que los investigadores entiendan claramente lo que se declarará por los participantes. Un intérprete de español estará presente en todas las entrevistas para asegurar que la entrevista se realice lo más fluidamente posible. Se utilizará al intérprete solamente si los participantes no hablan inglés. Una vez que las cintas de audio se transcriban, se mantendrán en casa de Lance Stout y serán destruidas después de tres años.

**Incomodidad/Riesgos:** Como su identidad no será revelada no anticipamos ninguna consecuencia adversa como resultado de su participación. Lo único que pueda causar inconveniencia podría ser el horario y localidad de la entrevista.

**Beneficios:** Usted ayudará al Distrito Escolar de Liberal a mejorar como involucran y se comunican con los padres de familia. Se ha demostrado que el involucramiento de los padres mejora el desarrollo de los estudiantes. **Además, yo creo que usted aprenderá más acerca de las escuelas de Liberal y también tendrá la libertad de hacerme preguntas acerca de las escuelas si así lo desea.**

**Confidencialidad:** Cualquier información se mantendrá confidencial y será revelada sólo con su consentimiento.

**Rehusar/Retirar:** La participación en el estudio es completamente voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o de no hacerlo **no** afectará relaciones futuras de usted o su familia con Wichita State University y/o el distrito escolar de Liberal. Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, usted es libre de retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento y sin ninguna sanción.

**Contacto:** Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de este estudio, mi información de contacto es la siguiente: Lance Stout, Superintendente de Escuelas en Liberal, KS y estudiante de Doctorado en Wichita State University, teléfono 620-604-1012. Usted puede también contactar a mi profesora, Dr. Linda Bakken, Ph.D, Departamento de Liderazgo Escolar, 104 Hubbard Hall, 316-978-6996. Si usted tiene dudas acerca de sus derechos como sujeto de investigación, o acerca de alguna daño posible a causa del estudio, usted puede contactar a la oficina de administración de estudios de Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, teléfono (316) 978-3285.

Usted no tiene ninguna obligación de participar en este estudio. Su firma indica que usted ha leído la información provista arriba y ha decidido participar voluntariamente. Usted recibirá una copia de este consentimiento.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Sujeto

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Testigo

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## APPENDIX E

### English Assent Form



WICHITA STATE  
UNIVERSITY

College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership

#### Assent Form

For Child or Minor Subject:

I have been told by my mother, father, or guardian that it's okay for me to participate, if I want to, in a project about parent and student perceptions regarding their community and school. This project also strives to learn what can be done in order to provide positive outcomes for strengthening connections between home and school. I know that I can stop at any time I want to and it will be okay if I want to stop.

---

Name

---

Date

## APPENDIX F

### Spanish Assent Form



WICHITA STATE  
UNIVERSITY

College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership

#### Forma de Consentimiento

Para infante o menor en cuestión:

Me ha dicho mi madre, padre, o guardián que está de acuerdo en que yo participe, si así lo deseo en un proyecto de las percepciones de los padres y estudiantes acerca de su comunidad y su escuela. Este proyecto también hace que aprendan que se puede hacer para brindar opciones que refuercen las conexiones entre el hogar y la escuela. Yo sé que puedo dejar de participar en el momento que yo quiera y está bien si así lo decido.

---

Nombre

Fecha

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Examples of Semi Structured & Open Ended Questions**

#### **Interview 1. Focus on Household Interview**

1. What is your name and can you tell me about yourself?
2. How did your family arrive here in Liberal?
3. What was it like when you moved here?
4. Did you know anybody?
5. Where else have you lived previous to living in Liberal?
6. Were there different ways of doing things that you noticed?
7. What is a typical day for you like in your home?
8. What are some things that you do together with your family?
9. What does a typical evening look like in your home?

## **APPENDIX G (continued)**

### **Interview 2: Focus on Regular Household Activities and Routines**

1. What do you do on weekends?
2. Where do you work? How long have you worked there?
3. What other jobs have you done?
4. Describe for me a typical week?
5. Do any of you enjoy math? What kinds of things (work or hobbies) do you do that engages math principles in daily life and work?
6. How about reading? What do you enjoy reading?
7. What hobbies do you enjoy?
8. Who takes care of the children when you are working?
9. Do you know your neighbors?
10. How involved are you with your neighbors?



## **APPENDIX G (continued)**

### **Interview 3: Focus on How Parents Construct their Roles as Parents and Caregivers**

1. Can you share with me some of the highlights and challenges of raising your children?
2. What is the best part of being a parent?
3. What was your schooling like when you were a child?
4. How was it different than your children's education?
5. What are your goals and expectations for your children in school?
6. Do you feel welcome when you attend your children's school?
7. What can the school district do to make you feel more welcome?
8. Do your children enjoy school?
9. Do you speak English or Spanish in the home? Outside of the home?
10. What are some barriers to you being involved with your children's activities at school?

## **APPENDIX G (continued)**

### **Student Interview Questions**

1. How long have you lived here?
2. What do you enjoy about living in Liberal?
3. What is the best thing about school? What is the worst?
4. Did you ever attend school in Mexico? If so, what was school like in Mexico?
5. What would be one thing that you would say to your teachers to help you learn better?
6. What do you like about your favorite teacher?
7. Do your parents know what your grades are in school?
8. What do your parents do to help you with school?
9. What are some of your hobbies?
10. What activities are you involved in at school? In the community?
11. Do your friends enjoy school? Why or why not?