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LATINA ACADEMIC SUCCESS: THE ROLE OF K-12 SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND PERSONNEL

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Latina Academic Success: The role of K-12 School Experiences and Personnel

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Denise Flores and Monica Ramos and all of the other students and young people who have inspired and encouraged me. You are truly the wind beneath my wings.

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Latina Academic Success: The role of K-12 School Experiences and Personnel

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This qualitative study investigated the role that K-12 teachers and other school personnel as well as school experiences such as classes, extracurricular activities and empowerment programs played in the academic success of six Latinas enrolled in a selective Texas university. The participant group attended the same foreign language magnet program from grades six through twelve, making it possible to study their collective school experiences over an extended period of time. The data was collected using individual interviews with the participants and the teachers and other school personnel that the participants identified as having made a significant contribution to their academic careers. Based on the data analysis, the students were identified as having either "low social capital" or "more social capital" resources to further their academic success. The key findings of the study were: (1) It was necessary for students to become enmeshed in the school community network of resources to build the social capital

connections needed to pursue a higher education. (2) For students with low social capital resources the school was the primary source of social capital connections that enabled them to pursue a post-secondary education. (3) For students with greater social capital resources, the school worked as an important partner with the family to enhance the students' academic success. This study is significant because it deconstructed the interactions between students and teachers to differentiate between those teachers who were emotionally supportive and those teachers who helped students build social capital connections that enabled them to be accepted into a selective university and to continue to be academically successful at the university level.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic success is the product of many factors, including but not limited to the innate ability of the student, the support of the family, and the quality of the schooling received. The purpose of this research was to understand from the perspective of Hispanic females what they thought their K-12 schools had gotten "right" in helping them develop the academic and social skills they needed to obtain a college education. The participants in the study were six Mexican American women from San Antonio, Texas, who had attended the same magnet school program from grades six through twelve. As students of the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP), the participants were guided by the same philosophy, taught by many of the same teachers, and encouraged to participate in a number of the same extracurricular programs. After high school graduation, all of the participants continued their studies at a large, public university in Texas. Because the participants have a five-year age span, and because they were each in the program for seven years, the participants' experiences provide a window into the workings of the FLMP for approximately twelve years. This time span made it possible for me to explore in both breadth and depth the question: **What role did K-12 school personnel and school experiences play in the academic success of Latinas enrolled in a selective university?**

Increasing the number of Hispanic students in the academic pipeline to college is critical to the economic growth and development of Texas. Demographers project that by

2040, the Texas population will be approximately 50.5 million people, and, if immigration continues at current levels, seventy-eight percent of those people will be Hispanic. In order to meet the needs of an expanding population, the state must have an educated workforce capable of competing in an ever-increasing technological marketplace. Yet compared to the national average (5.4%), Texas has a smaller proportion of its population (4.9%) seeking a post-secondary education. If this educational disparity is not rectified, by 2030 the projected loss of income per Texas household is estimated to be $4,000.00 (Brown, 2002).

To address the shortfall of college educated workers, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (TCEHB), with statewide support from business, political, educational, and community leaders, developed a plan to increase college enrollments by 500,000 students by 2015. To meet its intermediate goal for 2005, the state would have to add 3,400 white students; 21,400 African American students; and 44,395 Hispanic students. In its 2002 Progress Report, the THECB revealed that as of 2001, thirty-four percent of its 2005 goal had been reached. However, in the category of Hispanic students, only fifteen percent of its stated goal had been obtained. If Texas is to reach its goals for higher education enrollments, it must find ways to increase the number of Hispanic students who leave high school with the skills and motivation to pursue a post-secondary education.

The idea that Hispanic students can achieve the highest levels of success in Texas public schools is a fairly recent concept. As recently as the late 1960s, the median level of education for Hispanic students in Texas was 4.8 years, while nationally, Hispanics

received an average of 7.1 years of schooling as compared to 12.1 years for whites and 9.0 years for non-whites (Navarro, 1995). Although in the last forty years there have been improvements in the amount and type of education Hispanic students receive, large gaps still exist between the academic achievement of Hispanics and their white peers. For decades researchers have tried to explain this disparity in school performance, focusing largely on the characteristics of Hispanic students or their culture that apparently kept them from being successful in school. Far less attention has been directed at understanding how those Hispanic students who have achieved academic success were able to do so.

While many Hispanics have achieved degrees in medicine, law, education, and other disciplines they are still not represented in higher education at an appropriate rate for their population density. Hispanics comprise fourteen percent of the population of the United States, but in the academic year 2001-2002 they received only 5.5 percent of the bachelor's degrees, 4.1 percent of the master's degrees, 3.2 percent of the doctor's degrees, and 4.5 percent of the professional degrees awarded nationally (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In Texas, where Hispanics make up thirty-two percent of the population (Hispanic Research Center, 2000), they earned 18.5 percent of the bachelor's degrees, 11.5 percent of the master's degrees, 5.8 percent of the doctor's degrees, and 10.2 percent of the professional degrees awarded in the academic year, 2000-2001 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2002).

Advocates and researchers working since the 1960s to improve the quality of education that Hispanic children receive have won two crucial victories. The first was

Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District, 1971, in which the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the state's public school financing system was unconstitutional. Consequently, the Texas Legislature had to create a school finance plan that addressed the economic inequities of the statewide school system. The new school finance bill added millions to the SAISD budget. The second breakthrough came in the 1970s when researchers began to document the existence of gifted and talented Hispanic students in public schools, and to make recommendations about identifying and teaching these children. (Bernal, 1974; Bernal and Reyna, 1975; Mercer, 1977; Amodeo, 1981; Amodeo, 1982; Argulewicz, Elliot, and Hall, 1982). In the early 1980s, the Texas Legislature made grants available for school districts to set up programs for gifted and talented children, and in 1987, it mandated that all school districts provide programs for gifted students at every grade level (Texas Education Code, Section 21.652)

Research Question

Despite the persistence of huge inadequacies in the schooling of Hispanic children, there are many Hispanics who have achieved significant academic success. Five of the six women in this study came from a working class background, and all of them attended inner-city schools plagued by poverty and chronic under-funding. Yet, they went on to become students at Major University (MU), one of the top public research universities in the nation. By asking these women to describe the K-12 school experiences and personnel that made a significant difference in their education careers, I

hope to identify the educational practices or programs that, if replicated, could lead to academic success for more Hispanic students.

From 1992 until 1997, I was privileged to be part of a team of educators who rebuilt a dying, inner-city middle school with a majority Hispanic population into a model of academic success and support for students whom others in the community had written off as hopeless. I witnessed what a profound effect a school community could have on the lives of marginalized children. I chose this research topic because this experience caused me to want to examine more deeply the nature of a school's role in the academic success of Hispanic students. I decided to focus my investigations on Hispanic females because I have been an advocate for adolescent girls since I read How Schools Shortchange Girls (American Association of University Women's Report, 1992). Based on this and other research, I designed and taught a leadership and self esteem program for at-risk eighth grade girls, several of whom are presently enrolled in or have graduated from college.

Methodology

I chose to do a qualitative study because I was interested in learning from the participants what they thought the school had done to motivate them to seek a college education and to facilitate their achieving this goal. I used interviews as the main means of obtaining this information. Through the interviewing process, I formed a personal relationship with most of my study participants. Over the course of two years, the participants and I also used numerous telephone conversations and emails to expand the

discussion beyond the formal interview setting. Using these multiple interactions I developed a detailed case history for each participant. From the case histories, I conducted a cross case analysis to identify the common themes that appeared across the participants' lives.

I limited my participant group to only those students who had graduated from the Foreign Language Magnet Program at Henry Trueba High School. By using participants from a single school, I was able to construct a rich understanding of the school culture and educational climate in which they lived. Because the participants were enrolled in the Foreign Language Magnet Program from grades six through twelve, I was able to explore how the program affected them over a substantial period of time, allowing me to develop a picture of their educational experiences that had both depth and breadth. In addition to the data gathered from the participants, I tapped other sources of information to broaden my understanding of the context in which the participants lived and received their education. For example, I interviewed teachers and other school personnel whom the participants identified as having made a significant impact in their lives. I asked these educators what they did to promote the idea of college attendance for their students. I also visited the schools that housed the FLMP and spent time exploring the neighborhoods where the participants had grown up.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical construct I am using to explain the findings of this study is the Network Analytic View of Social Support Systems developed by Ricardo Stanton-

Salazar (1995, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). Network analysis theory describes individuals as deeply enmeshed in three levels of social webs: the micro or individual level; the meso or community and institutional levels known as cliques; and the macro or societal level known as system networks. At both meso and macro levels there are tacit rules of conduct about communication, interdependence, and resource exchange that govern all interactions of those in the clique or network. These rules are learned through participation in various social webs at this level. For example, middle class students live in a variety of social webs that allow them to attend schools and participate in extra-curricular activities which prepare them for college and other post-secondary opportunities with the potential for career mobility and political empowerment. The social webs of working class Hispanic students, on the other hand, seldom provide such easy access to the same resources and privileges. Consequently, the school becomes vitally important in the lives of Hispanic children because it is there that they can become enmeshed in the various social webs that facilitate their access to the larger webs of opportunity.

The concepts of social capital, network orientation, and help-seeking orientation are used to describe the complex negotiations between the students and the school's institutional agents. Social capital is defined as a dynamic process based on investments made by the help-seeker and the provider. When a student takes advantage of an opportunity or resource made available to her through a social agent, the student is using social capital. When the investment is beneficial to both parties, even though there may be substantial power differences, a relationship of trust as well as expectations and

obligations is built. For the student, the exchange may be in the form of personal support, such as material support (including money), personal favors, academic tutoring, or counsel on personal or private matters. The exchange also may be in the form of institutional support, such as information about school programs, academic tutoring or mentoring, college admission, and assistance with career decision making. For the teacher or counselor the exchange might create a feeling of being helpful or of job satisfaction.

The network orientation of a student is based on the student's attitude toward her web of relationships. If the orientation toward school is positive, the student will likely develop help- seeking skills and strategies that further connections within the academic web. If the student's network orientation is negative, she is likely to withdraw from the connections of the web.

In order to activate the support of an institutional agent, a student must cross several psychological borders (Gross-McMullen, 1983). First she must recognize that she needs help; second, she must evaluate the cost of asking for the help. These costs are often calculated by the student in terms of a loss of self esteem or in damage to social relationships with peers or reference groups. The request for help can be especially expensive in high self-esteem individuals who have come to equate their abilities with their sense of self. In such cases, seeking help can be seen as a sign of personal failure. If the student thinks her help seeking behavior confirms stereotypes such as a lack of intelligence and ability or a faulty character (laziness), the negative association with help seeking is further intensified (Nelson-LeGall, 1985). Those students who do exhibit a

positive help-seeking strategy become more firmly enmeshed in the school web and become even more likely to receive the institutional support they require. According to network analysis theory, the key to crossing the multiple borders that lead to academic success is the level of *confianza* that a Hispanic student feels towards those school agents who are the gatekeepers to the social capital- producing webs. *Confianza en confianza* is the term for a social construct which has been identified by anthropologists and cultural psychologists as a cornerstone in Hispanic interpersonal networks (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The literal translation for the term is "trusting mutual trust" and denotes an interpersonal relationship based on mutual generosity and reciprocity.

> When individuals have confianza in each other, they are willing to make themselves vulnerable to the other, to share intimacies without fear of being hurt or taken for granted. Confianza also allows people to engage in important transactions without fear of being deliberately deceived and used. (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 26-27).

These relationships tend to be the by-products of on-going, supportive interactions between the institutional agent and the student, they are usually initiated by the school agent, not the adolescent.

Stanton-Salazar describes two types of relationships- multiplex and multi-stranded that often lead to *confianza* based interactions between a student and school agents. In a multiplex relationship the adolescent depends on the agent to provide "multiple forms of support for different problems and across different situations"

(Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 225). Many times the support provided is outside of the adult's job description and is motivated by an emotional investment in the student. An example of this type of relationship is a school counselor who provides various types of material and emotional support for a student. Multi-stranded relationships involve multiple roles or functions on the part of the adult. The role of a coach in an athlete's life is an example of a multi-stranded relationship because the coach is concerned about the student's academic performance, personal health and training, and other aspects of his life.

It is important to note that not all supportive relationships with school agents produce social capital for a student. In order to produce social capital, the relationship must be a conduit for "high quality institutional support, particularly support oriented toward academic excellence and college admission" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 188). Although any teacher can be involved in *confianza en confianza* relationships with one or more of his or her students, it is sometimes easier for extra-curricular or elective teachers to achieve this level of interaction with students. The time spent preparing for competitions and performances often allows the student and teacher/coach to interact with one another in a variety of situations. Multiple interactions over time provide opportunities for the student to build *confianza* in the teacher and allow the teacher to act as a conduit for multiple kinds of institutional support.

The Value of Network Analysis Theory

Without the perspective that network analysis theory brings, this study simply confirms what common sense predicts: that smart kids in a school with competent and caring teachers, and an enriched curriculum will succeed. By using the question "Did the relationship build a social capital connection for the student?" to deconstruct the interactions between the participants and their teachers, I was able to get beyond the stories of helpful teachers and counselors to identify those social networks and school agents who were genuinely creating social capital for the students.

Further, by using network analysis theory to define academic success as a dynamic system that can be refined, I moved the discussion of Hispanic academic success out of the mode of blaming teachers and students for their lack of success. Instead, I create the possibility of teaching school agents to build those necessary connections within the interactions they already have with students. For example, during an interview with one of the teachers, I asked what she did to promote the idea of college attendance for her students. She showed me a row of college catalogues on a shelf in her classroom and said that she kept these materials available for her students at all times. She was disappointed because none of the students used the catalogues. Yet, for the catalogues to be a source of social capital for her students, the teacher would need to spend time explaining to her students how to read the catalogues and understand the information they presented. The teacher would accomplish several things by taking this next step. First, she would directly impart institutional knowledge to the students about how to use a college catalogue. Second, by showing this level of concern and support for the students'

academic success, she would create an opportunity to build the kind of personal connection that leads to a relationship of *confianza* so important to Hispanic students. Third, she would enable her students to avoid the psychological fear of appearing stupid by asking how to use the catalogues. A simple lesson on the use of the college catalogues would transform an unused resource into valuable social capital connections for her students.

There is often a serious disconnect between what school personnel think they are providing to help their students and what students feel is meaningful to them as they seek information to further their education. For example, I have visited many schools where school officials have proudly shown me their section of the library that contains college catalogues or the newsletter put out by the counseling office that tells of upcoming events such as upcoming dates for the SAT test or college recruiter visits. Additionally, I have talked to large numbers of Hispanic high school students and post-high school adults who have said, "Yeah, I knew about that stuff, but I was embarrassed to go look at it. It seemed too weird and not for me." By combining network analysis theory with the findings of this study, I have been able to develop a systematic way to explain to teachers and school administrators what the difference is between telling kids they have the potential to go to college and increasing that potential into a reality. I am not naïve enough to believe that one workshop on network analysis theory as it pertains to Hispanic high school students will change the educational outcomes for large numbers of Hispanic children. Based on my long experience in the education system, however, I do believe that there are many caring teachers and school personnel working with marginalized

children. Showing them how to improve their rate of success with simple changes to what they are already doing is a win-win situation for both the school agents and the students.

Historical Context

San Antonio Independent School District

Unlike many major metropolitan school districts, San Antonio does not have one school district that serves all the children of the city. Instead there are seven independent school districts located within the city limits. The more affluent districts are on the north side of the city; the districts serving the poorer minority children are located on the west and south sides of town. Historically, access to educational opportunity in San Antonio has been determined primarily by where you live.

Until the 1940s, Hispanics were restricted by the city's housing covenants to living on the west side of San Antonio. As the Hispanic population grew without corresponding increases in the available residential space, the neighborhoods were plagued by some of the highest rates of tuberculosis and infant mortality in the United States (Rosales, 2000). The degree to which SAISD was successful in educating the children of these barrios has been the source of controversy for decades.

An example of the differing perceptions of the white administrators of San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), and the parents of the Hispanic students in the district is apparent in two documents from the 1930s. The journal of the Texas State Teachers' Association, *The Texas Outlook*, published an article in the November,

1935 issue, in which the white superintendent of San Antonio ISD (SAISD), J.C. Cochran lauded the educational opportunities the district was providing for its Hispanic students. Extolling the virtues of Sidney Lanier Vocational High School on San Antonio's west side Cochran said:

> Anyone who visits San Antonio and fails to visit this school [Lanier] will miss an opportunity to see one of the best pieces of educational work being carried on anywhere in the United States. The paramount problem here is to help a race of people to adapt themselves to American ideals and social customs. The rapidity with which this task is being accomplished is amazing. The fact that in twelve years the enrollment in the Sidney Lanier School increased from 126 to 1450 students is evidence enough to show that these people of Latin-American extractions are realizing more fully the advantages of an education.

In comparison, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) issued its own report in 1934 on the state of schools serving the Hispanic children of the west side of San Antonio. The Committee on Public School Buildings and Recreational Facilities found that although there was only a small difference in the number of Hispanic and white children in the district (12,334 Mexican American and 12,224 white), the differences in educational opportunities were enormous. For the white children there were twenty-eight schools with 369 classrooms; for the Hispanic children there were eleven schools with 269 classrooms. Class size in the west side schools averaged forty-eight students even though state law mandated no more than thirty-five students per class. Further, the district spent $35.96 per white child and only $24.50 per Hispanic child (San

Miguel, 1987). Texas State Superintendent of Public Instruction L. A. Woods validated the report's findings and referred the matter back to the SAISD school board. LULAC representatives tried several times to meet with the SAISD board to discuss the situation but were refused an opportunity to present their findings. LULAC then formed the *Liga de Defensa Escolar* (League for the Defense of Our Schools), a coalition of numerous social, civic, commercial, and religious organizations to work for better educational opportunities for the children of the west side (San Miguel, 1987, p. 86). This organization worked for fourteen years to bring attention to the educational plight of the children of San Antonio's barrios. Other organizations, such as Students for Better Education and Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS) also have labored to bring needed reforms to San Antonio schools. Seven SAISD parents filed a lawsuit, *Rodriguez* v. *San Antonio Independent School District, 1971*, challenging the way public schools were funded by the state. Following a twenty-one year battle, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the state's public school financing system was unconstitutional (Valencia, 1991). This ruling led to a complete overhaul of the state's method for funding public schools, which in turn added millions of dollars to SAISD's budget.

According to Texas Education Agency standards, the students of SAISD continue even today to perform below their white peers in the wealthier districts of the city.

A comparison between the two school districts on the north side of San Antonio and SAISD for the school year 2000-2001 show the differences between the districts' ethnic populations, per student expenditures, and standardized test scores. SAISD has a greater Hispanic population and more students who require bilingual or English as a

Second Language instruction. It also has less money to spend per student. There is a 150 point difference between the mean SAT score of an Hispanic student in the North East School District and an Hispanic student in SAISD. These statistics confirm that even in 2000- 2001, residence still plays a part in access to educational opportunity (Texas Education Agency, 2001- 2002).

Table 1: School District Comparisons

2000-2001	Ethnicity	Econ. Disadv.	Dist. Expen di-ture	Limited English Speak.	Enroll. By Prog.	Mean SAT Scores	Mean ACT Scores	Drop-out Over 4 years
SAISD	H-86.1% W – 4.0	92.3%	$7,017	18.4%	Bil/ESL 14.1% G/T 5.6%	H- 806 W-939	H-16.5 W-20.2	H-10.9% W-6.7%
Northside ISD	H-56.1% W-34.7%	41.7%	$7,197	6.0%	Bil/ESL 4.8% G/T 8.0%	H- 943 W-1059	H-19.9 W-23.2	H-10.8% W – 5.1%
North East ISD	H-39.6% W-48.0%	35.0%	$7,450	3.9%	Bil/ESL 3.3% G/T 6.8%	H- 959 W-1071	H-19.4 W-22.1	H-8.0% W-2.2%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2001-2002

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE MAGNET PROGRAM

The Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) was created in the 1980s to provide an opportunity for students to study a foreign language for seven years. Originally the students could choose French, Spanish, German, Latin, or Japanese; Russian was later added to the course selection. Over the years, a number of changes have been made in the design of the program. When the participants of this study were students of the FLMP, the process for inclusion into the program required fifth grade students to fill out an application, write an essay, and secure recommendation letters from at least two of their teachers. All FLMP students attended either Tomas Rivera or Robert E Lee Middle Schools and Henry Trueba High School. Once in the program, students were required to maintain a seventy-five average in all their course work. Students who failed to maintain the appropriate grade average would be sent back to their home campus. An evaluation of the FLMP conducted in 1996 by the Center for the Study of Education Reform at the University of North Texas found that sixty-six percent of the students were female; seventy percent were Hispanic; thirty percent came from families that made less than $10,000 per year; and less than thirty-three percent stayed in the program for the full seven years. A former director of the FLMP stated that ninety percent of the students had been identified as gifted and talented while in elementary school (Mr. K., Personal communication, August 15, 2001).

At the middle school campuses, FLMP students were segregated from the other students in the school. They waited in a separate area on campus before school and their academic core classes were all located in the same wing of the school. These classes

were taught at an Honor's class level. Electives and physical education were taken with the general student population. Once at Trueba High School the FLMP students were tracked into Advanced Placement and Honor's level classes, so they rarely were in academic core classes with the general population of students

HENRY TRUEBA HIGH SCHOOL

Built in the early part of the twentieth century, Henry Trueba High School originally served the large German American population of the city. After World War II, the growing Mexican American middle class began to move into the neighborhood. Presently, the population at Trueba High School is 96.2 percent Hispanic and 99.8 percent economically disadvantaged. For the school year 2001-2002, 60.1 percent of the students who took the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test passed all three portions of the exam (Texas Education Agency, 2002). The neighborhoods around Trueba High School, as well as the home attendance areas of the participants, have been the sites of numerous gang related violence.

The Participants

A more complete description of the individual participants is included in Chapter Three, and the education biography of each participant is included in the Appendix. In brief, the participants are Mexican American females. All were born in San Antonio and attended SAISD schools from first grade through high school graduation. They were all identified by the school district criteria as gifted and talented while they were still in elementary school. They were each involved in a wide variety of extra-curricular

activities and were never considered discipline problems. Five of them grew up in single parent homes; all are from working class backgrounds. Three of the girls are sisters, and all of them knew one another while they were students of the FLMP even though they were in different graduating classes. Since coming to Major University several of them have roomed together in various configurations. As of the spring semester 2003, three of the participants have graduated from MU; the other three are on target for graduation.

Use of Pseudonyms

The names of the participants and schools they attended have been changed. I chose to use the actual name of San Antonio ISD because it is identified as such in the public documents I have referenced.

Definition of Terms

Hispanic/Latino/a – Both Latino and Hispanic are widely used as umbrella terms to identify people of various backgrounds including Mexican, Mexican American, Cubans, Central Americans, and South Americans. I have chosen to use the term Hispanic as the universal term for people of Spanish-speaking origin because it is the term used by the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources for my statistical data. When speaking specifically about the participants of the study, I use the term Latina/s because it is less cumbersome than Hispanic female(s).

White or Anglo – I have chosen to use the term white to indicate the ethnic and cultural background of people of European descent. The U.S. Census Bureau uses this term, as do several of the statistical data sources I referenced. In quotes

from other sources, the term Anglo is sometimes used to identify people of European descent, I have retained the usage the quoted author has chosen.

School experiences - School experiences is an umbrella term that includes any interactions the participants had in classes, while participating in school-related activities or in conjunction with extra-curricular activities.

School personnel - School personnel includes any teacher, administrator or other person employed by the school district or working under the auspices of the district such as employees of programs like Project Stay or University Outreach.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons. At its most basic level, it provides evidence that Latinas from single parent homes and living in dangerous neighborhoods can succeed in school if they are given the proper support. At the next level, the study examines the role that the school can play in the production of social capital for students who come to school with few resources. The data provides compelling evidence that for some students the school is their only lifeline to opportunities that their family can not, or do not provide for them. Most importantly, my study identifies specific behaviors that teachers or other school agents can use to change a supportive teacher/student relationship into one that builds social capital for the student.

Another important aspect of this study is that it allows Latinas who have successfully navigated the road from elementary school to university to offer their assessment of their educational experiences. Market research is a standard component

when business wants to develop or improve a product. These young women's explanations of what kinds of experiences bolstered their success, offer educators insights with which to evaluate existing programs or those being developed.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, academic success is based on the convergence of many different factors. Three of the most important ones are the innate ability of the student, support from the family, and the quality of the schooling received. The school community has little control over the students' raw intellect or their level of family support. Educators do have enormous control over the type and quality of support that the school provides. This study demonstrates that the combination of social network analysis and the data provided by these participants generates valuable information about what a school community looks like that maximizes its students' potential for academic success.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One is the introduction to the study. Chapter Two is a literature review of the articles and books that have relevance to the topic. Chapter Three is a discussion of the methodology used in the study. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter Four which focuses on students who entered school with very little social capital, and Chapter Five which discusses the participants who began their school career with more social capital provided by their parents, older siblings, and experiences in the community. Chapter Six offers the conclusions to be drawn from the study and the recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Writing a literature review about Hispanic academic success begins with a literature search, an activity that is like trying to find nuggets of gold in a rock pile. The published research on non-immigrant, English-speaking, second generation or more Hispanic students often must be mined out of bibliographies in articles, or ferreted out from within research cited under such terms as the "Hispanic dropout problem" or from research on Hispanic gifted students. In addition, a researcher must decide if he or she seeks research that deals with immigrants or native-born Mexican-American students, monolingual Spanish speakers, bilingual Spanish/English speakers, or Hispanic students who are monolingual English speakers. Whose success are we talking about?

This complexity illuminates problems with the way research on Hispanics is catalogued in two of the most commonly used education research databases. For instance, using the Educational Abstracts database, I entered "Hispanic" and "academic achievement" as search descriptors. Twenty-three citations appeared. Nine of them concerned community college or university level issues; six of them had very little to do with the topic; and six of them led to some information about promoting academic

achievement for Hispanic students. Changing the descriptors to "Mexican American" and "academic achievement" revealed eleven citations, only three of those citations were in any way connected to promoting academic success for Mexican American students. In the ERIC database, I entered the identifiers "Hispanic/high school/achievement," and 104 journal entries appeared. I found several relevant articles but their major descriptors were listed under "dropout prevention." The lack of ready access to information on Hispanic students who have achieved academic success promotes the idea that academically successful, second generation Hispanic students are a fluke rather than a consistent reality.

For the purposes of this study, I limited my literature review to research that applies to Hispanic students who have achieved academic success in mainstream English-language based schools. The issue of bilingual education will not be addressed at this time because it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The immigration literature will not be addressed because it does not apply to the participants in this study. Five of the participants' families have lived in Texas for several generations; the sixth participant is the child of immigrant parents, but she was born and raised in San Antonio and attended San Antonio ISD schools throughout her K-12 academic career. She is fluently bicultural.

In the first section of this literature review I take a very brief look at the historical recognition of Hispanic academic success. The second section presents research that has focused on the personal and educational characteristics of high achieving Hispanic

students. The third section discusses studies that have examined the best educational practices for promoting K-12 academic success for Hispanic students.

Historical Precedent

The belief that there are few academically capable Hispanic students can trace one of its roots back to the writings by L. M. Terman (1916, p. 91-92), father of the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test, who wrote that "Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves." In Texas, public education for Mexican Americans closely followed this guideline. For the most part, Mexican American children in public schools were segregated into inferior quality schools and instruction was primarily focused on making them proficient in English and training them for vocational work (San Miguel, 1987).

During the 1960s and 1970s, researchers began to publish studies that brought attention to the educational experiences of Hispanic students. Although the majority of this research was focused on trying to explain the academic failure of this population (Supik and Johnson 1999; Valenzuela 1999; Guzman 1996; Hurtado and Garcia 1994; Valencia 1991; San Miguel 1987; Buriel 1983; Argulewicz, Elliot et al. 1982; Jackson and Cosca 1974), several researchers directed their attention to the academic success of Hispanic students. Bernal (1978) listed the seven characteristics that gifted Mexican American students possessed that might not be noticed by white school personnel. These traits included the child's ability to rapidly acquire English as a second language;

demonstrated leadership ability; advanced conversation skills; intelligent or effective risk-taking behaviors; inventing creative games and play; accepting responsibilities at home normally reserved for older children; and being recognized by others as having the ability "to make it" in the Anglo dominated society. Bernal's work helped set the stage for studies on Hispanic giftedness for the next two decades.

As researchers such as Renzulli (1978, 1986), Gardiner (1983), and Arroyo and Sternberg (1993) expanded the concept of giftedness beyond a fixed I.Q. score, alternative means of assessing giftedness were developed which provided Hispanic students greater access to programs for gifted children. Other researchers presented findings that highlighted the specific needs of highly intelligent Hispanic students. Amodeo (1981,1982) described the importance of including parents in the identification process for gifted Mexican American children. She also explained certain cultural factors that might cause Mexican American parents to under-refer their children to a gifted program. DeLeon (1983) reported that although Mexican American children tended to be more field-dependent learners, the standardized tests used to identify giftedness contained a majority of questions that were biased towards field independent learners. De Bernard (1985) explained that the strategies that bright bilingual children used to accommodate their second language acquisition might have a negative effect on their standardized test performances. Argulweicz (1982), Buriel (1982), High (1983), Roberts and Hutton (1985), and Clifton (1986) wrote about the effects of teacher bias towards Mexican American children and its negative effect on those children's chances of being recognized and included in programs for gifted students.

High Achieving Hispanics – High School and College Students

In an attempt to discover why some disadvantaged Hispanic students achieved greater success than their peers, researchers began investigating the lives of highly successful Hispanics in an attempt to identify the factors that fostered their success. Two categories of studies emerged: research focused on high achieving high school students and studies of Hispanics who were enrolled in, or graduated from a college or university.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

There is a scarcity of research on highly successful Hispanic high school students. There is much more research available on "at risk" or low performing Hispanic students who have achieved greater academic success when placed in supplemental or empowerment programs that provide the academic and social support needed for them to become successful. This literature will be discussed in the section of the review on best educational practices for Hispanic students.

The first five articles were the only ones that I found that specifically investigated the educational success of high achieving Hispanic students. The fifth study looks at the factors of resilience in Hispanic high school students.

From the results of a nationally administered survey of 58,000 high school students from 1015 schools, So (1987) was able to identify a subgroup of low socioeconomic Hispanic students. Using quantitative methods, So evaluated the students responses to questions about whether or not they take pride in their Hispanic culture and how much they aspire to achieve middle class economic status. He found that highly academically successful Hispanic high school students closely identified with their ethnic

group and also aspired to become part of the economic middle class. These students viewed educational achievement as a tool for upward mobility. This study was important because it was one of the first to report that Hispanic students did not have to abandon their ethnic identities to achieve academic success.

Herbert (1996) used qualitative methods to investigate the academic and social success of three male Hispanic high school students in a northeastern urban high school. He found that the young men believed strongly in themselves, that they benefited from supportive relationships outside the family that provided guidance and co-parenting, and that all three were heavily involved in extracurricular programs such as athletics, clubs, honor societies, volunteer work, and religious events. Further, each of them had attended special summer enrichment programs on college campuses.

Three studies investigated the factors of success for Latinas in high school. O'Halloran (1995) studied 125 Mexican American females who were successful in high school science courses using the Science Career Prediction Scale as well as interviewing the participants, counselors, and teachers. The respondents indicated that they had received strong support from their mothers for their academic success and that approximately eighty two percent of them had attended a preschool or Headstart program. All of the participants indicated that at least one teacher at the K-12 level had encouraged them to pursue further educational opportunities. The surprising element in the findings was that though the students had done very well in high school science courses, they knew very little about possible careers in science.

Moss (1999) conducted an ethnographic study over a two year period of gifted Latinas in a magnet school for gifted and talented students. His goal was to examine "how the socialization in gifted education affected these young women" (p. 13). His conclusions were that the young women needed to be separated from their non-achieving peers as early as middle school, and needed a nurturing environment with small classes, academic acceleration, and high expectations for going to college.

Reis and Diaz conducted a three year ethnographic study of thirty-five economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse, talented students who attended a large high school in a northeastern city. Reis and Diaz (1999) reported their findings on the factors which enhanced the academic success for a cohort of nine high-achieving females, three of whom were Hispanic. All of the respondents reported receiving support and encouragement from their teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, and mentors. Each of the women was involved in a variety of extracurricular activities during both the school year and the summer. Most chose not to date during high school because they felt this activity would prevent them from reaching their academic goal of a post-secondary education. The women exhibited a strong belief in themselves and demonstrated academic resiliency when faced with family problems. The students also stated that it was important for smart girls to be grouped together in Honor's and advanced classes so that they could support and encourage each other. Although all of the respondents said they knew their parents were proud of their academic success, most of the parents had been minimally involved with the school community.

Gonzales and Padilla (1997) studied the academic resilience of 2,169 Mexican American high school students in three California high schools. In their study, academic resiliency is defined as the ability to maintain high levels of academic motivation and performance in spite of stressful life events that have the potential to cause academic failure. From the data generated by a 314 question survey the researchers identified two groups of participants: the academically resilient group (N=133) composed of students who earned mostly grades of "A" and the non-resilient group (N=81) made up of students who identified themselves as earning mostly grades of "D" on their report cards. The data analysis revealed that a sense of belonging in the school community was the most significant predictor of academic resilience. The next most important predictors were school and peer support and the value the student placed on attending school.

The next study that is not specifically about highly academically successful Hispanic students but because it was part of a national study which included students from San Antonio, Texas I am including it in the review. Adams, et. al. (1994) used the data produced by the ASPIRA Association Five Cities High School Dropout Study (Velez and Fernandez, 1991) to investigate the role of gender, Spanish and English proficiency, generation, language dominance, and mother's education on Hispanic ninth-grade students from five cities (Chicago, Miami, Milwaukee, Newark, and San Antonio). A random sample was taken of 110 Hispanic students, stratified by gender, from each of seven high schools in the five cities. The participants completed a ninety-five-item questionnaire in either English or Spanish. The findings indicated that female students were experiencing greater academic success than males, that recent Hispanic immigrants

performed better in school than United States-born Hispanics, that ethnicity had no effect on their grade point average (GPA), and there was a small but negative influence on English language proficiency and academic performance.

These few studies illustrate how much more research is necessary to explore the academic lives of successful Hispanic high school students. The preponderance of the studies I found were done on the East or West Coast of the United States and do not necessarily represent Hispanic students in middle or southwestern America. My study, therefore, fills an important gap in the literature because it was done in Texas, one of the five states with the largest Hispanic populations in the United States. Further, none of the studies I reviewed looked at the K-12 span of the participants' educational experiences or identifies specific kinds of interactions between the student and the school agents which the participants perceived as being helpful in furthering their academic success. Additional research is necessary to create a rich understanding of the educational and social factors that promote K-12 Hispanic academic success across the different regions of the country. Further studies into the lives and schooling of second generation or more Hispanic students who are neither gifted nor at-risk of dropping out are desperately needed before we will understand what effect the school has on the lives of this population of students. The insights gained from these studies can form the basis of reforms so that schools can meets the needs of these specific students.

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Gandara (1980) was one of the first studies to report on Hispanics who had received a Ph.D., J.D., or M.D. degree. She interviewed forty-five male and female

subjects about ten areas of their backgrounds, including demographics, religion, parental characteristics and their child rearing practices, the physical environment of the home, school related issues, peer relations, communities, health factors, ethnic identity and aculturation, and personal attitudes. The participants of this study said that the most important factor in their academic success was the work ethic their parents had instilled into them. They credited persistence and hard work, not their own intellectual abilities, as the keys to their success. In elementary school only one-fourth of the participants had demonstrated high levels of academic success but during high school eighty-two percent of the respondents were recognized as college bound. More than two thirds of the participants had gone to school in a highly integrated or mostly white environment and felt that this experience had made them bicultural, equally at home in either the Hispanic or white culture. They also felt that being able to compare their own academic abilities against members of the dominant culture helped them have the confidence to pursue a higher education.

Gandara (1982) examined the academic success of Mexican American women. She conducted interviews with seventeen women between the ages of twenty-eight and forty years old, who grew up in a lower socioeconomic home, and then went on to earn a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. degree. Gandara reported that it was hard to find a large sample of Mexican American women with Ph.D.s from low income families because in most cases such women came from families with one foot in the middle class because of their mothers' occupations. In contrast to the stereotype of a submissive Mexican woman who stays home to raise the children (Andrade, 1982), sixty-five percent of the participants'

mothers had worked outside the home and were a strong voice within the family. The women of the study cited their mother's example of working hard as a major motivator for their own success. Because most of the participants had gone to highly integrated high schools they felt comfortable in both an Hispanic and a white environment. The majority of the study's participants had remained unmarried and childless while pursuing their education.

Gandara (1994) studied sixty-five people of Mexican descent (M= 30, F=35) who came from lower-income and working class homes and who had earned a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D.

Within the women's group there were two cohorts. The first group consisted of twenty women who had earned their degrees between 1970 and the early 1980s, were approximately forty seven years old, and had attended college during a political era when many opportunities for minority students were just becoming available. The second group of fifteen women earned their degrees during the late1980s and the1990s. Their average age was thirty-one years. Their degrees were earned in a more socially conservative era, but these respondents had been exposed to a wider range of women's roles than had those in the first cohort. The question guiding this portion of the analysis was, "How did the second cohort of educationally ambitious Mexican American women's lives differ from the older cohort?" The data revealed that in both groups, the participants' mothers had been powerful figures in the family and were very supportive of their daughter's education. Almost three fourths of all the females had attended integrated schools and had extensive contacts with non-minority peers. Many of the

women stated they had acquired knowledge about additional educational opportunities from their white classmates. In both women's cohorts a substantial number had been placed in the non-college preparation track at school and had had to fight for their right to take college preparatory classes.

The primary difference between the two women's groups was that the second generation of Latina scholars had a more uneven record of achievement during their K-8 education than had those in the older group. Almost half of the second generation said they had received low grades or had problems with discipline at school. Although two thirds of the older cohort had decided before they entered high school that they were going on to college, less than half of the second generation had made a decision to attend college by the time they entered high school. Once in high school, the second generation Latinas received much less attention from college recruiters than the first generation had gotten.

The study's general findings from both genders indicated that the achieving white students, including a high degree of family literacy and parental investment in the participant's education. The differences were that for the Mexican American families the literacy was in Spanish and the parental involvement did not include frequent parent/teacher conferences or participation in the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA). Most of the participants' parents encouraged both their sons and daughters equally, but were often more specific about educational possibilities with their sons. The male participants in the study reported receiving mentoring from outside the family twice as often as the women in the study, even though all the women in the first cohort and more

than half the women in the second had demonstrated academic excellence throughout their school career.

Gandara (1995) interviewed thirty Mexican American men and twenty Mexican American women who were born during the 1940s and early 1950s and who had earned either a Ph.D., M.D., of J.D from a selective American university. Two thirds of the participants were first generation Americans or had come to this country as a small child. All of them had grown up in low socioeconomic circumstances, many as the sons and daughters of farm workers or other unskilled laborers.

Gandara found that most of the participants' families had been supportive of their educational success. From the parents' example, the participants learned the value of hard work, the ability to set and achieve personal goals, and to value literacy. Ninety-eight percent of the subjects reported having at least two of the five following reading materials in their home, an encyclopedia, a dictionary, a daily newspaper, magazine subscriptions, or more than twenty-five books, often these materials were in Spanish. Sixty-two percent of the respondents remembered that family discussions often included topics related to politics, labor organizing, and world events. A number of the participants' parents enabled their children to attend schools that were perceived to provide a better education even though the schools were located outside their neighborhood. Many of the study's participants related familial stories that told of former ancestors who had been wealthy and controlled their own lives. These family stories created a "culture of possibility" (p. 112) that encouraged the academic ambitions of the children in the family.

Even though most of the respondents grew up in the American southwest were Mexican segregation is common in schools, between sixty and seventy percent of them reported going to schools in which the student body was composed of at least half or more white students. Attendance in these desegregated schools provided the respondents with access to a college preparatory curriculum, competition with middle-class non-Hispanic classmates, and an opportunity to judge their own competency against other students who were college-bound. Twenty percent of the women and thirty-seven percent of the men had been placed in a non-college academic track during their high school career. However, by the end of high school all the women had gained a place in the college preparatory track. In spite of the participants' families low-economic status, one third of this sample had attended private schools.

The men and women of the study reported different patterns of mentoring experiences. The women all said they were good students throughout their school career, but only thirty percent reported having a teacher or some other adult outside the family provide guidance in setting their pre-college educational goals. The men, on the other hand, reported many more people who offered the support and guidance of a mentor, in spite of the somewhat inconsistent academic records of at least half of the male respondents.

Achor and Morales (1990) also investigated the factors of success for one hundred Mexican American women with Ph.D.s. The majority of the participants were from low-income, traditionally oriented families and grew up speaking Spanish. The study reported that the participants expressed a strong sense of self and held strong career

ambitions. Most of the women felt that their families had been supportive of their education and career aspirations. Thirty-one percent reported that they had experienced no barriers in their pursuit of a doctoral degree. Each of the participants had benefited from the presence of a mentor or role model among their faculty or advisers. The ability to obtain financial aid was a key factor in their being able to continue their education.

Aguilar, M. (1996) studied a group of students in one of the small, Catholic universities in San Antonio, Texas. This university was identified by Solorzano (1995) as one of the top four institutions that produced the most Latina undergraduates that went on to earn a doctorate. The participants in the 1996 study were eighty-four Mexican American women who were the first person in their family to attend college. Approximately half of them were freshmen at the time of the interviews. The semi-structured interviews were organized around six variables: demographics, the effects of growing up as a women and a person of color on achievement (racism, sexism, parental attitudes), cultural strengths, personal strengths, support systems, and barriers. The participants stated that they felt as though they had little access role models and that they had experienced sexism in the school system and from their teachers and in the workplace from their employers. They credited their success to an ability to take on a challenge, feeling a spiritual calling to complete their education and the desire to succeed. Eighty-three percent of the respondents said their family members had been supportive. Only eighteen of the participants identified a teacher as having been influential in their success. One of the personal barriers they identified as having affected their academic career was the lack of knowledge about how to achieve their goals.

Aguilar recommends four components as necessary to build an educational model of success for Latinas. They are: (1) educators must be aware of the personal and cultural strengths and sources of support for Hispanic students (2) educators must acknowledge the barriers these students face as part of their daily life (3) educators must affirm diversity and integrate cultural contexts into the education of the students and (4) school policy, curriculum, and resources must be reformed to remove the structural and social barriers to educational achievement.

Galindo and Escamilla (1995) developed educational biographies of one male and one female Hispanic educator who had grown up in low socioeconomic families in Colorado. From these stories, the researchers concluded that both subjects had strong family support for literacy and learning. For example, the male participant's family left the migrant farm work circuit to provide a more stable educational environment for their children. Each of the educators had been involved in a number of extracurricular activities at school and were placed in classes for college bound students. For the female participant, the Upward Bound program provided counseling that aided her admission to college.

Arellano and Padilla (1996) investigated academic invulnerability among thirty undergraduate Latino students enrolled in a highly selective university. The researchers gathered data through a demographic questionnaire, an educational resiliency scale, and interviews with the participants. Using information taken from the questionnaire, the respondents were divided into three categories based on the education level of the parents. Group One parents had obtained no more than eleven years of education; Group

Two had at least one parent who was a high school graduate; and Group Three had at least one parent who was a college graduate.

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that twenty-two of the thirty respondents had been students in GATE, an educational program for gifted children. Participants said that their identification as gifted during their elementary school years provided them access to high achieving peer groups, special attention from their teachers and school administrators, and consistent reinforcement for being the best and brightest students. Twenty-one of the participants credited their academic success to their own persistence and drive to succeed. The motivation behind their persistence was different for students in groups One and Two as compared to students in Group Three. Students in Groups One and Two had entered school with less social capital than those in Group Three. Students in Groups One and Two often explained their motivation to succeed as based on wanting to prove to others that they could accomplish something in spite of their ethnicity and low social status. Group Three participants were more interested in testing their own personal boundaries and limitations. They reported less incidents of discriminatory behavior than the participants in other two groups.

For Groups One and Two students role models outside the family were more important than for Group Three. Fifteen of the respondents in Groups One and Two identified a specific teacher, counselor, or program personnel who had taken a personal interest in them and had served as a mentor or role model. The mentors provided access to information about the college entrance process that the members of Groups One and Two would not have had without the adult intervention. Group Three students had a

harder time identifying someone outside the family who had helped them with the college entrance process.

While members of all three groups said their parents strongly supported their pursuit of an education, the parents of Groups One and Two students stressed that an education was the only means to achieve social and economic mobility. The parents of Group Three students had no doubt that their children would attend college, it was only to be expected.

Lopez (1995) approached the issue of Hispanic academic success from a slightly different angle. He administered a questionnaire to one hundred Mexican American students attending a small public college in California. The survey asked about the participants' perceptions of five challenges that might keep them from finishing their degrees. He found that the biggest areas of concern were financial difficulties, domestic responsibilities, academic discouragement, and gender and racial discrimination. The most often cited resource for dealing with these problems were individuals who helped the students meet the challenges.

This body of research firmly establishes that Hispanic students from even the lowest economic classes are capable of reaching the highest levels of academic success. Some of the factors that fostered the participants' academic success were non-stereotypical mothers who worked outside the home and demonstrated a work ethic that valued persistence and hard work. Opportunities to attend highly integrated or mostly white schools and access to a curriculum for college-bound students during the K-12 school years allowed the participants to demonstrate their academic capabilities in a

majority culture setting. These integrated environments also allowed the respondents to develop a bicultural persona in which they were equally at home in and Hispanic or in a white cultural setting.

A careful examination of the home lives of the participants showed that many of the same elements that are believed to foster white, middle class children's academic success were present in these Hispanic homes, albeit in a slightly different form. For example, there was a high degree of family literacy in the Mexican American homes but the literature was often in Spanish. Most of the respondents said that they knew their parents strongly supported and encouraged their academic success even though the parents did not often visit with teachers at school or participate in parent/teacher organizations. These studies demonstrate how important it is for the school community to look beyond the perceived deficit in a Hispanic child's life and value the strengths the child brings to school even if they take a different form than is generally expected.

Three studies that focused specifically on Latinas enrolled in graduate school or who had already graduated with a master's or Ph.D. are Thorne (1995), Longo (1995), and Kitano (1998). Thorne (1995) in the New York area and Lango (1995) in California both investigated the motivation and characteristics of Latinas who pursue graduate level degrees. Thorne examined the impact of sex role traditionalism and fear of success on the achievement motivation of sixty-three Latinas who had either earned a doctorate or were doctoral candidates. She used multiple regression analysis to analyze the data generated by the respondents' answers to the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire, the Sex-Role Traditionalism Scale, the Fear of Success Scale, and the

Personal Unconcern Achievement Motive Scale of the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire. Thorne found that high achieving Latinas were motivated by a multitude of internal and external factors, including social support, economic realities, and personal characteristics and coping strategies. The study also found that these women exhibited less traditional sex-role behaviors in the work place than they did at home and that their fear of failure was low.

Longo's study (1995) compared two cohorts of Latinas. Students in the first group were enrolled in a graduate program in a California university; the second group's members were seniors in the same university. Longo's goal was to determine which characteristics contribute to Mexican American women continuing their studies into graduate school. Her findings were that Latina graduate students tend to be older, more mature students committed to education. These students come from traditional families and have been assimilated into the mainstream dominant society. Strong support from the family is necessary for these women to take on the non-traditional behaviors, manners, and attitudes that are often at odds with their cultural heritage.

Kitano's 1998 study of fifteen gifted Latina women was part of a larger national study (Kitano, 1994/95; Kitano and Perkins, 1991) that investigated the variables affecting the lifetime achievement of ethnically diverse gifted women. Data was gathered from both the participants and their mothers or siblings about the personal characteristics the women had exhibited during their K-12 schooling. Only six of the women had exhibited high academic success throughout their school career; nine of the women were considered to be average students. Ten or more of the women recounted

stories of one or more educators who had made them aware of their own high potential, had provided support for their academic achievement, had encouraged them to further their educational careers, and had offered assistance in gaining entrance to competitive high schools or colleges. Participants' whose academic lives did not receive much support at home stated that praise and support from their teachers was very important to them.

Twelve of the women in the Kitano study had experienced discouraging incidents related to school. These situations included being punished for speaking Spanish at school, being tracked into low achievement or vocational tracks in high school, being refused entry into college preparatory courses, and being told by counselors that they would not able to compete in a college atmosphere. Kitano determined that the Latinas' ability to adapt their cultural strengths to meet the challenges of competing in majority culture forums was the source of much of their success. These strengths included strong interpersonal relationships, a strong sense of interdependence, their respectful treatment of others, and their belief in the primacy of education.

Kitano made four recommendations for encouraging other gifted Latinas. (1) There must be early recognition and nurturing of their abilities. (2) Educators must communicate high expectations of achievement to Latina children of all socioeconomic groups. (3) Social institutions have a responsibility to provide students with environments that are free of harassment and bias. (4) The parents of gifted Latina students must receive early and continuous advising regarding career alternatives and preparation for college, including strategies for obtaining financial aid.

Several themes consistently emerge from these studies done with high school and university level Latinas. (1) The women are often dependent of the school system to recognize and nurture their academic potential. For many women, this recognition did not come easily; they had to fight for their right to be included in college preparatory classes. (2) Family support, particularly from their mothers, was vital to Latina academic success. (3) Encouragement from teachers and mentors can support those young women whose home lives does not provide what they need. (4) Many of the women in these studies were educated in highly integrated environments which allowed them to evaluate their own academic capabilities in situations that built their self confidence about pursuing a post-secondary education. (5) Although Longo's study found that Hispanic women needed to be highly assimilated into dominant culture to be successful, this was not found to be true in the majority of the other research. One of the characteristics most common to the participants in the various studies was the ability of a participant to function successfully in both Hispanic and white society. Many of the studies' participants said that their Hispanic roots are an important element of their success.

Best Educational Practices for Hispanic Students

This section of the literature review examines the research literature that focuses on promising educational theory and practices for Hispanic students.

Cumings (1986) presented a theoretical framework for discussing the personal and institutional changes that schools would need to make to encourage more Hispanic students to stay in school. He proposed that (1) minority students' language and culture

must be incorporated into the school program (2) the minority community must be encouraged to become an integral part of the education process (3) the classroom pedagogy must create opportunities for the students to use language actively to develop their own knowledge and (4) education professionals must become advocates for minority students instead of considering the student the problem. Cummins theorized that if schools incorporated the four tenants he proposed they would help create students who were empowered not only to be successful students, but, more importantly, to be successful people.

As part of a larger project on "effective schooling," Moll (1988) reported his findings of outstanding teaching practices in two fifth grade classrooms. Both of the teachers had been identified by their administrators and peers as effective with Hispanic children. One of the teachers taught in a bilingual classroom; the other in a monolingual English classroom. Although these are elementary teachers, their strategies are applicable at any grade. The teachers shared the following characteristics. (1) They emphasized substance and content in their teaching. They assumed their students were capable and competent and they provided a challenging, creative, and intellectually rigorous curriculum. (2) They chose teaching materials that were meaningful and interesting to the students instead of using prepackaged curriculums taught in a rote fashion. (3) They presented their curriculum in a wide variety of ways and included reading and writing activities within the broader context of what was being studied. (4) The teachers encouraged their students to use their own personal experiences to make sense of the classroom content. Relevant stories from the students' lives were

incorporated into the classroom discussion. (5) The teachers assumed authority over the curriculum because they had a conscious political strategy. Using sound educational reasoning, they convinced their principals to allow them develop the curriculum that would be meet the needs of their children. The outcome was that the children in their classes were scoring at or above grade level on the school district's standardized testing measurements.

Trueba and Bartolome (1997) urged educators to move away from the idea that Latino children needed to be "fixed." Instead, they suggested that teachers need to be taught to combine exemplary teaching practices with cultural and linguistic codes that were appropriate for Hispanic students. Their suggestions included using heterogeneous learning groups so that low-status children were not segregated from other more academically successful children and to capitalizing on the student's existing knowledge as well as valuing the language and life experiences of the children in their classrooms.

Romo (1996) reported on a four-year longitudinal study of one hundred Hispanic youth whose school district had designated as at risk for dropping out of high school. Romo's study followed the students from the age fifteen to nineteen years old. In addition to the students, the researchers interviewed parents, teachers, school administrators, and police officers. Field work included visiting the homes, clubs, arcades, malls, and apartment complexes where the students congregated. Based on her findings, Romo makes the following eight recommendations to increase the chances for Hispanic students to be academically successful. (1) Teachers need better training to meet the wide variety of student needs. The curriculum should put the learning of the

students before the "essential elements" of the course curriculum. (2) All school personnel must be able to describe in detail the type and level of skills that all students need to graduate from high school and be able to communicate those expectation to parents. (3) School personnel must learn how to give parents useful advice about how to keep their children in school and on the pathway to graduation. (Romo recommends a seven strategy approach for parents.) (4) Attending classes should be more rewarding than skipping school. Students need to be grouped into "schools within schools" so that teachers get to know the students better and students have an opportunity to feel part of the school community. (5) Schools should reward not only students who earn high grades, but also students who show persistence and demonstrate hard work. (6.) School personnel must learn to behave in a respectful manner to all parents. (7) Schools should help students draw a clearer connection between school success and better paying jobs. (8) Schools should be more flexible so that low income students can work and go to school.

In her literature review aimed at the best practices for keeping Latinas from leaving school, Romo (1998) suggested that school programs should promote self-efficacy, self-confidence, and high academic expectations. She also recognized Academic Outreach, Upward Bound, Community of Scholars, and the Bridge as examples of successful empowerment programs that helped improve students' academic performance and encouraged them to set academic goals and work towards achieving them.

Romo (1999) presents a compendium of best practices for educating Hispanic children. The book focuses on positive changes school staff, families, communities, and students can make to increase the potential for academic success. Each chapter uses a different viewpoint to examine issues such as culture, language, gender, family/community, and the social and political context of the students' lives. For each topic there is an applicable literature review and suggestions to educators on the best practices to use in meeting these challenges. A final chapter lists the names and addresses of different organizations that provide resources for educating Hispanic students.

Parades Scribner (1995) presented a series of research-based educational practices for Hispanic high school students. Her review of the literature found that most effective way to keep Hispanic students in high school was to make their schooling a more engaging and collaborative experience. She suggests that teachers should be personally committed to the advancement of each child. Schools should eliminate ability grouping, and create peer tutoring opportunities. Paredes Scribner notes that allowing teachers to remain with the same group of students for several consecutive years enabled the students to form bonds with their teachers and created opportunities for teachers to become knowledgeable about the instructional, social, and emotional needs of each student.

Other important findings described by Parades Scribner were that schools which adequately serve their Hispanic students have in common several characteristics. These traits included providing a culturally supportive climate for the students and parents and training and staff support for teachers as they plan programs for students learning English

and there is a coordinated effort between the Bilingual department and the other academic departments of the campus.

Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes-Scribner (1999) investigated eight high performing schools with majority Hispanic populations looking for the external, internal, and criterion performance conditions that made a difference in student learning. In addition to interviewing the "usual suspects" of teachers, students, and administrators, these researchers interviewed the community and business leaders, the school board members and their staffs, and the custodial and cafeteria workers. This study found that high performing Hispanic schools exhibit a clear and coherent mission that is shared by all the members of the learning community. The schools in this study proactively involved the students' parents through personal contact, created inviting learning environments, provided both formal and informal involvement at school and home, and built on the Mexican American culture, values and experiences. The pedagogy of the schools studied is culturally responsive and all teachers are strongly committed to the idea that all children can succeed at high levels. The curriculum is driven by the needs of the students and often includes thematic units, cooperative learning strategies, peer and cross-age tutoring, and language support for students whose limited English skills interfere with their ability to understand the content. The three most common findings across the eight schools were that the schools' policies placed emphasis on meaning and understanding, that mathematical skills were embedded in context, and that connections were made between the subject areas being taught and life outside of the school.

In *Hispanic Education in the United States: Raices y Alas* (2001), Dr. Eugene Garcia, the former director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs of the U.S. Department of Education, presents an excellent overview of the state of education for Hispanic students in the United States. He stresses that schools serving Hispanic populations must promote a challenging and integrated curriculum, teaching methods that enhance the students' learning, and sustained communication with the parents. In the chapter on adolescents Garcia discusses several programs that have proven to be successful in keeping Hispanic middle and high school students engaged in school, including ALAS and AVANCE. In the chapter on preparing Hispanic students for a post-secondary education, Garcia reminds educators that the emphasis must be on consistent, intensive, and well articulated programs that support the student throughout their secondary years. Even students who seem to be on track for graduation and a college career must be monitored and supported

The PACE Report (1997) was commissioned by the University of California Board of Regents to examine strategies that would bring more disadvantaged and minority students into the college pipeline. The section on K-12 education presented the following conclusions. (1) Strategically timed programs for minority students provided an important bridge to higher education. (2) A comprehensive approach to providing support for the students is more effective than single component strategies. (3) The intervention must be sustained over time and the programs work best when they are well-integrated with K-12 schools instead of operating independently or on the margins.

Flores-Gonzales (2002) used role-identity theory to explain that students who develop a "school kid" instead of a "street kid" identity are the most likely students to graduate from high school. Based on the case studies of twenty-three students and ten former students from Hernandez High School in Chicago, Illinois, the author explained that for students to develop a positive school identity they must receive rewards and recognition for their accomplishments. They need to form close and warm relationships with their teachers and other school kids. They must be encouraged to think positively about their future. She offers the following six recommendations to facilitate the develop of a "school kid" identity. (1) Schools need to set clear and consistent standards, rules, and expectations for both academic and disciplinary behaviors that are applied fairly across the student body regardless of race/ethnicity, ability, class, gender, or language skills. (2) Schools should make each student feel as though he or she is important, not invisible, and students should be treated with respect and dignity. (3) Schools should provide opportunities for students to develop numerous and deep relationships with their teachers and peers. Students should have opportunities to interact with teachers outside the classroom and get involved with their peers in academic and social activities. (4) Schools should redefine achievement by minimizing the level of competition for grades, for inclusion in the extracurricular programs, and teacher attention and provide alternative ways for more students to become involved in the life of the school. (5) Schools should help students develop multiple identities connected to school. This can be accomplished by having extracurricular activities that appeal to different types of students, not only athletics or the band. Participation in these activities should not be

dependent on grades or skill level. (6) Schools must help students construct ambitious but realistic visions for their future, help them set academic goals, and teach them the concrete steps they need to follow to realize that goal.

Recommendations

The recommendations for effective educational practices for Hispanic students are very consistent and straightforward. First, schools need to value the language and culture of Hispanic students. One way to demonstrate that validation is through open, respectful, and ongoing communications with the parents that actively engages them in the schooling of their child. Second, it is the school's responsibility to be proactive in reaching out to the parents because traditionally Hispanic parents have not felt welcome in their children's schools. In addition, the school must present a curriculum based on the assumption that Hispanic students are capable of rigorous learning challenges instead of trying to remediate their assumed intellectual deficits. A model curriculum would be meaningful, interesting, and incorporate the cultural and life experiences of Hispanic students. Teachers of Hispanic children need to be strongly committed to creating a positive learning environment for their students. They should be adequately trained to use a variety of teaching strategies that will accomodate the learning styles of their students. None of these recommendations is beyond the scope of a committed school administration and staff. The important question then becomes, "Why haven't these recommendations been instituted in all schools that serve Hispanic students?"

My review of the literature on Hispanic academic success reveals that there are some important gaps in the research on this topic. For example, there is a serious lack of research that focuses on Hispanic students who are multi-generational Americans who are neither gifted or learning disabled and who have minimal Spanish language skills. This population of students, the "regulars," as they are referred to in the Foreign Language Magnet School need to be studied to discover what makes education work for them. Such research should also examine why Hispanic females are consistently out-performing Hispanic males at every level of education.

Hispanic academic success is a daily reality in schools across the country - a fact that needs to be documented and shared with the entire educational community. Successful educational practices that promote academic success for Hispanic students should be catalogued in the research databases in a manner that will make them readily search-accessible. The dominant paradigm for educating Hispanic students must change from dropout prevention to the promotion of academic success.

Chapter Three will describe the research methodology used to complete the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used in the dissertation as well as in a pilot study completed earlier. I used qualitative methods in both studies to discover factors of success for Latina students at Major University.

Pilot Study

The pilot study for my dissertation research was conducted during the fall semester of 2000. The question guiding the research was "What role did mentors play in the behaviors, attitudes, and college aspirations of undergraduate Latinas enrolled in a selective university?"

To develop a pool of participants, I requested from the Database Coordinator in the Registrar's office, a list of all the Latinas from San Antonio, Texas, who were enrolled at Major University. Due to confidentiality restrictions, the list provided could not be sorted by ethnicity or gender, consequently the list contained all the names of students from Bexar County, Texas, who were enrolled at MU. Using a zip code map of San Antonio, I matched the attendance areas of the high schools in San Antonio ISD with the corresponding zip codes. I then went through the appropriate zip codes and highlighted all the obvious Latina names, which revealed twenty-seven Latina students from the SAISD attendance area that were enrolled in Major University. I contacted each

of the identified women and recorded the name of the high school she had attended. I asked each woman if she knew of other women from her high school who were attending MU and thereby I was able to identify two additional names for the list. Of the twenty-nine women contacted, fifteen had attended private high schools in San Antonio. Of the remaining fourteen women, seven had attended the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) housed at Henry Trueba High School.

I arranged to interview three of the women from the list who had attended a SAISD high school. Two of the interviewees are sisters who had attended the FLMP; the third participant was from another magnet program in a SAISD. The sisters were from a Mexican American family who has lived in Texas for several generations. The third participant was an immigrant from Guatemala who attended school in SAISD from grades eight through twelve. I interviewed each participant in an audio-taped session lasting approximately sixty minutes. The tapes were then professionally transcribed.

Several themes appeared from the interviews. First, all three of the participants were from single parent, low socio-economic households. All of the women had been identified as gifted before entering high school and each had participated in at least one minority empowerment program during her high school years. All three of them could identify specific teachers who had taken a special interest in them and provided extra attention to their needs. Each of the participants had been involved in a number of extra-curricular activities throughout their school career.

A second data source for the pilot study was a focus group. The fourteen Latinas identified from the MU's Registrar's list as having graduated from SAISD high schools

were invited to be a part of the focus group. Seven of them agreed to participate. The night before the session I contacted each of the seven women and confirmed that they would be present for the group session. At the time of the meeting, only four of them showed up. The session was held in the education building at MU from 10:00 AM until about 12:30 PM on a Saturday morning. Each group member was paid $30. for her participation.

The focus group was conducted using the Interactive Qualitative Research (IQR) method. IQR is valuable when working with traditionally marginalized groups such as Latinas because it allows their individual and group voices to be heard, reducing both the perceptual and influential roles of the researcher in collecting and coding the data. I have used this method twice before and found it to have integrity and reliability because it allows the participants to develop a sense of ownership about the research process to which they are contributing. Because they generate and code the data themselves, they are able to discuss the different facets and nuances of their shared reality.

In the first phase of the IQR process, the participants generated data about the people and experiences that motivated them to want to attend to college. This data was categorized into similar groups or "affinities." The participants were then asked to examine the affinity groups and describe their relationship to each other. The final analysis of the affinity groups revealed the following themes. The first theme "A person's family's attitudes towards school determines the student's attitude toward the school community," was the only one that was independent of school related behaviors. The next three themes were interconnected and each affected the outcome of the other

themes. First, the school determines which teachers and extra-curricular activities the student will be able to experience. Second, school-related activities such as classes, clubs, and other extra-curricular activities provide opportunities to develop mentoring relationships with adults. Finally, the classes and activities a student is involved in largely determine who the student's friends will be.

From the pilot study, I learned several things that facilitated the design of the dissertation study. First, I learned that it would be necessary to screen the participants for their immigrant status. A number of research studies have shown that there are substantial differences in school between recent immigrants and minority students present in the United States for two or more generations (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Jacobi, 1991; Matute-Bianachi, 1991; Trueba, and Bartolome, 1999; Suarez-Orosco and Suarez-Orosco, 1995). Second, it became obvious that the way I defined a mentoring relationship was different from who the participants thought of as a mentor. I assumed that any teacher who provided nurturing and information about getting to college would be identified by the participants as a mentor. When I asked the participants to identify what the term "mentor" meant to them, however, they described another woman, probably older, who would help them understand how to live in a bicultural world - someone who had successfully combined her Latina culture with the world of academic success. Because the purpose of the dissertation study was to focus on what teachers and other school personnel had done to motivate or facilitate the participant towards college, I chose to eliminate the word "mentor" from the research question and replace it with "school experiences and personnel."

The most important contribution of the pilot study was the understanding that I needed to limit my participant group to only those women who had attended the FLMP. As I worked with the focus group participants I realized that combining the experiences of students from different schools and different magnet programs would make the analysis too broad. The FLMP participant group allowed me to focus on students who all had been members of the same magnet program for seven years of their education. In addition, because their ages ranged over a five-year span, I was able to examine how the program had worked for approximately twelve years. This participant group made it possible to examine in both depth and breadth how the school had facilitated their academic success. The pilot study was a valuable tool for shaping and defining my dissertation research. It allowed me to refine my research question so that the data generated would be more likely to give clear answers to the question: **What role did K-12 school experiences and personnel play in the academic success of Latinas enrolled in a selective university?**

Dissertation Study Design

Using a phenomenological approach as defined by Patton (1990), I conducted interviews and observations and used written documents to investigate "the structure and essence" (p. 69) of the role of the school in the participants' academic success. To understand the participants' experience from an emic perspective, my primary data source was a series of open-ended interviews that provided opportunities for the study's participants to express their points of view without being constrained by questionnaire

categories (Patton, 1990, p.24). I collected, verified, and clarified additional data through a number of phone calls and emails to the participants. Over the two-year time period that the participants and I communicated, we developed a sense of open communication and mutual respect. This level of discourse made it possible for me to construct detailed educational biographies of the women giving special emphasis to the important people and experiences that enriched their academic lives.

Patton (1990) asserts that a qualitative design unfolds as the fieldwork unfolds that is, the design partially emerges as the study occurs (p.61). As I became more familiar with the participants' stories, I interviewed teachers and other school personnel who were identified by the participants as having had an impact on their educational lives. Additionally, I visited both the middle and high school that the participants had attended, and I drove through the neighborhoods and took pictures of the homes where they had grown up. These experiences helped me to add depth and texture to the biographies and provided opportunities for me to gain a deeper understanding of the context of the participants' schooling.

To address the purpose of the study and to provide focus to the emerging research design and methodology, I based the interviews on the following questions:

1. What role did school experiences such as classes taken or participation in school related activities play in motivating the student to attend college?

2. What role did the school community play in providing information that facilitated the student's college aspirations?

3. What role did teachers and other school related personnel play in motivating the student to attend college?

4. What role did teachers and other school personnel play in providing information that facilitated the student's college aspirations?

5. What role did extra-curricular activities play in furthering the student's goal to attend college?

Settings

Major University and the San Antonio Independent School District were chosen as the sites for the research because of the contrast between the two learning environments. MU is a selective university; SAISD serves primarily low income, minority students. A Latina who overcame the inherent obstacles of an inner-city San Antonio high school and made a successful transition to the academic world of MU would be a good model of academic success. The participants of this study have demonstrated that success.

MAJOR UNIVERSITY

Major University is the academic flagship of the Major University System. Founded in 1883, it has grown from one building, eight teachers, and 221 students to the largest university in the nation. In 2002, MU had approximately 50,000 students; 2700 faculty members, including several Nobel laureates and Pulitzer Prize winners; and 17,000 staff members (FACTS, 2003, p. 1). Accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, MU is one of the sixty three leading research universities in the United States and Canada. The National Research Council recognized that seven of the doctoral programs at Major University rank in the top ten of the nation (p. 2).

The student body is drawn from all 254 Texas counties; all fifty states of the United States, and from 115 foreign countries. In the 2000-2001 academic year, the ethnic breakdown was sixty-five percent white, 13.9 percent Hispanic, 3.5 percent black, 13.7 percent Asian American, and 3.4 percent other. (FACTS, 2003). Of the 871 National Merit Scholars attending MU, 245 were in the 2000 freshman class (p.6). Acceptable SAT and ACT scores differ for the various colleges within MU, but the suggested minimum SAT I score is 1200 and the ACT composite is 24 (Adair, Peterson, and et.al. 2000). As stipulated by the Texas Education Code 51.803, any first time freshman who graduated in the top ten percent of his or her high school graduating class is automatically eligible for admission to the university. Estimated costs for one year of undergraduate studies is $9,000 for a student living at home and $14,000 for an off-campus resident. The MU grants more doctor's degrees to Hispanics than any other university in the nation (p.6).

SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

San Antonio, Texas, has provided a public school system for the children of the city since 1854. The system became an independent school district in 1899; it received a state charter in 1903. As of 2003, San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) is the ninth largest district in Texas and the second largest school district of the fifteen located in Bexar County. Eight high schools, seventeen middle schools, and sixty-four elementary schools serve the district's approximately 57,000 students. The ethnic make up of the student body is 86.5 percent Hispanic; 9.3 percent black; and 3.8 percent white. Approximately twenty percent of the students are identified as Limited English

Proficiency and 90.3 percent are economically disadvantaged (Facts and Figures, 2002). Although SAISD student scores have shown steady gains since the first Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test was administered in 1994, in 2002 only 73.3 percent of the students taking the exit level exam passed all three sections of the test, as compared to the statewide average of 85.3 percent (Facts and Figures, 2002).

The Texas Education Agency publishes an accountability rating for each of the schools of the state based primarily on the TAAS scores earned by the students of the school, attendance and dropout rates, and other performance criteria. Schools can earn a rating of exemplary, recognized, academically acceptable, or low-performing. In the 2002 campus ratings, SAISD had one high school and nine elementary schools that earned the highest rating of exemplary; five high schools, three middle schools, and twenty-five elementary schools earned the recognized rating. The 1999-2000 academic year was the district's first time to receive a recognized rating for one of it's high schools (Facts and Figures, 2002).

Texas also requires that each high school provide data on the mean ACT and SAT scores earned by the students who took the tests during their senior year. Across SAISD, approximately sixty-one percent of the 2001 class took these two college entrance exams. The mean SAT score in the district was 803 as compared to the state average of 987; the mean ACT score in SAISD was 16.5 as compared to the 20.2 average state score (Texas Education Agency, 2001 – 2002)

Participants

Based on the knowledge gained from the pilot study, I determined that the optimum participant group would be Mexican American female graduates of the Foreign Language Magnet Program who were currently enrolled at Major University. Using the list of twenty-nine Latinas from SAISD that I had created for the pilot study, I identified the names of the women who had attended the FLMP. I also attended two meetings in September of 2000 at the Major University Student Affairs Building, one meeting was Kappa Delta Chi, a Latina service sorority, the other was with MU's Hispanic Affairs Council. At both meetings, I explained my research study and asked those present to explain the research project to others in their organizations that might fit the criteria of my study. At the Kappa Delta Chi meeting I was introduced to a young woman who had graduated from the FLMP and who identified herself as Latina, though her surname sounded Italian. To make sure I did not miss any other possible candidates for the study, I asked each of the women I contacted from the university list if they knew of any other Latinas from their high school who were currently enrolled at Major University. I discovered two more names by this method.

At this point I had identified a total of seven women who met the criteria of the study. I contacted each of them and asked if they would like to be participants. Six of them agreed to do so, the seventh declined due to shyness. The six participants in this study are Mexican American females born in San Antonio, Texas, who attended SAISD elementary schools and were accepted into the Foreign Language Magnet Program as sixth graders. All six remained in the program through high school graduation and were

enrolled in Major University at the time of the study. While in elementary school all of the participants had been identified as gifted and talented according to SAISD standards. They each were involved in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and none was ever considered a discipline problem. Five of the participants grew up in single-parent homes; three of the women are sisters. Only one of the participants is from a middle class background; the others are from the working class.

The following summaries introduce the participants individually. A more complete record of their educational biographies is located in the Appendix.

Vanessa Perez is the oldest of the three Perez sisters. During high school she studied Japanese, participated in the Henry Trueba High School marching band, and took elective classes in the Radio, Television, and Film Program. Vanessa graduated from high school in 1996. She has funded her education at Major University by working part-time and by securing a variety of loans, grants, and scholarships.

Cecilia Perez is the middle sister of the Perez family. She also studied Japanese as a second language, was on the flag team of the Trueba marching band, and worked at a restaurant throughout high school. She graduated in 1997 in the top ten percent of her class and is majoring in Geology at Major University. She has continued to work during college and has financed her education with loans, grants, and scholarships.

Casey Perez is the youngest of the Perez sisters. She chose German as her second language in middle school and switched to Russian in high school. She competed in a number of activities in high school and was first chair in the percussion section of the UIL All Region Marching Band two years in a row. She was the only female in the All

Region percussion section. She was drum captain of the Trueba marching band during her senior year. In statewide Russian language competitions, she finished in the top five contestants two years in a row. She also worked in a restaurant while in high school. She is attending Major University as a government major with a minor in Russian. She has financed her education by working part-time and with grants, scholarships, and loans.

Lydia Mendez is a studio art major at Major University. She studied French in the FLMP and was deeply involved in SAY SI´, an after-school art program throughout high school. Her two older siblings also graduated from Major University. She financed her education with grants, loans, and scholarships, as well as part-time work.

Angela Hernandez was ranked number three out of 436 students in her 1999 graduating class. She was the only female in the top five students. She studied Latin as her second language, marched in the high school band, and was involved in a variety of school and church related activities. She is an engineering major at Major University and was made a member of the Engineering Honor Society during her freshman year at MU.

Gisella Garcia graduated from the FLMP in 1996; her second language was Japanese. During high school she was involved in the Academic Decathalon and was a member of the swim team for two years.

PARTICIPANT DIFFERENCES

After I developed extensive educational biographies of each participant, it became clear that there were two distinct sub-groups within the sample. The first group was made up of students who had minimal social capital resources when they entered school.

Because of family issues, the Perez sisters entered school without solid connections to their extended family, a church or other social organization, or any other type of social support system, such as friendships outside the family. Although their mother often expressed a desire that her daughters attend college, she had little practical knowledge or advice that could help them achieve this goal. According to Vanessa, the oldest sister, the children were almost totally dependent on school resources to develop funds of institutional knowledge or support that would generate the social capital necessary to further their dreams of a college education. These participants will be identified in the findings as the Low Social Capital (LSC) group.

The second group was made up of students whose greater levels of family support from made their academic success more likely. Lydia Mendez is from a two-parent home and has two older siblings who graduated from Major University. Angie Hernandez has a fairly extensive support system provided by her mother's employers. Even though Gisella Garcia's father did not live in the home, both her mother and father are college graduates.

By comparing the impact of school experiences and school personnel on the two groups, I was able to see the role the school community plays in the lives of low social capital students, as well as in the lives of those students with greater access to social capital connections. For the three students with greater resources, the school community functioned as it does in many middle class families. The school served as a conduit through which institutional resources, privileges, and opportunities were combined with other resources from the family. For the Perez sisters, school was their only lifeline to

the institutional resources they needed to generate the social capital necessary for academic success.

Confidentiality

As required by the Major University Institutional Review Board, each participant signed a Consent to Interview form before I began her first interview. After the interviews were audio-recorded, the tapes and transcripts of the tapes were locked in a file cabinet in my home. All field notes and other correspondence between myself and the participants were also kept in the locked file cabinet. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, each woman has been assigned a pseudonym in the report of the study. The names of the schools they attended have been changed, and the school personnel interviewed are identified by their initial only.

Data Collection

Each participant was interviewed at least twice, in sessions lasting from one to three hours. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including the Education Building at MU, over meals in restaurants, and at other mutually convenient locations. The follow-up conversations were conducted in person, by telephone, or by email. The number and length of the follow-up conversations varied depending on the availability of the individual participant. During and after the interviews and conversations, I made extensive field notes about the participant's responses. Some of the audio tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriber; I transcribed some as well.

At the first interview with each participant, I began by explaining why I was doing this research. I told them about my time as a teacher in San Antonio and the program I had created to encourage Latinas to attend college. Establishing my long-term interest and concern about these issues helped create a foundation for our talks. I asked the participants to begin with a chronological accounting of their earliest memories of learning. From there we constructed a history of their educational experiences, giving special focus to important events or people at each stage of their educational career. The format of the interviews allowed the participants to describe, reflect on, and assign their own meanings to their educational experiences. This interviewing technique was developed by Louise Spindler (Spindler, 2000) as the Expressive Autobiographic Interview. The purpose of this technique is to elicit materials concerning a person's particular cultural knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes concerning their perception of the world around them. Spindler (2000) and Patton (1990) have noted that data of this nature could not be secured directly through the use of questionnaires or structured questioning, because responses to such instruments often reflected the ideal (what the informant thought the interviewer would want to hear) rather than the actual beliefs of the informant.

As the participants' stories developed, opportunities arose for me to ask about parental involvement in the participant's educational process, as well as the school's role. From these recollections I was able to construct a narrative of the participants' educational history and home life.

The second interview with each girl was a form of member checking as well as an opportunity to gather more data. These interviews were usually conducted over a meal, or in another informal setting; they lasted about an hour or more. The participant and I read through the narrative together, checking for accuracy and completeness. Reading their narrative often stimulated the participant to remember further thoughts and stories about their educational experiences. I made field notes were made about these conversations. As I collected new data, I rewrote the narratives to reflect the changes. Several times I telephoned participants to check on specific bits of information for further understanding about something that was said in the interviews. These conversations lasted anywhere from five or six minutes to a half hour or more. I took notes were during and after the calls.

In addition to the interviews with the participants, I interviewed in person, by telephone, or through email correspondence most of the teachers whom the participants identified as having made a significant impact in their lives. Unfortunately, several of the teachers had retired and were no longer available for discussion. The questions guiding these interviews were:

1. What do you think you do in your classroom that might motivate students to want to go to college?

2. Do you have a conscious intention to motivate you students towards college attendance?

3. Do you provide materials or resources to facilitate your students' access to a college education?

The responses to these questions made it possible for me to compare what the participants thought the teachers did that was helpful to them and what the teachers thought they had done that was valuable to the student.

In order to understand the environment of Foreign Language Magnet program, I visited both the middle school where five of the participants had attended and Henry Trueba High School. On each campus I spent time taking field notes and talking with students and teachers about the FLMP. I spent time in the neighborhoods where the participants grew up, investigating the resources available to them such as public libraries, the student's school bus routes, and the general economic conditions of the areas. These activities allowed me to understand several things. First, I was amazed by how far several of the participants had to travel by city and school bus each day to attend the magnet program. Second, I was able to confirm that all but one of the participants had grown up in homes that were very humble in size and style. Third, I was able to observe the considerable degree to which gang influence was evident in the neighborhoods through graffiti and unsupervised youths loitering about. Because of this field work, I was able to have a better understanding of the context of the participants' lives.

Data Analysis

This study has two separate components: six individual case studies that represent stories of Latina academic success and a cross-case analysis of the six cases. Patton (1990) describes the case study as a report that takes the reader into the life of a person,

group, or a program in order to search for "patterns and themes within a particular setting or across a case" (p. 384). He stresses that the record should be able to stand alone and allow the reader to understand the case as a "unique, holistic entity" (pg. 387), and that the cases should be comprehensive and include a multitude of "dimensions, factors, variables, and categories woven together into an idiographic framework" (pg. 387).

Using Patton's model (1990) for constructing case studies, I began by assembling the raw case data of the interview tapes and assigning each interviewee a color-code that was used to identify any data that was related to her. When an interview was completed, either I, or a professional stenographer transcribed it. Each transcription document was line numbered starting with the number one for the first line and continuing sequentially until the end of the interview.

In the Emergent Stage, or first round of data analysis, I looked for common categories of information. I identified five major categories: (1) Personal Information, (2) Special Teachers, (3) Special Programs, (4) Administration, and (5) Extracurricular Activities. Each of these categories was assigned a color: green for Personal Information, blue for Special Teachers, yellow for Special Programs, pink for Administration, and purple for Extracurricular.

Going back to the interviews, I identified segments of the interview transcripts that corresponded to the five major categories. I cut the transcripts into category segments and pasted them on the appropriate colored index cards. For example, I cut from Lydia's interview transcript any comments she made about her teachers and pasted on blue index cards. I numbered the cards consecutively using a marker in the color

assigned to the participant (Lydia's was orange.). Each category started with the number one and was a complete set. Using this arrangement, it was possible for me to reconstruct the interview in the order that it was recorded using the transcription line numbers and to build a record of all the statements made by a participant about a particular category by grouping the color coded cards together.

While trying to find the most effective way to present each participant's story, I wrote the narratives both thematically and chronologically. I decided to use the chronological method to report their stories because it enabled me to construct a more complete picture from the data gathered. The narratives range in length from fifteen to twenty-five pages and describe a rich, holistic account of the educational history of each participant, highlighting the important people, events, and opportunities that furthered their goal of college attendance.

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

When the six narratives were complete, I was able to begin the cross-case analysis. Returning to the data cards, I grouped them into the five categories from the Emergent Coding phase (Personal Information; Special Teachers, Special Programs, Extracurricular Activities, and Administration). This was very easy to do because of the color-coded cards. In the Axial Coding, or second phase of data analysis, I examined each category to find sub-categories within them. During this process the following sub-categories emerged.

1. Personal Information was divided into two sub-categories:

A. Home Life - data pertaining to family demographics, attitudes towards schooling, and other background information necessary to build a thick description of the family life of the participants.

B. School Career - data specifically about events and people that were school related. The category of Administration was absorbed into School Career.

2. Special Programs and Extracurricular Programs were combined and re-divided into three subcategories:

A. Academic programs are those classes constructed by the school district to deliver a particular curriculum, i.e. the Gifted Program and the Foreign Language Magnet Program.

B. Extracurricular programs are those provided through elective classes or such as athletics, band, or sports, and activities such clubs, or honor societies.

C. Empowerment programs are sanctioned by the school district, but are funded and staffed by people who are not employees of the school district. The primary purpose of these programs is to increase the educational opportunities for low-income and minority students. Examples are the Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio; Project Stay; and University Outreach. Student participation in these programs is voluntary.

Special Teachers and Administration were combined into one category.

I managed the third level of data analysis, or Theoretical Coding by creating a spreadsheet on accounting ledger paper for each category and sub-category. Beginning with the category Home Life, I listed each participant's name going down the left-hand side of the paper. Each column going across the top of the paper was labeled with an attribute of the participant's home life. For instance, some of the columns' names were Mother's level of Education, Mother's Occupation and Father's occupation. Then the appropriate data was recorded in the proper place for each participant. On the Special Teacher spreadsheet, I listed the teacher identified as influential to the participant on the vertical axis, and listed the characteristics of the teacher on the horizontal axis.

Once I completed the spread sheets, it was possible to see which attributes or characteristics had relevance in more than one participant's life. For instance, the most common characteristic among the teachers who had been identified by the participants as having made a significant impact in their life was that each teacher used resources from his or her own life to make an educational point. In some cases these resources included an exchange student who was living with the teacher, personal photographic slides about places the teacher traveled, or stories about the teacher's own journey towards a college education. Prior to creating the spreadsheet, I would not have identified personal stories as the most important attribute.

When all of the spreadsheets were completed, I organized my data into chunks that were small enough to enable me to think and write about the findings in a meaningful way.

Researcher Statement

My interest in the topic of Latino/a academic success began while I was teaching in San Antonio, Texas. For eighteen years I taught in schools where the student populations were primarily low socio-economic Hispanic students. In addition to my teaching experiences, I was deeply involved in social justice issues in San Antonio. These issues included working for school board candidates that seemed to be committed to reforming the education system and working to pass bond issues that would provide better city services for the poorer parts of San Antonio. Over time, I came to be accepted into community life of the neighborhoods in which I taught. Through my interactions with my students and their families, I developed a deep appreciation for the struggles my students encountered as they attempted to become educated in the public school system.

While teaching middle school, I developed and taught a leadership and self esteem program for eighth grade girls. The majority of girls in the program were students who showed some academic promise but were not performing well in school. One of the primary goals for the program was to make college attendance a conceptual reality for my students. During the four years I operated the program I saw the difference it could make in the life of students when they were exposed to direct information about going to college. One of the success stories from the program is a young woman who graduated from UT Austin, December, 2001. She is currently finishing a Master's Degree in Business at UT San Antonio. Being a part of this young lady's life since she was in the seventh grade and watching her growth over the past eight years was the inspiration for my research question.

I have conducted three other research projects that focused on Latino/as. In 1997, I collected a series of oral histories of Latinas who had been involved in the social justice movements of San Antonio. In 1999, I was a participant-observer of Mexican American high school students from Laredo, Texas, on a seven day horseback trip through New Mexico and Arizona. The purpose of the study was to observe the way the students learned about art from a famous Mexican American artist. In 2001, I was part of a research project in an inner-city high school located in Houston, Texas. There I conducted a focus group with twelve Mexican American and African American junior and senior level high school girls that explored the factors of their academic success. All of these experiences have made me more attuned to the subtexts of my participants' stories. In addition, these studies have sharpened my skills as a researcher.

Because there were underlying subtexts in the participants' stories that I as a White researcher could not always understand, I spoke many times with several of my Mexican American friends who had grown up and attended schools in San Antonio. Through them, I have developed a deeper understanding of what it meant to be a Mexican American child in the public schools of San Antonio, as well as cultural knowledge about the different neighborhoods and customs of San Antonio.

Validity

MEMBER CHECKING

Each participant was given an opportunity to review her narrative and make corrections or additions to it. In each instance, the participants seemed to be emotionally

moved by seeing their story in print. As Angie Hernandez said, "I didn't realize I had accomplished so much. It's a lot more impressive when it is written down." I have not received any negative feedback about the narratives from the participants.

TRIANGULATION

I triangulated the findings of my study through the technique of "triangulation of sources" (Patton, 1990). As a means of verifying details or adding other perspectives, I interviewed seven teachers and one high school counselor who were identified by the participants as having been important to their academic growth. I interviewed the oldest sister of the Mendez family because she is also a MU graduate. Conversations with SAISD district level personnel provided information about the Multilingual Program and the SAISD guidelines for being accepted into the Gifted Program. I examined SAISD documents about the Multilingual Program and Brackenridge High School. Documents from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website provided important information about SAISD and individual school's demographics. I used documents and websites produced by the empowerment programs to gain a further understanding of their missions and goals. I visited and spoke with the University Outreach coordinator and the Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP) founder and director in San Antonio, Texas. Each of these people has given me new windows through which to view the educational careers of my participants. Perhaps the most unexpected source of information was gained through the University of Texas Bandorama held at the Frank Erwin Center in Austin, Texas. Seeing the UT marching band perform helped me understand the importance of the drum line in

a band. This knowledge was very useful in understanding Vanessa's and Casey's comments about their time in the Henry Trueba drum line.

While gathering background information for this study, I met both inspirational teachers and dedicated school personnel. Getting to know these people helped me understand why my participants think so highly of them. These professionals keep my faith in the public school system from dying.

PEER REVIEW AND DEBRIEFING

Throughout the dissertation process I consulted with a number of my graduate school peers to discuss and critique my work. Conversations with fellow graduate student Irma Bakenhaus helped me understand from an adult perspective what it was like to be a Latina student in the public school system of San Antonio. Julio Naboa Polanco, a longtime friend and fellow graduate student, has been invaluable in going over the narratives and talking about my findings. He was particularly helpful when the Perez brother was killed. Julio helped me understand the differences between the Perez sisters and their brother and their relationship to the school community. My friend Rosemary Livar provided incredible insights into the cultural nuances of being a "Southside," "Eastside," "Northside" Mexicana in San Antonio. Dr. Ray Allrich, who finished his dissertation and graduated while my research was in process, provided great deal of technical advice. Additionally, I have asked teachers in San Antonio with whom I taught to read my work and make constructive comments about it. Katherine Adams served as my "lay person" reader. Her job was to read my study and make sure that it was

accessible and interesting to people outside my professional field. She also completed the professional edit of the manuscript in its entirety.

The next chapter will report on the findings of my study as they relate to students with low levels of social capital when they enter school.

Chapter 4: Low Social Capital Students

The findings from this study are divided into two chapters: Chapter 4 focuses on the participants who had very little social capital when they entered school. This group will be identified as the Lower Social Capital (LSC) group. Chapter 5 focuses on those participants who entered school with greater social capital resources. These students will be identified as the More Social Capital (MSC) group. By examining the role the school played for each of these groups using network analysis theory, I was able to draw important conclusions about the ways in which the Foreign Language Magnet Program and other SAISD institutional support systems facilitated the academic success of these six Latinas.

The Lower Social Capital Group

The academic success of Vanessa, Cecilia, and Casey Perez is an excellent example of the role that "consistent access to an open, supportive, educational environment" (Garbarino, 1992) can play in the lives of children who come to school with very few social capital connections. Their involvement in the school community allowed them to develop *confianza" en confianza* relationships with school agents. These relationships served as gateways to a series of social webs that allowed the girls to develop their self esteem, to see themselves as competent and valued learners, and to access resources and services that facilitated their academic success. The sisters' younger brother, Marcos, was not invested in school or the academic life. He became involved in the life of "the street" and was shot and killed at the age of sixteen. His life

was not enriched by the *confianza* in the school community that the played such an important role in his sisters' academic success. Flores-Gonzalez (2002) provides an excellent description and analysis of the way children develop either a "school kid" identity as represented by the Perez sisters, and the "street kid" identity of their brother. Her theory is exemplified in the lives of the children of this family.

Because it is important to not romanticize the girls' accomplishments, I have included a detailed description of their home life. Understanding their personal background will enable the reader to see that the Perez sisters' achieved their academic success by overcoming incredible personal, financial, and psychological obstacles. Because Vanessa is the most articulate of the three sisters her voice is the most prominent throughout most of the chapter. Within the family dynamics, Vanessa has always been the pathfinder to opportunity for herself and her sisters. As Vanessa says,

> I tend to be the one who guides my sisters; I think its just personality. I have strong convictions of what's right and what's wrong, what I need to do, and the tenacity to stay in MU.

Raised in a small frame house in the borderland between the west and south sides of San Antonio, the Perez girls grew up in an inner-city neighborhood plagued by poverty, violence, and a lack of social services. Their family unit consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Perez, the four children, and Mrs. Perez' father. Within the family unit they dealt with domestic violence, mental abuse, and class conflicts. The family fractured when Vanessa was in middle school and Cecilia and Casey were in elementary school. As a result of the divorce, Mr. Perez physically, emotionally, and financially abandoned the family.

Necessity required Mrs. Perez to enter the workforce full time and the three younger children to transfer to an elementary school closer to their home.

Mrs. Perez, the girls' mother, grew up on the south side of San Antonio. Her father's employment at Smithson Air Force Base allowed his family to move into the economic middle class. Mrs. Perez graduated from high school and attended community college for a short time. She quit school when she got married. Mrs. Perez is not bilingual and chose to raise her children as monolingual English speakers even though their father was bilingual Spanish/English. This decision caused a great deal of strife within the family.

Originally from Laredo, Mr. Perez' family moved to the west side of San Antonio when he was in elementary school. In the cultural life of San Antonio, the distinction between being raised on the west side or the south side of the city is very important to some people. Both sections of the city are predominantly Mexican American, but Westsiders are considered by some to be the poorest of the poor, while the south side is thought to be populated by a higher class of Mexican Americans, some of whom have made inroads into a middle class lifestyle.

According to the sisters, these perceived class differences created conflict within the Perez family because Mr. Perez often accused Mrs. Perez of "trying to act white" and of "thinking that she was better than him." Perez isolated his wife and children from the extended family on both sides and would not allow them to attend the Catholic church. Because the children did not speak Spanish, attend the neighborhood school, or go to the local church they had very little interactions with the other children in their

neighborhood. Vanessa said this cultural isolation caused her not to feel connected with Mexican American culture. Vanessa said:

> I never really had a Mexican or Hispanic identity. I don't really know what I thought. I knew I wasn't white, of course. But at the same time I didn't think I would ever call myself Mexican because people who were Mexican always spoke Spanish and their relatives were in Mexico. I have no relatives in Mexico. . . It was just hard to make that sort of identity claim.

The younger sisters also report having little connection with their Mexican heritage until they reached college. This family dynamic is important in the educational life of the sisters because bi-culturalism is one of the factors that has been found to be important in the educational success and personal resiliency of Hispanic students (Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Trueba 1999).

Vanessa credits her mother as being her first teacher and remembers her mother as being very active in her and Cecilia's school careers until the family troubles began to escalate.

> She was a very, very good teacher. When we were younger she just had a lot of insight as to what to do. Like reading to us all the time, and talking to us about different things. I got environmental ideas from her and stuff like that. She was one of those hippie-people. She had all these civil rights ideas and stuff.

Cecilia says, "If the Science Fair was coming up she would take us to the library to get books. She made us want to do it. She was real enthusiastic. She made it fun." Mrs.

Perez also made it very clear to her girls that she wanted them to go to college and that they would need scholarship money to do so. Cecilia said of her mother,

> She always talked about it [going to college], and the main thing was I always wanted good grades. I knew we couldn't afford college. I knew I had to get scholarships. So that was my drive. I needed the money.

Casey says she knew from the time she was a little girl that her mother wanted all three of the girls to go to college. "She always wanted us to go. It was something she always wanted to do but couldn't. I guess because of her marriage and having us kids real young." Mrs. Perez' disintegrating marriage and her need to work outside the home lessened the amount of time she had for Casey and her son.

Because the house in which they resided was in a west side school attendance area, the children should have been enrolled in Smithson Elementary School, which according to Vanessa, "had a really bad reputation." Mrs. Perez instead opted to enroll her children in Colby Elementary School, which she had attended as a child. Vanessa said:

> We hid our address. We lied about our address to go there so I didn't have any neighborhood friends or anything like that. All my friends were at school and when I came home I had my sisters.

Cecilia and Casey were forced to transfer to Smithson Elementary when her parents divorced. It was at Smithson that they first found teachers they identified as having made important contributions to their academic careers.

Literacy was an important aspect in the Perez family and both Mrs. Perez and her father were enthusiastic readers. Mrs. Perez read mysteries and other novels; her father read the newspaper daily, as well as novels. According to Vanessa:

> I got kind of interested [in reading] because of him [her grandfather]. He had this green chair and he would always sit down and read the paper with his glasses. I'd sit at the top of a chair just looking at him and I remember just watching his ears because they would wiggle while he read. I just thought it was cool.

Her grandfather also played an important role in Vanessa's love of languages. He spoke several languages, including German, Spanish, French, and a little Dutch. He learned the last two languages while he was stationed in Europe during World War II. "He knew all these languages and he would sing the French National anthem to us . . .I knew I wanted to be like Grandpa, I wanted to speak a lot of languages." When Vanessa's grandfather died, her father's abuse of the family escalated.

The School's Role in the Participants' Academic Success

SOCIAL CAPITAL PRODUCTION

Mrs. S., Vanessa's second grade teacher, provided Vanessa's first social capital connections. They were to have a profound effect in Vanessa's and her sisters' lives. As stated earlier, a supportive relationship between a teacher and a student provides a social capital link if the support is "oriented toward academic excellence and college admission." (Stanton Salazar, 2001, p. 188). An important message Vanessa received in Mrs. S.'s class was the idea that going to college was a priority. Vanessa does not

remember knowing what college meant at that time, but she knew if her mother and Mrs. S. talked about it, it must be important. The second link Mrs. S. provided was to introduce Vanessa to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Mrs. S. was aware of Vanessa's love of languages because Vanessa had asked Mrs. S. to teach her to speak Spanish. Mrs. S. tried to introduce some Spanish instruction into the class curriculum but was forced to discontinue it when the school principal came into the class and told the children that speaking Spanish was against the school rules unless students were in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Vanessa said, "We were all disappointed." Mrs. S. also introduced her class to the Foreign Language Magnet Program by handing out brochures about the program and telling them that they could apply to be a part of it when they were in fifth grade. Vanessa decided then that she would definitely apply to this program as soon as she was old enough. The third valuable institutional support Mrs. S. provided was that she recommended that Vanessa be placed in the academically accelerated class for third grade. By being in this class Vanessa was then tested for, and accepted into, the SAISD program for gifted and talented students.

Being identified as gifted put Vanessa into the realm of her school's academic elite, conferring on her the tacit understanding that she had college potential and was worthy of the school's special attention. Privileges associated with this distinction included being a member of a pull-out program in which she received an enriched curriculum, the attention of specially trained teachers, and other forms of institutional support. Vanessa's comment about her G/T program was:

> We got creative freedom and that was really exciting. I remember being in art class and if I would make something they (the teacher) would say, "No, you cut the picture the wrong way." And I would think, "Why can't I just do it my way?" and in G/T you could do it however you wanted to do it. If you were drawing something, you could draw it how you wanted. You could use the color you wanted. So I liked that a lot. I realized that they had more trust in us. I thought, "I'm going to try to prove myself so I could get more trust.

During the summer between fourth and fifth grade, Vanessa participated in a program developed by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). As a member of this group, Vanessa and other children were taken to Our Lady of the Lake University, where they explored different career options. From this experience Vanessa learned the names of specific colleges that she might be interested in attending. She returned to school in the fall thinking, "Okay, I need to go to a good school and stuff. I started thinking about college from then on."

Vanessa's identification as a gifted student had repercussions at home. Her sister Cecilia readily admits that most of the important decisions of her life were based on following the example set by her older sister. Cecilia said:

> I was pretty envious of all the attention she got. She really didn't have to put effort into school. She was bright. She was smart, and I always tried to out-do her. . . I just copied everything she did.

Cecilia was not identified as gifted until fifth grade. She says this was a burden to her that she intended to correct. Cecilia said:

> I was really disappointed and I felt bad about not being in there [the Gifted Program]. She [her mother] was pretty mad that they didn't put me in there. She was really pushing that they put me in there.

When the screening process for G/T began in fifth grade, Cecilia had a plan for being noticed. In the test for creativity and original thinking the students were given a piece of paper with three dots on it and were told to draw something. Cecilia remembers:

> I thought I was really going to freak them out. I wanted to get in real bad, it was my last chance. So I went ahead and drew from this movie I had seen, *The Philadelphia Experiment*, a picture of the top of the deck of the boat where the men were trapped. It was based on a true story. I drew the man halfway sticking out of the boat because in the experiment they got somehow stuck in the boat. I drew that, and it got a lot of attention. I got in.

Being accepted into the Gifted Program made Cecilia eligible for the same types of institutional support that other academically elite children were granted. Casey also was identified as gifted though she does not remember when it happened. As members of the Gifted Program, the Perez sisters were virtually guaranteed acceptance to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. When Vanessa was given the opportunity to apply for admission, she did so. She was accepted, as were her sisters when they applied as fifth graders.

There are two middle schools that are designated as feeder schools to the Foreign Language Magnet Program at Henry Trueba High School: Tomas Rivera and Robert E. Lee Middle Schools. Only one of my participants went to Robert E. Lee, the other five

went to Tomas Rivera. Consequently, the majority of the observations in this chapter will be based on what happened at Tomas Rivera. Also, there seems to be very little attention paid in the community to the fact that Robert E. Lee is a part of the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Whenever the program was discussed by district personnel I talked with, Tomas Rivera was their main focus. In many cases, Robert E. Lee was not even mentioned.

The Foreign Language Magnet Program was designed to enhance the learning of the brightest kids in the school district. The program's focus was on becoming fluent in a second language, and the students could choose to study either Spanish, French, Latin, German, Russian, or Japanese. As one teacher at Tomas Rivera told me, "Who else but college bound kids would be interested in learning a second language?" Another teacher in the program told me that while all of the students accepted into the program were not identified as gifted, at least ninety percent of them were. Once in the program, the students were showered with institutional, personal, and academic support, all of which facilitated the development of a *confianza* relationship between the students and the school agents.

Because the Foreign Language Magnet Program is a magnet school, students from all around the district were bussed each day from their home school to Tomas Rivera. According to all the participants there was a hierarchy in the school with the "FLMPs" at the top and the "Regulars" at the bottom. "Regulars" were all those students at Tomas Rivera Middle School who were in the school's normal attendance area.

The FLMP students were physically segregated from the regular students before, during, and after school. Upon arrival at school, they were confined to a separate part of the outdoor campus that kept them away from regular or low-status students. The principal of Tomas Rivera Middle School started each day's announcements over the public address system reminding the students they were in "the Harvard of middle schools." Even though all the students heard the announcement, according to the participants the multilingual students knew that his comments were directed to them. Within the school day the multilingual students were in all Honor's classes, which were located in a separate hall of the campus, again segregating them from low-performing students. Only in their elective or physical education classes were they able to interact with students who were not in the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Vanessa recalls:

> I remember the first day of school. We all went outside and all the new sixth graders lined up outside – well the FLMP ones – all the others lined up on the other side of the school. From the beginning we were separated – segregated, you know. There was "The FLMPs" and there was "The Regulars." We called everyone else "The Regulars". . . . It started taking on a demeaning tone after a while.

Vanessa's perceptions of the differences between the students tracked into the FLMP program and the "regular" students is consistent with the research on the effects of tracking students (Oakes, 1985).

An example of the increased academic benefits that FLMP students received is the special English and biology classes that were available to Casey's eighth grade

cohort. The biology class was taught by a community college professor and every other week the students left the Tomas Rivera campus and went to the community college to use its biology labs. It was possible to earn high school credits for both classes.

Students in the Foreign Language Magnet Program are asked to make a commitment to stay with the program throughout middle and high school, allowing them to stay in the program for seven years. Many of the students have the same language teacher for three years in the middle school and four years at the high school. The Perez sisters remained in the program for the required time, allowing them to build *confianza en confianza* relationships with some of their teachers. Both Cecilia and Casey developed deep attachments to their language teachers. Cecilia's Japanese teacher became a surrogate father for her. It was to him she turned when in an academic or emotional crisis. Twice he convinced Cecilia to persevere in situations in which she wanted to quit because she was afraid of not living up to her own high standards. The first situation had to do with her position on the flag team of the marching band. Cecilia wanted to quit flag team because she was having trouble learning a routine. Mr. K. talked her out of it, and she went on the earn a leadership position on the team.

The second time was when she wanted to drop out of Japanese class because she was afraid she was not going to make an "A" in the class. As Cecilia recalled,

> I went up to him and said, 'Mr. K, I need to talk to you. I think I want to get out of Japanese and I need your approval.' He just stayed quiet. I told him, "I am going to drop Japanese." He asked, "Why?" I told him I didn't think I was going to do so well. I didn't want it to bring my GPA down. I started talking faster

> because he was getting angry. I said, "I'm not going to do anything with languages or arts. I'm going to go into engineering." He said, "Damn it, Cecilia. I see how different you and your sister (Vanessa) are. You have so much potential, but you never believe in yourself and you always quit on things." He just really went off and I was about to cry. I said, "Okay, I'll stay." I actually got an "A." I worked harder. He scared me.

Twice Cecilia wanted to quit because she was afraid of failure. Each time, Mr. K. served in the position a parent might. He encouraged her to giving the dreaded challenge another try. In each case Cecilia was able to turn a potential defeat into a victory because she had internalized the *confianza en confianza* relationship with Mr. K. She felt confident to seek help from him and to heed his counsel.

When asked if the counselor had tried to talk Cecilia out of dropping Japanese class, Cecilia said, "Yes, but you know she had so many kids, you know, bothering her about things. She just finally gave into it. She said, 'All right. You know, whatever you want.'" The interaction between Cecilia and her counselor illuminates what happens when there is not time for the school agent and the student to build a relationship. Situations that might encourage the student to persevere and to develop a new social skill or a new level of confidence are missed because of time constraints and a lack of mutual trust.

Casey Perez was very close to Mrs. B., her Russian teacher. By doing well in Russian language competition, Casey earned important validation for herself as a learner. "My teacher was really proud, and I felt good, and the people at school where really

happy." Her Russian classes became an important conduit of personal and institutional support. Through her state-level competitions with other Russian language students Casey was able to visit the University of Texas at Austin campus. There she was introduced to her first Hispanic with a Ph.D. and had her personal academic abilities validated by doing extremely well in competition. As Casey recalled:

> His name is Tom Garza and I thought it was so cool that he was head of the department and he's Hispanic. I kind of see him as a role model. It's like there are not too many people who are Hispanic and speak Russian. When I got here I was the only Mexican American; everyone else was white or something, or they have a Slavic background. I felt kind of out of place, but I didn't care because I liked it. I looked at stuff about him [Dr. Garza] and he went to Harvard. I was like "Wow! Cool!" He graduated with a Ph.D., and is Hispanic, plus he was the head of a department I really love!

Seeing Dr. Garza and doing so well in the competitions played a major part in Casey's choice of Russian as her major at MU.

The Foreign Language Magnet Program played a vital role in the academic success of the Perez sisters because it provided a framework in which they could develop a rich social capital network. The structure of the Foreign Language Magnet Program provided a safe environment for the students to initiate positive help-seeking behaviors which increased their ability to access necessary institutional resources. The *confianza en confianza* relationships that are essential for the academic development of Hispanic students (Stanton-Salazar ,2001) was nurtured chiefly through the language program, but

also through supplemental programs such as University Outreach and extra-curricular activities such as band and athletics. In addition to the personal support that these relationships provided, they were important sources of institutional support in the form of advice about college admissions and aspirations.

OTHER FORMS OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

In addition to the institutional support provided by the school agents and the curriculum of the Foreign Language Magnet Program, the Perez sisters received other forms of support from the school district that strengthened their positive network orientation, encouraged positive help-seeking behaviors, and strengthened their personal resiliency. The vehicles for these network building opportunities ranged from the normal array of clubs, sports activities, and service opportunities that are a part of most middle and high schools to curriculum offerings such as the Radio, Television, and Film Program and empowerment programs whose mission is to increase college attendance for low socio-economic status and minority students. These various forms and levels of support expanded the social networks of the girls and provided opportunities for them to enjoy different kinds of institutional resources. Because each of the girls put together her own unique combination of support systems, I will describe them individually, rather than as a group.

VANESSA

Vanessa led the way into the world of empowerment programs when she participated in the EXCEL Program offered by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) during the summer between her fourth and fifth grade. She

remembers that the teachers of this program took the students to Our Lady of the Lake University and let them research a career topic. Vanessa chose to explore the role of a marine biologist or oceanographer. "I remember seeing a picture of a dolphin and I was like, 'Oh, I want to be with a dolphin.'" On Career Day, the students presented posters they had made about their chosen career. From this activity Vanessa learned the names of three specific colleges, Our Lady of the Lake, St. Mary's University, and Texas A&M University at Galveston. She said, "I started thinking about college from then on."

Vanessa said that middle school was a horror for her because of the turmoil in her family, her difficulty making friends, and her lack of self confidence. Because her family was not a very strong source of emotional support, involvement in school activities was her primary means for building a positive self concept and sense of accomplishment. One source of positive networking was through the University Outreach Program, of which she was a member from sixth grade through high school graduation. Through University Outreach she heard from guest speakers on a variety of topics concerning college, she went on field trips to different universities, and she attended cultural events around the city. As Vanessa said, "My family didn't go anywhere. If it had not been for the school, I would have never visited the River Walk, or any number of other places around the city."

For the first two years of high school, marching band played an important role in providing Vanessa a place in which to build a positive social network. As one of only three females in the drum line, she was a member of a group that enjoyed high visibility and strong group cohesion. Marching band also allowed her to excel in a situation that

challenged gender roles. All of these factors increased her sense of personal accomplishment and led to strengthened personal resiliency. Performing with the band exposed Vanessa to the higher levels of material resources enjoyed by high schools from wealthier parts of the city. This awareness played an important part in expanding her world view.

For Vanessa the Radio, Television and Film program she became involved with during her junior and senior year, was the area of the curriculum outside the Foreign Language Magnet Program, which gave her the most direct link to college. Speaking about her RTF teacher, she said,

> From the beginning, he started talking about what you want to do as a career. He is a very good teacher, he is very student-level. He made us very comfortable, not embarrassed to ask anything. He was also Hispanic so it made us more comfortable, not to feel stupid. He knew we didn't feel we'd have to impress him or anything. I'd ask him, "What's a good school?" He went to UT but interestingly enough his thing was not RTF. It was political science.

This teacher simplified crossing the psychological barrier of a fear of looking stupid because he was "very student level. He made us . . . not embarrassed to ask anything."

When it was time for Vanessa to apply to colleges, her understanding of the process, her knowledge about her options, and her confidence for taking a risk that was outside the perimeters of her family experience had all been enriched by complex social webs provided through her school networks. She decided to apply to Major University because there was a connection for her in three separate areas. MU had a Japanese

department, a marching band, and an RTF program. Had Vanessa attended the high school in her attendance area, rather than the FLMP, she would have not had access to the RTF program or to the Japanese language instruction. These choices were available to Vanessa because of a web of interconnecting networks that were first made available when her second grade teacher introduced her students to the Foreign Language Magnet Program and recommended Vanessa for the academically advanced third grade class. The events that followed: identification as gifted, inclusion in the Foreign Language Magnet Program and the availability of the various curriculum and supplemental programs which enriched Vanessa's school and personal life show clearly how much influence the school can have in the life of a child who comes to school with very little social capital.

CECILIA

For Cecilia, the San Antonio Pre-freshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) was her most important form of institutional support. PREP is an academically rigorous three-year program designed to promote careers in science and engineering to women and minorities. Program participants attend mathematics-based classes five to six hours daily for eight weeks during the summers between sixth and ninth grade. Activities include course work, team projects, class presentations, examinations, career awareness speakers, field trips, and special events. Acceptance into the program is based on an overall grade point average of eighty-five, with at least an eighty-five average in an Honor's math class.

Good conduct grades, letters of recommendation, and an essay are also part of the entrance requirements.

Because many of the attendees are from low income families PREP provides special provisions such as free lunch, transportation assistance, and a stipend of up to $800 per session are provided to students who qualify based on financial need. Participants must reapply each year for inclusion in the program.

Cecilia was encouraged to apply to the program by her sixth grade math teacher. She said "There were three of us who did [apply]. My teacher said, 'You're a girl and the other two are guys. You got an "A" in math. Try it.' I didn't really want to, but she said they would pay me."

Being able to earn money while learning was an important motivator for Cecilia. She began working for pay to help support the family as soon as she legally could hold a job. Vanessa said that Cecilia's money was often important to the family's survival.

Cecilia fell in love with PREP once she got over her initial shyness. She credits it with changing the course of her life. She said that PREP helped her "discover math." Throughout middle and high school she took all the advanced math and science classes that were available to her. PREP gave her the confidence as well as the academic base to declare herself an engineering major as a freshman at MU. She has since switched to a major in geology because of the on-going harassment by the male engineering students.

Another important aspect of the program for Cecilia was seeing Hispanic college students from prestigious universities such as Princeton and Yale working as teaching assistants in the program. Cecilia said:

> I wanted to be like that. It made me realize that if they could do it I could too. It wasn't just for every Hispanic girl to get married and start working right after high school. I felt like, WOW! These people can make it and they come from where I do.

In addition to providing high quality instruction in math and science, the PREP program was an important source of social capital for Cecilia because it allowed her to break tacit gender and class rules and validated women as capable learners in math and science.

Other forms of support that Cecilia received while a student in SAISD came from membership in a large number of clubs and activities throughout her school career. She was able to develop her leadership skills through serving as vice president of the student council as a freshman and by being flag captain of the color guard during her junior year. She said that the male coaches for her sports teams served as father figures "because my mom is a single parent and I didn't have a father. I really looked up to all my male teachers and coaches." In middle school, her science teacher, a woman, introduced Cecilia to the world of environmental engineering through the school's Environmental Club which monitored the health of the creek behind their school. A member of University Outreach from sixth grade through high school, Cecilia remembers attending sessions where the paperwork trail for college admission, financial aid, and other aspects of university life were discussed. In addition, University Outreach provided cultural experiences and academic enrichment experiences for her.

All of these people and experiences helped Cecilia develop a rich network of connections that allowed her to enter multiple institutional contexts and forge relationships with people who had access to power and resources that were not available to her through her family.

CASEY

As the youngest child in this gifted trio, Casey often felt inferior to her older sisters. She explained that Vanessa excelled in English and that Cecilia does well in math but that she, Casey, was "just in the middle." Because of her parent's divorce and her mother entering the workforce full time, Casey received less parental attention than her sisters had from the time she was in fourth grade. Consequently, the support provided by the school system was essential to her developing the network she would need to be academically successful.

Beginning in elementary school, Casey was able to develop a positive network orientation towards school through academic competitions. In fourth grade her teacher's reward system of candy for good grades pushed Casey to make the best grades she possibly could. In fifth grade, a school-wide competition based on the amount of books a student read introduced her to historical fiction and other types of reading. "They always had big old prizes, and I liked that a lot." In middle school she was able to compete in contests that tested her German-language abilities. She said:

> I loved competition in German 'cause I was doing really good. . . . They would give you a whole paragraph in German and you would have to read it right and

pronounce it right. I liked that a lot, it was really fun. . . . My favorite time of the year was competition.

In high school Casey switched her language study to Russian and again rose to the top of the class through her competitive spirit. During her junior year she finished third in a statewide competition of approximately three hundred students. Although competition is not usually listed as a form of institutional support, for Casey it provided opportunities for her to judge her abilities against other academically advanced peers. Attending language competitions at various universities introduced her to college campuses and exposed her to academically successful Hispanics such as Dr. Tom Garza, head of the Slavic Languages Program at U.T. Austin. This reinforcement of her abilities was part of the "open, supportive educational environment" (Garabino, 1992) that is a necessary ingredient for the development of personal resiliency.

Identified as gifted and a member of the Foreign Language Magnet Program, Casey received all the benefits and privileges that those two programs conferred. However, another form of support was equally as important to her. Casey's participation in the marching band in high school provided her with an avenue to challenge gender roles and develop strong leadership abilities. Because of scheduling problems between content classes and advanced middle school band, Casey spent two years in the intermediate band and did not get to compete with the advanced band at University Interscholastic League tournaments in middle school. Consequently, she felt that she was behind the other students in the high school band. Casey's intense determination to excel

in this endeavor compelled her to work as hard as she could to be the best. According to Casey:

> I was a big band nerd. . . . I would practice all the time. I didn't get to move up to play snare for two years. I tried real hard. I didn't really know how to read music that well but I learned a lot. . . . I would go really early to school, like at 6 in the morning . . . I didn't go to lunch, I'd just go straight to practice, and then after school I would stay until 6 p.m. or whatever. I loved it so much.

Casey's hard work and persistence paid off. By her senior year she was the captain of the drum line, a position that traditionally been held by only males. She also did well in band competitions.

As a junior Casey was awarded the a "One," the highest ranking for her percussion performance and was also chosen as the first chair percussionist for the Regional Band. "I was the only girl, too. I competed against all these boys. I felt good 'cause I got first chair and everyone else was behind me." She repeated this accomplishment her senior year. "I did it again. I got First Chair, and I was still the only girl. . . that felt really good." Although band provided her excellent opportunities to demonstrate her competence, it also brought a series of challenges. As Casey stated:

> It was hard because a lot of the guys didn't like a girl being captain. We were always fighting. They felt like I was not as good as them. I didn't know as much as they did, but I was the only one who ever competed. I made the school look better by going to competitions.

Her band teacher provided her both personal and institutional support. Casey remembers:

> He was real nice, he would stay and help me. He would give me advice and help me play my music whenever he had time. I appreciated that because he was real busy with drum line. He would help me with the snare. I would cry a lot like, "No one likes me in band and all the guys hate me because . . . you know." And he would be, "No, you can do it. Don't care what anybody says cause in the future none of it is going to matter because you are going to be somewhere else." He would help me out a lot. He helped my confidence.

By showing Casey personal attention, supporting her right to be the drum line captain, and reaffirming that she was on her way to bigger achievements, the band director inspired a sense of *confianza* between himself and Casey. He showed respect for her abilities, and he was a dependable source of comfort and assistance. He also gave credibility to her college aspirations by reminding her that her future was bigger than high school band.

Casey did not participate in supplemental programs as often as her sisters did. She tried PREP for one year but found that it was not how she wanted to spend her summers. She said, "I guess I was following too much what my sister (Cecilia) wanted to do. . . . I learned a lot, but I kind of realized that it wasn't meant for me. I don't want to be an engineer even though I could be one." Even though she did not stick with the PREP program, her comment about knowing she could be an engineer if she wanted indicates that she still absorbed important information about her life options given during her short time in the program.

Casey did not become active in University Outreach until eighth grade. She said she had been approached by members of the organization before but had not been very interested. During the summer between Casey's eighth and ninth grades, however, University Outreach provided her an opportunity to take enrichment classes in English and chemistry for high school credit. Casey recalled:

> We took chemistry, and an English class, courses to help you get ready for high school. That helped me a lot 'cause when I got to Chemistry it was really hard for me, balancing equations. In the summer I was like, "Oh, I can't do this." But when I got to high school, it was really easy. I was like, "Aw – that's nothing." I think it helped me out a lot.

Having taken these classes allowed her to take extra courses in science and math during the regular school term.

Casey also received a lot of support from the organization Project Stay. Her senior year was an especially difficult one for her. She was very lonely for her two older sisters who were now away at college. She was worried that because she was not in the top ten percent of her graduating class she would not get accepted into Major University, and she was intimidated by the essays that had to be written for her college applications. Casey explained:

> I had to write my essays over and over. I didn't have anyone to help me. I tried to ask Vanessa but she was like, "Don't bother me." I would call her in Austin and I would tell her "I don't know what to write. Read this and tell me if it sounds good." She helped me on one, she said "You need to change this, it don't [sic]

> sound right." . . . My mom would fill out whatever she needed like W-2's and stuff and then I would take it to Project Stay and they would help me with the paperwork. I was kind of happy they looked over my essays and helped me.

The counselor at Henry Trueba said that the students were not supposed to be involved with both University Outreach and Project Stay, but he never enforced that rule because he wanted the students to get whatever help they needed to succeed. Like her sisters, Casey was involved in a large number of clubs, organizations, and honor societies. Each of which increased her social network and positive school orientation.

Even though Casey had two older siblings who had successfully navigated a path to college, their accomplishments did not automatically ensure that Casey could depend on their help for her own success. With her two older sisters away at college, Casey was without their guidance for the first time in her life. It was also a difficult time in the family because her mother was having a difficult time controlling her younger brother and there were often disruptions in the home. Casey felt that she was alone in completing the paperwork for college admissions. She was highly dependent on the help of her teachers and other support systems provided through the school. Her story illuminates the fallacy of thinking that older academically successful siblings can be the primary source of the networking support that younger siblings need. As the older siblings become involved in their own lives outside the home, they may not be a reliable source of support to the younger brothers and sisters.

Conclusion

Network analysis stresses that "adolescents need to be embedded in multiple social webs organized for their empowerment and successful development" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). It is clear that for the Perez sisters the school was the primary source of access to those social webs necessary for the girls to matriculate to college. A number of support systems were in place that made it possible for the girls to be involved in the social webs which created social capital that was unavailable from their family.

The Perez sisters' first entry into the web for academically successful students was through their identification as gifted students. This recognition gave them access to an academically enriched curriculum taught by specially trained teachers. It also provided a positive network orientation towards schooling that made it easier for them to initiate help-seeking behaviors such as applying for admission into the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Having been identified as gifted, the sisters had a better chance of being chosen for the Foreign Language Magnet Program.

As a member of the middle school Foreign Language Magnet Program, the sisters were separated from their low performing peers, and provided with an enriched academic curriculum. They were also regularly reminded of their academic superiority by being told that they attended the "Harvard of middle schools." Through their language instruction the Perez sisters were able to develop long term relationships with their teachers that allowed them to develop relationships with school agents. Additionally, the sisters took advantage of empowerment programs such as University Outreach and PREP that were available to them. These programs exposed them to knowledge, cultural

events, and people that expanded their world view and made them believe that a post secondary education was within their reach. They were further embedded in the social network of the school through their involvement in clubs, sports, and honor societies. Each of these venues provided opportunities for the girls to build academic skills as well as social skills such as leadership, teamwork, and cooperation.

By the time the Perez sisters entered high school, they were sure that they were going to college. Membership in the Honor's classes in middle school made the sisters eligible to take the Advanced Placement classes offered in high school. This high level of instruction provided the academic knowledge base that made the sisters competitive in the high stakes testing required for college admission. Supplemental programs such as University Outreach and Project Stay provided direct support when they navigated the paperwork obstacles for college admission, and they reinforced the idea that the students were special and deserved to go to college. Individual teachers took the time and personal interest to counsel with Vanessa, Cecilia, and Casey when they reached crisis points in their personal lives and school careers. The amalgamation of these separate elements created the necessary support networks for these three young women whose family could provide very little social capital. Because of the network the school provided the Perez sisters were able to fulfil their dream of attending college.

Chapter 5: The More Social Capital Students

This chapter examines the role that school personnel and school experiences played in the academic success of Angie Hernandez, Lydia Mendez, and Gisella Garcia. From childhood these participants were embedded in numerous social webs that enabled them to construct an identity of personal competence and acceptance. They entered school with a predisposition towards a *confianza en confianza* relationship with the school and its agents. Further, their families provided a level of emotional and economic support that allowed these three girls to focus on their academic life rather than on the survival of the family. For these participants the most important aspect of their school experience was the development of mentoring relationships with specific teachers who provided important on-going emotional and institutional support. Although, Angie, Lydia, and Gisella were involved in multiple school activities and received the tacit and tangible rewards of being students in the Gifted Program and the Foreign Language Magnet Program, it was a single relationship with one special teacher that made the greatest impact on their academic success.

This chapter has four sections. The first section introduce the three members of the More Social Capital group; the second session discusses the social capital provided by the families of the participants. The discussion concerning the school's role in the participants' academic success are the subjects of parts Three and Four. In part Three I have examined the vital role that teacher-mentors played in the participants' lives. Part Four focuses on the role of the school curriculum, extracurricular activities, and empowerment programs in the academic success of these participants.

Personal Backgrounds

LYDIA MENDEZ

At the time of the study, Lydia Mendez was a junior, majoring in studio art at Major University. She is the youngest of three children and both her brother and sister are graduates of MU. Her parents are native-born Texans. According to Lydia's older sister, both English and Spanish were commonly spoken at home when she was a child, but by the time Lydia and her brother were growing up (seven years later), English was the language spoken most commonly by the family. Lydia only remembers her parents speaking Spanish when they did not want the kids to know what they were talking about. Her father has an Associates Degree in Heating and Refrigeration from St. Phillips College, a community college in San Antonio. He is in charge of the heating and cooling system of an apartment complex; her mother works as a teacher's aide in San Antonio ISD. Her parents are still married to each other and recently have welcomed their first grandchild into their lives.

The neighborhood where Lydia grew up is in one of the poorest areas of San Antonio. A large, protective fence encircles both the front and back yards of her house. There are no sidewalks on the street. Several houses near hers are covered in gang graffiti; several others have boarded up windows. There has been a great deal of gang violence near Lydia's home over the past fifteen years and at one point, bullets were fired into the Mendez home during a drive-by shooting spree. The neighborhood seems an unlikely place to find three Major University graduates from the same family.

Lydia entered kindergarten with a very positive network orientation because her older brother and sister were always telling her "school was fun. You get to read and stuff." Yet she found the early grades boring because of the "rigid schedule." She was sent to reading and math classes with the older students because she was learning more rapidly than her peers. Lydia was identified as gifted but did not stay in the program very long because she had a fight with one of the teachers. She said, "I decided I didn't want to do it anymore. My parents were not going to make me do anything I didn't want to."

Lydia decided to enroll in the Foreign Language Magnet Program because she had become interested in the work of French artists and wanted to learn to speak French. During middle school she participated in PREP, the Pre-freshman Engineering Program, but did not find PREP very helpful, and she could not identify anyone in the program who made an outstanding impression on her. Throughout her elementary and middle school years, Lydia was deeply involved in activities at her church.

In high school she was in a variety of clubs and organizations and was a cheerleader during her freshman and sophomore years. It was during her homeroom class that Mrs. S., the art teacher, noticed Lydia drawing and encouraged her to enroll in the advanced art classes. Lydia dropped cheerleading to switch to art. She and Mrs. S. developed a close student-mentor relationship that provided Lydia with a great deal of emotional and institutional support.

Lydia never contemplated the idea of not going to college. It was not until she was in high school that she encountered the idea that college was not the final destination

of all students. Because her older brother and sister had gone to college immediately after high school, she was confident that she would go also.

GISELLA GARCIA

Gisella is the younger of two children. Both of her parents have college degrees. Her father is a physician; her mother owns her own business. Although Gisella does not consider herself fluently bilingual, she was able to test out of three of her four required Spanish language classes at MU. Spanish was also the language in which she communicated with her maternal grandmother. Gisella is the most affluent of the study participants. She grew up in a very attractive home in the King William District, an historical area in San Antonio. Houses in this area range from small, lower middle class homes, to million dollar mansions that carry historic designations.

Gisella's mother chose not to marry the father of her children, and he was not an active participant in Gisella's life. The child support he paid, combined with Ms. Garcia's income, first as a paralegal, and then as a small business owner provided a level of financial security that none of the other participants enjoyed. Gisella and her older brother began their educational careers at a private Catholic elementary school near their home, but they transferred to public school when Gisella was in the first grade.

Gisella can not remember a time when she was not in the gifted program. "I have absolutely no idea how I got identified. I just remember being in GT classes for as long as I can remember. I don't know why me, or what I did." This air of bafflement about her educational career was a continual undercurrent throughout Gisella's interviews. She does not remember applying for the Foreign Language Magnet Program, and she has no

idea how she was picked for the scholarships she was awarded through MU. According to Gisella, her educational career has simply been a matter of following steps laid out for her:

> I don't see what has happened to me as a big deal or as a major accomplishment . . . . Like I said, it was just the next step. It was just like going to the next set of schools. . . . I could take somebody who didn't even expect to graduate from high school . . . I would see that as something bigger because they just didn't fall into their expectations -where I just came and did what I thought was the next step.

Gisella was not involved in very many extra-curricular activities in middle school and high school. She was a member of the swim team for two years and on the Academic Decathlon Team as a junior and senior. The majority of her spare time was taken up with her membership in the Jehovah Witness Church.

Once at college Gisella became very active in campus life. Because she was selected for a Presidential Scholarship she was invited to participate in the Preview Program. This opportunity included a one-week orientation to MU and a chance to enroll for six semester hours during the second summer term. Students are assigned a peer mentor and attend weekly workshops and tutorials relevant to academic success, cultural enrichment and social events. Gisella credits the Preview Program with much of the success that she has experienced at MU. She also feels that Preview set her in the direction of joining a Latina sorority and getting involved with the Hispanic community on campus. As Gisella stated,

> I was never the person that was all about Latina Power and let's just serve the Hispanic community. I've never been like that. I'd rather join a multi-cultural organization. I think that being in the Preview Program and meeting these people - I fell into that and I never thought I would. The university is the most segregated place you'll ever go. I thought I was above that . . .

Although the social networks of Gisella's K-12 school experiences were not as deeply entrenched as those of the other study participants, those connections did provide her with the academic background and social skills that she employed in her life at the university. Her story provides an interesting window into the life of a student that is not deeply connected in high school but goes on to college and blossoms into a well-rounded student and person.

ANGIE HERNANDEZ

Angie's story is that of the oldest child of immigrant parents. Her father and mother came to the United States from Mexico as teenagers and took whatever work was available to them. After they married, they continued to maintain close relationships with their families in Mexico and took regular trips home to spend time with the extended family. The Catholic Church is an important part of the family's life, and Angie was involved in many church-sponsored activities throughout her childhood and adolescence. During high school, Angie worked as a teacher's aide in the religious school. Angie credits her deep faith as one of the primary sources of strength and comfort when her father died.

Angie's father worked as a handy man and according to Angie "taught himself to fix anything." He died unexpectedly when she was fourteen years old. Mrs. Hernandez has always worked as a housekeeper. She has formed close personal relationships with several of her employers who then served as the source of support and social capital connections for her children. Angie said that her parents were determined that she and her siblings would go to college. The notion of educating their daughters, as well as their son, caused a stir within the extended family because most of the female cousins in Mexico did not finish high school. "They stop school at about thirteen years old." Angie called her parents "pioneers" and said that, "they had different expectations for themselves and their children." From an early age Angie was responsible for caring for her younger sister and brother while her parents worked. When her father died Angie inherited his truck and became the family chauffeur, seeing to it that she and her two siblings got to school and their numerous after-school activities on time.

Angie's pre-kindergarten teacher, Mrs. G., recognized Angie's incredible intellectual gifts and began encouraging her parents to think of her as capable of going to college. Mrs. G. remained actively involved in Angie's academic life and encouraged her to go to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Angie applied and was accepted into the FLMP and chose Latin as her second language. She liked middle school because, as she said "It was the first time I had been really challenged." She remembers that often during the daily announcements Tomas Rivera was referred to as the "Harvard of Middle Schools." She says this phrase both intimidated and encouraged her. While in middle school, Angie played in the band, was in the National Junior Honor Society, and worked

on the yearbook staff. In the summer between sixth and seventh grade, Angie joined the PREP program. She credits PREP with helping her decide to become an engineer.

Angie's father died the week before she entered eighth grade. In spite of this tragedy, she was able to earn As in all her classes including two high school credit courses, Algebra I and Biology. Angie feels that both of these high school level classes increased her self esteem because, "once I got through that I thought, 'If I can do that, I can do anything.'"

During eighth grade, she became a member of University Outreach and remained active in the program throughout high school. Angie was also chosen to be a member of the Talent Identification Program (TIPS). All of these opportunities and accolades continued to reinforce Angie's self worth as an exceptional student.

In high school Angie continued to excel in math and science. She credits her pre-calculus teacher with recognizing her abilities and encouraging her early to take the Advanced Placement Calculus exam. As a member of the top ten percent of her graduating class, Angie was provided with a special newsletter from her counselor that included information on SAT and ACT testing dates, upcoming deadlines for scholarship applications, and other information directed at helping her to go to college . She is the only study participant who gives her high school counselor any credit for providing her with information about attending college. He provided a workshop for the parents to explain the college application process to them and tell them what resources were available to help them further their child's education. Several of the other participants

expressed regret that they did not have this specific counselor because he was the only one the students thought was helpful.

Social Capital Connections Provided by the Family

The home lives of the these study participants provided them with four important tools for dealing with the school community with *confianza*. The first was a bi-cultural perspective, which several other researchers have determined to be an essential part of Hispanic academic success (Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Trueba, 1999; Gandara, 1995). These young women have deep roots in their Mexican American heritage and have close relationships with their grandparents and extended family. As Lydia noted:

> He [her father] wanted us to be proud of our race but he didn't want us to have that be the only thing that we focused on. . . . Its like, 'No. You're Lydia first and foremost, and the fact that you are Hispanic is secondary."

Angie's parents regularly took their children to visit their extended family in Mexico. Gisella's maternal grandmother is an important member of her household. This connection with family provided the study participants with a sense of who they were as individuals and as members of a larger community.

Second, the families provided models of academic success for the young women. Lydia's older siblings were very academically successful. Additionally, they each have at least one parent who has a college degree. Lydia's father came home from a tour in Vietnam determined to get an education. According to his oldest daughter, in addition to taking the required courses for his heating and cooling degree, he also took courses in

child psychology and literature. He has wide reading interests and often read to his children as they were growing up. Gisella's father is a physician, her mother has a degree in Interior Design. Ms. Garcia also worked as a paralegal for many years before she opened her own business. Although Angie's parents did not have as much formal education as the other parents, Angie was exposed from a very young age to her mother's employer who was the principal of an elementary school. This woman took great interest in the Hernandez children. Angie said they called her "Grandma," and she often spoke with Angie about her school work and her educational plans. This surrogate grandmother provided emotional support and social capital in the form of advice and counsel about school-related issues.

Third, the parents of these participants educated their daughters with the same fervor that they did their sons. As opposed to the stereotypical model in which Mexican sons are educated and Mexican daughters are married young, both the boys and girls of these families were expected to pursue a post-secondary education. Lydia and Angie were involved in the Pre-freshman Engineering Program at the University of Texas at San Antonio. The idea of a Mexican American female engineer is a novel one for many people in the education community. This opportunity was an important step in breaking gender and class roles.

Fourth, because Mrs. Hernandez, Ms. Garcia, and Mrs. Mendez were deeply involved in the school community, a feeling of *confianza en confianza* was created between the family and the agents of the school. Angie and her mother developed a life-long friendship with Mrs. G., Angie's pre-school teacher. Angie, as well as Mrs. G,

remembered that Mrs. Hernandez was never too busy to bake cookies or cupcakes for classroom celebrations and to participate in Parent Teacher Association (PTA) activities. Again, these simple actions helped Angie to build a positive network orientation towards school and for school agents to see Angie's family as supportive of the school's agenda.

Ms. Garcia, Gisella's mother, started a chess club for Gisella's school, an unusual opportunity for the children in her neighborhood. As Gisella recalls,

> We had a little elementary Chess club that my mom started because she knew my brother was interested in it. Maybe she just saw it meant something . . . she was interested in having that for us and we had quite a bit of students involved and we were all really close . . . What my mom did was really nice because a lot of kids maybe were not doing such good things on the weekend. Every Saturday we had a Chess tournament to go to. We would always eat pizza. It was like "a thing".

The members of the chess club competed in and won a number of tournaments against primarily Anglo middle school students from schools around the city. In addition to providing the Garcia children an important place in the school web, the chess club provided them and the other children in their elementary school with a source of ethnic pride and personal achievement. The chess club broadened the individual and institutional social webs of the children who participated in it.

Mrs. Mendez, Lydia's mother, worked as an aide in the elementary school that her children attended. This enabled her to form personal relationships with the teachers and administrative staff of her children's educational community.

By modeling positive social interactions within the school environment, the parents of these participants established a sense of embeddedness in the academic community. This orientation made the process of crossing the numerous cultural, class, and gender borders present in interactions between Latina students and the public school system a much less threatening prospect.

Other Positive Social Networks

The participants' families were involved in church communities. Each of the participants stated that being a part of the church was a source of support for them. Lydia's mother took her children to a Protestant church where Lydia sang in the children's choir and was involved in the youth activities her church provided. Gisella's mother became involved in the Jehovah Witness Church. When Mrs. Garcia left the church community, Gisella stayed as a member throughout high school. She felt that several adult male members of the church served as substitute father figures, and that a couple of the female adult members tried to provide support and guidance. Angie was very sure that her involvement in the Catholic Church and its youth activities were a source of emotional and social support when her father died. Being embedded in the social network of a church community was a source of support that strengthened the personal resiliency of each of the participants.

Angie's family benefited from a social network that was developed through the employers for whom Mrs. Hernandez worked. One of the families Mrs. Hernandez

worked for was headed by a retired school principal. Her daughter worked as a teacher in San Antonio. Angie recalled,

> We called her [the principal] Grandma. She was inspirational. . . . They [the mother and daughter] told my mother about things I should be doing and how important college was for me. . . . They were always checking on me to see if I had any paperwork that I needed help on. I was pretty lucky that I had people working in that area that knew what needed to be done."

An Army colonel who was also an engineer headed the second family. He was the one who gave Angie the idea and encouragement that she too could be an engineer. He encouraged her to participate in the Pre-Freshmen Engineering Program (PREP) at the University of Texas at San Antonio. The emotional connection between the second family and the Hernandez' was so deep that when the Colonel's family decided to move to North Carolina, they wanted the Hernandez' to come with them. Both of these "supplemental" families provided information about the importance of a college education, provided encouragement for continued academic success, and offered guidance about specific strategies for college attendance.

Angie acquired additional social capital through another network, which she achieved access to through her friendship with the daughter of Dr. L., superintendent of the San Antonio ISD. Dr. L's idea, according to Angie, was to provide experiences for her child and several of her friends - a group of six girls. They read the same books and discussed them, attended cultural events such as plays, and had rich discussions about "all sorts of different things." Angie said she "really enjoyed those times." More than

any of the other participants in this study, Angie was accepted into and benefited from a number of "second-family" groups which provided opportunities not often available to other children from her neighborhood.

The School's Role in the Participants' Academic Success

TEACHER MENTORS

Although the whole school community was important to the academic success of the MSC group, the most important contribution to each participant's academic achievement came from the interest and care of a specific teacher. Each of the participants had a long-term relationship with a teacher that provided personal as well as institutional support. Because teachers are the primary sources of the social capital connections that working class or low income students must have to progress through the academic web, teachers literally have the capacity to transform the lives of their students (Stanton Salazar, 2001).

Each participant in the MSC group had a specific teacher who played a pivotal role in her life by providing personal as well as institutional support over a long period of time. For Gisella such support came from her Japanese language teacher, Mr. K.; for Lydia, it was her art teacher, Ms. S.; and for Angie, it was her pre-school teacher, Mrs. G. Each of these relationships exhibited the four characteristics that Stanton Salazar identified as a transformative student/teacher relationship. Those characteristics are: (1) the school agent's personality inspires confianza, mutual respect, and substantial emotional attachment, (2) the school agent's professional demeanor makes them attractive as a reliable and comfortable source of support, (3) the school agent proves

trustworthy on a specific problem or crisis, and (4) the school agent has a history of providing valuable support to the student. Additionally, these relationships were shown to be essential to the student even when there were caring and supportive relationships in the student's home and family.

Gisella and Mr. K.

Gisella and Mr. K. developed their bond over an eight-year period. In addition to being Gisella's Japanese teacher at both Davis Middle School and Henry Trueba High School, Mr. K. became a trusted advisor to the family through his association with Gisella's older brother who was also in the FLMP. Mr. K often spoke with Gisella's mother about her son's lack of motivation. The relationship he developed with Gisella was completely different. Gisella describes her relationship with Mr. K. this way:

> He just recognized, or at least – I don't know - there was just a connection. I was a student he liked and he was a teacher that I liked. He recognized whatever ability that he did. We had a fun relationship with each other. We'd play with each other. I was the one he would pick on in class to make things funnier, or make light of situation. Maybe he knew that I could handle it. Aside from the joking and having the sense of humor, he also made it a point to offer any opportunity of anything that was advanced or anything outside of school. He always let me know about it.

After meeting Mr. K. and listening to him talk about his commitment to his students and the Foreign Language Magnet Program, I understood that he viewed himself as a father figure, mentor, and advocate for his students. As one of Mr. K's outstanding students,

Gisella was guaranteed a full measure of his attention, concern, and monitoring of her emotional, as well as academic development. Starting in middle school, Mr. K. provided numerous opportunities for Gisella to hold leadership role in the Foreign Language Magnet Program.

> He [Mr. K] was head of the Foreign Language Magnet Program, so whenever the principal needed someone – a student – to speak to an audience, when the parents were coming or whatever the case may be, he [Mr.K.] always went to me. He was probably the first person that had me speak in front of people and he always did that throughout middle school and high school. He always went to me above – when I was in sixth grade – above an eighth grader. When I was a freshman – above an eighth grader.

Mr. K. also gave Gisella the chance to attend an intensive Japanese language-training program being held at Ohio State University during the summer between Gisella's junior and senior year of high school. She applied and was accepted into the program. According to Gisella, "They had students from all over the United States, but only twenty could be in it. I was the only person that had been accepted from Texas, which was awesome and interesting or exciting to me."

When Gisella began to apply to colleges, she turned to Mr. K. for advise and support. He encouraged her to apply to colleges out of state and wrote letters of recommendation for her college applications. When she decided on MU because of the availability of scholarship money available, Mr. K. endorsed her decision.

When I spoke with Mr. K. about Gisella, he recalled her as being a special person. Although he expressed regret that he had not been able to do more for her brother, he was proud of his influence in Gisella's life. He had only the fondest things to say about her and her abilities. He became teary-eyed when I told him Gisella had picked him as the most important teacher in her life.

The *confianza en confianza* relationship that Mr. K. and Gisella developed had all the characteristics of a transformative relationship. Both the teacher and student felt a deep respect and affection for one another that grew over time and through a variety of interactions. Mr. K. served as a surrogate father to the Garcia children, offering counsel to the children's mother about Gisella's older brother's problems with underachievement. He provided numerous opportunities for Gisella to be recognized as a scholar and a leader. Gisella never doubted that she would go to college after graduating from high school. She did not need someone to convince her that college was a possibility and she said she filled out all of the college admission paperwork by herself. In sum Mr. K. provided Gisella with opportunities to see herself as an outstanding scholar and as a competent public speaker. These lessons were very important in her development as a college student.

Lydia and Mrs. S.

The bond between Lydia and her art teacher, Ms. S. began during ninth grade homeroom class when Ms. S. observed Lydia drawing. Ms. S., the advanced art teacher, convinced Lydia that she needed to take art classes. Even though this program change required that Lydia quit cheerleading to enter the art program she made the schedule

changes immediately. She credits this action as being the most important development in her school career. Lydia referred to Ms. S. as both her mentor and her friend, noting that:

> She was so eager about art and she was the first person that told me you could actually have a career out of art. I mean my parents were never one to say, 'You'll never make any money.' But they didn't really know much about being able to work as an artist.

Ms. S. became an important role model for Lydia because she had been a working artist, a fact that Lydia mentioned a number of times during her interviews. "She was actually an artist before she was teaching high school. She taught at the university level and then decided to teach high school." During Lydia's senior year, she seemed to be struggling with her art and with life in general. Ms. S. counseled Lydia often during this time. Finally, one day in class Lydia had an epiphany experience around an issue of how to present a certain aspect of her work. Ms. S. remembers that from then on Lydia was excited and confident about her art. By having an on-going relationship of trust and affection with Lydia, Mrs. S. was able to help her persevere through a difficult time and to grow from that experience. Ms. S. also made a significant contribution to Lydia during a time of crisis when she was having a difficult time solving complex math problems. Ms. S. explained to Lydia that math was just another form of problem solving such as in art. Lydia remembers Ms. S. saying, "It is something different but it's still problem solving. The techniques that you would use to try and figure out your art, you would use to deal with math." This insight made a tremendous difference for Lydia's performance

in math class. Ms. S. had, in effect, transcended her role as art teacher and made the problem-solving techniques she taught more widely applicable.

Mrs. S. provided an important form of institutional support when she encouraged Lydia to become involved in an after school art program called SAY SI, on which she served as a board member. SAY SI is a year-round, long-term visual and graphic arts program for students from San Antonio's urban high schools and middle schools. The goal of the program is to provide a place where student artists can work with the guidance of professional artists. In addition to providing Lydia a workspace and free materials with which to create her art, SAY SI also involved students in the technical aspects of showing their art. Ms. S. encouraged Lydia "to get to know people who are interested in your work so you can keep up with them and establish yourself . . . maybe they might become a collector." SAY SI became the focus of Lydia's time after school. She went to the studio every day except Friday, and was back again on Saturday morning from 8:00 am to noon. Lydia recalled,

> I loved it. I loved it. I met all of my friends there. I met my best friend when I was in high school but we weren't particularly close until after I graduated. But most of my friends I met at SAY SI . . .. because they were other artists. Not that you would want to just surround yourself with artists but at school most of my friends wanted to be doctors and lawyers. It was great talking to them but they didn't understand why I wanted to paint.

Through SAY SI, Lydia exhibited and sold a great deal of her work. She explained,

> The first show that I was in, I sold the most out of anybody there. It was nice. I didn't have a job and I wanted to paint. That's pretty much what everyone wants to do. I mean, make art and make money off of it. I was making some money.

When I went to interview Ms. S., I caught her on a particularly busy day and she was reluctant to speak with me. When I explained that I was there to talk to her about Lydia Mendez, she gasped, "Oh, my heart," indicating that she held Lydia close to her heart. She immediately invited me into her classroom and spent about twenty minutes telling me about Lydia as a student. She asked that I give Lydia her current phone number and tell Lydia to get in touch as it had been awhile since they had last spoken. It was obvious that both Lydia and Ms. S. retained a close bond even though it had been four years since they had been teacher and student.

Mrs. S. provided an important social capital connection for Lydia because she helped her student see that art could be a career as well as a hobby. This was not information that Lydia's loving and supportive family could supply for her. In addition, Mrs. S. introduced Lydia to an organization that provided her with direct access to other artists and a forum from which to show and sell her art work. This opportunity allowed Lydia to grow as an artist and it gave her a peer group that included other teenage artists who understood and supported Lydia's goals for herself and her artwork. This personal validation was a source of strength and comfort as Lydia built an identity as a competent artist. The *confianza en confianza* relationship that Lydia had with Mrs. S. was built on personal trust and the knowledge that she could confide in Mrs. S. and receive responsible advice and counsel. Lydia said she always knew that she was going to

college because her older brother and sister had done so. What Mrs. S. gave Lydia was an opportunity to study a discipline that engaged her passion as well as her intellect.

Angie and Mrs. G.

Angie's critical teacher-mentor relationship was formed with her pre-school teacher,

Mrs. G. Recognizing Angie's intelligence and abilities, Mrs. G. told Mrs. Hernandez that college should be her expectation for Angie's future. A friendship began between the two women that continues even now. Mrs. G. has been an important source of institutional support for all three of the Hernandez children. It was through her that Angie was introduced to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Angie said, "She was really nice. She guided me along the way as I grew up and before I graduated from elementary school she had some suggestions about which schools I should go to." In Angie's life, Mrs. G. was not only a reliable source of institutional knowledge, but also was available to both Angie and the rest of her family for comfort and reassurance when Angie's father died unexpectedly. Mrs. Hernandez sought Mrs. G's advice about how to help the children deal with the tragedy. Even though Mrs. G. has gone on to be a school administrator and the Hernandez children are no longer in her school Mrs. G. has maintained a close relationship with the family. An example of the deep affection that Mrs. G. held for Angie was that she attended Angie's high school graduation ceremonies and gave her a small gift.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

When each of these three participants entered school, she did so with a positive network orientation towards the school and its agents. Because of the strength of the social webs and self esteem provided by the family, these girls expected to be successful in school. For these participants, their early school experiences probably were not substantially different from those of a middle class child who enjoys a positive orientation towards school. The school supplemented the family ethos of educational success. Lydia and Gisella had older siblings who had been identified as gifted and received the institutional support that goes with being part of the academic elite. Angie had the immigrant's faith that education was the path to social mobility (Suarez Orozco, 1995). Once in school, their expectations were confirmed. They were all identified as gifted in the primary grades and provided with the specialized curriculum and institutional favor that this label confers. As they reached the intermediate grades they were encouraged to apply to the Foreign Language Magnet Program and were accepted. Because this program is targeted at the students who are gifted or show exceptional academic promise, the personal and familial expectations of the participants and their families were again confirmed.

When the three participants reached high school they already had a family-sanctioned understanding that they would attend college immediately after graduation. Each of them reported that it never occurred to them that they would not go on to college. Although all three were members of University Outreach and found the knowledge and experiences that this program provided to be helpful, they had other sources of

information about how to deal with the practical requirements of college admissions, such as filling out the college applications and applying for financial aid. Angie said that her surrogate grandmother, the school principal, offered to help her complete the paperwork. Gisella said she did not ask anyone to help her, she just got the forms from the school and completed the paperwork on her own. Lydia's experience was similar; she felt confident that she knew how to complete the paperwork and did so.

Because the school offered programs that furthered these young women's academic goals, it served as an important partner, along with their parents, and their own native intelligence, to ensure their academic success.

Conclusions

Angie, Gisella, and Lydia entered the San Antonio ISD school system with well developed personal and community social webs that helped them take advantage of the opportunities offered by the school. Within their family webs the girls had economic and emotional stability, examples of academic success, and family attitudes that encouraged them to pursue academic achievement. Outside the family, the participants were involved in community webs through church membership and other activities that also contributed to their academic success. Once at school, they gained access to the institutional rewards provided for those students identified as gifted and they were allowed to enroll in the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Acceptance into the Foreign Language Magnet Program exposed them to teachers and fellow students who shared

their expectations of college attendance and to a curriculum track for the college-bound. All three participants took advantage of empowerment programs such as PREP and University Outreach. It is clear that the infrastructure of their schooling was very important to their development as scholars.

According to the participants, however, the single most important aspect of their educational experience their mentor relationship with a special teacher. These relationships grew out of daily interactions student-teacher interactions over a period of several years and were characterized by a deep emotional attachment that included trust and rapport. Because students in FLMP often had the same language teacher for two or more years, teachers had on-going and long term opportunities to provide both tacit and explicit forms of support for the participant. Each of the participants credits her mentor with having made a significant impact on her personal and academic lives.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore the role that K-12 school personnel and school experiences played in the academic success of Latinas enrolled in a university. My intent was to find a group of academically successful Latinas and to ask them what their school "got right" in helping them achieve their goal of a college education. During my search for an appropriate participant group, I identified seven Latinas from one high school in San Antonio, Texas, who were enrolled at Major University (MU). Six of the young women chose to be in the study. The seventh declined due to her extreme shyness. At the time of my study no other high school in the San Antonio Independent School District had produced as many Latina scholars who were enrolled at MU. This situation offered me an excellent opportunity to explore what an individual high school had done to foster such a high level of academic success among its Latina students. Upon closer examination I discovered that it was not an individual high school, but the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) that had been the common denominator for the participants. Participating in the FLMP offered the students access to a wide array of experiences and people who created a dense social network of educational opportunities. Although many of these opportunities were available outside the physical or curriculum limits of the school, they were accessible to each of the participants because of her status as a student in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD).

With respect to within-group differences, this participant group is remarkably homogeneous. They are all Latinas who attended SAISD schools from grades one

through twelve. They all were identified as gifted and all attended the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) from grades six through twelve. Five of them are from working class families, and five of the participants were permanently separated from their fathers by the time they were in early adolescence.

The main difference among the participants is the amount of social capital resources they had when they entered school. Based on this difference, I divided the six participants into two subgroups, the "Lower Social Capital" participants (LSC) and the "More Social Capital" participants (MSC). The three LSC students entered school with very few social capital resources. They did not have a strong Hispanic identity or extended family connections; there were no older siblings or close family members who had successfully attended an institution of higher learning; and they were not members of community groups such as churches or other neighborhood organizations. The three MSC students began school with many more social capital resources. All of the participants had strong connections to extended families, and they had a well-defined sense of their ethnic identity. Two of the three participants in the MSC group had older siblings or family members who had experienced academic success at the college or university level. The third participant gained knowledge about the college application process from the social network of supportive adults provided to her through her mother's employers. These participants entered school with a greater understanding of the educational process that leads to a post-secondary education.

By comparing the data generated from my analysis of these two sub-groups I was able to compare the role of the school in the lives of children who have very few social

capital resources with the role of the school in the lives of children who entered school with a stronger network of social support. My study indicates that K-12 school experiences were crucial to fostering the academic aspirations of the students in both sub-groups. The difference between the groups was the degree to which the school's programs and support systems filled in the gaps in institutional knowledge and social connections that the family did not possess. For the LSC group, the school community served as the lifeline to academic success because the participants' families did not have the emotional or financial resources to function as a full partner in the girls' academic development. For this group, the K-12 school community provided a framework in which the LSC students could make connections with people and experiences that nurtured their natural abilities and that provided opportunities for them to publicly demonstrate their competence as learners. The K-12 community also offered the social capital connections they needed to matriculate to college. For the MSC participants, the school functioned as an important partner with the family to generate the resources the students needed to realize their academic potential. Although MSC participants made important social capital connections through the school, they also had family resources that helped them make similar connections.

Using naturalistic and ethnographic research methods allowed me to understand from the participants' perspective on what they thought the school had done to facilitate their academic success. By interviewing additional school personnel, examining program documents, and visiting the middle and high schools that housed the FLMP, I was able to build a rich, dense picture of the educational experiences of these participants.

The question that guided my study was "What role did K-12 school experiences and school personnel play in the academic success of Latinas enrolled in a university?" To answer this question I interviewed each participant with two lines of questioning. My first inquiry explored the participants' interactions with teachers that they identified as influential in facilitating their academic success. I asked the participants to describe the ways that the school agents had motivated them to further their academic career and to identify what types of practical help or advice the school agents had provided that facilitated their acceptance into a university. I will discuss my findings concerning those questions in this chapter under the section heading "Teachers, Mentors, Advocates."

My second line of questioning focused on the participants' school experiences, including academic classes, elective classes, clubs or honor societies, and empowerment programs. I asked the participants to explain the role these various experiences played in motivating them to attend college and to describe the kinds of practical advice or support these experiences had provided that facilitated their efforts to be admitted into a selective university. I will discuss my findings on this topic in this chapter under the section heading "Institutional Support."

Network Analysis Theory

Using network analysis theory (Stanton Salazar, 2001) to analyze the data generated in this study made it is possible for me to identify, name, and understand the individual components of the complex network of support that enabled the participants to experience academic success. Further, it allowed me to deconstruct the interactions

between the school agents and participants so as to identify those forms of support that were the most likely to further the student's college aspirations.

Network analysis theory posits that the academic success of Hispanic students is predicated on the student being involved in multiple social networks that enable him or her to actively engage in the social life of the school and to develop relationships with school agents, primarily teachers and counselors, that provide access to institutional support. The crucial element necessary for Hispanic students to develop these relationships is a feeling of *confianza en confianza* with the school agents. When Hispanic students have *confianza* in the school community, they are then more likely to exhibit the behaviors necessary for academic success namely: 1) a positive network orientation, 2) positive help seeking behaviors, and 3) the production of social capital.

The academic careers of the participants in this study reflect all three of the factors of success. The participants entered school with a positive network orientation and continued to build supportive relationships during their elementary school years. Their acceptance into the Foreign Language Magnet Program was the foundation on which they were able to build a large fund of social capital that enhanced their ability to be accepted by a selective university and then to continue their academic success at the post-secondary level.

POSITIVE NETWORK ORIENTATION

Each of the study's participants entered school with a positive orientation towards education. Through the encouragement of their parents and/or older siblings, school was presented as a good experience where the participants were expected to do well. This

positive aura of academic success continued as each participant was identified as gifted and began to receive the tacit and explicit privileges that accompany being a member of the educational elite. Acceptance into the FLMP furthered the positive network orientation of the participants as they entered middle school.

Examples of the positive support network for the FLMP students included regular communication with the student's parents, attention to the student's class and grade performance, and counselor monitoring by the of the student's overall social and academic well being. If a student was perceived as falling behind in either area, there were school agents available to assess the situation and to prescribe corrective measures. According to the participants, this special attention provided a sense that they were valued in the school community.

POSITIVE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS

Network analysis theory states that if a student's orientation toward school is positive, then the student is more likely to develop the help-seeking behaviors that enable him or her to become deeply involved in the academic web. Further, a positive orientation makes it more likely that Hispanic students will be able to develop *confianza* in the school personnel, a characteristic, which Stanton-Salazar (2001) identified as essential for Hispanic students. He also found that a major constraint to the development of positive help-seeking behaviors was the few opportunities for students and teachers to know one another well, a situation that often occurs in public secondary schools.

During their middle and high school years, all of the participants formed *confianza en confianza* relationships with at least one of their teachers. These

relationships developed over several years. This extended connection was possible because the teacher taught multiple levels of the same subject. Four of the participants identified their foreign language teacher as their primary mentor; the other two participants identified teachers who taught multi-year electives such as art and marching band. Each of the participants told of seeking advice and counsel from their teacher/mentors during times of academic or personal trouble. I have provided a more detailed examination of the teacher/student relationships in the chapter section, "Teachers, Mentors, and Advocates."

PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In addition to providing emotional support for the students, the student/teacher relationships were also rich sources of social capital for the participants. School agents provide social capital connections when their support provides a direct link to institutional resources that further a student's ability to achieve a college education. Examples of institutional resources and support include but are not limited to academic tutoring or counseling, providing information about college admission procedures, offering assistance with career planning, and providing access to advanced level courses that make the student competitive in a college-bound peer group.

The structure of the Foreign Language Magnet Program made it relatively easy for the participants of this study to access many different kinds of institutional support. A detailed discussion of the types of resources and institutional support that facilitated the participants' journey to college will be presented in the chapter section, "Institutional Support."

The design of the Foreign Language Magnet Program enhanced all three of the key ingredients for Hispanic student success during the crucial developmental period of middle and high school. By providing a positive social network, encouraging students to build supportive relationships with teachers and other adults in the school, and actively promoting opportunities for the creation of social capital, the FLMP created an environment in which the participants were able to become involved in multiple social webs with strong supportive adult relationships. The participants in this study are exceptionally bright, and half of them had strong family support for academic success. Nonetheless, without the structure of the FLMP the likelihood of their success would have been diminished.

The School's Role in the Participants' Academic Success

TEACHERS/MENTOR/ADVOCATES

Elementary School (Pre-kindergarten through grade five)

Grades K-5 are not often included in the discussion of university access, but for these participants the elementary school experience was very important to their eventual matriculation to a selective university. Early in their school careers all the participants developed important relationships with teachers who provided a wide array of personal and institutional support. One of the most important teacher/student relationships in Angie Hernandez' life was made with her pre-kindergarten teacher, Mrs. G. Looking past Angie's humble home life and parents who spoke primarily Spanish, Mrs. G. recognized Angie's immense intellectual talent and encouraged her parents to think of her

as having the potential to go to college. Mrs. G. became a close friend and confidant of the family; she also taught Angie's siblings and provided emotional support to the family when Angie's father died. Mrs. G. remained actively involved in Angie's academic career and guided her into the Foreign Language Magnet Program.

Vanessa Perez' second grade teacher, Mrs. S. recognized Vanessa's love of languages and introduced her to the idea of attending the FLMP when she went to middle school. Vanessa remembers that Mrs. S. gave her a pamphlet about the FLMP that she kept until fifth grade. According to Vanessa, Mrs. S. encouraged all her students to plan on attending college. Though Vanessa did not really understand what college was, she knew her teacher and her mother both though it was important.

Casey and Cecilia Perez' most influential elementary school teachers did not appear until they changed schools and were introduced to Mrs. W. and Mrs. T. Mrs. W., Casey's fourth grade teacher, held contests in her classroom to see who could make the best grades each grading period. Casey is naturally competitive and this push for academic excellence taught her about the internal and external awards that are the result of demonstrating academic excellence. Mrs. T. taught both Casey and Cecilia when they were fifth graders. Mrs. T. introduced the girls to the idea of traveling through her use of films and personal slides. She also ignited a love of reading in the Perez sisters because she would say, "I picked this book out just for you. I think you will really like it." By expanding their understanding of the natural world and inspiring a love of reading, this teacher played an important role in preparing both students for academic success.

The participants received an important form of institutional support from their elementary teachers when the teachers recommended that they be tested for the gifted and talented program. Once the participants were identified as gifted, they became part of the academic elite of SAISD and were recipients of numerous explicit and tacit rewards for their school performance. Flores-Gonzalez (2002) describes this process as developing a "school kid" identity. Her research demonstrates that once that identity becomes firmly entrenched in the student's self-awareness it becomes difficult for the outside forces to pull the student away from his or her path of academic success. In several of the participants' families the "school kid" identity of the oldest child had a positive effect on the younger siblings. For example, Vanessa Perez' younger sisters consciously strove to be as academically successful as their older sister is. The Hernandez children who followed Angie's academic path were also mentored by Mrs. G. and have created their own high levels of academic success. Gisella and Lydia had older siblings who were identified by the school as being gifted. Knowing that their siblings had been successful in school created an expectation for each of them to continue the family tradition of academic achievement.

The participants of this study entered elementary school with a positive network orientation towards school. Once there, they were able to engage school agents in relationships that were both emotionally and institutionally supportive. These student/teacher relationships helped the participants see themselves as worthy members of the school community who could solicit the help of a teacher or counselor with the

expectation of being well received. This ability to seek help in a positive manner was vital to the participants' ongoing academic success.

Middle and High School

Once the participants became students in the Foreign Language Magnet Program they were enmeshed in a social network of teachers and counselors who were committed to the educational success of each student. The structure of the FLMP ensured that most students would have multi-year relationships with their language teachers as well as exposure to other teachers of exceptional ability. Gisella, Casey, and Vanessa chose Japanese as their second language. This decision brought them under the direct influence of Mr. K. who was both their teacher and the director of the FLMP. In my interviews with Mr. K. it was obvious that he saw himself as a teacher, father figure, and mentor to his students. He said that it was his policy to visit with each of his students' parents a minimum of four times per year. These interactions included telephone calls, school conferences, and home visits (Personal interview, March, 2001). Because he taught the Japanese classes at both Lee Middle School and Henry Trueba High School, Gisella was his student for seven years. During this time, their relationship expanded beyond the typical student/teacher interactions. From the time Gisella was in sixth grade, Mr. K. regularly chose her to speak in public settings about the FLMP. He said she was one of the most remarkable students he had ever taught. When she was a junior in high school, Mr. K. nominated Gisella for of an intensive Japanese language program offered at Ohio State University during the summer. She applied and was accepted into the program. Though Gisella never had any doubt that she would go to college, her relationship with

Mr. K. provided opportunities for her to develop an image of herself as a competent public speaker and as a valued scholar. Her trip to Ohio State University was an important form of institutional support that enabled her to meet other peer scholars from across the United States. Additionally, because Gisella was not involved in very many other school-based activities during her middle and high school years, the connections created with and through Mr. K. were essential in Gisella's long-term academic success. Once Gisella reached college she blossomed into a student who held leadership positions in numerous campus organizations.

Mr. K. also served as Cecilia Perez's surrogate father, academic confidant, and emotional counselor while she was in high school. It was to him that she turned when she needed advice and counsel about school problems. She recounted two separate episodes during which Mr. K. acted much as a loving parent would have if confronted with similar situations. Twice Cecilia wanted to drop out of situations where she was afraid she would fail to reach the high standards she had set for herself. Mr. K. talked with her at length about the situations and helped her summon the courage to go on. With respect to her dropping her senior-level Japanese class, his manner was stern. He told her she was not a quitter and that he would not allow her to drop out. She recalled, "He just really went off, and I was about to cry. I said, 'Okay, I'll stay.' I actually got an "A." I worked harder. He scared me." As these situations illustrate, the relationship between Cecilia and Mr. K. went well beyond that of an institutional agent and a student and involved explicit forms of emotional support given in a climate of trust and rapport. Mr.

K.'s intervention gave Cecilia what she needed to be able to preserver through her time of crisis.

Lydia's most important teacher/advocate was her art teacher, Mrs. S., who noticed her drawing during homeroom class. Impressed by what she saw, Mrs. S. encouraged Lydia to enroll in advanced art. Over the three years Lydia worked with Mrs. S. they developed an intense emotional bond. Mrs. S. remembered that Lydia struggled several times throughout the years with depression about her abilities as an artist and her future. Lydia said that it was Mrs. S.'s belief in her that made it possible for her to continue her studies. Mrs. S. remembered that after a fairly long period of internal struggle Lydia had an epiphany in art class that let her break through her artistic barriers. Mrs. S. said from that point on Lydia's artwork entered a whole new level of expertise. Without Mrs. S.'s ongoing support it is possible that Lydia might have given up before she reached this crucial point in her artistic development.

Both Mr. K. and Mrs. S. provided their students with emotional and institutional support that was deemed important by the participants. Lydia Mendez's family had helped their two older children successfully navigate the passage to the university, but they did not have the knowledge or connections to involve Lydia in the world of working artists. For this kind of support Lydia was dependent on her school-developed social capital created by Mrs. S. The support that Mr. K. provided for Cecilia was vital because it came at a time when Cecilia had no father at home to offer any guidance and when her mother was struggling to earn a living for the family. Without Mr. K., Cecilia would not have had a caring adult with whom to express her fears and worries about her school

issues. In contrast to Mr. K.'s response concerning Cecilia's desire to drop her Japanese language class, her high school counselor had simply signed the paperwork for dropping the course. As Cecilia said, "she [the counselor] had so many kids bothering her about things. She just finally gave into it. She said, 'All right . . . whatever you want.'"

The emotional support that Casey Perez received from her teachers at school made it possible for her to persevere through some very difficult personal experiences. As a member of the Trueba marching band, Casey rose through the ranks of the drum line to become drum captain. The first female to ever achieve this distinction, Casey received an enormous amount of harassment from the male members of the drum line. Her band director stood beside her and counseled her to ignore this criticism and to focus on her goal of attending Major University. He reminded her that she had earned this honor by her performance at state level band competitions. In doing so, he provided the emotional support that Casey's absent father could not, and he gave Casey an invaluable opportunity to build her self esteem as a Mexican American woman who could compete in a non-traditional, all male environment.

Casey's Russian language teacher also provided an arena for Casey to compete in an area that had very few Mexican American participants. Because of her excellent performance in Russian class Casey was able to compete in statewide language tournaments held at UT Austin. She remembers being one of very few Mexican Americans participating in these competitions. These opportunities to succeed in gender bending and ethnically uncommon roles allowed Casey to develop a sense of herself as

an achiever in multiple realms which strengthened her confidence about attending a selective university.

Angie Hernandez's high school counselor was the source of the majority of her information about applying for college admission. He published a newsletter that contained information about when college recruiters would be on campus, about scholarships, and about other relevant topics. The newsletter was routinely distributed to all the students in the top ten percent of the graduating class, and copies were available to other students who went by the counseling office to get one. The counselor also conducted a workshop to teach parents how to fill out the paperwork necessary to apply to a college or university and to apply for financial aid.

Conclusions

The academic success of the participants in this study was greatly enhanced by the support and advocacy of their K-12 teachers. Each of the young women formed early attachments with school personnel that provided emotional and institutional support. Even years later, both the participants and their identified teachers spoke of one another in terms of warm regard. The relationships the participants developed with their teachers were carried out in a context of caring and rapport that extended over a period of years, allowing them to develop a deep sense of *confianza* in their teachers' ability to provide support and counsel. These relationships were crucial for the participants to the develop a positive self-identity and a sense of themselves as academically capable students, important factors in continuing their post-secondary education.

A second vital aspect of these teacher/student relationships is that the teachers or counselors provided direct, practical information about how the student should prepare for the college admission process. By initiating these conversations instead of waiting until the students asked for the information, the teachers spared the participants the embarrassment of revealing how little they understood about the educational process. For adolescents the fear of appearing stupid or unsophisticated can prevent them from asking questions that they assume everyone else already know the answer.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Because they are so inextricably bound together, it is impossible to draw a distinct line between the emotional support and institutional support that the participants received from members of the school community. Without the positive network orientation and support for help-seeking that the participants gained from having *confianza* in their teachers, the participants would not have had access to the specific curriculum and extra-curricular programs provided by the school district or might not have been willing to take the risk of participating in these special opportunities. The analysis will be divided into three categories. The first section will discuss the curriculum programs that were created by the school district to address the particular academic needs of a group of students, i.e. the program for gifted children, Honor's and Advanced Placement classes, and the Foreign Language Magnet Program. The second section will address the school-based classes or experiences that are not part of the core academic curriculum but are created by the school for students. These experiences include elective classes, athletic competitions, and clubs and organizations, including honor societies. The third section will focus on

extracurricular programs that are sanctioned by the school community but are organized and run by entities outside the administration of the school district. Examples of such programs are the Pre-Freshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio and the University Outreach program. All of these opportunities whether part of the academic curriculum or the extracurricular programs, are part of the total school experience of the students. For the study's participants, each of these types of programs had a direct impact on their academic success.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The academic success of these participants was possible because of a comprehensive and multifaceted system of networks that became available to them when their elementary school teachers brought the participants' intellectual abilities intelligence to the attention of the appropriate school agents. This recognition of the girls' academic abilities set the stage for numerous opportunities and privileges that are available primarily to the academic elite in the San Antonio ISD.

The curriculum programs that most benefited the participants the most were the Gifted Program and the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Once identified as gifted, the participants were assigned a new status within the school hierarchy. With this label came the explicit reward of a curriculum developed to meet the needs of gifted children and teachers who were trained in the techniques of gifted education. The "gifted" moniker assigned a tacit understanding that these students had the ability to "make it" in the academic world. Being a part of the Gifted Program provided an entrée into the

Foreign Language Magnet Program because the majority of students selected for the program had been identified as gifted (Personal interview, Mr. K., March, 2001).

The Foreign Language Magnet Program was the most important form of institutional support the participants received. This magnet program was designed to provide instruction and enrichment "for those students who demonstrate above average academic performance" (Program Documents, 1994). Inclusion in the FLMP guaranteed that the participants were automatically embedded in a series of social networks that were designed to provide explicit socialization for academic success. These funds of institutional knowledge were delivered in a variety of ways, beginning with the application process for the program.

In order to be considered for inclusion into the FLMP each student had to fill out an application, write an essay, submit copies of her elementary school transcript, and receive the recommendation of at least one teacher. This application process conveyed important lessons about navigating through a bureaucratic system to obtain access to institutional resources. Acceptance into the program conveyed an instant social status change for the student because they were bussed from their home attendance campus to a magnet school for their daily instruction. These actions publicly identified the student as "smart" and a high achiever. Several of the participants of this study spoke of the FLMP as "where the smart kids go to school."

Once at school, the FLMP students were segregated from the "regular" students attending the school. Before school, the FLMP students were assigned to a specific area of campus away from the "regular" students. Each class day began with an announcement

by the principal that the students were in "the Harvard of Middle Schools." Although this message went out to all the students, the participants felt it was directed towards them. Angie said this daily proclamation both inspired and intimidated her. All of the FLMP students were tracked into Honors classes. The only time they were able to interact with the "regular" students was during electives, physical education, and lunch. The academic rigor of the Honors classes was kept high and students' performances in the classes were carefully monitored. Students who did not maintain an overall average of seventy-five or above were counseled about their academic performance. If the student did not improve the grade(s), she could be withdrawn from the program and sent back to her home school (Program Documents, 1994). The practice of tracking students into academic paths has been written about by a number of other researchers studying Hispanic academic success. Most studies found that being on a college-bound curriculum path was advantageous to the student (Gandara, 1982,1994, 1995; Oakes, 1985).

Eighth graders were allowed to take certain classes for high school credit. Through a special arrangement with San Antonio Community College (SAC), Angie and Casey took a Biology I class that was taught by a SAC professor. Every other week the students went to SAC to use the better-equipped science labs to do their required lab work. The explicit and implicit funds of institutional knowledge created through this experience are staggering. In addition to the validation the students received as learners, they were given regular opportunities to participate in learning on a post-secondary campus. As evidence of the impact of this class, Casey said the class was hard for her because she "couldn't understand everything he [the professor] said, and he wrote real

sloppy. But I thought it was really cool because this is what college is going to be like – get used to it." Angie said she found the class very challenging, but, she said, "Once I got through that I thought, 'If I can do that, I can do anything.'" High school classes in English I and Algebra I were also available to the FLMP students.

The culture of the FLMP was focused on academic achievement. The students were publicly validated as the academically elite of the school district. The curriculum was rigorous; it was designed to create opportunities for the students to learn social and study skills and the academic and institutional knowledge and to make the personal commitment to excellence that is necessary to make a smooth transition into a post-secondary education.

ELECTIVES AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Access to high quality elective classes was a further boost to the participants' academic careers and to the development of social networks. These classes included the language classes that were the cornerstone of the FLMP. Through these classes, the participants were eligible to compete in a variety of different events. Being able to compare their academic prowess to that of other students in the city and state was an important part of the construction of an image of themselves as scholars. Angie enjoyed a high level of success in University Interscholastic League Latin competitions and in the National Latin Exam. Casey loved competing in Russian language events often held at UT Austin. Because so few students in San Antonio took Russian, competitions had to be statewide. Each year of high school competition, Casey finished among the top ten students. One year she earned third place out of more than three hundred competitors.

She said these accomplishments were important because she knew she made her teacher proud of her. It was through these events that she first saw a Hispanic with a Ph.D., Dr. Tom Garza, head of the Slavic Languages at UT Austin. When asked what she thought had been the most important in reaching her goal of attending MU, Casey said, "I guess if I had to give you one reason it would be Russian. I thought, 'I can't wait to get to college and take all the neat courses they offered!" When Casey enrolled at Major University, she began as a Russian major.

Being a student at Henry Trueba High School, rather than at her home school, offered Vanessa an opportunity to take the Radio, Television, and Film classes. These classes became the focus of her academic passion during her junior and senior years of high school. Vanessa said that one of the major reasons she wanted to attend Major University was because of the Radio, Television and Film program there.

Angie, Vanessa, and Casey were all members of the Henry Trueba High School marching band. Angie played the flute and felt that it helped her make friends and enjoy the social side of high school. For Vanessa and Casey participating in the band was a pivotal experience in their educational career. Through her membership on the drum line, Vanessa found both a reference group and friends, relationships that had been hard for her to make during middle school. Casey became captain of the drum line, a position never before held by a girl. Through this exercise in gender bending she gained valuable leadership skills as well as opportunities to compete at the city and state levels. She was the only one of the Henry Trueba drum line members to bring home medals from the competitions. She said that these experiences made her feel good about herself. "I was

the only girl, too. I competed against all these boys. I felt good 'cause I got First Chair and everyone else was behind me."

Participation in band enabled the girls to travel to other schools and to gain an awareness of the different economic levels of students around the city. Their involvement in the band also fostered the girls' feelings that they were important in the social life of the school, and it provided numerous opportunities for them to develop skills in cooperation and leadership. Cecilia was a member of the color guard, a corollary to the marching band. She rose through the ranks to be a flag captain during her junior year. She was not a member of the color guard during her senior year because she needed the time to take an extra science class. Nonetheless, Cecilia's participation in the color guard gave her leadership skills and taught her a valuable lesson about overcoming her fear of failure.

The myriad clubs, organizations, and honor societies that are part of every middle and high school are rarely thought of as important purveyors of institutional support and resources, but they were for the participants of this study. Cecilia and Casey spoke of the Environmental Club, sponsored by their female, middle school science teacher. As part of the club's responsibilities, the students monitored the health of the creek located behind their school. Cecilia said that this experience helped her to see a woman as a scientist and awakened a deep interest in the natural world. Casey and Cecilia were both officers in their high school class, opportunities that allowed them to experience being part of an election, to serve as leaders in their school, and to develop status among their peers. Angie was a member of several different organizations that focused on community

service projects. One such group, the Interact Club, worked to remove graffiti from buildings and to plant flowers and shrubs in the neighborhood. These activities enabled her to feel as though she was making a difference in the community and allowed her to engage in activities outside the home that earned her the respect of adults in her social network.

All of the participants were in the National Honor Society and as part of their community service requirement they tutored elementary school students in reading. In addition to the elementary school experiences, Casey tutored fellow students who had not passed all portions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. This activity was good for her self-image as a learner because she often felt inferior to her two older sisters. Thinking about this activity Casey said,

> It would be kind of frustrating but I would think, 'Aw, imagine how hard it is to teach me.' So I would help them. I used to help out with some other kids too, like maybe they were taking easy physics and I was like, 'EASY!'

Serving as role models to younger children as well as their same-age peers provided the participants with validation, as well as a sense of competency and leadership. Each of these opportunities broadened the girls' social network as members of their community. Additionally, they learned a multitude of interpersonal skills and had their status as academically elite students reconfirmed.

EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Beginning in elementary school, the participants participated in a number of programs that were designed to encourage Hispanic students to start thinking about a college education. During the summer between fourth and fifth grade, Vanessa attended a program sponsored by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) that was designed to expose high achieving Hispanic students to life on a college campus and to encourage them to think about going to college. The program participants were taken to Our Lady of the Lake University and taught to do research about a career that interested them. Vanessa said that it was through her participation in the HACU program that she learned that she needed to start thinking about going to a college and that she became aware of several universities around the state that she might be interested in attending. Vanessa made an important social capital connection through this experience. She was able to see herself as a serious candidate for a college education and learned valuable information about college campuses and requirements. The experience provided explicit information about college and adult success, giving Vanessa a connection that her family had not been able to provide.

The participants had multiple opportunities to access social agents with connections to other forms of institutional support. One such program was the Pre-freshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio. Cecilia, Angie, Lydia, and Casey were all involved in PREP. Casey dropped out after the first year, but the other three girls completed the three-year program. Angie and Cecilia credit PREP with fostering their desire to become engineers. Both young

women enrolled as Engineering majors when they entered MU. One benefit of being a student in PREP was taking classes with other high achieving peers from all over the city at various college campuses around San Antonio. Cecilia said that seeing the Hispanics program assistants from San Antonio, Brownsville, and Laredo who were also students at prestigious universities made her think, "I want to be like that. . . . It wasn't just for every Hispanic girl to get married and start working right after high school." Angie said PREP prepared her for a college setting where you "just go to class and listen to lectures."

Another empowerment program that was especially helpful to these participants was the University Outreach Program. This resource is sponsored by the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University. Its function is to provide emotional support, cultural opportunities, and explicit help in navigating the road to college. Starting in middle school, counselors from University Outreach provided opportunities for the participants to attend cultural events such as the ballet. Vanessa said that without these field trips, she and her sisters would not have had any of these experiences because her parents "didn't take us places." These activities were important because they connected the girls to enriching experiences that exposed them to cultural worlds outside of their own. University Outreach also took the students to visit various university campuses. When it was time for the participants to begin their university application paperwork, University Outreach counselors were available to facilitate the process.

For Casey, Project Stay, another empowerment program with the mission of helping minority students get to college, was especially helpful during her senior year. It is commonly assumed that if there is an older Hispanic student in the family who has

attended a college or university that they will serve as a guide for the younger siblings. Even though Casey had two older sisters in college, they were busy with their own lives in another city and were often not available to help her with the college admission paperwork. The counselors at Project Stay provided the emotional and practical support that facilitated Casey's completion of the college admissions paperwork.

Lydia Mendez's networking opportunities were immeasurably increased by the SAY SI´ program, which her art teacher, Mrs. S. had encouraged her to join. This off-campus arts-based organization was created to provide a place for urban middle and high school students to develop their artistic skills. The program provided free art supplies, mentoring by working artists, classes on the business side of being an artist, and forums for the student artists to sell their work. Once she discovered SAY SÍ, Lydia spent every afternoon and Saturdays at the SAY SI studios. She said,

> I sold a lot of my artwork there. The first show that I was in, I sold the most out of anybody there. It was nice. I didn't have a job and I wanted to paint. That's pretty much what everyone wants to do. I mean, make art and make money off of it. I was making some money.

Lydia was validated as an artist through this program and she received vast funds of institutional knowledge about the world of a working artist. Lydia credits SAY SI and her art teacher with giving her the courage to declare herself an art major at Major University.

Recommendations

This study clearly demonstrates that K-12 school experiences and school personnel played vital roles in the participants' matriculation to college. According to the data analysis, the most significant contributions of the school were: (1) relationships with school agents such as teachers, counselors, and administrators that allowed the student to build "*confianza*" in the school and its representatives, (2) an enriched curriculum that enabled the participants to be competitive in the college admissions process, and (3) the empowerment programs that provided opportunities for the participants to further their self identity as capable learners and to make strong connections within the college-bound community. When this study is placed within the context of Stanton-Salazar's Network Analysis Theory, it illuminates specific ways that the K-12 academic community and the teacher preparation programs could improve to better serve the needs of Hispanic students.

K- 12 SCHOOLS

K-12 educators can not continue to operate on the belief system that Hispanic academic success is dependent largely on the efforts of the individual student. Instead, the K-12 school community must accept and embrace its role as a vital conduit to higher education opportunities. Most students know that they need a "good education" to succeed in life, but many fewer understand exactly what a "good education" entails. School personnel often assume that students do understand how the educational system works, but that assumption is erroneous. A large portion of students are ignorant about the system that educates them, and they do not know how to make it work for them. This

ignorance could exist because of the students' lack of social capital or it could be because educators make unrealistic assumptions about what students understand about the system in which they participate every day. For example, Casey Perez did not know whether or not she had been in the gifted program, and Gisella Garcia had no idea how she was identified as gifted, how she was chosen for the Foreign Language Magnet Program, or how she qualified for the college scholarships she was awarded. These individuals have demonstrated exceptional competence as students and yet they lacked basic knowledge about their own educational history. If a student who performs at this level is unaware, imagine how bewildering the "regular" student must find their educational process.

Beginning in middle school, all students, not just those who have been identified as gifted, should be given systematic instruction about the way that the education system works. Direct connections must be drawn for middle and high school students between today's class choices, grade point averages, and school attendance and tomorrow's ability to access further opportunities in higher education. All students at the high school level need to be walked through the college application process even if they do not seem to be college-bound. In too many high schools in Texas college admission information is made available only to those students who are in the top ten percent of their class, and too much emphasis is placed on attending one of the two big name universities in Texas. There are many smaller universities that will admit students who are not in the top ten percent of the graduating class. High school students need to understand that they have options beyond UT Austin and Texas A& M.

The agents of the K-12 schools can become advocates for the educational advancement of Hispanic students. This advocacy could be demonstrated in the following ways:

1. As gatekeepers to education opportunities, members of the K-12 school community need to understand the cultural and psychological barriers that Hispanic students must overcome to access academic opportunities in social institutions that are dominated by white, middle class values and norms. Through ongoing professional development, teachers, counselors, and school administrators can learn about the role of "*confianza*" in the interactions between Hispanic students and school agents. This understanding should go beyond the vague concept that teachers need to show respect for their students, to the idea that Hispanic students need at least one, and preferably many, adults in their academic world who proactively reach out to them to form relationships that are based on a sense of rapport, confidence, and compassion. In this study, the school agents who made a significant impact on the participants initiated the contact with a conscious effort to engage the student in a conversation, activity, or program opportunity.

2.) This proactive approach by school agents to the students can not be regulated to a single attempt, but rather must be a part of a continual outreach to students. For example, Casey Perez said that she declined to become involved in the University Outreach program for at least a year in spite of repeated invitations. Once she became a member of the program, it provided a great deal of emotional support and a number of important social capital connections for her. In the literature on best practices for

Hispanic students a wide range of suggestions are made for student outreach. These strategies include mentoring, tutoring, peer mentoring, individual and group counseling, motivational speakers, visits to college campuses, and greater access to empowerment programs. Although many of these suggestions are drawn from research studies that focuses on trying to keep Hispanic students from dropping out of school, the focus could shift so that these opportunities would be offered in expectation of Hispanic academic success rather than as a buffer against failure. The first posture is based on a deficit model, the second is not.

3.) Because being enmeshed in the K-12 school community enhances academic success, students need multiple ways to become part of the school's social network. A number of low-cost, high impact ways to accomplish this goal are available. For instance, in the middle school where I taught, we instituted a series of initiatives to create a positive climate in which the students could receive recognition and rewards and become involved in the social network of the school. One effort, the Renaissance Program, rewarded academic success and good attendance through a series of color-coded identity cards. Those students who earned a card had their names listed on a chart near the entrance to the school. At the first level, students who had passed all of their classes and had good attendance and behavior earned a variety of privileges, including a free movie and popcorn during school time. At the second level students earned all the privileges of level one, plus extra privileges such as half-price admissions to sports activities. At the highest level, a gold card symbolized an all "A" report card and earned even greater privileges for the recipients. Identity cards were passed out with a lot of

fanfare in advisory class at the same time report cards were distributed. There was no limit on how many cards could be distributed at each level so the element of competition was not among students but was a form of self-motivation. Local businesses gave discounts to student cardholders, which provided a form of community recognition for being a good student. After instituting this program, the grades and attendance patterns of the student body showed significant improvements that continued to grow over time.

Another initiative encouraged all teachers to choose three to five students per grading period who had shown some sort of academic progress and teachers mailed a postcard to the students' home congratulating them on their hard work. The goodwill that was generated by those postcards was immeasurable. Years later, I heard stories of postcards that stayed attached to refrigerator doors until the cards were faded and frayed. Neither of these initiatives was expensive or labor intensive, but both enabled numerous students to earn recognition, rewards, and privileges for their academic efforts. When combined with a wide array of athletic opportunities both intramural and school teams sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities based on a variety of interests, the school community provided multiple ways for students of differing ability levels and interests to become enmeshed in the social network of the school. It is through this type of social relationship building that students develop the skills and connections that enable them to pursue further educational opportunities.

All of the participants in my study credited their involvement with extracurricular activities as the element that made school a good place for them. Four of the young women said participation in the marching band or the flag team provided them with

opportunities to demonstrate leadership, develop friendships, and participate in competitive events that strengthened their self esteem. The advanced art classes gave Lydia Mendez a place to demonstrate her artistic abilities, but just as importantly, those classes and the relationship with her art teacher were a haven in which she could work out the struggles of adolescence. In times of financial shortfalls however, electives programs are often the first to receive budget cuts. If the goal is to increase Hispanic student success, more not less of these extracurricular activities must be made available to the student body.

4.) K-12 school agents need to be taught the difference between a supportive relationship and one that helps students build social capital. With very little effort a teacher's encouragement can be changed from, "You can be successful if you work hard and believe in your dreams, to "You can be successful if you work hard and believe in your dreams. But you are going to need some practical tools to get there. Here is an example of a college entrance form, let me walk you through filling it out." Many middle and high schools have advisory programs, time during the day when administrative duties and socialization or study skills are taught. Using this time to actively teach the process of academic success would be of value to many students.

PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Preservice teachers must have adequate preparation for teaching in a cultural community different than their own. This instruction must go beyond an introduction of the different cultural holidays and "quaint customs," to a deeper understanding of the role of culture in peoples' lives. For example, there are cultural differences in the way

Hispanics and whites perceive the role of education. In the white culture, to be educated means that a person has earned one or more post-secondary degrees primarily by reading books and demonstrating mastery of the material through a series of intellectual tests. It is possible in white culture to be very educated but not very wise. In Hispanic culture the concept of *educación* "refers to the family's role in inculcating in children a sense of moral, social and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation of all other learning" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). While Hispanic parents want their children to be academically competent, they also expect an educated person to know how to relate to the world with dignity and respect. These attributes can not be measured on a standardized test. Teachers of Hispanic children need to understand how important the concept of respect is when dealing with Hispanic children or with their parents. If a teacher is perceived as having little respect for the student's culture that teacher will not be able to build a relationship with the student based on *confianza en confianza.* Without *confianza* in the system, the Hispanic student is unlikely to become engaged in the social networks of the school.

To be better prepared to work with Hispanic students, preservice teachers need to understand the role that deficit thinking has played in the educational history of Hispanic children. They need opportunities to examine their own preconceived notions of what a model student looks like and then compare those notions to the unrecognized strengths that Hispanic children bring into the classroom. For example, teachers need to understand that family literacy, whether it is in Spanish or English, still provides the students with rich experiences to share in class. Another popular misconception is that

Hispanic parents do not care about the education of their children. The fact that Hispanic parents do not come to school to visit with the teacher is offered as evidence of this lack of care. Teachers need to be familiar with the reasons Hispanic parents feel uncomfortable visiting the school and then develop ways to make their classroom or school community more welcoming to their students' parents (Valencia and Black, 2002).

Preservice teachers need multiple opportunities to interact in classroom settings with students of different ethnic and economic backgrounds than their own. These interactions need to be followed by periods of debriefing in the university classroom that allows an examination of the social and political conditions that may have fostered the behaviors or attitudes demonstrated by the K-12 students. It is only through understanding of the context of the students' lives that teachers can begin to develop the compassion and empathy that encourages them to reach out to students who are culturally different from themselves.

Teachers of Hispanic students need to learn ways to make the curriculum more culturally relevant. During their preservice training they need opportunities to develop curriculum units that include Hispanic contributions to the academic discipline that they will be teaching. Finding appropriate materials can be difficult, but if a teacher goes into her new classroom with some resources readily available she is more likely to find ways to include them in the standardized curriculum.

HISPANIC STUDENTS

This study clearly demonstrate that Mexican American students who are highly intelligent, fit the "model student" image, and show the appropriate demeanor to teachers and other school agents can become deeply involved in the social capital networks that allow them to reap the benefits of many educational opportunities. But what about the students who are not in the top ten percent of their graduating class or who are not identified as gifted before leaving elementary school? All six of the study's participants told stories about other students who were as smart as they were but had not been able to get the positive attention of the school agents. This study demonstrates how much the social network of the school can do for low social capital students who are identified as gifted. But how much are school communities doing for the students who are not identified as gifted? A greater effort must be made to connect with those students who do not make it into the "top-tier" of the academic elite category.

Note of Caution

Because this is a qualitative study based on the experiences of six individuals, it is not necessarily a replicable study. Additionally, it can not be assumed that the data represents all Mexican American females. However, the experiences of these participants do offer an important view into the world of Latinas who came to school with varying degrees of social capital. By studying the effect of the school community on both of these groups of women provides important insights into the role the school can play in the lives of its students.

Suggestion for Further Research

This study leaves unanswered many questions that require further research. The first avenue of investigation should be to replicate this study with academically successful Latino students. Because Latinas are graduating at a slightly higher rate from both high school and college than Latinos, it is important to understand why these differences exist. Does the role of social capital work differently in the lives of male Hispanic students versus female Hispanic students?

Another important line of study should be how social capital is produced in high schools that are not organized on a magnet school model. The participants of this study were in a highly selective group of students, with teachers who were dedicated to the development of their academic success. Their experiences might be substantially different from high school students in a different type of setting. Knowing how social capital networks function in different high schools would help build a more complete picture of the role that social capital production plays in the lives of Hispanic students.

A third area of research suggested by this study is an examination of the efficacy of teaching school agents new ways of interacting with Hispanic students based on the social capital model. Can teacher behaviors be changed, and will those changes make a difference in the academic success of their Hispanic students?

In conclusion, the most important outcome of this study has been the ability to deconstruct the interactions between students and K-12 school agents to identify the specific behaviors that promoted social capital production and academic success for the study participants. Using that line of inquiry to help a school evaluate its internal

processes when dealing with Hispanic students can provide an important tool in the work of helping more Hispanic students achieve academic success and further their ability to pursue a higher education.

Vanessa Perez: Education Biography

HOME LIFE

Vanessa Perez is the oldest of the three sisters participating in this study, all of whom are enrolled at Major University. Vanessa was twenty-one years old at the time of my first interview with her. She was a senior in MU's Radio, Television and Film Program and was planning to take one more year of classes before graduating. She came to the interview somewhat warily. She told me that she wanted to check me and the situation out before her sisters became involved because "My sisters will tell you anything." I reassured her that I was not attempting to dig into family secrets or make judgements about her family life and that anything she told me would be kept confidential. Once she felt that the purpose of the interview was positive rather than negative, Vanessa was open about her school experiences and her family life.

Vanessa's family consisted of her father, her mother, her three siblings (two sisters and a much younger brother), and her maternal grandfather. Vanessa's father is from a traditional Spanish-speaking Mexican American family from Laredo; her mother, also Mexican American, is from San Antonio. The neighborhood in the near-west side of San Antonio where Vanessa's family lived has traditionally been Mexican American; many of the residents have been there for more than one generation. Vanessa's home is a very small white frame house which belonged to her grandfather. The businesses along the main roads have a worn, shabby look about them. Most expanses of exposed concrete in the area are marked with gang graffiti. The neighborhood forms a sort of

borderland between the more poverty stricken barrios of San Antonio's west side and the marginally middle-class neighborhoods on the central and near south sides of downtown San Antonio.

Although Vanessa's father and grandfather were bilingual, Vanessa's mother spoke only English. As a consequence, the children were raised as monolingual English speakers. According to Vanessa, this decision caused a great deal of tension between her parents. She remembers arguments in which her father would yell at her mother "You don't speak Spanish. Do you think you're white?" or "You think you're too good for me." Vanessa remembers that at one point Mr. Perez became so incensed that the children did not speak Spanish that he tried to force them to do so. After much frustration on his part, and many tears on the children's part, he gave up.

Vanessa at first alluded to and then told me of her father's abuse of the family. Although she did not chronicle the kinds of abuse to which he subjected the family, it was an underlying subtext throughout her discussion of her homelife. Vanessa expressed a strong sense of cultural and social isolation when she was growing up. She felt that part of this was because of her father's unwillingness to be connected with his wife's family and because of her own lack of connection to Hispanic culture. Vanessa explained,

> I never really had a Mexican identity or Hispanic identity. I don't really know what I thought. I knew I wasn't white, of course. But at the same time I didn't think I would ever call myself Mexican because people who were Mexican always spoke Spanish and their relatives were in Mexico. I have no relatives in Mexico. I have no connections. It was just hard to make that sort of identity

claim. . . . My cousin Julie who has German blood in her so she looks kind of white, bit she sounds more Mexican than I do.

Because Vanessa did not speak Spanish she felt isolated from the other children in the neighborhood. As she says,

> We don't speak Spanish. . . . My sisters and I felt very separated from kids in the neighborhood. They would call us things like 'white girls' and say things like, 'You're traitors and stuff.' So we felt like outsiders, but at the same time we were there [in the neighborhood].

Another reason Vanessa gave for not feeling accepted by the neighborhood children was because she attended an elementary school outside their neighborhood school attendance area. Vanessa remembers,

> Our neighborhood school was Smithson Elementary. Originally it was an Air Force school for military kids. It turned into a public school and it has a really bad reputation. So she [Vanessa's mother] didn't want us to go there because we were right there on the border of the West Side [of San Antonio]. She picked her elementary school, so we went to that school. We hid our address. We lied about our address and stuff to go there. So I didn't have any neighborhood friends or anything like that. All my friends were at school and when I came home I had my sisters. So there was always this separation between school and friends."

Vanessa also felt left out of a Mexican identity because of lack of connections to the Catholic church.

> A lot of Hispanics tend to be Catholic. I didn't have church in my life because my father didn't allow it. He was against the Catholic Church for some reason. So I always felt outside of my friends because of that – not only not knowing Spanish and stuff. I didn't know anything about church and I always wanted to go to church. I always wanted to be Catholic. My mom, behind my dad's back, would kind of tell us things, like Hail Mary's and stuff. So I do have influences, like Catholic influences and stuff - but not real theology.

Vanessa reports that she and her two sisters have always been very close emotionally, with Vanessa serving as the acknowledged leader and authority on most things concerning the girls. As she said,

> It's weird because we have this love-hate relationship. It's like, 'I hate you stupid.' But at the same time we get scared to be without each other. . . . I tend to be the one who guides my sisters; I think its just personality. I have strong convictions of what's right and what's wrong and what I need to do and the tenacity to stay in MU.

Both Vanessa and her youngest sister, Casey, expressed in separate interviews a fear of being without each other. When Vanessa started school she hated being without her sisters. Casey, the youngest sister, also spoke of how much she hated being without her sisters when they went away to college while she was still a senior in high school. She said it was a horrible year and she could not wait to get to MU. Casey and Cecilia are

presently roommates, but Vanessa has always lived apart from the other two sisters even when they lived in the same apartment project. Vanessa reported that she does not feel the same attachment to her younger brother. She said:

> I never talk to him because he's not academically successful at all. He's had a lot of gang influences. We don't know what's going to happen. Since we are closer in age and sisters, we tend to focus on each other and just sort of have given up on our brother for the time being.

According to Vanessa, both of her parents attended San Antonio Community college in San Antonio. When mother got married she dropped out of school. During their separate interviews, all three of the sisters commented on their mother's desire to make sure they became educated because she had not. Their mother often used her disappointment at not finishing school to remind her daughters of how important their own education was.

Literacy was very important in the Perez home. Both Vanessa's mother and grandfather were active readers. Her mother read mystery novels and often read to the children. Vanessa's grandfather read the daily newspaper as well as novels and other things. She remembers,

> I got kind of interested because of him. He had this green chair and he would always sit down and read the paper with his glasses. I'd sit at the top of a chair just looking at him and I remember just watching his ears because they would wiggle while he read. I just thought it was cool.

Her grandfather also played an important role in Vanessa's love of languages. He spoke several languages including German, Spanish, French and a little Dutch. He had learned the last two languages while he was stationed in Europe during World War II. Vanessa recalled, "He knew all these languages and he would sing the French National anthem to us . . .I knew I wanted to be like Grandpa, I wanted to speak a lot of languages."

After Vanessa's grandfather died, her father's abuse of the family escalated eventually leading to a divorce when she was in the seventh grade. She has not seen or heard from her father since that time. Because her father has not contributed to the economic support of his family since he left, Mrs. Perez has worked at a variety of clerical jobs over the years. Consequently, she has not been able to be as actively involved in the two younger children's educational experiences as she had been with her first two daughters.

SCHOOL CAREER

Elementary School

Vanessa credits her mother as being her first teacher, saying:

> She was a very, very good teacher. When we were younger she just had a lot of insight as to what to do. Like reading to us all the time, and talking to us about different things. I got environmental ideas from her and stuff like that. She was one of those hippie-people. She had all these civil rights ideas and stuff.

When Vanessa started kindergarten at Colby Elementary School, she remembers being

"really overly, introvert shy." She also found the other children perplexing. "I guess I was pretty closed off or isolated. I think most people are until kindergarten." She remembers watching a boy in her class eating glue and thinking, "What's wrong with him?" Because she did not speak up in class or actively participate, Vanessa thinks the teachers thought she was retarded. She said,

> They kept giving me all these Special Education tests to try to figure out if there was something - if I was a slow learner, if I was dyslexic. They were giving me all these tests. I remember being in the office with the lady and they would have ear phones on me and they would ask, 'How many times does the dog bark?' and then the dog would bark and you would have to say it was a dog or whatever.

Vanessa says she did not tell her mother about the testing until she was in fifth grade. When her mother found out about it she was angry and wanted to know why Vanessa had not told her about these events at the time. Vanessa replied that she had been afraid to tell her parents.

In second grade, Vanessa had a close relationship with her teacher, Mrs. S. Vanessa asked Mrs. S. to teach her to speak Spanish and Mrs. S. agreed to do so. and When the class finished their lessons early she taught them the Spanish alphabet and some simple phrases. Soon after the class began their study of Spanish, the school principal came into the class and told the children that speaking Spanish was against the school rules unless you were ESL (English as a Second Language). The children were disappointed but the Spanish lessons were stopped.

Vanessa remembers that Mrs. S. talked about the importance of that college and she introduced her class to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. She told the students they could apply for membership they got into the fifth grade. Mrs. S. recommended that Vanessa be placed in a third grade classroom for accelerated students.

Vanessa's third grade class was made up of the smartest kids in that grade level. Vanessa says her academic performance ranked near the top of the class. Her best friend was a boy named Joey Garcia. She remembers they would give each other tests on math and trivia such as "Who was the 21st president of the U.S?" Smiling, she said, "We were nerds." Vanessa and her sister Cecilia participated in a Ballet Folklorico program during third grade. Her grandfather paid for the private lessons with a troupe directed by Pete Ramirez. Vanessa said the lessons provided an opportunity for her and her sister to interact with other children. The dance performances also allowed the sisters to visit places such as the Riverwalk that their parents wouldn't take them to see. She continued in dance classes until the end of sixth grade.

In fourth Vanessa qualified for the Gifted and Talented Program. She remembers being pulled out of her regular class to meet with other students and explore different topics such as social studies and art. She recalled,

> They would take us out of class to do creative things. We got creative freedom and that was really exciting. I remember being in art class and if I would make something the teacher would say, 'No, you cut the picture the wrong way.' And I would think, 'Why can't I just do it my way?' and in G/T you could do it however you wanted to do it. Like if you were drawing something, you could

draw it how you wanted. You could use the color you wanted. So I liked that a lot. I realized that they had more trust in us. It gave me more, like, 'I'm going to try to prove myself so I could get more trust.'

Near this time, Vanessa saw a Sixty Minutes television show about the Juilliard School of Music in New York. In the segment, school representatives were looking for talented young people who's talent "didn't necessarily come from technique. It was different." Vanessa dreamed of being discovered by the Juilliard School. I was always waiting. I asked, "When is Juilliard coming to San Antonio – to come look at our neighborhood. . . . Mom, how do I go to Juilliard?" She said, "They are not going to come to San Antonio." After a while Vanessa quit expecting Juilliard to come.

During the summer between fourth and fifth grade, Vanessa participated in the EXCEL

Program offered by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). Vanessa remembers that they took the students to Our Lady of the Lake University and let them research a career topic. Vanessa chose to explore the role of a marine biologist or oceanographer. "I remember seeing a picture of a dolphin and I thought, 'Oh, I want to be with a dolphin.'" On Career Day, the students presented posters they had made about their chosen career. From this activity she learned the names of three specific colleges, Our Lady of the Lake, St. Mary's University, and Texas A&M University at Galveston. "I started thinking about college from then on." Vanessa says she did not especially like any of the teachers in the summer program because she does not remember any of them being "particularly receptive."

> I mean they were Hispanic, too, and everything but I didn't understand anything. I just thought, "Oh forget it. I'm not going to ask them." I don't remember them being academic or anything. I didn't really like that program but after that when I came back to fifth grade I started thinking, "Okay, I need to go to a good school and stuff."

During fifth grade Vanessa went to an assembly in the school cafeteria where she saw a program on the Foreign Language Magnet Program. She remembers, "I just knew, 'Okay, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it! **I'm going to do it!**' I need to go because I want to learn another language . . . that was my big sell on it." She applied to the program and was accepted; "I remember never being afraid that I wasn't going to be accepted. I just thought, 'I'm going to go.'"

A series of coincidences helped Vanessa choose Japanese as her second language. First, she attended a school assembly where she learned a Japanese song. Then she saw a Japanese play presented by Incarnate Word College. She was enchanted by the experience. "I thought the Kimonos were beautiful and I thought everything was so different and so cool." Finally, she had heard on the television news that the Japanese economy was the strongest. Vanessa thought, "Okay, if I'm going to do good in a job, I need to know the language that is going to be important to the country; and that was Japanese. It was like one of those connections – so I started learning Japanese."

Ironically, when it came time for Vanessa to transfer to the Foreign Language Magnet Program she did not want to go. She preferred to attend the local middle school with her friends and she did not think she could make the adjustment to a new school.

Vanessa's mother never even considered the idea of letting her daughter forfeit the opportunity to attend the FLMP. Having her mother stand firm on the decision was a crucial moment for Vanessa. Vanessa recalls, "Deep down, I wanted to go to the FLMP," but she needed her mother to take responsibility for the decision.

Vanessa hated middle school and thought it was horrible. On the first day of school she lost her lunch and got turned around in the building and could not find her way to class. She went to the administrative office crying. Mr. A, the principal came out, comforted her, arranged for her to eat school lunch and he gave her a quarter to buy tea because she had had tea in her thermos. She says this simple act of kindness deeply touched her. She remembers crying every day and did not feel as though she had a real friend until late sixth grade when she bonded with a girl named J., whom she still considers a friend. The one adult she felt an emotional connection towards was her principal, Mr. A. In Physical Education class, Vanessa sprained her ankle. Mr. A. came and carried her to the nurse's office where they called her mother. For Vanessa, Mr. A. was more important than any of her teachers at the middle school. Vanessa's grandfather died and her parents divorced during this time, making Mr. A's attentions especially important to a lonely child who was having a hard time coping with the destruction of her family.

Once at Tomas Rivera Middle School, Vanessa and the other FLMP students were segregated from the mainstream student population. She said:

> I remember the first day of school. We all went outside and all the new sixth graders lined up outside – well the Multilingual ones – all the others lined up

> on the other side of the school. From the beginning we were separated – segregated, you know. There was "The Multilinguals" and there was "The Regulars." We called everyone else "The Regulars". . . . It started taking on a demeaning tone after a while.

Friendships between the two groups were difficult because there was very little chance for the students to interact. The FLMP students were placed in all Honor's classes. If their grade dropped in a single class they would be moved into a regular track classroom. Vanessa began to do poorly in math and was transferred to a regular math class. She stayed in the regular math program throughout high school.

In sixth grade Vanessa had "a really good history teacher named Ms. Perez." Vanessa liked that the class was very organized.

> You had a binder and in that binder you had the first part was the grammar parts of history, I mean like the dates and stuff like that. The second part was analytical stuff – 'What do you think about this?' And then you had a journal that you had to keep. Everybody hated her and called her names, but I liked her a lot.

Another thing that Ms. Perez did that impressed Vanessa is she brought the exchange student from Egypt to visit the class.

> I remember we had been studying about Egypt – about the myths about the pyramids and one of the myths was like people got killed because they opened the tomb and I think we asked her 'What do you think about that?' and she said, 'I think there's just some bad air in there.' . . . So it kind of burst our bubble about

making concepts about other people. She [Ms. Perez] started teaching us about stereotypes and stuff like that.

The Japanese class that Vanessa was taking also had a profound effect on her.

> It was weird because in a way I felt sort of Japanese. We learned a lot of culture, so I have a lot of Japanese cultural traits. . . . There are little nuances that I have like I lower my eyes a lot, of course as a shy person it's very easy for me to fall into and so when I'm talking to people I have to remind myself all the time to look at them in the eyes. 'Look at them in they eyes so they don't think you are stupid.'

Seventh grade brought even more challenges to Vanessa. She recalls being very unpopular but having a small group of friends including the only African American girl in the whole school. Vanessa said, "We would tell her 'don't worry about it. You're Hispanic." Vanessa thinks one of the reasons she was unpopular was because she could not afford the designer clothes and backpacks that the other students had. In order to compensate for her inability to compete economically, Vanessa says she developed an attitude of disdain for all of the commercially popular items. She would say, "You're wearing that? You are like so, whatever." These lines were delivered with a particular sneer that dismissed the wearer as inferior some way.

In eighth grade Vanessa served on the yearbook staff. The staff's sponsor, Mrs. A, was also Vanessa's English teacher. Vanessa recalled an incident in which Mrs. A. asked her what she would do if her sister got pregnant. Vanessa replied that her sister wouldn't do something like that. Mrs. A. pushed the issue and asked Vanessa to use her

imagination saying, “This is a fact of life, Vanessa. There’s sixth graders right now getting pregnant.” Vanessa remembers being insulted and again tried to tell the teacher that her sister wouldn’t do anything like that. But again, Mrs. A. said, “Answer the question, Vanessa.” Vanessa said she was getting “fed up with her” and that the teacher began to get angry when a boy from the class spoke up and said “Miss, she’s [Vanessa] the type of person that says, ‘I’ll cross that bridge when I get there.’” The teacher got angrier and said, “Bobby stop playing around. How many times have I told you not to speak without raising your hand.” Vanessa was grateful to Bobby for standing up for and for providing her with a way to explain how she coped with things. She had never heard the phrase “cross that bridge when you get to it.” Vanessa said “I could never explain it before. I just thought it was a dumb question.”

High School

Entering Henry Trueba High School brought some important changes for Vanessa. At first she loved high school, for the first time she was in classes with students who werewere Honor students but not necessarily from the Foreign Language Magnet Program. She recalls,

> I remember my freshman year being sort of a shock. “There’s no more regulars now.” We got so much focus on us in middle school and the regulars didn’t get any focus at all. It was just a given that if they were going to get any focus it was from Lanier High School, and that was it. That was their only option. At Lanier, its called Lanier Voc because Lanier was a vocational school and so you know automatically they were looking at shop classes and cosmetology and

stuff like that. It was like they didn't have anything open to them. When we went to Henry Trueba we had more options. There was an RTF program you could apply to.

The ethnic diversity at Henry Trueba was a new experience for Vanessa. It was the first time she had been around large numbers of African American students.

Vanessa joined the marching band during her freshman year to be with her friends. She had to beg the band director to let her in the program because she had no previous experience in music. Vanessa told the band director she would learn to play the flute. She borrowed a flute from the school and was learning to play it when he offered her an opportunity to play cymbals in the drum line. The band became an important focal point for Vanessa. "By the end of freshman year it meant everything to me. I put it above all my other classes." According to Vanessa being on the drum line had a big impact on her life. She explained, "I felt like I had brothers that I always wanted, I guess 'cause I never had a real father figure." The band provided a social order and a place for Vanessa to fit in. Vanessa said the only other girl on the drum line was a gangster. "The drum line had a big history and one of the histories was a gang-related issue." Vanessa says she that was just an "average girl" and that the other drum line members would tease her about wanting to play the flute.

Band competition provided Vanessa with a standard to compare the resources of her school with other San Antonio schools. She said, "If you went to band competition you would know that Churchill [a predominantly Anglo school on the north side of San

Antonio] had the best equipment. ing." Vanessa said that the flag team's equipment was made out of poles and masking tape but from the stands the spectators could not tell that the equipment was not of professional quality.

Band parent involvement tended to be more practical than monetary. Vanessa explained,

> Parents, of course, in our school helped out, too, but it was more like, 'Oh, my dad works at the water company. He can get you that milar piping to make the flag' Another guy was a carpenter, he could build a cabinet for the drum line's equipment. Our drum line equipment was really bad, uniforms - really bad. We couldn't change from year to year like the other schools - like Churchill.

In her junior year, Vanessa felt that the band was changing. She says that discipline, which had always been strict but fair, became more lax because of complaints by girls within the band who did not like being ordered to do pushups for not adhering to the rules of the band. Vanessa began changing her focus to the Radio Television and Film Program offered at the high school.

During her Junior year, Vanessa's attention was taken away from her school pursuits with the advent of her first boyfriend. Vanessa recalls, "I was all head-over-heels with my boyfriend."

Vanessa's worries about her boyfriend were a strong undercurrent throughout the year. She felt the school was not paying enough attention to him. In her Japanese class, Vanessa started to cry because of her concern for him. She related her concerns as;

> Nobody was taking an interest in my boyfriend because he is a "regular" student. He's so great at music. It's just nobody's ever taken an interest in him at all. I think he's really had more of that traditional ethnocentric experience where people put him aside. He gets labeled so quickly. It's interesting about him; his parents do speak Spanish and his dad's from Mexico. Maybe he projects it in some way that I am not aware of.

Another of Vanessa's friends had the same experiences with her boyfriend saying; "They don't give a crap about him just because he's not in honors' courses." Her preoccupation with the relationship caused her grade point average to drop considerably. She went from being in the top ten percent of her class to somewhere in the top twenty percent. Vanessa does not feel that her high school counselor was very helpful. She said:

> I never saw her my freshman year. Sophomore year I saw her once because I needed a shot, a measles/rubella shot. Junior year she was forced to meet with every single person but she was always saying she didn't have time to do this. But I noticed there were certain students that could hang around at her office whenever they wanted. I didn't think it was fair."

During her senior year, Vanessa enjoyed her Radio, Television and Film class. She explained:

> From the beginning, he started talking about what you want to do as a career. He is a very good teacher, he is very student-level. He made us very comfortable, not embarrassed to ask anything. He was also Hispanic so it made us more comfortable, not to feel stupid. He knew we didn't feel we'd have to

> impress him or anything. I'd ask him, 'What's a good school?' He went to MU but interestingly enough his thing was not RTF. It was political science."

Among her friends in the FLMP, only Vanessa and one other girl went away to college. She says many of the others intended to go to college but did not because of money issues or families who did not want their children to move away from home. Vanessa says her own mother was very emotional about Vanessa's leaving home but she did not ever try to keep her from going. "She always wanted us to do our best."

Vanessa does not remember being recruited by any colleges. She decided to apply to MU because they had a Japanese program, a radio, television and film program (RTF) and a good band. Her first choice was to major in RTF but she knew she could do well in the Japanese program if she did not get into the RTF program. She went to the library at her school and looked at a college reference book and got a phone number for the admissions office at Major University. She called the office and they sent her a registration packet. She was awarded enough financial aid, including a Presidential Scholarship so that she only had to borrow $3000. her freshman year. She has financed her education with scholarship, grant, and loan money as well as working as by a work-study student in the RTF Department.

Vanessa was part of the Gateway program as a freshman at MU. She feels that Gateway helped her because as she said:

> My mom has never been in my academic life. I've always had to do things on my own. So without that [Gateway] I wouldn't think to do what other kids' parents thought of for them. Working for the RTF Department, I see parents

> come in and be like, 'My daughter needs this. She needs that.' . . . They demand stuff for their daughter. Like the advisor's number. They need to set up an appointment and ask, 'Why isn't she doing well?' I didn't have that so the Gateway Program sort of took over that part by giving me my advisor's number and stuff."

Scheduling follow-up interviews with Vanessa was difficult because she had a number of problems during her last year in school which led her to take a medical withdrawal for the spring semester, 2002. In addition to her other worries, Vanessa's younger brother was shot and killed by his best friend. Vanessa is scheduled to return to MU and graduate in the fall of 2002.

Cecilia Perez: Education Biography

HOME LIFE

When I met Cecilia Perez in the Fall semester, 2000, she was a sophomore at Major University, majoring in engineering. She is a petite woman with has long, curly, dark brown hair, and sparkling eyes. Cecilia grew up in a small house on the border between the San Antonio ISD and Edgewood ISD. She is the second daughter in the family of three girls and one boy. Though her parents are both bilingual English and Spanish, her mother raised the children to be monolingual English speakers. Vanessa, Cecilia's older sister, told me this decision caused a great deal of tension in the family and related stories of fights between the parents when her father accused her mother of trying to make the children "White." According to Vanessa, Mr. Perez also accused his wife of trying to be "White" and of thinking she was better than he was because she came from a middle class family in San Antonio whereas he came from a poor family in Laredo. Cecilia' s parents were divorced when she was in the fourth grade. Prior to the divorce her family life was filled with physical and mental abuse from her father. Cecilia told of times when one of the sisters would try to stop her father from hitting another of the sisters, noting. "We would tag team him." Cecilia also recalled that her father called her and Vanessa "the ugly stepsisters" and said that Casey, the third sister was his only beautiful daughter. Cecilia's mother received no support from her husband following the divorce. She entered the workforce full time working primarily as a secretary. Cecilia has not seen her father since she he left the family.

Cecilia readily admits that many of the important decisions of her life were based on following the lead set by her older sister. She said "I was pretty envious of all the attention she got. She really didn't have to put effort into school. She was bright. She was smart and I always tried to out-do her. . . I just copied everything she did." Cecilia remembers that both her parents had an influence on her attitudes towards school.

> They would make sure we did our homework, turn off the TV, they would always look at our report card making sure we had A's. She[her mother] read to us. If the Science Fair was coming up she would take us to the library to get books. She made us want to do it. She was real enthusiastic. She made it fun.

Mrs. Perez also stressed that the girls needed to go to college and that they would need scholarship money to pay for their education. This knowledge made Cecilia strive for good grades in school.

Education was important to her extended family, as well. Her mother's brothers sent their children to private school, which was a source of envy for the Perez daughters, Cecilia stated "We were jealous. We wanted to go to private school but my mother would say, 'They have more money. You can get just as good an education if you try harder.'"

During high school Cecilia worked as a waitress at two different restaurants on the San Antonio Riverwalk in addition to maintaining a high grade point average and participating in numerous extra-curricular activities. She said that working gave her self-confidence a boost:

> That [working] was a big thing. Learning how to deal with people older than me. . . . My boss was real nice to me. He told me, "You know, I see a lot in you. You can do a lot for this restaurant being a host and being a waitress, so I'm going to hire you." The fact that he paid attention to me and believed in me, you know, gave me a chance. It made me feel good about myself.

At least half of the money she earned went towards supporting the family. Once her mother borrowed $800. from her to have the washer and dryer replaced. Cecilia often used her money to reward her younger brother when he did well in school. They would walk over to a fast food restaurant and she would buy him dinner. By the time Cecilia graduated from high school she had $3200. saved. She used this money to have braces put on her teeth. "I have paid for all my dental work myself. I am really proud of my teeth."

SCHOOL CAREER

Elementary School

Cecilia began school at Smithson Elementary School and does not remember much about her elementary school experiences except that she was very shy. She says she knew she was smart because her mother had always told her so. She learned to read easily and made good grades.

Cecilia recalls that from an early age she knew she was going to college. She explained:

> I didn't know what college was in kindergarten, but I'd say maybe by second or third grade. She [her mother] always talked about it and the main thing was I

always wanted good grades. I knew we couldn't afford college. I knew I had to get scholarships. So that was my drive. I needed the money.

Mrs. Perez chose to enroll her children in a school outside the attendance area in which they lived because she thought Smithson was a better school than Colby Elementary School, the family's neighborhood school. When the school district became aware of their actual address, Cecilia and her sister Casey were involuntarily transferred to Colby Elementary School. This transfer actually worked in Cecilia's favor because at Colby she met her first teacher of note, Mrs. T., her fifth grade teacher. Cecilia remembered:

> She picked me out of the crowd. She noticed I was real shy. She just did real special things for me. She would always give me books to read and say, 'I thought you might like this one.' Or 'This one reminds me of you. She always made me feel special when she would give me books to read. Things like *Ramona the Pest* and one about Rachel Carson. They weren't fifth grade level. She always encouraged me to try harder.

Fifth grade was also important to Cecilia because it was the year she qualified for the Gifted Program. Knowing that this might be her last time to qualify for the program, Cecilia made a deliberate plan to be recognized by the assessment team. She explained:

> They came to class and brought this sheet of paper with three dots on it. They wanted us to draw something and include the dots in the picture. We all had to draw something and the most interesting pictures got picked for G.T. I thought I was really going to freak them out. I wanted to get in real bad, it was my last

> chance. So I went ahead and drew from this movie I had seen, *The Philadelphia Experiment*, a picture of the top of the deck of the boat where the men were trapped. It was based on a true story. I drew the man halfway sticking out of the boat because in the experiment they got some how stuck in the boat. I went and drew that and it got a lot of attention. I got in.

Towards the end of fifth grade, Cecilia applied to the Foreign Language Magnet Program, "because of my big sister. She went there." Cecilia was also motivated to go to the FLMP because she did not want to go to her neighborhood middle school. She had heard that the school had a bad reputation and that there were gangs in the school.

Middle and High School

When she was accepted into the Multilingual program, Cecilia chose Japanese as her second language because Vanessa her older sister was taking Japanese. Cecilia admits "I just copied every thing she did. She took Japanese so I took Japanese. I said, 'I'm gonna get an A because she always had the A's.

Middle school was a productive time for Cecilia. In addition to all her classes being Honor's or Gifted classes, she was involved in basketball and track, served on the student council, and was in the environmental club. Cecilia identified three middle school teachers who were important in her development as a student. Cecilia said her sixth grade English teacher impressed her because "She paid a lot of attention to the students. She knew everyone's name and she would remember particular things we told her. She even had us write a diary. . . . We would hand it in and she would give it back to us with her comments on it." Cecilia says this activity was important to her because it

made her feel connected to someone at school. Her science teacher sponsored the school's environmental club. As part of the club's duties, the students kept the creek behind the school clean and maintained readings of the water quality of a creek. Cecilia credits this class with teaching her about the environment and inspiring her to become a geophysical engineer. However, it was Cecilia's sixth grade math class that set into motion a series of events that played a determining role in her choice of a college major.

Her math teacher recommended that Cecilia apply for the Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio. PREP was designed to promote careers in science and engineering for women and minority students. At first Cecilia was reluctant to apply but when she discovered that they would pay she decided to try it. Cecilia was accepted into PREP and credits it with changing the course of her life. Until the PREP program she thought she was best in subjects with lots of reading, "but then I discovered math." The first summer that Cecilia attended PREP it was housed on the Lanier High School campus. Lanier is located in the heart of the west side of San Antonio, in a barrio that is known for its poverty and violence. Later years, the program was housed on university campuses around town. Cecilia remembers this about her first summer in PREP:

> I was scared. I was real intimidated. It really inspired me. They had five assistants and they were all from college. One was from Yale, one was from Baylor, one was from another really prestigious college. And they (the assistants) would always tell us that we had a head start on things and how they wish they had had that when they were young. They gave us food. A lot of kids there could

not afford lunch so they gave us free food. They introduced us to a lot of engineering things. They were like, 'You are going to be learning this next year.' So they brought in Trig and stuff like that.

Three of the five assistants were Latinos. Cecilia said this fact was important to her and she remembers thinking:

> I want to be like that. It made me realize that if they could do it I could too. It wasn't just for every Hispanic girl to get married and start working right after high school. I felt like, WOW! These people can make it and they come from where I do.

The second year of PREP was held at Incarnate Word College (now the University of the Incarnate Word) and the third year was at St. Mary's Univerisity. Cecilia said that being on the different college campuses made her feel good. At Incarnate Word she took physics. She said "I just felt good about being in that class. It was a real privilege. A lot of kids didn't make it, a lot dropped out."

When asked about the role that athletics played in Cecilia's academic career in middle school (she had played basketball and run track) she did not think it had been all that important to her being a better student. She did consider the coaches very helpful, she said:

> They just made sure we stayed out of trouble. I like it that they would always correct us. If they saw someone in the group cussing or doing something like that, that was not sportsmanlike, they would always say, 'Now that's not

> ladylike.' I really liked that. Especially because my mom is a single parent and I didn't have a father. I really looked up to all my male teachers and coaches.

Transitioning to high school was not too difficult for Cecilia. During her freshman year she was elected vice-president of the student council. She found the teacher sponsors of the organization "not too cool." When I asked why, she replied:

> They didn't help out at all. They didn't pay attention to what we did. They made jokes about other kids. They actually talked about other kids in front of us. Students - they'd make fun of students. They [the sponsors] were young. They were like twenty-six . . . they didn't really make good teachers.

Academically, Cecilia tried to take all the math and science course she could. She said, "I never wanted to take anything like shop or anything like Home Economics. I always tried to take computer science or anything that colleges would pay attention to."

Twice during high school Mr. K, Cecilia's Japanese teacher played a huge role in helping her weather serious crises. The first incident had to do with Cecilia's participation in the school's color guard. While Cecilia's older and younger sister were in the Band, she was a member of the flag and dance team. At one point, performing in the Color Guard became very difficult for her. She doesn't remember what caused the problem, but she wanted to drop out of the group because she felt staying in was just too hard. Mr. K. talked to her about the situation, saying "You never follow through on things, you need to follow through on this." With his counsel she decided to stay in color guard. She said, "I stuck with it and I saw a lot of progress. I did really good in it. I just excelled at color guard. I was a really good dancer and my routines were pretty good."

Cecilia went on to become a flag captain during her junior year. She chose not to be a part of the color guard during her senior year so that she could take extra science and writing classes. Cecilia feels that being a member of Color Guard helped her in school because it gave her leadership experience and motivated her to strive for excellence.

The second time Mr. K. intervened was a much bigger incident. Cecilia had decided to withdraw from her Japanese class because she was afraid she was going to get a B. She did not want to make any "Bs" because it would bring her grade point average (GPA) down. She convinced herself that Japanese was not going to help her in the future so she went to the counselor and had a schedule change form made up. When she approached Mr. K. with the schedule change she says he got very angry. She recalled:

> I went up to him and said, 'Mr. K., I need to talk to you. I think I want to get out of Japanese and I need your approval.' He just stayed quiet. I told him, 'I am going to drop Japanese.' He asked, 'Why?' I told him I didn't think I was going to do so well. I didn't want it to bring my GPA down. I started talking faster because he was getting angry. I said, 'I'm not going to do anything with languages or arts. I'm going to go into engineering.' He said, 'Damn it, Cecilia. I see how different you and your sister [Vanessa] are. You have so much potential, but you never believe in yourself and you always quit on things.' He just really went off and I was about to cry. I said, 'Okay, I'll stay.' I actually got an "A." I worked harder. He scared me.

In both of these situations, Cecilia wanted to quit because she was afraid of failure. Each time, Mr. K. served as a mentor or parent. He encouraged or shamed her

into giving the dreaded challenge another try. In each case, Cecilia was able to turn a potential defeat into a victory.

When I asked her if the school counselor had also tried to talk her out of dropping Japanese class, Cecilia said she had but not forcefully, "You know she had so many kids bothering her about things. She just finally gave into it. She was like, 'All right - whatever you want."

One of the few classes Cecilia took with regular education students was her Government class in twelfth grade. She did not find it a good experience. She said the other students and even the teacher picked on her. She explained:

> They would make fun of me. My teacher he would walk around and he be saying, "Ms. Perez, the only "A" in the class." And the students would all say "Whoooo" and start clapping. I'd be embarrassed. He was actually a nice teacher. He would just do it. He'd make fun of the other kids. We all had fun in there though. Sometimes I'd fall asleep and wake up with a big sticker on my back.

Cecilia was in the top ten percent of her graduating class the first year the Texas Legislature decreed that students in the top ten percent would receive automatic admission to any state college in Texas. Cecilia wanted to go to Texas A&M University but Vanessa convinced her to come to MU so that the sisters would be together. Vanessa was concerned that Cecilia would not do well if she was alone at another university. Cecilia says that Vanessa was correct in her assessment of the situation. She explained "I didn't know how hard it was going to be to be away from home. I didn't know how different I would be away from my mom. The first year was very hard. I cried a lot."

Cecilia had trouble with her roommates and had problems adjusting to "such a big campus," and "not knowing anyone here at MU. She began to feel more comfortable at MU when she met someone in her class from San Antonio. Cecilia said:

> He happened to be from Holy Cross High School. We started talking about that. I was like, 'Oh, you're from a private school.' And he was like, 'Yeah.' It was really nice. We just became friends and he introduced me to all his friends because a lot of the Holy Cross guys were over here, too. We just all started hanging out and being friends. We were all in engineering and computer science, too, so we'd help each other with homework and stuff. And they were Hispanics.

Cecilia reports that she had a hard time adjusting to the lack of Latino/as in her classes at UT.

> I felt like nobody. There was nobody else here like me. I couldn't tell if anybody was Hispanic. I just felt like, 'You're so insignificant . . . You don't matter. . . Nobody wants to talk to you.' It was just that when they did talk to you they seemed to think I speak Spanish or something.

Cecilia related several examples of what she considered to be stereotypical thinking about her as a Latina by her classmates "They're surprised that and I don't speak Spanish all the time. And it's not my fault. Another one would be maybe that I'm dumb. . . . Like I'm going to copy or something." Cecilia's engineering classes seemed to give her the most trouble on gender and ethnicity issues. In one class she and three other girls ended up working together on their project and becoming friends. Cecilia recalled:

> We realized a lot of the guys thought we were dumb or something. We were actually the ones that did all the work. We put all the effort into the project. The teachers saw that. The guys, they just didn't pay attention because they didn't think we were going to be any help or anything.

When I asked Cecilia if she thought being a Latina made it more difficult in engineering, she replied,

> Well, I think sometimes. But its just if you're a girl in engineering. That's the issue. The guys don't care what you are. It's just like if you're a girl, you're less to them. They don't want to work with you. They don't want you in their group.

Cecilia was not ready to get out of the engineering program even though she had witnessed other girls who left the program. She told me of one girl who the guys in her work group made cry. According to Cecilia the young men told the young woman to "Just go home and we'll get the grade. You just take the grade." When the female student asked why they didn't want to work with her, the fellows called her "a bad name." According to Cecilia, the young woman "just like gave up on it. She actually got out of engineering."

Postscript: Cecilia did leave the engineering program and transfer to geology. She says she is much happier there. In April, 2002, Cecilia's younger brother was shot and killed by his best friend. As a consequence of this tragedy, Cecilia took an incomplete in several of her classes for the spring semester. She returned to MU in the fall 2002 semester and was on track for graduation.

Casey Perez: Education Bibliography

HOME LIFE

Casey Perez is the youngest of the three sisters who participated in the study. She has a quick wit, a dry sense of humor, and a self-deprecating manner. At the time of the first interview her major was government, with a minor in Russian. One thing that became quickly apparent during the first interview with Casey was her lack of confidence in her academic abilities and the difficulty she has recognizing her educational strengths and achievements. Casey often stated that she was "not smart" or "not good at" a certain subject or skill, but then she would tell me about winning a competition or making an "A" in an Advanced Placement class that she said she "wasn't good at." For instance, Casey declared that she was not good in math or science like her sister Cecilia, but she made an "A" in pre-calculus, an "A" in Advanced Placement Physics, and she took an advanced biology course for high school credit while still in eighth grade. I asked Casey why she thought she was not good in math. She replied:

> I took Pre-Cal and I liked it, it was fun. But that is only cause I had people to help me. I had to study all the time. I had to practice the problems at home in order to do good. . . . .At Henry Trueba High School there were a lot of smart math people. They could do it on their own but I always needed help. I'm kind of slow when it comes to math. You have to go real slow for me to get it.

Casey said her sense of academic inferiority may come from always feeling less able than her two older sisters. She said, "I'm not good at English like Vanessa. She passed her

AP test and I got a 2 or something. She got credit, I couldn't. Cecelia is good at math naturally and I'm just kind of like in the middle."

Though she respects and admires her oldest sister, it is Cecilia, the middle sister, to whom she is the closest emotionally. Currently, Cecilia and Casey share an apartment at MU with another friend from Henry Trueba High School. As Casey told me about her activities and friends in high school, I said, "So all your life you have been surrounded by people who excel academically." Her replied intensely:

> Yeah, like people who are better than me. All my friends like [her boyfriend] was number one [in class ranking], and the friend that helped me with physics he was number two. He and my ex-boyfriend were always fighting for number one. R. was really smart. He would help me with my physics or stuff like that. Other people, like my friends or my sisters would get frustrated if they tried to help me. They didn't have patience. But R., he would break it down really good. . . . Angie [a participant in this study] was real smart [heavy voice emphasis]. I never asked her for help.

Casey was in the fourth grade when her parents divorced. According to both of the older sisters, their father both physically and emotionally abused his wife and children. Though Casey has not seen her father since she was nine years old, she thinks that he had both a positive and negative influence on her educational career. She remembers that Mr. Perez insisted that the girls make high grades in school. She explained "He would make you study and say, 'You better get an A. You better be good.' He was always mean about it . . . he scared us that we would get spanked or

something." When I asked if he followed through on his threats she said, "Yes." Before the divorce, Mrs. Perez had been a stay-at-home-mom; after the divorce she worked full time outside of the home. This change meant that Mrs. Perez had less time to offer to Casey and her younger brother the enriched learning experiences that she had provided for the two older children.

Casey says she knew from the time she was a little girl that her mother wanted all three of the girls to go to college. She thinks her mother emphasized that goal because of her own disappointment in not going to college. Not doing well in school was not an option for the daughters of the Perez family. According to Casey, however, her younger brother did not have the same commitment to academic excellence. He has not done well in school and does not express an interest in going to college.

SCHOOL CAREER

Elementary School

Casey began school at Smithson Elementary School. Her mother chose to enroll her children in a school outside the attendance area in which they lived because she thought Smithson was a better school than Colby Elementary, her neighborhood school. Casey does not remember much about her early elementary school experiences. She does recall that she liked pre-kindergarten because "you only had to go to school half a day." In third grade, because she lived outside the Smithson attendance area she was involuntarily transferred by the school administration to Colby Elementary School. She does not remember being particularly upset about the transfer.

Casey can not remember if she was in the gifted program. She only remembers being a member of the Math Superstars competition. This program allowed the students to compete in math contests against others in their grade level at their school. The school winners would compete against other elementary schools in the district. Casey said, "I always wanted to be the best because you would have stars going all the way across [a wall chart]." Casey did go to the district level math competition but did not win. She remembers that she was always "on the "A" or "A/B" honor roll" and that she did not join Ballet Folklorico with her sisters because she was "too shy to dance with a boy."

Throughout her educational career, Casey has done well in situations that involved competition. She cited this example from fourth grade, " Mrs. H., my teacher, would give you points and awards if you did good on your work. You could get candy and stuff. That was very motivating for me." Both Casey and Cecilia had Mrs. T. As their fifth grade teacher. As Mrs. T. Had done for Cecilia, she made a very positive impression on Casey. Casey explained, "Mrs. T. Was real smart . . .. She was a big environmentalist, and she talked about stuff. She got us to read books." Mrs. T. Also had a reward system for those who read many library books and Casey was among the top winners each grading period. With Mrs. T.'s help, Casey discovered that she liked historical nonfiction and she enjoyed reading about Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad.

Middle and High School

Casey applied to the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) because her two older sisters were students there. She recalled, "I felt like all the smarter kids went to

Rivera and I wanted to be with the smarter kids – like my sisters. I didn't know if I could do it, but I applied anyway, and I got in." Once in the FLMP she chose German as her second language. She liked her German teacher and loved learning about German culture and entering German language competitions. Casey said:

> I loved competition in German cause I was doing really good . . . I like more the speaking and writing. They would give you a whole paragraph in German and you would have to read it right and pronounce it right. I liked that a lot, it was really fun. . . . My favorite time of the year was competition.

During middle school Casey was in all Honor's classes and participated in those activities her older sisters told her to join. She played alto saxophone in the band because her sister Vanessa told her it was a good instrument for her. She joined the Prefreshman Engineering Program sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio because her sister Cecilia encouraged her by saying, "They pay you and you get to learn all this stuff. You can be an engineer like me." Casey was accepted into the program but dropped out after the first summer. She said, "I guess I was following too much what my sister, Cecilia, wanted to do. . . . I learned a lot, but I kind of realized that it wasn't meant for me. I don't want to be an engineer even though I could be one." Cecilia was a member of the environmental club so Casey tagged along with her to help monitor the water quality of the creek behind the school and to keep the creek clean. Casey and Cecilia were on the same soccer, volleyball and cross-country running teams. She said she was not a very good athlete but it was fun and she felt it helped relieve her stress. In seventh grade because of scheduling problems Casey had to retake beginning band if she wanted

to keep band as an elective class. Consequently she was unable to participate in band competitions during seventh and eighth grade which was very disappointing for her. When she became bored with the saxophone she switched to the percussion section.

When I asked if she took part in any special program during the summer between her seventh and eighth grade year she replied, "I don't think so. I always wanted my summers free. I saw how my sister would work hard and stuff and I'd say, 'I don't think so.'"

Eighth grade was an important year for Casey academically. Two of her classes, biology and English, were offered for high school credit. A San Antonio Community College (SAC) professor taught the biology class, and labs were held once a week on the SAC campus. Casey liked the class but said it was hard for her because she, "couldn't understand everything he [the professor] said, and he wrote real sloppy. But I thought it was really cool because this is what college is going to be like – get used to it." She remembers doing lots of dissecting and finding the class "really interesting." Casey became a member of University Outreach during eighth grade. She said the organization took the students to cultural events such as the ballet and they visited various college campuses.

During the summer between eighth and ninth grade, Casey took two classes offered by the University Outreach program to prepare her for high school English and chemistry. She found both of the classes to be helpful.

Casey's high school years were full of highs and lows. She loved band, Russian, and her government class; she tolerated the rest of it. Because of the biology and English

classes she had taken in eighth grade, and the University Outreach program she had attended during the summer, she was placed in advanced science and math classes. For instance, she took chemistry as a freshman even though it is normally a junior level course. In addition to a full academic load, Casey was a freshman class officer (parliamentarian) and marched in the band carrying cymbals or the bass drum, and aspired to play a snare drum like her sister Vanessa. Casey feels that because she was not in concert band in eighth grade she had to teach herself many of the skills that the other students already knew. She says, "I was a big band nerd. . . . I would practice all the time."

Because Casey did not like her ninth grade German teacher, she planned to change her language class from German to Spanish, but she was denied a transfer because the Spanish classes had reached maximum enrollment. A male friend of hers, who had been dismissed from the German class for non-cooperation, encouraged Casey to join the Russian class to which he had been reassigned. He told Casey the class was "cool" and there were "only six kids in the class." When she transferred to the Russian class she remembers thinking, "I don't want to take Russian that will never help me . . .. But after taking it, I found I loved it." Casey became active in Russian language competitions and earned a bronze medal her freshman year.

During her sophomore year, Casey continued to play in the band and participate in Russian language competition. Casey's junior year held many opportunities for her to excel. At a Russian language competition held at the University of Texas at Austin, she came in third out of the approximately three hundred Russian-language competitors from

across the state. Another important event at the competition came when Casey saw the head of the Slavic languages department at the University of Texas at Austin. To her great surprise he is Hispanic. She remembers,

> His name is Tom Garza and I thought it was so cool that he was head of the department and he's Hispanic. I kind of see him as a role model. It's like there are not too many people who are Hispanic and speak Russian. When I got here I was the only Mexican American; everyone else was white or something, or they have a Slavic background. I felt kind of out of place, but I didn't care because I liked it. I looked at stuff about him [Dr. Garza] and he went to Harvard. I was like 'Wow! Cool!' He graduated with a Ph.D., and is Hispanic, plus he was the head of a department I really love!

Seeing Dr. Garza and doing so well in the competitions played a major part in Casey's choice of Russian as her major at the Major University.

Band became even more important to Casey during her junior year. She recalls, "I would go really early to school, like at 6 in the morning . . . I didn't go to lunch, I'd just go straight to practice, and then after school I would stay until 6 p.m. or whatever. I loved it so much." After coaxing from her friend, Casey entered band competitions and did extremely well. At the regional level competition she was awarded the highest ranking for her performance and was also chosen as the First Chair percussionist for the regional band. Being the only female in the percussion section made Casey feel proud of her accomplishment. She said, "I was the only girl, too. I competed against all these boys. I felt good 'cause I got first chair and everyone else was behind me."

Academically Casey had several challenging classes her junior year, including her Advanced Placement English course. Though she thought her English teacher was very strict, Casey said she read some excellent books in the class and improved her writing skills. She found her pre-calculus course "exciting and fun" and she made an "A" in her Advanced Placement physics class. Casey's extracurricular activities included fundraising for the Russian club and tutoring other high school students who had not passed the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills Test (TAAS). The end of Casey's junior year brought a different kind of passion, one that did not enhance her academic career – her first serious boyfriend. This relationship was very problematic and caused her a great deal of stress and grief.

Casey described her senior year as "really bad." For the first time in her life she was separated from her older sisters both of whom had moved out of town to attend Major University. She lamented, "They never came home. They didn't come home'til maybe Christmas, just for a little while." Casey was also experiencing high levels of frustration at home because her mother was having a difficult time controlling her younger brother's behavior. He had become involved in a gang and often brought people into the house that made it difficult for Casey to study. An ongoing undercurrent of fear throughout Casey's senior year was her fear that she would not be able to get into college. She explained,

> I felt bad because I was not in the top ten percent of the graduating class and both of my sisters were. . . . I was really scared.. . . . I was afraid I would end

up going to SAC [San Antonio Community College] - like San Antonio High School or whatever they call it. I didn't want to go there

In the midst of these worries Casey broke up with her boyfriend and was having a difficult time writing the essays that were part of her college admission process.

In band Casey was appointed captain of the drum line and though it was an honor, it came with a big problem. She experienced a lot of harassment from the male members of the drum line because they could not accept a female as captain of the drum line. Her band director played an important role in helping her cope with this strain. Casey said,

> He was real nice, he would stay and help me. He would give me advice and help me play my music whenever he had time. I appreciated that because he was real busy with drum line. I would cry a lot like, "No one likes me in band and all the guys hate me because . . . you know." And he would be, 'No, you can do it. Don't care what anybody says cause in the future none of it is going to matter because you are going to be somewhere else. He would help me out a lot. He helped my confidence.

At regional band competitions that year, Casey again earned the First Chair percussion placement. She was still the only female in the drum line. In her Russian class Casey continued to do well in the competitions she attended.

On the academic front, Casey said she slept a lot in classes that were boring to her. One class that kept her awake was her government class. She liked the teacher because he was young and often talked about his dream of going to law school. Casey

also liked his innovative teaching techniques and the fact that he brought the outside world of electoral politics into the lessons.

In spite of her fears Casey applied to the Major University, the University of Texas at San Antonio and Southwest Texas State University. She also joined Project Stay, an organization that provides support to students who want to go to college. Casey said:

> I joined my senior year. I remember joining it because they were all willing to help. Even now they are still sending me letters saying if I need help with financial aid. But I think that helped me to. They even had guest speakers come, like people from UT Austin. It made me feel better because I knew I didn't have the highest grades but still I had lots of other awards and stuff, like my band, and I had awards in Russian competition.

When I asked if her older sisters had been helpful in during the college application process, Casey said they were not much practical help. Writing the two essays required for the admissions applications was the task that created the most anxiety for Casey. She recalls, "I had to write my essays over and over. I didn't have anyone to help me. I tried to ask Vanessa but she was like, 'Don't bother me.'" UTSA and Southwest Texas State University quickly accepted Casey into their freshman class but she kept hoping that she would get to fulfill her dream of studying at Major University. She finally received her acceptance letter to MU in April or May.

Casey has struggled academically since being at MU . She admits that learning to be self disciplined has been difficult. In the Spring semester, 2002, her younger brother

was shot and killed by his best friend. She missed more than two weeks of classes because of this tragedy, and , as a consequence Casey "Incompletes," in several of her courses. When I last spoke with her she was unsure about the immediate future.

Gisella Garcia: Educational Biography

HOME LIFE

When I met Gisela she was a senior at Major University planning to graduate in the spring semester. She is exceptionally poised and articulate, with a serious self-deprecating manner. Originally, I was not sure whether she was an acceptable candidate for the research study because her demographics are very different from the other participants. Even though her socio-economic status and parental education level were considerably higher than the other participants, I decided to include her data in the study because she fit the three primary characteristics for inclusion in the study. She is Mexican American, female, and a student of the Foreign Language Magnet Program from grades six through twelve.

One example of a difference between Gisella and the other participants is the value the young women put on their accomplishments. Each of the other five participants expressed pride in a particular award they won or expressed a general feeling of satisfaction at having come so far as compared to their parents. Gisella, however, seems to lack a similar sense of accomplishment. She said, "I don't see what has happened to me as a big deal or as a major accomplishment. . . . it was just the next step. It was just like going to the next set of schools. Another way Gisella differs from the others is in her ambiguity about her job possibilities after college. Each of the other participants picked majors that have a fairly direct connection to the job market (engineering, geology, and radio, television and film). Gisella chose to major in philosophy. At our first interview

she had no idea what she was going to do after college. By the time of our second interview, Gisella had decided to join Teach for America. Gisella's attitudes towards college and post-graduation plans were more like those of an undergraduate from a stable background who is accustomed to having a parental "safety-net." Gisella explained that her mother had always encouraged her to get a degree in business because that it would assure her a job with a good salary. But Gisella says that she has no passion for business and it is not an acceptable option for her.

Gisella is the youngest of two children born to a Mexican American woman who does not reflect the stereotype of the passive Mexican American wife and mother. Ms. Garcia is a native Texan with a Bachelor's degree in interior design. She was in her thirties when her son and daughter were born. She chose not to marry the children's father, a physician from Mexico. Gisella never mentioned his name, and in a follow-up interview she listed the five times that she remembers having any interaction with him. She says that her mother went to court several times in an effort to have the father's level of child support raised. Between her salary and regular child support, Mrs. Garcia was able to provide a middle class lifestyle for her children.

English is the primary language spoken at home, though Gisella says she learned enough Spanish to communicate with her grandmother. She does not feel that she is particularly fluent in Spanish but she did, however, place out of three of her four Spanish language classes at MU. She also expressed irritation with her brother for not making an effort to learn enough Spanish to carry on conversations with his grandmother, leaving the translations to her or her mother.

Several times Gisella referred to her mother as "liberal" or "very liberal" in her approach to child rearing. For example, Gisella spoke of two times her mother left important decisions up to her, decisions that, upon reflection Gisella feels should have had more parental input. The first time was when Gisella had to decide whether or not to advance to second grade before she completed first grade. Gisella says her mother asked her if she wanted to make the change rather than making the decision for her daughter. The second important decision that Ms. Garcia left to Gisella was about religion. Gisella explained:

> Maybe around fourth or fifth grade my mom started [to] take us to a church and it would always be different. Maybe one weekend she felt like, 'Hey, let's go check out the Baptist church. Let's check out the Catholic church.' But then she became interested in Jehovah's Witnesses and she took us to those meetings. But then she decided she didn't want to go and to give us the decision. She was always very liberal. Even though I think she was a little too liberal."

Gisella's older brother, Vincent, set the intellectual benchmark by which she has measured her own intellectual capabilities. She said that it was accepted that "his intelligence was far superior to mine, but I always managed to do better because I was more mature than he was. . . ." Gisella said that even though her brother was exceptionally bright, he made average grades in school. Vincent scored high enough in the testing that he was a National Merit Scholar and came to MU on a full scholarship. Because of his zero grade point average, he was asked to leave the university after his

first semester. Gisella says that he still has not finished college and has no ambition to do so.

SCHOOL CAREER

Elementary School

Gisella began kindergarten in a private school. She remembers there was a difference between her abilities and those of her classmates. For example, Gisella said that when the kindergarten teacher would say, "Here, you try to read this page," some of the other children would really struggle to read the page. Gisella's response was, "Let me read you the book." She says she was "always ahead" of her peers. Early in first grade, the school administration wanted to place Gisella in a second grade classroom. She decided not to follow this option because she was afraid she would not know anyone in the second grade class. Gisella wonders what her academic career would have been if her mother had insisted on the move. Gisella reflected,

> I really do think had I picked the other or maybe she just made me go to the second grade, I would have been a lot more ambitious. I am not as ambitious as I know I could have been, but I think things would have been different for me. . . . I think I would have done more with regards to my grades.

In second grade, Gisella transferred to her neighborhood public elementary school. She says there is not a time she can remember not being in the Gifted Program. She said, "I have absolutely no idea how I got identified. I just remember being in GT classes for as long as I can remember. I don't know why me, or what I did."

Fourth and fifth grades brought several new experiences into Gisella's life. Her brother taught her to play chess and she proved to be very good at playing the game. To encourage this hobby, Ms. Garcia started a chess club her children's school. This activity provided an outlet for her and her brother as well as some of the other neighborhood children. Gisella remembered:

> What my mom did was really nice because of lot of moms' kids didn't, I mean, maybe they were doing not so good things on the weekend. Every Saturday we had a Chess tournament to go to. We would always eat pizza. It was like a thing.

Though the members of Gisella's chess club were elementary students, they often competed against middle school students around the city. Gisella often won her chess matches and this gave her a sense of achievement. She said, "It was another indicator that I was okay."

During this same period of time, Gisella's family became involved in the Jehovah Witness Church. Her mother attended church services for several years but then decided to withdraw from the church community. Gisella continued to be a faithful member of the group. Two of the elders in the congregation served as father figures in Gisella's life. The church became so important to Gisella that at one point in high school she thought about not going to college, but instead doing something connected with the church. She said, "I wanted to do something religious but my mom kind of got that out of my head. She made sure she did that really fast, actually."

Middle and High School

Middle School was a different experience for Gisella than it was for the other participants. She was the only one that did not go to Tomas Rivera, instead she went to Lee Middle School. Demographically the schools have always been different. At Rivera, Latino students are ninety-five percent of the population; African Americans less than one percent. At Lee, African Americans and Latinos are each about forty-five percent of the school population, with about ten percent white students (Texas Education Agency, 2000). While the Lee TAAS scores are now more aligned with the Rivera scores, there was a significant difference when Gisella was attending Lee Middle School. The Rivera students did significantly better on the TAAS testing of 1994, outscoring Davis by eleven percentage points. At Rivera, approximately fifty-two percent of all the students passed all three parts of the TAAS test, whereas at Lee, only forty-one percent passed all three sections. Gisella commented on her perception of the differences between the two schools.

> Totally different schools, completely different people. Maybe its just an excuse, but I do think if I had gone to Rivera, meeting up with those students at Trueba and becoming really good friends with people who went to Rivera, I really do think I would have performed a lot better. Someplace in middle school is where I took the wrong – not the wrong turn, but I just started not caring as much and I took on a different attitude.

The most positive part of Gisella's middle school years was her relationship with Mr. K., her Japanese teacher. In a separate interview with Mr. K., he told me how

impressed he was with Gisella from the first time he met her. Mr. Kimura knew Gisella's mother through his dealings with Vincent, who was also in the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Gisella explained her relationship with Mr. K. as:

> He [Mr.K.] was head of the FLMP, so whenever the principal needed someone – a student – to speak to an audience, when the parents were coming or whatever the case may be, he always went to me. He was probably the first person that had me speak in front of people and he always did that throughout middle school and high school. He always went to me above – when I was in sixth grade – above an eighth grader. When I was a freshman – above an eighth grader.

In high school, Gisella continued to be a part of the Multilingual Program, taking honor's and Advanced Placement Classes. She said she was not very involved in high school extracurricular activities. She did join the swim team which she hated. She said:

> I was on the swim team, that was horrible. I'm not good at anything physical. I was scared to do anything physical. I was scared of doing things with my body – like running track. I was embarrassed. I was just very scared when I would have to stand on the block and I really didn't like the idea of competition physically.

Even though she hated it, she stuck it out on the swim team for a couple of years. Besides the swim team, Gisella's other extra-curricular activity was Academic Decathlon. At first she declined the invitation to be on the team was because she thought they only wanted her because her brother had been on the team. Her AP English teacher convinced her otherwise.

Mr. Kimura continued to be important for Gisella. She explained:

> He just recognized, or at least – I don't know - there was just a connection. I was a student he liked and he was a teacher that I liked. He recognized whatever ability that he did. We had a fun relationship with each other. We'd play with each other. I was the one he would pick on in class to make things funnier, or make light of situation. Maybe he knew that I could handle it. Aside from the joking and having the sense of humor, he also made it a point to offer any opportunity of anything that was advanced or anything outside of school. He always let me know about it.

During Gisella's junior year, Mr. K. told her of an intensive Japanese program that was being offered at Ohio State University. She applied and was accepted into the program. She described the program as "They had students from all over the United States, but only 20 could be in it. I was the only person that had been accepted from Texas before, which was awesome and interesting or exciting to me."

Even though going to college was not ever a doubt to Gisella, she still feels that she was very uninformed about her choices. She said she knew nothing about the different schools within the college community. When the time arrived for her to start applying to college she did not need any help with the application process. She said that Major University sent a recruiting team to her Advanced Placement English class. Gisella applied to Washington University, University of Missouri at St. Louis, Trinity University in San Antonio and UT Austin. Her first choice was Trinity University but she was not accepted into their freshman class. When she applied to Major University it

was her "backup plan." She says she assumed that she would automatically be accepted by MU.

Though Gisella now knows that she has no "passion for business" her mother had encouraged her to combine her study of Japanese with business. When she approached Mr. K. with this idea. his reaction caused her to change her plan.

> I remember when I expressed that interest to him, he made it a point to say 'You know the business school is very difficult.' And it is. People who get accepted into this school, they have extremely high SAT scores, but the idea that affirmative action still took place at that time, maybe I could have been accepted. I'm sure I could handle the work once I was in there, but maybe without affirmative action I wouldn't have been.

She also misunderstood the application process and thought that if she applied to the MU business school and was not accepted that she would not be able to attend MU at all. She said:

> I remember thinking that had I applied to business school, and they were so selective, if they didn't accept me I would not be able to go to MU. I didn't inquire further. I was like, 'I'm not going to do that. I'm going to college.' So I didn't even try to do that [apply to the business school].

She now knows that if MU had not accepted her into the business school, "They probably would have just stuck me in Liberal Arts." She says she has no regrets about not getting a degree in business because, "I have absolutely no passion for it. . . . It's so very much my mom. I mean, she's a business person."

Gisella has financed her education with the help or her mother, her grandmother, her father, and by working throughout college. She said:

> I didn't apply for scholarships. I was like – whatever – and I regret that completely. I never had the attitude, 'I don't want to go until I can pay for my own education because I knew that wasn't going to happen. I always felt as if loans weren't a big deal. This is so naïve of me because I thought when I get out of college I'm going to have a big job and I'm going to be able to pay it back.

After being accepted into Major University, Gisella was awarded a Presidential Scholarship. Receiving a Presidential Scholarship made her eligible for the Preview Program which is sponsored by the Academic Retention Services at MU. The purpose of the program is to provide an introduction to life at MU. It includes a one-week orientation to MU and then an opportunity to enroll for six semester hours during the second summer term. Students are assigned a peer mentor and attend weekly workshops and tutorials relevant to academic success, cultural enrichment and social events (Adair, 2000). Gisella described the program as:

> You get to learn the campus before all the students come. You have one-on-one with your teachers – small classes. Basically, I think, so that you can meet people like in the administrator centers just so you can have a little network.

Gisella thought that many of the other participants in the Preview Program were first-generation college students. She also thought that the program was directed towards minority students though this criteria is not reflected in the program literature. She credits the Preview Program with much of the success that she has experienced in college. She

says that other members of her Preview cohort went on to be presidents of several organizations and to be very involved in campus life. She also feels that Preview set her in the direction of joining a Latina sorority and getting involved in the Hispanic community on campus. She explained:

> I was never the person that was all about Latina Power and let's just serve the Hispanic community. I've never been like that. I'd rather join a multi-cultural organization. I think that being in the Preview Program and meeting these people - I fell into that and I never thought I would. The university is the most segregated place you'll ever go. I thought I was above that, but I don't want to say that about the people that are all about Latina Power. There's nothing wrong with that either. I mean I never had that mentality and somewhere down the line I fell into it. I'm part of this little Hispanic community where everybody knows everybody, or at least the Greek community is a big part of the Hispanic community. I fell into that and I think a lot of that was being established in the Preview Program or working with retention services for minority students.

The summer after her freshman year, Gisella was a Preview advisor and had ten new students to take care of during their summer orientation and classes. She said that she really enjoyed it and it was a fun job.

It was necessary for Gisella to work to help pay for her college expenses. Her first two years at MU, she worked at the Multi-cultural Information Center. Her job included working with student programming putting together different programs for the African American Agency. She also worked as a telemarketer for MCI, and as a file

clerk at several of the law firms on Congress Avenue. As graduation approached and she began to think about her first post-college job, she had very little notion of what she wanted to do. She said:

> I'm not exactly sure what it is that I want to do with my life. I do know that I hope it's whatever I'm passionate about. I always say that, but when I look back at a lot of my mentality, I see that everything I want to do is just for the sake of knowledge; is just for learning and that's it.

When Gisella heard some of her friends talking about Teach for America she decided to apply to the program. She was accepted and will be moving to Houston to teach in a low income school starting August, 2002. She hopes that teaching will allow her to give back to the community as well as keep her love of learning alive.

Angie Hernandez: Educational Biography

HOME LIFE

At the time of my first interview with Angie Hernandez, she was a sophomore Major University, majoring in engineering. She is tall and thin and has a very reserved manner. She answered each question exactly as asked without much elaboration. My attempts to further explore her answers were often not successful. At our second interview she relaxed a little, and I was able to see her shy smile and to feel that I had gained enough of her trust to get a deeper understanding of her educational story.

Angie is the oldest of three siblings; she has a younger sister and brother. Her mother lives in San Antonio; her father is deceased. Angie's parents are both from Mexico. Her mother is from Vera Cruz and her father was from Monterrey. Each of her parents was the first member of their families to come to the United States. Both arrived in their late teens and took whatever jobs they could find in to make a living. Mrs. Hernandez has been a housekeeper for most of her life. She has worked for several different families for extended lengths of time. Mr. Hernandez was a handy man. According to Angie her father was a very good mechanic and carpenter. Angie was especially close to her father. She says she spent lots of time "helping him with the flashlight when he was fixing the car and stuff like that."

Angie's parents maintained close ties with both families in Mexico. On alternate years they went to visit her mother's people in Vera Cruz and her father's folks in Monterrey. Although both of her parents were bilingual, Angie and her brother and sister

were raised primarily monolingual English, though Angie says she knows enough Spanish to communicate with the family in Mexico.

Mr. or Mrs. Hernandez were deeply committed to the idea that their children would be educated. Because her parents did not get a chance to finish school, they wanted both their son and daughters to go to college. This notion of educating the daughters as well as their son caused a stir within the extended family because most of the Angie's female cousins in Mexico did not finish high school. She explained, "They stop (school) at about thirteen years old." Angie called her parents "pioneers" and said, "they had different expectations for themselves and their children." Angie credits her parents with helping her build a strong character. Speaking of her father Angie said, "He had a strong work ethic. He would always say do your best job the first time, that way it's a good impression. My mom taught me to have a strong drive and never give up."

Because Mrs. Hernandez worked, Angie was often in charge of caring for the two younger children. Angie remembers, "I had to make sure they didn't leave the stove on too long and start a fire. She [her mother] would call and want to know what we had for lunch, what we were doing, and stuff like that."

After Mr. Hernandez died, Angie assumed even more responsibilities within the family. When she received her driver's license, she used her father's pickup truck to do the family errands and to drive herself and her brother and sister to the various activities in which they were involved. Angie says her sister has now taken over that responsibility for the family.

According to Angie, the Catholic Church has always been an important facet of her life. She participated in her church youth group and worked in the church's religious education program on Sundays as a teacher's aide. The Church became an even more important part of Angie's life after the death of her father. "It was a place where I could get comfort," she said. Angie has continued to attend Mass regularly while she is in college.

Two of Mrs. Hernandez' employers have had an on-going interest in, and connection to, the Hernandez children. One of Mrs. Hernandez' employers was a retired school principal whose daughter taught school in San Antonio. Angie recalled, "We called her [the retired principal] Grandma. She was inspirational . . . They [the mother and daughter] told my mother about things I should be doing and how important college was for me." Both of these women kept close tabs on Angie's progress. Angie remembers, "They were always checking on me to see if I had any paperwork that I needed help on. I was pretty lucky that I had people working in that area that knew what needed to be done."

A colonel in the Army headed the second family important to Angie. He was an engineer and is responsible for giving Angie the idea and encouragement to become an engineer herself. When his family moved to North Carolina, they wanted Mrs. Hernandez and the children to go with them. Though the Hernandez family declined the offer, both families have remained in touch.

SCHOOL CAREER

Elementary School

Angie began pre-kindergarten at Barttle Hill Elementary School, a five-minute walk from her house. Her pre-K teacher, Mrs.G., became a family friend and mentor. Angie said "She was really nice. She guided me along the way as I grew up and before I graduated from elementary school she had some suggestions about which schools I should go to." Mrs. G. has also taught Angie's younger brother and sister and stayed close to the whole family. She is now an administrator at Barttle Hill.

Angie's only comment about her primary grades was that she liked her teachers but doesn't remember anything special about those years. Her mother often served as the room mother and was active in the PTA. Angie says her mother was the one to make "cookies and stuff." Angie thinks she was identified as gifted as early as second grade. She remembers the testing process as a series of puzzles that she had to figure out how they fit together. Her earliest memory of the gifted program was going to a special class one day a week. In third grade, she says about four or five children would sit at a separate table and worked on "separate exercises and stuff like that." Angie also recalls being in an advanced class in fourth grade where the children would have "little gatherings for discussions after a test or whenever." She describes her gifted teachers as "really good."

Angie says that in fifth grade the teachers were trying to prepare the students for high school by having them change classes for certain subjects. During this time Angie had an opportunity to compare her intellectual skills with those of her peers through a

classroom game called "Around the World." Until then she says she knew she was smart because she was in special classes, but it was this game that boosted her confidence. The students were asked to stand up in pairs around the room. Questions were asked, and whoever in the pair answered first remained standing. The last person standing was the winner. Angie said "I knew I was smart when I beat the smartest guy in the class playing Around the World."

Middle and High School

Mrs. G., Angie's pre-kindergarten teacher continued to be a source of information, encouragement and counsel for Angie throughout elementary school. As far back as Angie can remember Mrs. G. had encouraged her to apply to the Foreign Language Magnet Program. Angie took Mrs. G.'s advice and made her application. She was accepted and chose Latin as her second language. Instead of going to Mark Twain Middle School, her assigned middle school, she boarded a bus every day to Tomas Rivera Middle School. Angie remembers,

> It was traumatic in the sense that I had to wake up early to go to school, especially in winter when you didn't want to get up in the cold. But it wasn't an awful thing. I had to ride the bus all the way until sophomore year in high school.

As part of the FLMP, Angie was in all Honor's classes. She liked middle school because it was the first time she felt really academically challenged. She chose to play a flute in the band as her elective. She remembers that often during the daily announcements, Tomas Rivera was referred to as the "Harvard of Middle Schools." She says this phrase both intimidated and encouraged her. She was honored to be a part of

the program, but she knew she would need to work hard to meet her previous levels of success. While in middle school, Angie played in the band, was a member of the National Junior Honor Society, and worked on the yearbook staff. She did not participate in any sports. In the summer between sixth and seventh grade, Angie joined the PREP program. The San Antonio Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP) is sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio and is was designed to promote careers in science and engineering for women and the minority community of San Antonio. One aspect of PREP that Angie really liked was the speakers from a variety of different occupations. She completed all three years of PREP but missed one consecutive summer because of her father's death. It was during her second or third year in PREP that Angie says she decided to be an engineer. She feels that she did not develop any mentoring relationships between herself and any of the teachers of PREP because the time that the two groups spent together was too short to allow a strong bond to form between the teachers and the students. Angie said "It was more like a college setting – just go to class and listen to lectures." One thing Angie did not like about PREP was that the program included military recruiters who made the military "sound like it was really cool. I though I was going to get angry because they targeted the Hispanics."

Angie recalled that eighth grade was the hardest of the three years in middle school because of her father's death and the amount of academically advanced courses she took. Angie's father died unexpectedly just before school started. Days after attending his funeral, Angie began a very rigorous academic program. In addition to her Latin class and the other required eighth grade subjects, she took two high school credit

courses, algebra I and biology. Her biology class was taught by a professor from San Antonio College (SAC).. He came to Tomas Rivera to lecture and every other Friday the students went to SAC for the lab portion of the class. Angie's second high school level class was algebra I, a class that Angie found "very challenging." She feels that both of these high school level classes increased her self esteem because as she said, "Once I got through with that I thought, 'If I can do that, I can do anything.'"

In eighth grade, Angie became a member of the University Outreach, a program in which she remained active throughout high school. She describes it as, "a community service thing. We had a meeting maybe once a month. We'd have a speaker, learn how to write – how to fill out the applications and stuff like that." Angie was also chosen to be a member of the Talent Identification Program (TIPS). She remembers that "They sent me a letter . . . and said you are doing this and that, go talk to that person. It was about college. They gave you a little booklet about names of colleges and what they had to offer."

At Henry Trueba High School, Angie continued to take Latin classes as part of the FLMP. Her Latin teacher was special to her because as Angie says,

> She was always real interested in what I did because I did a little competition . . . in UIL Latin Reading competitions, mythology exams, and National Latin Exams. She made sure I kept up with it to go [to)] higher and higher levels. She was always interested in my classes and how I was feeling. If I had any problems, . . . if everything was okay. She was just very encouraging.

Most of Angie's high school elective classes were focused on math and science. She credits her pre-calculus teacher with recognizing her abilities and encouraging her early to take the Advanced Placement calculus exam. While she says he was the toughest teacher she ever worked with, she liked him because,

> He's the salt of the earth. He made me think a lot. He saw my potential and he gave me a challenge. He really made me work to get through that class . . . It's like okay, if I can pass his class, I can pass anything.

Angie says she liked and respected her Advanced Placement English teacher because she was "a very challenging teacher. Especially in critiquing your essays and stuff like that." Her history teacher was "pretty awesome." Angie explained "She wouldn't just focus on what happened, but like the background – how it happened, why it happened. The little things."

Overall, Angie enjoyed high school was very complimentary of her teachers.

Angie's extracurricular activities included playing the flute in the marching band, serving in the Interact Club and doing community service, such as cleaning up graffiti and planting plants. As part of her responsibilities for National Honor Society she mentored elementary school students in reading. In addition, she was also involved in the Catholic Youth Organization. She says she was socially active in high school but only dated in group outings and did not have a particular boyfriend. In March of her senior year she began working at the Casa Rio Restaurant on the Riverwalk in San Antonio.

Because of her friendship with the daughter of Dr. L., the superintendent of San Antonio ISD, Angie was included in a group of five girls that Dr. L. mentored. Dr. L's

idea, according to Angie, was to provide experiences for her child and several of her friends. As a group they read books and discussed them, attended cultural events such as plays, and engaged in rich discussions about "all sorts of different things." Angie said she "really enjoyed those times."

Angie's high school counselor was a valuable resource for her keeping her informed about important dates and deadlines having to do with college and scholarships. He also provided workshops for the parents to learn how to complete the paperwork necessary for college admission and financial aid. Because Angie was in the top ten percent of her graduating class, (she graduated number three out of 473 students) she received a newsletter and other forms of special communication about college opportunities from the counseling department at Henry Trueba High School.

Angie says that there was never any doubt in her mind that she would go to college. As she says "It was never like, 'Oh, I guess I won't go.' It was just the next step." But she feels that being able to start her math and science courses in middle school gave her an opportunity to take higher math classes such as pre-cal and calculus which gave her a competitive edge for getting into a selective university. She said chose MU because "It was close. It had what I wanted. It was pretty affordable. I applied to others, but they were so far away. She [her mother] didn't want me to go to MIT in Boston, but she was okay with MU."

Because Angie received a Mu Presidential Scholarship, the Minnie Piper Stevens Scholarship, the Baumberger Scholarship and some smaller one-year scholarships it has not been necessary to take out any loans to finance her education.

Once at MU Austin, Angie has continued to excel academically. She is one of the few students who were nominated for the Engineering Honor Society as a freshman. She feels sure her younger sister will also come to MU to major in engineering.

Lydia Mendez: Educational Biography

HOME LIFE

Lydia Mendez participated in an individual interview and the focus group that was used to gather data for this study. At the time of my first interview with her, she was a junior at Major University majoring in studio art. She is the youngest of three children; her brother is about a year older than she and her sister is almost seven years older. Her brother and sister are Major University graduates. Lydia's parents are native born Americans and English was the primary language spoken in her home. She said her parents only spoke Spanish when they did not want their children to know what they were talking about. Her father has an Associates Degree in Heating and Refrigeration from St. Phillips College, a community college in San Antonio. He is in charge of keeping the air conditioning and heating systems maintained for an apartment complex; her mother works as a teacher's aide in San Antonio ISD. Her parents are still married and have recently welcomed their first grandchild into their lives.

The neighborhood where Lydia grew up is in one of the poorer areas of San Antonio. Her house sits within a fenced front yard. There are no sidewalks on the street. Houses near hers are covered in gang graffiti; several have boarded up windows. There has been a great deal of gang violence near Lydia's home. The neighborhood seems an unlikely place to find three Major University students from the same family.

I also interviewed Lydia's older sister Alice, who lives and works in Austin. She provided additional family background information and remarked on the greater number

of choices that Lydia had had in her educational experiences that she had. When I asked her to elaborate, Alice explained that when she was growing up the Foreign Language Magnet Program (FLMP) or special classes for gifted children did not exist. She does not remember many of her peers going on to college after high school.

When Lydia spoke of her family she expressed pride that her parents "have always been parents, unlike my other friends. They had mothers that wanted to be their best friend and they didn't want to be the bad guy." She said her father wanted her to be proud of her cultural heritage but "not live with the victim mentality." She recalled,

> He wanted us to be proud of our race but he didn't want us to have that be the only thing that we focused on, that we were Hispanic and that's it. It's like, 'No. You're Lydia first and foremost, and the fact that you are Hispanic is secondary.

Literacy was an important aspect of life in the Mendez family home. Lydia's father is an avid reader and has "a little section [in the house] of nothing but books and books and books." Mr. Mendez read to Lydia a lot when she was a little girl. Lydia learned to read around the age of four years old to protect herself from being exploited by her older sister and brother. She remembers that they would lie to her about when her favorite television shows were on. They would point to the television guide in the newspaper and say, "See, it says right here – the show you like doesn't come on." Lydia's mother was the one she went to for questions about her homework. Lydia says if her mother knew how to help her daughter she would do so, if not she would refer Lydia to her older brother for help. Lydia's mother and grandmother each made important

contributions to Lydia's understanding of herself as a student. Her mother told her to go to school and not be ashamed of being smart. Lydia said:

> My mom was really, really smart, but I guess in the '50's it wasn't a good thing for a girl to be so and also because she was Hispanic they expected her to stay home and take care of my grandmother. [Her family said] 'Why are you wasting your time. You need to be learning to be a good wife.'

Lydia's grandmother told her to get an education and take care of herself because no one else would. Her grandmother's middle-class lifestyle was destroyed when her husband died and left his money to his mistress. Lydia's grandmother was forced to go to work in a restaurant and to clean houses. She never wanted Lydia to be "at anybody's mercy." Lydia said there was never any question that she would go to college. If fact, it was a surprise to her when she went to high school and found that not everyone shared that goal.

SCHOOL CAREER

Lydia attended Daniel Boone Elementary School from kindergarten through fifth grade. She was excited about starting school because my brother and sister were already there. She said "They were always telling me – school is fun. You get to read and stuff." In second grade Lydia was sent to classes with older children for reading and math. She realized she was learning at a faster rate than most of her peers, and she found first and second grade boring because of the "monotonous schedule, which I didn't like." Lydia also remembers that her second grade teacher talking about the importance of going to

college. Lydia's third grade teacher was the most influential of her elementary school teachers. Lydia recalled:

> She was always talking about the advantages of getting an education and how that was like the best way to get places. I know that when you're young you're not really paying that much attention to college or whatever but she was the one that was really pushing it. Like it opens doors to a lot of stuff that I wanted to do. She was really good at listening and giving you advice. She made the classroom learning experience fun.

During third grade, Lydia's artistic talents were recognized and she was recommended for the Gifted and Talented Program. Lydia was accepted into the program but did not stay too long because of a conflict with a teacher. She explained "I decided I didn't want to do it anymore. My parents were not going to make me do anything I didn't want to." Lydia did not return to the gifted program at any time in her school career.

In fourth grade Lydia had an experience that set the stage for her future. She saw a television program on the Discovery Channel about paintings. She was so intrigued by the subject of art that she asked her father where she could find pictures of the paintings she had seen on the television. Her father owned two books about French art and shared them with her. One of the books was written in French. These two things - art and French - came together in such a way that they helped Lydia choose her second language when she enrolled in the Foreign Language Magnet Program.

Representatives of the FLMP from Tomas Rivera Middle School came to Lydia's school and recruited for the program while she was in fourth grade. They explained the

program and spoke about the kinds of things the students would be able to study. All aspects of the program intrigued Lydia so she completed the application and was accepted into the program. She explained that her decision to study French was based on the fact that most of the paintings she liked were in French or Italian museums. Because the FLMP did not offer Italian Lydia chose French as her second language.

Middle and High School

Lydia liked the Foreign Language Magnet Program because she thought the teachers were more enthusiastic and had higher expectations than she had previously experienced. Her favorite French teacher, Mr. B. made learning a second language fun. Lydia said:

> He would do skits. Just anything that would get you on your feet about the language because he wanted to show that you really learned it; that you weren't just relying on the dictionary. He would think of scenarios. You would have to make up situations. … I got to hold up a bank. It was just different things like that that made it fun.

In addition to using creative teaching techniques, Mr. B. also spent time talking with his students about the years he lived in Spain and France, a practice that Lydia found very exciting.

Lydia mentioned as an afterthought that she had been in the Prefreshman Engineering Program (PREP) sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio. It was designed to promote careers in science and engineering for women and the minority community of San Antonio. She said she liked the math aspect but did not find PREP

very helpful to her and could not identify anyone in the program who made an outstanding impression on her.

Lydia described Henry Trueba High School as having a predominantly Hispanic population with a few black students and two white students. She said that both white students were her friends and they used to make each other laugh by referring to themselves as "the other white guy at Trueba."

Extra-curricular activities began to take up more of Lydia's time. In ninth and tenth grade she was part of the Pep Squad and also became a cheerleader. During homeroom, Lydia's teacher, Mrs. S., observed her drawing and told Lydia that she needed to be in an art class. Lydia dropped both pep squad and cheerleading and signed up for Mrs. S.'s art class. This change marked the most important development in Lydia's school career. Lydia and Mrs. S. forged a relationship that continues to this day. Lydia referred to Mrs. S. as both her mentor and her friend. Lydia explained:

> She was so eager about art and she was the first person that told me you could actually have a career out of art. I mean my parents were never one to say, " You'll never make any money." But they didn't really know much about being able to work as an artist.

Lydia was very impressed by the fact that Mrs. S. had been a working artist before she became a high school art teacher. One of the most important things Mrs. S. did for Lydia was to help her accept criticism of her art work. Lydia said:

> There was a lot of times when I wasn't very good about taking criticism especially with my art work. It was so precious and you can't possibly tell me

> that it doesn't look good. And she would be, 'Yes I can. And there's going to be a lot of other people who are going to tell you.

Mrs. S. also encouraged Lydia to become involved in an after school program called, SAY SI´ an after-school visual and graphic arts program for San Antonio's urban middle and high school students. The purpose of the program is to provide opportunities for students to work with professional artists, provide a place for the students to sell their art, and learning about the business aspects of being an artist. Mrs. S. told Lydia that while the program would save her money on art supplies, she needed to view it more as an opportunity to establish herself as a working artist. Lydia went to the SAY SI´ studio every day after school except Fridays from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Lydia said:

> I loved it. I loved it. I met all of my friends there. I had met my best friend when I was in high school but we weren't particularly close until after I graduated. But most of my friends I met at SAY SI´. . . . because they were other artists. Not that you would want to just surround yourself with artists but at school most of my friends wanted to be doctors and lawyers. It was great talking to them but they didn't understand why I wanted to paint.

In addition to providing her a space and materials with which to create her art, SAY SI´ also got the students involved in the technical aspects of showing their art. Through the exhibitions of the students' work, Lydia was able to sell a number of her pieces. Lydia recalled:

> The first show that I was in, I sold the most out of anybody there. It was nice. I didn't have a job and I wanted to paint. That's pretty much what everyone wants to do. I mean, make art and make money off of it. I was making some money.

Two other teachers at Henry Trueba High School were influential in Lydia's development. Her psychology teacher always encouraged her students to strive towards being a better person. Lydia explained:

> She wasn't narrow minded, which I had experienced at Trueba a lot. I had one history teacher who was just hell bent on making sure that women stayed at home sweeping – the girls sweep. I mean, I know it was a joke, but still I didn't appreciate that because I felt I experienced so much of that already. But [the psychology teacher] always said, 'You don't have to take that.' She was real instrumental in owning your own voice.

Lydia's physics teacher, Mrs. P., changed her perceptions about math by placing the mathematical concepts into a context that made sense. Lydia said, "I could see it and so I think it made it easier to understand." Because she enjoyed physics so much, Lydia became president of the Physics Club. This position gave her multiple opportunities to spend time with Mrs. P. Lydia admired her teacher's honesty and advice about competing with men in the workforce. Lydia said:

> She [Mrs. P.] was extremely intelligent and I liked it that she was in a male-dominated field. She talked about how it was going to be as a woman going in. She said, "Don't go in there and think they're all out to get you but at the same time don't assure that they're all out to help you." She said it's very difficult.

> They [men in the field] don't know how to relate to you and you don't know how to relate to them. They'll feel threatened.

Lydia said she has found Mrs. P.'s assessment of the world to be both accurate and helpful.

Lydia also had complementary things to say about Ms. G., her French teacher. Lydia liked it that Mrs. G. allowed her students to role play and use the language in a more natural context. Mrs. G. often had French-speaking guest speakers visit her class so that the students could practice their conversational skills with someone fluent in the language.

During her junior and senior years, Lydia was in the French Honor Society, the National Art Honor Society, the National Honor Society and the Physics club but the majority of her free time was devoted to the SAY SI´ art program.

One problem that Lydia noticed at Tueba High School was the lack of attention paid to the students who were not in the "top twenty percent" of the graduating class. She explained:

> If you were in the top twenty percent, then you got special time with the counselors and they would automatically pull you aside and start talking to you about going to college. It made me angry because I was in the art program and I had friends who were amazingly talented artists but they didn't do too well in their academic courses. . . . I just think nobody talked to them, too, about going to college. It was like, 'Oh, y'all are going because y'all are already smart. It was something – it was unattainable for them and I didn't like that.

Lydia graduated in the top ten percent of her class. She applied to several art colleges and was accepted into the Rhode Island School of Design and the Chicago Art Institute. She decided to attend Major University primarily because of the financial aid offered by the university. Since coming to MU as a freshman, Lydia has lived in her own apartment and worked mostly in retail jobs. Because of a lack of time and resources Lydia has not been involved in many extra-curricular activities. One new experience that she has faced at MU is overt racism. Lydia explains:

> I had people [another student] tell me I didn't belong here. . . . As soon as they found out that you were on any kind of assistance, they would be like, 'You don't belong here. The only reason you got here is because you're a Hispanic and that's it.'

Lydia said she felt as if these students "would turn on you because you're taking their spot or their money." Her response to the young man with whom she had this confrontation was, "If I'm not supposed to be here and I'm below you, then I'll flunk out."

When asked what factors most contributed to Lydia's academic success she did not have to think about her response, it was "her parents." She feels that if they had not been as supportive as they were she could never have come to college.

> They [her parents] made it all sound like a joke that my dad could've gone to school. I mean, he went to junior college, but he got drafted, too, so he was going to go to a real college and I know that bothers him immensely. I know it irks him

> because he's so proud he's got three kids that are going to college. He's going to be happy when I get two degrees.

Lydia also said her sister helped her to withstand the cultural shock of coming to an academic community. She said her sister warned her not to be intimidated by intellectuals trying to make themselves feel better at others' expense. She told Lydia that "you can learn everything they know and you don't need to pay attention to that." Although Lydia felt that her parents were her biggest support and the reason she came to the university, she also felt that the close-knit family structure of Latinos could hold a student back. She explained, "They don't want you to travel far because they are afraid they are going to lose you."

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Vita

Cynthia Duda DuBois has been an educator for more than twenty five years. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Stephen F. Austin State University in 1978, and her Master of Arts degree in Peace and Justice from the University of Incarnate Word in 1987. After teaching in San Antonio public schools for almost twenty years, she began her doctoral work in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating in August, 2003.

During her career as a classroom educator, Ms. DuBois has worked primarily with low socio-economic, Hispanic students, teaching grades one through eight, remedial to gifted students. She was instrumental in setting up the first program for gifted and talented elementary students in South San Antonio ISD. During her ten years at the middle school level in North East ISD, she taught reading and Texas history, developed and taught the Options Program, a leadership and self-esteem program for eighth grade girls, and was part of the transition team that moved a low-performing, inner-city middle school onto a year-round academic schedule. The school also implemented team teaching and special education inclusion classes.

While completing her doctorate, Ms. DuBois supervised more than seventy-five student teachers, served as the education consultant for the Center for American History, and worked as a freelance editor for a social studies textbook publisher. Currently, she is serving as an assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

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