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*Preparing a New Generation of Leaders*

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**EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:**

*Preparing a New Generation of Leaders*

**by**

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## **Dedication**

Este trabajo es para mis jefitos, mis carnales, my wife, and children. Mi familia is the cornerstone of everything I do, and I dedicate this work to them.

## **Acknowledgements**

Las primeras gracias go to my jefitos, José Angel and Julia Guajardo for giving me the gift of life and the power of love; I want to also thank mis carnales Pepe, Paco and Lauro, muchas gracias for showing me the importance of having fun even during the most difficult of times. And I give my wife Joyce and my children Emiliano and Javier thousands of thanks for their patience, unconditional love, and commitment to traveling this journey of life with me. Thanks for always being there; I love all of you!

I also want to give special thanks to la raza del Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, and my close friends who traveled this journey with me; you give me hope and courage to move forward. And a special thanks goes to my partners in the institution that helped this Mexicano carve a place in academia. Pedro thanks for clearing the way for me; Dr. Jay, thanks for inviting me to come play at the university; you obviously saw something others did not. Jim, thanks for supporting me and validating that there is a place for a post-Mexicano to do academic work on the margins. Profe. Trueba, thanks for helping a dream come true. And Angela, thanks for role modeling academic activism, y adelante con la lucha.

## **EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:**

### *Preparing a New Generation of Leaders*

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Miguel Angel Guajardo, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2002

Supervisor: Pedro Reyes

The scope of my research falls into the areas of education, youth leadership development, and community change. The youth community development literature argues that it is not enough to educate our children or to teach them prevention skills alone. We must help youth develop their skills in a more holistic fashion that will help them meet the challenges they face as youth and adults. The traditional educational culture is presently not set up to provide this critical education. My research is place-based and grounded in Freirian principles of critical pedagogy.

The research questions of this research are the following:

- What are the necessary and sufficient conditions to educate leaders?

- What are the community-based actions that contribute to youth leadership development?

This dissertation is a case study of a new pedagogical strategy for teaching, learning, and developing young leaders. As a research strategy I employ participatory action research for collecting data and building skills. Additionally, I have consulted an archival collection of videotapes that has documented work conducted during the last four years. Through content analysis and subsequent conversations, I have identified critical moments and strategies that have contributed to the teaching, learning, and leadership development of youth.

During times of major societal transitions our society has struggled with the role of youth in our communities. We, in this South Texas community, view our youth as local assets and future leaders. The significance of this study is multifaceted. First, the political implications are inherently radical, for this document will chronicle a new political practice that puts young people in the middle of educational policy and practice as active, instead of the traditional passive, participants and creators of power; including youth in policymaking will begin to frame the process of change in a very different ontological reality. Secondly, it also promises to shatter traditional stereotypes often attached to Latino youth. And thirdly, this study promotes the crossing of multiple borders as a natural and organic process; and finally, I put forth an emerging community development paradigm that privileges youth as leaders. This study engages educators and learners in a discourse centered on teaching, learning, leadership and community youth development.

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## Prelude

*It's 6:00 a.m. and I'm running late, but my day actually began late last night as my kids, wife, and I began to prepare for my departure. It is time for my monthly travel to El Valle.<sup>1</sup>*

For the last ten years I have been spending a significant amount of time on the phone, email, or in route to and from South Texas. During this time I have been working with a group of colleagues from the area on an initiative that focuses on education reform and leadership development. But unlike the traditional reform efforts we saw during the 1980s and 1990s of basic skills movements, teacher and student testing, and a sprinkle of quality management (Shirley, 1997), this work is informed by the Freirian belief that education is grounded in real life, and consistent with the proposition that one cannot do effective or long-lasting education reform if we do not focus on the political economy of the area. This initiative is both pedagogical and organizational. Indeed, it is intended to help our community and partners look at education and community development from multiple and varying lenses: ontological, educational, political, cultural, and organizational. This initiative was in its infancy during the mid-1990s as we focused on building the human capital, but has picked up momentum as we began to secure outside funding for our work and expanded the collaborative leadership of the organization. First the Annenberg Rural Challenge Fund granted us a three-year grant to do education reform, and a

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<sup>1</sup> I will use italics in my text to denote the micro-narrative for the macro-narrative. The macro-narrative is utilized to help establish the context of the story and document.

teacher coordinated this effort. This grant was followed by a number of other smaller contributions by outside funding sources that allowed us to continue to do work both inside the school and in the community. It was very important for us to create both learning opportunities that are grounded in place, and employment opportunities that are desperately needed in this local South Texas area.

*The transition from my home in Austin to El Valle is not a difficult one for me; indeed, it is going home again. I grew up in this South Texas community, but it is not always as easy for my children and wife. It is especially hard when they drive me to the airport. The ritual is clear; first Javier, my 5-year-old, begins by saying, “Papi, I don’t want you to go,” in a somber voice and this, without fail, is followed by a sob. Then Emiliano, who just turned nine as I write this document, begins to get watery eyes and subsequently begins to cry himself; then without fail, my wife follows, and then I. The irony is that it is this emotional bond that ties all of my work and us together. I must remind them that I will be at their abuelito’s house in the company of friends and family, and will return in a couple of days. The trip usually is from Thursday to Sunday noon when the first flight from El Valle comes into Austin. It finally became apparent to me that the best way to avoid this emotional departure was by putting them to bed at night, of course, only after they helped me with the packing ritual, and calling a cab in the morning.*

I share this story because it represents a number of issues. First, the rest of this document will follow the same format. My dissertation is a form of autobiographical narrative. As Torres (1998) has done so eloquently and

powerfully in his book *Education, Power, and Personal Biography*, I propose to use the same genre in telling my story and the work of my partners.<sup>2</sup> However, as I tell the story I will attempt to minimize the master narrative, and remain at the micro level as I attempt to privilege the voices of my partners.<sup>3</sup> This document is about telling the story of a community, its strategies, and its efforts in preparing and developing local leaders. This is a community that has historically struggled with the challenges that we see in the traditional literature including economics, low educational attainment, mobility, migration and inadequate infrastructure to name a few (Kozol, 1991; Shirley, 1997), but in this community there's been a spirit of transformation. This change has experienced dramatic success, yet as we traditionally see in education, the existing organizational structures, policies, and bureaucratic cultures have been difficult to permeate, thus much more work is yet to be done; this is part of the challenge when change occurs from the bottom up, if I may use a trite problematic metaphor.<sup>4</sup>

Capturing the big picture of our work is critical, but much too broad and beyond the scope of this document; however, it is important to make a brief point of the context in which we grew up and what families and children face today. In this document I will chronicle the strategies, experiences, processes, and essential

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<sup>2</sup> I use partner because my work is done collaboratively and my research is co-created by myself and the community I work with.

<sup>3</sup> Some of my partners have read this document and provided input, thus, securing a certain level of internal validity and accuracy in my interpretation. Also, where appropriate and disagreement occurs, I will note this in the endnotes of the document.

<sup>4</sup> I see the bottom as the top; for it is here that the energy, ideas and everyday lives are being impacted. Indeed, it is also here where the spirit of diversity of people, ideas and actions are formulated.

elements that are put in place for the leadership development of youth and ordinary citizens. I will begin to chronicle the necessary conditions that have been developed for people and organizations in this community to change in a positive and proactive way.

So as I began with the story of my travels and the emotions of my family, I begin to put forth the ontology of my work (Scheurich, 2002). For it is only when I am aware of my ontological position and potential blind spots that I can begin to prevent making erroneous assumptions and begin to make sound analysis and assessments.

But if I stay as the narrator, I will not do justice to the document, experience, or the people of our community. Thus, the need to create the space for a dialogical dynamic to occur for the polyphonic process of story is critically important to this document. The story is at the core of a pedagogical process that many in this community have benefited from. For as I share in the story above, the process is emotional, collective, passionate, and as my kids continuously reminded me during the packing ritual, the baggage is loaded.<sup>5</sup> And finally, I include my family at the beginning as a commitment to my partners; they are as important to me as my most precious relationships: my family.

This story takes place in Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa, primarily, though during the past four years the journey of the characters in this narrative has taken them to 35 states in this country, places in South America, Asia, Africa, and

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<sup>5</sup> I use “baggage” as a metaphor for the biases that I and every other researcher brings with them to the research process, directly challenging the positivistic paradigm.

Europe. Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa are rural, agricultural communities along the Texas Mexican border, and are in many ways characteristically poor and isolated Mexican American border towns. In other ways, however, they are global communities being impacted by an infusion of ideas imported by its organic<sup>6</sup> leaders, as well as by the forces shaping one of the fastest growing markets in the western hemisphere. This is home, and this is where our educational experiment is unfolding.

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow the concept of organic from the Gramscian concept of “organic intellectuals” as I make reference to local leaders who have been raised in the area, and whose values are consistent with the local community.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **STATE OF EDUCATION**

Cuban's (1990) claim of restructuring school over and over is playing itself out again. Clearly our country has seen numerous school change efforts that vary from curriculum changes to reading strategies, and from restructuring funding initiatives to huge dosages of academic standardization and accountability measures. The issue of education, which is constitutionally a state issue, was prominent in our most recent presidential campaign, and subsequently in a nationally sweeping legislation entitled "leave no child behind." Clearly change is part of the natural order of things; it will happen to us, with us, or by us. The literature puts forth models of change that are helping inner city children, low income students, and minority youth (Meier, 1995, Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes, 1999; Scheurich, 1998; Shirley, 1997). In the literature we also find what I believe is the most effective broad-based school change movement in the country, the Alliance Schools Movement. The Alliance schools are organized by the Industrial Areas Foundation, and their effectiveness has received state and national attention. This movement is consistent with the recommendations put forth by Stone, et. al. who claim that the only effective school reform will happen by bringing schools into the political arena; change is contingent on building a strong civil society (Stone, 2001). But even in the most progressive of movements, youth are the recipients of the change and the reform; they are not actors in the process. Sure, youth are the ones who take the tests and live out the change, but

rarely are they in the middle of the political change process as key stakeholders.

It is here that I begin to establish and articulate the change that I will put forth in this document. My guiding principle is that one cannot have substantial or sustainable education change without responding to the political economy of local areas (Dardar, Torres, et. al., 1997; Anyon, 1997) This idea is consistent with the Alliance schools movement, and part of Stone's thesis, but I deviate in practice because I believe that youth should be at the core of the change process. They are the experts in their reality; they know first hand their needs; and at times they are the leaders of our communities. In predominately immigrant communities, for the first time in history we begin to see youth that are young chronologically, but old in experiences. Indeed, in many of our recent immigrant communities we begin to see a certain power dynamic playing itself out as we see youth who know more than their parents: language, culture, and economics. They become the interpreters, the negotiators and decision makers for their parents who are monolingual native speakers.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, in many instances this creates a stress level that is not necessary for youth (Garbarino, 1995), yet it is a survival situation within which youth are forced to live within. Here again, they had no input into this process. So it is critical for those of us who work for progressive change, education, and justice, that we include youth as key stakeholders in this process of change.

However, even when youth are successful at negotiating these adult responsibilities, they must put up with a child-like treatment in the classroom.

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<sup>7</sup> In South Texas the native language experienced most is Spanish.

This treatment occurs because of the lack of socio-culturally relevant curricula that could help students learn the cognitive skill based on a real life context and the unidirectional power dynamic that is common in the classroom. This incongruence dismisses a tremendous opportunity for developing our future leaders.

*I remember the spring of 1974 as we prepared for our first trip north to work. My father had gone through a major surgery and his medical unemployment support had elapsed. The mandate was go back to work. But, when it became clear that he was not physically ready to return to his old employment, no other option existed but to create the situation where the older members of the family could contribute to its economic subsistence. This included my parents, my older brother (13) and I (11). So the transition was on withdrew our selves from school, and helped by parents prepare for the journey. I was the one who always was in charge of helping my father make sure that the vehicle was in traveling conditions which included checking and changing the oil, rotating the tires, checking the coolant system, and providing the other maintenance as need. During the trip we were too young to help drive, but were did rotate in engaging in conversation with our father so he could stay awake.*

*And then once getting to the state of Michigan where Spanish speakers were not as common as in South Texas, we were elevated to the role and duties of translators for our parents; this happened in the supermarket when we bought groceries, the fields as salaries were negotiated, the doctor's office when any of us got sick, and in the public service offices when we applied for food stamps.*

*Clearly we, my brothers and I, were critical in the economic survivals of the family and securing that the health of the family was maintained. But this important role was quickly downgraded when we the federal agents removed us from the fields and forced my parents to enroll us in school. Upon our arrival at schools we were checked for head lice and sent to the basement of the building where all the children of the farmworkers were “taught.” Here, we attended school for the duration of the semester and upon its completion, we were sent home with report cards. I remember my grades because it was sent home in English and I had to read it to my parents. The teacher however, claimed that I did not know how to read and that I had to work on building my self-esteem. Even as a young boy, I know that teacher had not clue of who I was or what I knew. I still have this report card and letter she sent home. And I use it as a reminder to never assume that I know what students know. I have a need to ask and engage in conversation and take stock of the knowledge they bring with them.*

The role youth play in developing their educational experiences is critically important. Their participation in this process can begin to create a collective vision of education and youth development models and practices that are more democratic and open to diverse ways of learning and knowing for youth and adults. The field of community youth development, a model adopted by some youth non-profit service delivery organizations, provides a progressive model and practice that creates the space for youth participation in the development of their community (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002; Pittman, 1997; Wilson & Guajardo,

2000).<sup>8</sup> These models have received attention in the non-profit world, but most are usually divorced of sound pedagogical practices, principally because most youth workers are not trained in the fundamentals of the teaching and learning process. Secondly, traditional non-profit organizations have adopted traditional business models that have segmented their service delivery, instead of focusing on holistic methods of service delivery, what we experience are sports, educational, social service, arts or other specifically focused organizations. This critique does not imply that we all need to have education degrees to work effectively with youth, or we must be doing everything, but we do need to develop a sound systemic and broad-based approach to working with youth if we are to nurture an effective learning environment.

It is this systemic and holistic teaching and learning process that we have been working to create. This process is holistic when the home knowledge and the school learning are integrated; it is holistic when parents, students, and teachers become partners in the education and development of youth and their community; it becomes holistic when the values and experiences of youth and their surrounding community are included in the school curriculum, and it becomes holistic when disciplines and artificially established boundaries are permeated. And by employing this holistic process, we have been intent on cultivating a

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<sup>8</sup> Community Youth Development is a new field that marries community development with youth development and makes the argument that youth must play a role in the decision making process of their community. U.S. policy defines youth in a number of different ways depending on the context, i.e. voting, education eligibility, military responsibility, alcohol drinking age, etc... thus, making it difficult to designate when the youth years begin and end. At LGC we see the construct of youth as a continuum and an identity that is co-constructed. So, like many other countries and cultures, youth might be 14, 16, 18, 21, or 24 years of age.

cohort of young leaders. It is this story that has been thought through and constructed an inductive manner (Merriem, 1998; Patton, 1990), but also in a forward thinking and deliberate way as laid out in Appendix A. This document will serve as a vehicle for us to begin to theorize and explain the work we have been doing for a decade as well as contribute to future work. The currency of this document is internal for it will help us reflect on our own work, yet it will also begin to share our theories, practices, and processes with other communities how wish to pursue similar work.

#### **LLANO GRANDE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Llano Grande Center for Research & Development, a school and community based non-profit organization, is located at Edcouch-Elsa High School in Elsa, Texas, 15 miles north of the Texas-Mexican border in the Rio Grande Valley. The Center was founded by a group of teachers, high school students, and community members who were interested in uplifting a rural part of South Texas that by most objective indicators was mired as the most impoverished and economically distressed in the country. Tired of dwelling on the ubiquitous poverty indicators, we decided to work on developing the skills of our youth, parents, and other adult community members by focusing on the vast latent assets of our people. Essentially, our dream was to transform our lives and our communities by undertaking capacity building initiatives out of our schools. Our students, teachers, and parents, then, would become the agents for community and economic development.

The main participants in this venture have been all graduates of the area.

This effort has been fuel by individuals who have been committed to giving back to their community. And in very deliberate fashion, we have brought those who have stayed and those who have left (physically) to the realization that we all have something of importance to contribute. This philosophy has been fueled by assets based development model (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). The area has for too long been defined by the negative indicators which has in turn manifested a deficit development model for the area including the education of our citizens (Valencia, 1997). These issues informed much of the initial work which has been focused on identity development by building collecting and printing the stories of the residents of the area. This initiative has developed into a very sophisticated oral history project which has helped the Center build a strong foundation and relationships with the people of the community. This initiative has also influenced the direction of our work or every conversation with a community becomes input for the direction of the Center (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002).

Since we created the master plan in the mid 1990's, we have created multiple infrastructures under the Llano Grande umbrella. The following is a representative list of the wide ranging success we have realized:

- 51 of our students have enrolled in Ivy League universities; 24 have graduated during the past five years, and nine have returned to South Texas to participate in our development work; along the way, we have developed a nationally-recognized pre-college advising program. The Center has begun to teach other schools the best practices of our pre-college advising work.

- The Center has launched Llano Grande Publications, a publishing house that produces a school and community based journal, a community newsletter, and digital video products for school and community consumption.
- The center has created the Llano Grande Media Institute, out of which numerous documentaries and digital stories have been produced. Youth and adults work together to fashion their stories through digital media. Since 2000, Llano Grande work has been featured at five film festivals, and in numerous conferences in the U.S. and Europe.
- We have founded a student-run radio station.
- We created a student-led community based survey research project that focuses on building research skills and collecting pertinent data for community and economic development initiatives.
- The Center founded the Llano Grande Seminar Series, which began as a forum for cultivating a public discourse within our rural communities; the Seminar Series is primed to become a public educational forum through which we engage in conversations on local and regional community and economic development.

But in order to begin to direct the much needed frameworks that will help develop and educate both youth and adults, we must give time to deliberate with the following question: education for what?

### **EDUCATION FOR WHAT?**

Historically education has played several significant purposes in our

country and state. We first see formal public education in this country as it was formed to educate people for the clergy in the Northeast part of the country (Rippa, 1997). This purpose for education begins to be augmented with the Jeffersonian argument that the best way to maintain a functional democracy is by having an educated and prepared citizenry. This function is obviously informed by the writings of Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, and other enlightenment era thinkers (Soder, 1996). It was 1887 when Horace Mann delivered his Common Schools speech when we begin to construct schools as we see them today. His message of creating an education system for all as a vehicle for sustaining a democracy was clouded by his direct framing of education as a tool for developing works, and for assimilating immigrants. The three main reasons for education outlined by Jefferson and Mann might have been appropriate for their times, but are presently limited at best and problematic at worst. It has been clear to me that much of the technical components—reading, writing, and arithmetic—that education is set up to provide should be birth rights for people; yet we still have many citizens who never fulfill this right. Clearly, our societal context has evolved at an accelerated pace during the last 20 years, and we must examine the purpose of education in the appropriate social, historical, and political context. In this dissertation I propose to document the purpose of public education as articulated by a non-profit organization in South Texas which has been working on issues of education, leadership, and community development.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explain and document a process of education for leadership development. This work for leadership development goes

beyond the traditional concept of positional leadership<sup>9</sup> and looks at making public education more public in that learning and teaching takes place in a more organic informal setting and with nontraditional students. An emphasis is placed not only on the young traditional students in school, but also their parents, their neighbors, local business leaders, teachers, social service providers, and other stakeholders in the community. This document is about leadership in action. It is about leadership as a socially constructed process, and it is about leadership for community change. But as important local leaders who are in constant dialogue with each other as well as the world from/in a small community in South Texas. This movement is local, but it has been internationally informed and its intent is on developing the skills that can be transferred by its students. Clearly, the learning of reading, writing, and mathematics is important; but this not where change happens in this place we call school. It is in the political process and relationship building that students, parents, teachers, service providers, and public officials develop with each other (or not) that then begins to inform the guiding principles and actions taken (Stone, et. al, 2001). As Freire (Shore & Freire, 1987) puts it, it is as important to learn how to read the world as it is to read the word.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

Participatory and collaborative decision making have been at the core of the Llano Grande Center's guiding principles, and these values that have informed

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term positional leadership in associating leadership with a title (static) as oppose to leadership as a person in the middle of a process and who is always evolving (active). During the last 10 years I have studied and facilitated the leadership process for youth and adults and have come to the realization that the technical or skills building method alone does not make an effect leader. More on the dynamic process of leadership development is presented in chapter four.

the work of the Center. Thus, consistent with these values, this research is not mine alone. It belongs to my partners who have deliberately and actively participated in this collaborative inquiry process<sup>10</sup>. For as Ladson-Billings (2001) writes, I have yet to figure out how to do research by myself. This makes the identification of the stakeholders for this work critically important. The research as well as the organizing and educational work we do on a daily basis is interdisciplinary, pedagogical in nature, and progressive. This work is radical by definition because it deviates from the traditional practice of schooling. And it is forward thinking because it is grounded in the idea that the old has not worked for our students so we must do things different. This work is also grounded in the belief that we must work to cross the traditional boundaries that have been set up by an educational system that silos knowledge into departments, a society that is binary in thinking,<sup>11</sup> and resistant to change. So, with such a staunch tradition of doing the same things, it is easy to be radical by creating an intense spirit of participation, and by inviting and initiating a deliberate movement of a diverse group of people. In this educational process for leadership development we have partnered with school children of all ages, parents, teachers, business members, political/public servants, educators from higher education institutions, and private and public philanthropic groups. This work is also radical by participation. It is critical to invite youth and other common people to participate in the education of

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<sup>10</sup> A more elaborate discussion on the value of collaborative inquiry will be presented in the methodology chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> I use binary as a two option process: yes-no, black-white, good-bad. This framework has hindered the development of alternative thinking and therefore, stifled creativity.

youth and development of the community. But in order for those new to the process to participate in a substantial manner, the process must be pedagogical and informative for to invite traditionally marginalized people to be part of the democratic and educational process without educating them will recreate the initial problem of alienation.

This educational venture is interdisciplinary as we are convinced that good learning, effective teaching, and the creation of knowledge are at their best when the process is organic. It is when history is connected with economics and the story of people that we begin to make sense of the reality as we experience it. It is when we use the local stories to create the classroom readings that education begins to be organic. And it is this integration that makes our local reality a source for developing pedagogically sound teaching, learning, economic, and leadership development strategies (Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1998). This inclusion is critical, for as the old Chinese proverb reads: “Tell me and I will forget, show me and I might remember, include me and I will own it.”

This process of inclusion is pedagogically and politically sound, yet it is not this that fuels our practice; rather its inclusive because that process respects the partners.

### **PLACE, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

Small communities around the country, and the world for that matter, are losing their youth to the more populated and urban areas. In some instances they leave to attend college, pursue employment opportunities, or experience the

“excitement” of city life. With this demographic shift in population,<sup>12</sup> small communities have to be innovative and exploratory in creating exciting, intellectually challenging, and economically viable strategies if they want to keep their youth or have them return after college. It has become clear to us that place matters. Youth and adults who leave these small communities come back and stay connected with their families through various ways. They come “home” for holidays, they send money to relatives, they come for vacations, or they call home to stay connected to culture or, as in our case, we would go home to get spiritually rejuvenated after being in Austin after an intense semester session.

Place becomes more important for communities that are marginalized linguistically, culturally, and economically. Place and the consciousness of its identity, value, and practices helps youth and adults become more aware of their inner world as well as the outside world (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). Identification with place and its ecology helps us develop the concept of “learning how to be.”<sup>13</sup> Learning how to be will help youth learn how to navigate and negotiate their position in places outside their comfort zone. It is in place and community where many of us learned how the politics game works, how the economic systems are fair or not, how to make economic ends meet, and how to use our assets to overcome our shortcomings. It is in this place where we learned our values, politics, relationships, and the concept of giving back. Indeed it is about giving back to a community that nurtured and raised us. It is about nurturing this

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<sup>12</sup> 84% of Texans live in urban areas/cities.

<sup>13</sup> Educators in the international education community are considering a new set of basics skills that include learning how to learn, learning how to be and knowing how to know.

philanthropic spirit that will help our community as well as others learn how to become sustainable.<sup>14</sup> It is about learning how to nurture ideas, make decisions, and build strong communities based on dialogue<sup>15</sup> and conversation. It is about learning how to develop, teach, and learn skills that will allow youth to make healthy decisions and impact the public good. It is in this place where we learned these concepts that we have decided to bring back to help build the next generation of leaders who in turn will impact the rest of the world. The playing field has become bigger and the work has become smaller. But crossing borders (Gomez-Peña, 1996) is not a foreign concept; some of us have done this all our lives.

*I remember the day I received a phone call at my house. I was a junior in high school and a two way starter on the football team. On the other end of the line was a friend and teammate who was inviting me to a meeting. I asked, "What is this meeting for and who is convening it?"*

*He should have known better; he knew I would ask questions, but he continued. "Miguel, vente vato, we don't want to go by ourselves, and we have been summoned by some members of the school board to talk business."*

*"Okay, pick me up," I replied. So, that evening we ended up meeting with a group of local school board members.*

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<sup>14</sup> Sustainability means different things to different people; to me it is consistent with the Native American concept where one makes decisions based on the impact they will have on seven future generations.

<sup>15</sup> I will use dialogue, conversation and plática interchangeably. Theoretically I use Bakhtin's discourse on dialogical practice of creating knowledge. I find value in this term because it is both cognitive and spiritual. Indeed, I always considered a good conversation to be the best form of prayer.

*“This is not an official meeting,” they claimed. They just wanted to know how the new football coach was performing. They were, after all, “looking after our own good.” This information and sharing session undoubtedly would influence the conversations and subsequent political decisions made at the next school board meeting.*

As Scribner and Marshall (1991) so convincingly frame it, everything is political. It is the politics of education that are at the heart of this dissertation, a politic that is grounded in the values, principles, and practices of the local area and our residents.

#### **CONSTRUCTING THEORY, APPLYING THEORY, OR IS IT MAKING CAPIROTADA<sup>16</sup>: A DIALOGUE<sup>17</sup>**

It has been very obvious to me that the traditional models and theories that are part of the literature are informed by epistemologies and ontological realities that are incongruent with those of the people and places that I have worked with and who are my partners in this research. The prevailing positivistic paradigm that informs the academic discourse, values, practices, and research is limiting in framing and understanding our work and research. Thus, I have deliberately and assertively adopted a hybrid model for my work. For me it has been about

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<sup>16</sup> Capirotada is a traditional Mexican dish that is very popular during Lent. The dish has multiple layers of bread and in between each layer is fruit, peanuts, cheese, and a thick dose of brown sugar. Certainly there is no English translation for this word, but Luby’s Cafeteria has attempted to give it a name and has called it bread pudding. Que lástima.

<sup>17</sup> I use dialogue as “double reading (ala Bourdieu).” First, I use it as a symbolic concept that metaphorically describes the dynamic inter/exchange of theoretical guiding principle that inform my work, and secondly, I use dialogue as a process to inform and surface the theory that begins to inform our work.

understanding a variety of theories, epistemological paradigms, and ontological realities so I can best frame my work, research, and the stories that need to be told.

This document is the product of hybrid theory that is grounded in the Freirian critical concept of praxis, informed by a neo-Vygotskian premise that disciplines must be permeated, and that the zone of proximal development impacts our reality. This theory is augmented by the constructivist thought that reality is socially constructed, and the *mojado* theory<sup>18</sup> that I use to describe a concept that I construct from a cross-fertilization between the Gramscian concept of organic intellectuals and the subaltern studies that privileges marginalized thought from this South Texas Mexican American community.

I have described this section on theory building as a dialogue because my document as well as research is grounded in the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogue and carnival. Dialogue has been the most common and consistent research method I have utilized during the last 15 years, and this research is no different. It has been a valid research tool, an effective teaching strategy, and a provocative method for pushing the boundaries of programs, theories, ideas, concepts, and relationships. And we have all benefited from it.

Traditionally the literature describes theory as a vehicle to predict or

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<sup>18</sup> The word *mojado* is a derogatory term that translates as wetback in the US Southwest. It is a term that many Mexicans are used to in Texas, but I didn't learn of its global currency until I was in an international conference at the Salzburg Seminar in Austria. A young Scandinavian woman who described her politics as progressive came up to me and wanted to meet me because she had never met a Mexican before. So, when I asked her how she knows about Mexicans, she quickly and without thinking, replied, "That's what we call the people who come from the south to work in our country, Mexican Wetbacks." So I use this term to privilege the thought, struggle, resiliency, and resistance of this community in part because I am a product of this struggle.

explain certain occurrences or practices. But for me, theory has been a tool to inform our work, and the most valuable theory is a theory in use. For however minute the difference between these positions might be, it is worth highlighting. My reading of the former two positions and uses of theory we find in the literature are presented as givens, a point that to me carries a certain danger when adopted as a matter of fact. I am concerned for I believe that this carries many inherent and unchecked assumptions. If I do not check and scrutinize these assumptions, then my work falls into the dominant form and the prevailing theoretical constructs and dismisses my decolonizing principles, strategies, and values. I prefer to not only use theory, but construct theory in a different way. This process is about creating the dialectical process where ideas are exchanged, practices are shared, and theory is created. Thus, within this construct, we have built on the concept of praxis as a point in time and space where theory and practice meet. It is the inherent positive tension that is created at this pivotal point that percolates the new ideas, energy, and spirit that rejuvenates and feeds innovation. This is one of the theoretical constructs that gives birth to the energy, wisdom and courage for some of us to go beyond the existing constructs we experience in school, programs, and academia. Theory is critically important to the work we do on the ground and to the stories we put on paper.

Also, we build our work on the constructivist epistemological belief that reality is socially constructed, and we are convinced that we can construct success in spite of the overwhelming challenges we face daily. Historically education for Mexican American children in this country has been constructed on a deficit

model (Villenas & Foley, 2002; Valencia, 1997), and many times in order for children to succeed, they have needed to assimilate totallt into the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity, language, and values. This system is a construction of an ontology that is white, middle class, and guided by business and market driven economic values. However, using a constructivist framework, we are able to deconstruct<sup>19</sup> the existing practices, and policies that are in place, while simultaneously working to create policies, practices and programs that are more congruent with the existing values of the local families.

### **Una Historia as Theory Building**

In this next section I will continue to articulate the theoretical constructions that have informed our work and this document. I will weave narrative, the story, and the academic rhetoric into a theoretical construct(ion). These theoretical perspectives will inform—some overt, others more subtle—the rest of this document. I want to construct this theory by using voices of the people who create it, practice it, and live it. Thus I privilege an 18 year old student, Myrta, who studied history and conducted community based research along with graduate students during her senior year in high school. Myrta and her family are migrant farmworkers. This is a way of life for many families who live in this South Texas community. What follows is an essay prepared by Myrta as she goes inward and reflects about herself and shares her story.

*Edcouch, Texas, is the only place that I can truly call home, but as*

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<sup>19</sup> We believe that (s)he who is willing to deconstruct, must be committed to help rebuild. Anything less is irresponsible.

*a migrant it isn't the only place I live in. Every year as school comes to an end and the heat begins to burn, my family packs our bags and boards up our house. It would be nice to say that leaving gets easier every year, but I can't. It's gotten tougher every year. I can't say goodbye to my friends because I'm not really leaving, and I can't get sad because I know that I'll be back. Sometimes the only thing you can do is close your eyes for five minutes, because that is how long it takes to leave Edcouch and Elsa. Then, when you open your eyes, all you can do is hope that the three months of upcoming labor will speed by.*

*I can honestly say that up until my twelfth year of life I did not know what work was. Then one morning before the sun rose, my mother shook me out of bed and told me to get up. It was time to work. I didn't take the moment seriously because it was summer, and I was still 12. No one under 20 woke up before the sun, especially when you didn't have school. Who was I to break this unspoken rule; unfortunately, that didn't pass through my parents' minds.*

*The moment initiated my new stage of life, as a worker. I was to rise at the same time as the adults, and to do the same work as the adults. So at 12 years old my summer days were going to be spent in the fields.*

*We started off thinning peaches, the job that I hate with all of my heart. We rose at five in the morning, to make the day shorter and cooler, and terminated each day at around three. This cycle continued for the first month, and proceeded with the picking of raspberries, cherries and*

*blackberries for the last two months. While other kids were at home watching t.v. and going swimming, I was beneath the sun in my peach tree wearing my long sleeved shirts.*

*I did not complain as I worked because I understood that this is what my parents needed me to accept. If I complained I would only make myself look foolish because every other person there wasn't complaining. So every morning as I rose my heart sank, and I longed to make the sun disappear or the clouds pour their rain. My 12<sup>th</sup> summer of life was spent in denial and confusion.*

*I'm now 18 and I've gone back to Utah as a worker for the last five summers. As each summer passed I learned things that I know other people will take a lifetime to learn. I experienced life with a new perspective, and I found myself being thankful to my parents for teaching me what hard work is. The opportunities that this type of work offers are overshadowed by society's stereotype of migrant farm workers. Positive effects are blurred by the negative statistics and other data that researchers, the media, and others collect.*

*My summers spent in and with the land have educated me. I still deplore thinning peaches, but I have an understanding of life and nature that makes my heart race. Every day that I begin before the sun is to my benefit.*

*With this teacher, I have become a better student, not only of school but also of life (Myrta and Her Utah Experience, 2001).*

Myrta's story is not unique, yet rarely do we understand it or celebrate it. My document however is about creating the space for youth to experiment and learn about their story and its power. Myrta wrote this narrative during the fall of 2000 when she, as a high school senior, participated in a class that consisted of high school and University of Texas graduate students. The space created for her to develop this story was critical, but as important was the process in helping her put power and currency to her story. Myrta's narrative was part of her college application that gained her admission into Brown University. After completing her first year at Brown Myrta returned to the fields of Utah to join her family as she contributes to their economic subsistence. And at the end of the summer she will again return to Brown University for her second year of college life.

I share Myrta's story because it begins to paint a picture of the theoretical constructs that guide the work of the Llano Grande Center. Myrta's story is about learning to read the word as well as the world. She has developed a consciousness that has elevated her personal story to a level of power in route to reaching a certain level of liberation. Part of the liberation is her understanding of her own personal identity. An identity rooted in her annual journeys, in family, and community. Developing this identity is not simple. Myrta's articulation of her own cognitive dissonance clearly presents the struggle that she has gone through as she develops the skills and ability to live in multiple worlds: that of a migrant farmworker, a university student, and a public citizen. Her story has received national attention as many other students' stories.

Myrta's story, like his document, begins with the metaphor of packing her

bags for a trip. This trip is symbolic of the journey we have traveled both literally and metaphorically the last ten years. We have traveled thousands of miles to places of the world that have informed the LGC work in a global fashion; we have traveled to imaginary places and universities through reading,<sup>20</sup> and we have gone to worlds of the past by learning from and sharing with our elders. Some of these trips are difficult for they stretch our physical and intellectual boundaries, but to be sure, they are necessary in continuing to push the learning to higher level. Indeed, it is higher education and a higher level of learning that the LGC has committed to nurturing; higher education is not linear, and it should begin while youth are in grade school and continue well after they leave school. This is the commitment to making public education public and accessible to its citizenry in a democratic society. This is educational, political, and pedagogical. This is not an easy journey; the constant challenging of the status quo is a necessary stage for developing a different order of things. But, in the process, we must be cognizant of not creating a new structure that will generate new injustices. A reflexive process is needed to help insure this.

Additionally, as we experience the reality that life presents us when children are pushed to take on adult responsibilities for subsistence purposes, we must help people build on the assets of these experiences. It is only then, that we can begin to build resiliency of youth (Trueba, 1999) as we negotiate through the potential negative psychological and physical affects they might have. Indeed, as

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<sup>20</sup> This point is supported in the literature review section, even though, I must confess that some of my readers shared that this was the least engaging part of my dissertation an interesting point to analyze for future work.

it has been seen in Myrta's case, parents have learned to nurture this resiliency, and it is we who have learned from them and Myrta. This is part of what makes the Center's work pedagogical. The learning occurs not in a unidirectional way, but the role of teacher and students is continuously being negotiated and shared. Additionally, this bi-directional teaching and learning has created new knowledge a necessary condition for the pedagogical process to exist (Lather, 1991). This process creates tremendous unyielding power in people, and celebrates the strength of the organic intellectuals in our community. But, these experiences and organic knowledge are not privileged in traditional research; on the contrary, as Myrta writes, "The opportunities that this type of work offers are overshadowed by society's stereotype of migrant farm workers. Positive effects are blurred by the negative statistics and other data that researchers, the media, and others collect."

It is in the midst of these overwhelming hegemonic structures that we take these positions, do this work, and do this research. This research is grounded in decolonizing methodologies, but this alone is not sufficient as we help youth and their families find ways to live better lives. We must work to identify and build on pivotal points that will help youth find these transformational experiences. As Myrta so aptly shares, "As each summer passed, I learned things that I know other people will take a lifetime to learn." And in order to identify these experiences, we must have hope that our community and the world can be a better place to live in. Because it is this hope that has made Myrta and many of us better people.

So it is about finding new ways to telling and collecting our stories; it is

about having hope in ourselves and the future; it is also about having and practicing the power to imagine. Yes, it is about practicing the ability to identify the world as it is and making the leap to creating the images and stories about the world as it should be. This ability is critical but the process of this engagement is as important. Wheatley quotes Einstein as saying, “No problem can be solved with the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew.” And it is within this same spirit that I close my story with Myrta’s words of wisdom as she thanks the most organic of teachers: the land. “With this teacher, I have become a better student, not only of school but also of life.” It is this new consciousness that will help us inform and create the theoretical constructs that will guide us to the next level of education. These theories will be grounded in story, informed by the traditional literature, and guided by local values. This new theory is committed to creating a new way of viewing the world, working to accomplish the highest of standards, building an ethic that is committed to developing strong relationships, and that will be informed by constant dialogue. This theory will also be informed by the work we have done to date, the need for creating safe spaces, sharing power, and celebrating the spirit of our community. This theory is based on multiple praxes. We will continue to integrate the theoretical with the practical, the human with the spiritual, the past with the present and future, the micro with the macro, the local with the global, and the young with to the old. And this theory will be guided with a shared vision. As presented in Appendix A, it is critically important that we look to the future in a very deliberate and broad-base fashion. This broad-base approach

informs our work as we continue to build on our local assets and respond to the needs of the community.

Another strategy for connecting the micro with the macro is by using Myrta's story as a strategy for building theory. I use her story as a counter-narrative and as a strategy for disrupting the traditional order of things. Smith (1999) writes about indigenous peoples sharing their stories as a strategy for building a new history. Story is a tool that people outside academia have as a vehicle to build their reality as well as practicing a form of resistance. Story is so strong that its currency has been acknowledged and used by academicians too. Critical Race Theorists (CRT) too use story to disrupt the traditional order of things and expose the inherent inequalities in legal and other historical documents. Delgado (2001) and other CRT however, also use story in the tradition of the Native American storytellers who believe that (s)he who tell the story carries the weight of the world on their shoulders. This is symbolic of the responsibility and importance that is given to this process. The responsibility of this role is so great that I have decided, like Myrta, to embark on this journey with partners. Alone, this work will not be as comprehensive as needed. The work I present is dialogical in thinking and collaborative in practice. The spirit of collaborative development, collaborative leadership, collaborative storytelling, and collaborative inquiry too is a theoretical and philosophical position I put forth in document. The collaborative process too is seen as a form of disrupting the traditional order of things in the academy, but I practice it not for its value of resistance alone. I practice it for the value and richness it provides to the stories of

our community and our work.

Other theoretical contributions this document builds on, yet also contributes to, are the concepts of liberation and pedagogy of hope that Freire, Vygotsky, and Trueba convincingly lay out for us. The work of the Center develops these concepts in a number of different fronts that are informed by these principles. The Center's educational work is about developing a new model for educational leadership that is bi-directional, grounded in real life experiences, involves the learner in the decision making process, and does so as it celebrates the spirit of people's life.

The celebration of the spirit builds on the Bahktinian concept of carnival. Bahktin (1968) writes that the carnival is a celebration that occurs during the time of harvests. To build on Myrta's migrant experience, the farmwork experience is clearly a time to participate in the celebration of the harvest, but this is not the only symbolic ritual that we celebrate. Clearly, there is a new harvest at play. This harvest is the building of minds, leaders, and ideas in the new carnival that is at play in our organization and community. Clearly, the outcomes are a reason for celebration, but the process of youth development and leaders is one that must also be acknowledged and celebrated for its effectiveness and innovativeness. It is during carnival that we see the disruption of the traditional hierarchical roles a common practice at the Llano Grande Center. Bahktin writes, "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live it, and everyone participates (p. 7)." He continues, "Carnival celebrated temporary liberation for the prevailing truth and from the established order (p. 10)." And it is carnival when the folk humor is at its

best and worst. Laughter and sharing is at the heart of growing together, and growing together is at the core of collective action, a concept that builds power for young people.

The ideas and principles of the theories and theorists above have helped us shape the work of the Center, but as part of the culture, the work of the Center and our partners have significantly impacted the theorist as I see them, articulate them, interpret them, and use them. This bi-directional process is part of the development at the Center, and the theorists are youth, parents, teachers, and community activists. So as we look at teaching, learning, and the creation of new knowledge, we will look to the radical, the different, marginalized, and the new leadership in our community: the youth.

## **ROAD MAP**

This order of this document is nontraditional by design. The intent is not only symbolic<sup>21</sup>, but it is practical and consistent with the work that has informed my dissertation. The nature of this dissertation deviates from the traditional because it is practice that has informed the dissertation and not the literature review. This point does not minimize the importance of the literature, but it does grant a different role to the literature review and by design relegates it a tool which gives it a different value. And thus, in order to best portray its role, I've changed the literature review to chapter three of this document. So, in chapter two I include a methodological review that will consist of a variety of methods and strategies my partners and I have engaged in as we connect the methods with the

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<sup>21</sup> The symbolic gesture is that it disrupts the traditional order of things.

data, and the data with the action. This is then followed by a literature review that is transdisciplinary (Saldivar, 1997). This section highlights the ideas and concepts of others who have informed our work and the development of our organizational growth. This literature review is eclectic and at times might seem disconnected, but on the contrary, it is the literature that has most significantly impacted our work. The themes of the literature review have surfaced from the practice of our work. Then chapter four will follow with a number of stories and thematic categories that begins to paint a picture of the work we do. These stories will include the themes that I consider the core of what makes the work the Llano Grande Center's staff does effective and transformational. Within this chapter, I also present a preliminary long range plan of action that has been informed by numerous conversation and brainstorming sessions. This document then concludes with a chapter that will summarize some of the analysis of our work, the conditions of the context we live in, and some thoughts that we must consider for future work.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

The methodology employed for researching and informing this document has consisted of multiple strategies and is grounded in a qualitative framework of a case study. True to my theoretical constructs outlined above, I have adopted a hybrid model (Bhaba, 1994, Gomez-Peña, 1996) that has informed the strategies that best fit the context within a specific space and time. I have borrowed ideas and employed strategies from the participant observer (Patton, 1990), participatory action research (Gevanta, 1993), collaborative inquiry, community learning teams (Senge, 1990), critical ethnography (Foley, 1990, 1995; Thomas, 1993), and media and video analysis (Davies, 1999). This strategic hybrid approach has allowed me to participate in the development of my community as I have learned and taught while simultaneously collecting my data. The interaction between the teacher and the learner has also created new knowledge, thus making this effort pedagogical in nature (Lather, 1991). As I work on researching this project, I simultaneously work to build the capacity of my partners as I deliberately struggle to make the research reciprocal while also building on Lather's (1991) catalytic validity. Villenas (1996) thoughts of *The colonizer/colonized Chicana/o ethnographer* is a construct I carry with me out to the field and my backyard.

The data collected, stories told, and ideas written in this document are used to augment the literature while also informing our community of what we have accomplished and how we must continue moving forward to enhance our

reality. The stories included in this document also serve as an opportunity to give my community and myself a voice in the public sphere, a voice that has been silent for too long.

The data collected for this document have included a literature review that is interdisciplinary and strategically used to inform the analysis of the context and place of my case study. Other resources include a collection of personal conversations, a review of some internal documents, reports, video tape, archival data, and recommendations that have surfaced from discussions and my own personal observations. I do not claim to be objective in collecting and analyzing the data nor do I claim to be traditional. I do, however, claim responsibility for what is in this text. And as Wolcott (1994) shares, I am much more committed to being provocative than right. Additionally, as I share a more in depth explanation of the strategies I employ in this research, I will also make space in this chapter as well as in my conclusion for sharing some thoughts on epistemology and the role it plays in research, teaching, and leadership development.

### **CASE STUDY MODEL**

First, it is important to lay out the parameters of my case study. For this document I am researching the issue of education for leadership development. But unlike traditional dogmatic models of leadership development<sup>22</sup>, I place this process in the middle of its organic context. Thus, the adoption of a naturalistic inquiry method of collecting data will be more congruent than other scientific

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<sup>22</sup> Here I speak about leadership models that are more focused on preparing managers and technical leaders rather than leaders for progressive change.

strategies. I have been actively involved in a leadership development strategy through the teaching and learning process in this community for more than ten years. I have been a participant (observer), collaborator, and practitioner in the development of this organization and community. The focus of this work is broad based, but for this research much of the focus is on the process and conditions that we have established to nurture the academic and leadership development of youth and adults from this area.

### **Context of the Case Study**

A non-profit corporation, the Llano Grande Center is situated in the middle of a public high school. The organization was initiated from a teacher's classroom and has by nature been in partnership with the school district, but undoubtedly, the strongest bond has been with the students and families. The history of this community and its people has been grounded in the socio-political reality of the area. During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the town of Elsa was founded when the Southern Pacific Railroad came through town in 1927; Edcouch was founded the year before as part of the same economic boom. The area was developed by a land speculator from the Northeast and it was developed on three major conditions: great climate, cheap land, and cheap labor. The power dynamic that has been prevailing in the area is that the Anglos own the money and the land, and the Mexicans are the labor. The race relations in this community have historically been intense as el Señor y la Señora Salinas so aptly quote De León (1983), "They called us 'Greasers,' can you believe that?" And since schools are microcosms (Giroux, 1989) of the society, this tension historically

permeated to the schools.

Inequities abounded in this educational context. Jacinto González, the first Mexican American to serve on the Edcouch-Elsa board of trustees, repeatedly petitioned other board members for additional resources to address the deficiencies at North Edcouch Elementary. In a 1936 letter addressed to the board, Mr. González requested that additional staff be hired to keep the school clean and in safe operational conditions (González 1998).

Carlos Calderón, who lived in Edcouch for two years and taught at North Edcouch Elementary between 1948 and 1950, also addressed similar issues. While conducting research for his master's thesis at the University of Texas at Austin, Mr. Calderón documented the systemic inequalities in the education of Latin American children compared to Anglo American children. He observed that the physical structures of the Mexican school were clearly inferior and created poorer learning environments than the newer buildings and facilities at the Red Brick School. The ethnic composition of the faculty also added to the inequality. Mexican students had difficulty in understanding Anglo teachers, and Anglo teachers often had little patience for under skilled Mexican students (Calderón 1998, Calderón 1950).

The same type of resistance to change and integration experienced at the national level was playing itself out at the micro level locally (Contreras, 1994; San Miguel, 1987; Spring, 2000). Political change in this South Texas community has been a full contact sport. The courts did not grant the Mexican American community the status of an ethnic minority until 1972 *Corpus Christi v Rodríguez*.

(Contreras, San Miguel, 199?); however, the local activism in the Edcouch Elsa area pushed change forward. The Edcouch-Elsa High School walkout during the fall of 1968 became a watershed moment. It was this one political event that changed the reality of the community. Shortly after this walkout by protesting Mexican American students, the political positions shifted. The positional leadership changed when the Anglo power elite left, but unfortunately the same model of “Patrón Democracy” (Piñon, 1985) and leadership prevailed. The Mexicans were now in political (positional) power, but the ontology of the models within which they ruled were still that of white middle class. Thus, it is within this consciousness that we move to deliberately and assertively develop and train a new leader within a new leadership paradigm and a different ontology, one that is collaborative, inclusive, participatory, transparent, committed to diversity, and action oriented. This leader can read the word as well as read the world (Shor & Freire, 1987).”

In reading the world, as a community we must understand our history and acknowledge the changes within our society, community and institutions, but as importantly, we must change with them (Bolt, 2000; Schank, 2000). The needs of our children must be at the forefront of our community’s agenda. Every public resource we have must be directed in the best interest of our future leadership.

In evaluating our community’s reality, we must look at education from an interdisciplinary perspective. Our lens must look at the politics of the work we do and the context in which we do it. We must look closely at the economics of our community, the social cultural context of the area, and the organizational culture

and behavior of institutions we create. If we are to respond to the changing world, we must clearly go beyond the traditional social constructs of the education of Mexican American children. But in order to transform our community, we must tend to both the micro and macro forces impacting our educational and economic system.

A strategy adopted for assessing the issues of the area was the developing of multiple learning teams (Senge, 1990) within the local participant.

*During the time we began to set up the learning teams model a major international foundation had put out a Request for Proposal. Their mandate was very similar to the framework we had developed. This granted us an opportunity to try our model in a very practical and focused way. We convened public conversations with groups that ranged between 10 and 45 people. Through this discourse surfaced needs and actions that ordinary citizens were willing to turn into issues and take on. This information gathering process also helped us produce a well thought through grant proposal that insured our region over \$500,000. And this process has helped fund much needed community development initiatives.*

This story above is an example of participatory research in action. This process is where information, reflection, assessment, relationship building and action converge when opportunity arises. Indeed this method has relational, political, and economic currency. Participatory Action Research is simultaneously ethically robust and methodologically sound.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The participatory action research strategy utilized for this work provided for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Merriem, 1998). For it is clear that the immediate debriefing and reflection process that occurs after every activity is critically important for a variety of reasons. First, it is very important for adults to role model the learning process for youth as well as each other. Secondly, it is important to gauge the intellectual and emotional outcome and potential impacts of a lesson, meeting, or planning session. Thirdly, it is also important to highlight the action that can, should, or will come from this exchange of ideas. Fourthly, the debriefing will help inform the strategy and process for the next dialogue, class, session, meeting, or exchange. And finally, we must in a very public way gauge how each one of us is different after this exchange of ideas, thoughts, emotions, and or stories. So, the story has already been developed for me to tell it and I will do so with extreme caution, care, and great responsibility<sup>23</sup>. Additionally I will add some of my own thoughts and reactions.

Even though the data has been collected and much of the reflection and analysis has been done in the field, I do have the luxury of having the data for more careful and intense analysis. Most of the work we do is recorded on video for our archives, and it is this work that I have selected to use as a source of data for this study. This presents an opportunity to augment field notes in a very substantial way. Additionally, because I'm a founder of this organization, I've had

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<sup>23</sup> My use of story is consistent with Native Americans and Critical Race Theorists who have employed similar methods; they write, (s)he who tells the story carries the weight of the world on their shoulders.

the privilege of seeing the growth and evolution of an education agency since its inception. The fact that I am what Foley, Trueba, and others have referred to as the insider ethnic researcher has granted me much latitude in working in this community. It has opened doors for interviews and it has provided me with insider information that would have taken others much longer to figure out, but I do not take this lightly. My commitment to this effort is unconditional and the relationships that I've developed have forced me to a different level of ethical accountability. I will not violate the respect and trust of my partners. Because after all, I still have to go home. The ontology of this work is not to publish a document. The reason I do this work is to build strong communities; thus, the fact that this work can and has provided ground and space for this study is secondary and a by-product of working on our assets.

The outcomes and impact of this work have been very public. Our work has been highlighted on local, state, and national publications, but the same question is always asked by other communities: "How can we replicate this work?" And the answer is always the same: "You cannot!" But in the spirit of Paulo Freire (1993), we reply: do not attempt to replicate our work; but do take our concepts, values, principles and practices, and modify them to your social context. It is these theories, ideas, values, practices, and our social context that I will attempt to put forth so that other communities, organizations, or individuals can understand them better and utilize them within their own setting and context. The other reason for putting data in context is that our work has not been about setting up programs or curriculum; it has been about changing lives. This work

requires the commitment to transforming not only the self, but also the community. This has been a life long journey for many of us; the question for those who want to take these ideas and concept to their communities is this: are you willing to take life changing actions?

### **Data as Story**

This document will be based on a single-day training at Llano Grande. Building on Clifford Geertz's (1973) notes of the Balinese Cockfights, I will use this genre to capture a day long training to set the context of much of the work that we do on a daily basis. Simultaneously, from here I will extrapolate major themes and concepts that are common happenings in the daily work of the Llano Grande Center.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose a set of guidelines to follow as data are being analyzed and categories constructed:

- 1) consider issues that are mentioned in high frequency,
- 2) find categories that the reader will find credible,
- 3) select issues that stand out,
- 4) select categories that are unique.

I agree with most of the criteria, but have to take issue with number two. It is in the unexpected and extreme, sometimes the incredible, that I feel that learning happens. Thus in my document, there will be stories that might not be credible to the reader, but it will not be because they are not true; it will be mostly because people don't think that "out of the box" experiences can happen in education and leadership development nor that success can come from them. It is

this provocative notion that will help expand our imagination. Of course this is also very much related to the ontological reality of the reader. There will be plenty of people who read this document and who will never find it conceivable to think that in one of the poorest economic areas in the country we can create success, that old people who have no formal education nor speak English can create knowledge and wisdom, much less that these people can raise children that will be attending some of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in this country. The short of it is that I am not about to make it comfortable for the reader, but I am committed to making it educational.

#### **METHOD AND THEORY BUILDING**

Most of the work that is done at the Center is dialogically constructed and informed. Through this process we have constructed theories borrowed from theorists, academicians, and intellectuals. As important are the theories and processes that are created locally and then augmented with formal theories. Below I will provide a method and strategy I have developed as a method of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing program planning and theory building. This process has been developed naturally and organic in context, but because I believe others can benefit from it, I will attempt to present it in a more formal text.

#### **The DEMO Process**

The DEMO Process is an acronym for Theorizing, Deconstructing, Evaluating, Modifying, and Organizing. This process is one that I have begun to

use in guiding our own work, evaluating programming plans, and the constructing of documents. Below I will briefly explain how I used this process in constructing the theoretical framework for this document.

### ***Theorizing***

As I began to develop this document, I was convinced that I would begin by writing about Patton's (1990) and Merriam's (1998) concept of qualitative studies, and the naturalistic inquiry I would use to document my research. This was, after all, what other Ph.D. students had done and it sounded like the logical thing to do. After all, this is the same university that we have studied in and it must meet some kind of academic rigor. This construction of theory was safe; it has obviously worked in the past and the theorists are world renown. Additionally, I have already published an article using the same process so it must be good and it is original and mine. I constructed my methods chapter and let it sit for some time. Upon my reading of it the following took place.

### ***Deconstructing***

As I read through the methodological section, I began to look at the incongruencies, binaries, power inequity, and limitations because of its cultural and language privileges that my previous frameworks provided. This deconstructive analysis is one of the great benefits that surfaces when doing an analysis of one's work in the field with partners. Models, frameworks, and research strategies become much more powerful, effective, and relevant when they are constructed in context. Thus, my chapter as it happens in the field was

reconceptualized and required re-thinking and re-writing.

### ***Evaluating***

Once the deconstruction analysis is applied it is important to evaluate the outcomes so one can begin to inform the next steps. This could include expanding the literature, changing the strategies, or increasing the conversation so the research can benefit from more ideas and inputs. Evaluation in this case is not framed as a judgment; on the contrary, it is a process for increasing knowledge that will better inform decisions.

### ***Modifying***

Modifying a plan and theory is part of the necessary option in naturalistic inquiry and inductive qualitative research. This is also a characteristic that is inherent in the participatory research methodology I used to frame and construct this research. As change needed to occur, we took action. My theoretical and methodological construct has been strengthened by the modifications I've implemented before, during, and after the research process. The permission and ability to modify the process is very important to the construction of new models and methods for research.

### ***Organizing***

Organizing a good plan is an easy process; the difficult part is to have the commitment and stamina to see theories through their deconstruction and reorganization. Good organizing is continuous (re)organizing, and it is this last stage where the importance of this framework lies. It is critical that research

agendas as well as programming plans continuously be scrutinized and modified if they are to be responsive to the communities they are intended to help. This requires time, commitment, and maturity; it is critically important to accept the challenge and feedback of others and the self, for (s)he who is willing to deconstruct must be willing to help rebuild. Below is a short story that helps put this concept of The DEMO process into play.

### **Applying the Demo Process**

*Several years back the LGC was provided an opportunity to expand its presence by entering into partnership with a nationally recognized survey research firm that was looking to relocate to South Texas. An agreement was reached between LGC and the sole proprietor of the firm. For Llano Grande the espoused win-win situation was based on the following: the fact that this South Texas region needs jobs, we are bilingual, we are committed to developing a new economy, and this established company can help us create jobs. Simultaneously this partnership will provide access to the corporate world and subsequently many more contracts. For our survey research partner it would get: cheap labor, bilingual employees, local commitment, and an opportunity to sell the company when the time is right. It is our belief that we both shared the commitment to creating jobs in the area.*

*Soon enough the transition occurs. We sent a Llano Grande staffer to get trained at the corporate headquarters. The experience was tremendous and intense. Midway through the training process we evaluate the situation. This evaluation is about compiling the daily experiences, observations, dialogues,*

*infrastructure, and the long term sustainability of the operation.*

*On paper and based on the espoused theory, the partnership made perfect sense. But as we began to deconstruct the rhetoric, reconcile the espoused theories and theories in use, the cultural values and practices, it became clear that the partnership would not make sense. The type of employment created at the research corporation was based on rote practice. The mode of operation of this survey center was for its employees to make calls and punch in responses based on a number line or a binary system. There was no room for conversation, thinking, or probing. After all, this was about “doing science” and anything outside of the protocol would contaminate the data.*

*Based on our preliminary evaluation, we modified our plans. We were clear from the outset that our work is about leadership development--not preparing workers; certainly, good learners will be good workers, but our work is about much more than this. Thus, our modification of this plan was to continue the relationship in a less substantial manner and benefit from the training and mentorship this ally could offer to us. The (re)organizing process allowed us to continue to be autonomous in our work and the opportunity to prepare a cohort of young researchers who understand the inquiry process, who know how to build relationships, and who understand the power of knowledge, data, and story on public policy and practice.*

Below I will explain the epistemological and ontological issues that frame my work, my politics, and this document.

## **ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

One of the biggest challenges in operationalizing this hybrid method between critical ethnography and participatory action research is doing an internal check on our own biases and readiness for this kind of method. There is not much in the literature that allows the researcher(s) to check their own reality and the impact that this will have on the research process and the people that this process will impact. There is some convincing literature within the discourse of reflexivity (Foley, 2000, 2001; Marcuse, 1998) that begins to frame some of the strategies and positions that researchers can take to make their research much more credible and profound, but these still continue to be individual actions and interpersonal struggles. In this regard, I appreciate Scheurich's (2002) publication that focuses on anti-racist scholarship in a very public way; he breaks many of the academy's rules. It is this public struggle that begins to position the researcher in a space that makes him much more accessible to the much needed community work that happens when pursuing naturalistic inquiry. One strategy I have developed for this is the sharing of stories with youth and adults through the framing of questions such as these:

- 1) What is your political autobiography?
- 2) Tell me about your educational experience, give the high and lows.
- 3) Share some pivotal moments in your life.

This of course, has to be modeled and I am always willing to do this. This is important because it takes the reflexive process from the private (which is needed) to the public, which is needed much more. Thus, we begin to reveal and

hopefully reconcile our ontological blind spot Scheurich (2002) so eloquently describes in this book.

I must first present my epistemological reality into an academic context. By now it is obvious to the reader that I have selected not to place myself in the traditional academic (third party) position as I write this paper. This is consistent with a number of scholars who have proposed that objectivism does not exist (Collins, 1991; Gordon, 1998; Lather, 1991; Maturana & Varela, 1987; Scheurich, 1995; St Pierre, 1995; Williams, 1995). I have also taken this position because I lived this reality and have committed to owning what is in this text. Thus, I will place myself as the public I (eye) (Gordon, 1998; Williams, 1995). This position is critical to those who have shared their reality with me, and to me. Being both an insider and outsider, I am part of a community, but not physically with the community on a daily basis. But the public I/eye is always evangelizing the philosophy of our work while also constantly looking for ideas and resources that can contribute to our mission.

I approach this document from a Chicano's perspective (Pizzaro, 1999) who grew up in the South Texas geographic area, and who has experienced the poverty, the racism, and the marginalization of growing up poor, brown, and speaking Spanish. My epistemology is critical, racially based, postcolonial, and contingent on a number of ecological factors. The hope for this paper is that by the end I will present a strong theoretical document that is grounded in practice and is pedagogically and epistemologically congruent with the story of our community. Through this document I also hope to push the conversation and

dialogue to a plane that is proactive, visionary, and responsive to not only our past, and present needs/issues, but also for the future. My work is about developing and pushing forward a pedagogy and epistemology that is rooted and grounded in decolonization methodologies<sup>24</sup> (Smith, 1999). To do this we must understand the context of our reality and the world around us. Thus, the literature review that follows will help to begin making sense of this reality while also informing our actions.

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<sup>24</sup> I recall having a conversation with one of my biggest advocates in this venture of my ideas and much to my surprise he said, “Miguel you might want to tone down the language a little bit.” I replied “why Fred” (pseudonym)? “With the best of intentions he said, “Well you might not be able to get a job if you use this language. Academia is too conservative.” But, I can not abandon this calling. It is a spiritual calling as much as it is a political one. It is about my children and their children. So, that’s my story and I’m standing by it.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Above I have presented an eclectic snapshot of the methods and strategies of my research, and here I will present a literature review that is based on the ideas that have informed our work. In this section I will follow the same ontological and epistemological border crossing. I present a paper that outlines the transformational process of an area that has traditionally been plagued by the customary social ills that many inner city schools have experienced. Yet the approach to facing these realities has been very different. This literature review is interdisciplinary, informed by traditional academia, but also invigorated by and strengthened by the words and ideas of local people. This literature also serves as a framework that begins to lay the foundation of our work. Additionally, this literature review will help paint the picture and the context of the place we call home; it will also inform us on the power of place, a discussion on economics and our socio-cultural context; included here is also an overview on the thinking that has informed the organizational development of this work.

Consistent with the rest of this document, I put myself in the middle of the text in an attempt to disrupt the traditional sterile academic practices while also challenging the fallacy of objectivity espoused by the positivist paradigm. I will borrow from Marcues (1998), Foley (1995), Behar (1996), Gordon (1998), and other scholars who use a reflective process as a means to de-center my position while building credibility with the reader. I use a voice that is committed, excited about the future, and passionate about the education of our children.

The education of our children is the most important gift we can bequeath them; indeed, it is their birthright. A good education will tear down barriers of injustice, take us across oceans, and help us make informed decisions. But the reality is that in our region, we have been failing our children, and thus jeopardizing their future, the future of our communities, and thus weakening the social fabric of our democratic society. As Goodlad (2001) writes in his book *The Last Best Hope*, education is the only way to sustain a democracy. Unfortunately, as a society, we are not educating all our children, and this is unacceptable. Just as discouraging, many that we are being successful with are not being challenged.

So, it was in 1991 when a young teacher posed the question to his class: where do you want to go to college?<sup>25</sup> And the young teacher says that most of the students replied about going to the neighboring university. He then challenged them and asked “Why don’t you want to go to Harvard, Yale, Brown?” The students with blank faces asked, “Where is that, Sir. Where are these places?”

This was the beginning of work that has captured the attention of the U.S. education community as well as a number of international philanthropic organizations. The challenge was then placed on us. A number of alumni from this town in South Texas began to challenge ourselves to think beyond the existing paradigms to the rising expectations we had ignited in the youth who were asking where these places are. As part of this process, we began to look at college recruitment efforts and college retention, but also local community and

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<sup>25</sup> This story has been well documented by the Associated Press and many other local papers as well as the national publication *Parade Magazine*.

economic development efforts. This forced us to look at the literature as we began to inform the work that we had begun to formalize.

The mandate was simple: how do we develop a plan that will help us transform the area as we simultaneously begin to invest and build the future leaders? On the surface, the mandate was clear. Some of our partners replied, “Let’s bring a factory or a Wal-Mart.” But to others of us, it was about much more than surface superficial quick fixes. This call to action was for us to change our systems of education and cultural practices so we could better respond to our student population and the changing world. This was an opportunity for us to do an internal analysis of our community, our schools, and our cultural practices. So, after initial conversations, we decided we alone couldn’t develop a plan adequate enough to respond to the needs of our families and community. A number of conversations were nurtured in the classrooms and in the community, and the responses were clear: the traditional “technical fixes” would be neither adequate nor sufficient for the type of change we needed. Clearly, a curriculum alone does not change children’s lives—caring adults in their lives do this (Moll, 1990, 1992; Wertsch, 1985; Vygotsy, 1978).

After some conversations, some intense disagreements, and much reflection, a call for action was made. We invited stakeholders, including advocates for children, students, parents, business owners, teachers, and higher education personnel to join our work. Not all responded to the call, but we had a critical core that has been committed to this work. We started with the ends in mind (Covey, 1997); if we were to build the next generation of leaders, we must

begin with youth. Thus the classroom was the ideal place to be. Yet, we also know that it would be a big error if we omitted the other extreme (Fullan, 1991), so we began connecting with the elders in the community by collecting oral histories. This work was then transcribed and published in the Llano Grande Journal, a modern version of a Free Press (Giroux. 1996). This work has had tremendous currency and has helped us build strong coalitions and allies. This work has also provided great opportunities for youth development work and leadership opportunities. These conversations then informed other work, including the development of a seminar series.

*In 1998 I attended the Salzburg Seminar in Salzburg, Austria. This seminar series was started by a group of college students after World War II. The intent was to convene citizens from the international community to engage in conversation to help develop ideas and strategies for rebuilding Europe. These seminars have continued for 50 years and have been very effective. It became clear that we too needed a similar model for engaging the public in dialogue to think through ideas on how to rebuild the South Texas Region. The region has historically been economically distressed, and this situation has become aggregated with the changing of the local economy from agriculture to service. Thus, we began the Llano Grande Seminar Series as a strategy to initiate public conversations of locally relevant and pressing issues impacting the local community.*

*Through this vehicle we have nurtured the leadership development process but also pushed the concept of making education public. And we have put*

*ourselves in the middle of this process as learners, teachers, facilitators, and creators of knowledge. Thus, this literature review will examine some of these issues that are affecting our communities, our economics, and our work.*

What follows in this review is interdisciplinary by design; for the traditional silos of knowledge have not met the needs of educational professions, the people in it (student, teachers, parents, and administration) or the organization (Bourdieu, 1992; Wertsch, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). In this section, I will review the literature that will help explain the politics, economics, social-cultural context, and the organizational theory and practice. Many of the issues such as values, conflict, power, and interests clearly overlap, blurring the boundaries of the disciplines as advocated by numerous scholars (Bourdieu, 1992; Castle & Estes, 1995; Darder, 1997; Wertsch, 1998), and making this presentation what Tyack and Cuban (1995) refer to as a “pedagogical hybrid” to the approach of school reform.

## **POLITICS OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL**

### **Political Culture**

The socio-historical educational experience for children in South Texas mirrors that of other high minority areas. High concentration of Mexican American citizens is associated with lowest levels of educational attainments are more intense. This is a reality that is socially constructed, one of Massey’s (1993) arguments in his book *The American Apartheid*. Consistent with Elazar’s (1984) rubric of traditional political culture, the political culture of the area has been historically defined by the few white Anglo males who had the power of money

and land ownership. This small group sustained and benefited from the status quo. The political activity in the area has been layered by federal, state, and local policy. Clearly, education is local, but we do see the proliferation of both state and federal policies influencing the direction of the local curriculum and policy decisions. The most recent movements have centered on the state accountability and federal reading initiatives.

But no literature review on education should ignore the state of high stakes testing and the politics surrounding it. Scribner and Marshall (1991) write that everything is political, and this is especially magnified at the place we call school (Goodlad, 1984). It is important to acknowledge that the state of our present affairs is political and was created by the need of the state legislatures to develop an accountability system that will justify and indicate success based on standards developed by external agents. The use of high-stakes examination used to label the progress of our children has been challenged by many successful and credible educators and scholars (Meier, 2000; Sizer, 2000; Ayers, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; McNeil, 2000). I too find it disturbing that this is the only measure used to test the success of our schools, but I find it equally offensive that our students are not able to accomplish acceptable standards. The issue of accountability is something we need to define for ourselves so we can then put forward a system of accountability that will demand from us the highest of standards that our children, our families, and institutions deserve. However, we can only expect the highest and give the fullest of our efforts if the appropriate respect exists for one another at every level of our community (Sergiovanni, 1992; Barth, 1990; Bellah, 1996). The Texas

accountability system has brought to the forefront many inadequacies that used to go unseen, much less held accountable. It has forced schools to respond to the needs of children who have traditionally been marginalized mostly children of color. But we have acknowledged this and moved on. We feel this type of accountability system must be in places where there are not strong relationships and there is an absence of relational power. Much of the work we have done has been in spite of the oppressive pressures of a dogmatic assessment system that has unfortunately guided and dictated curriculum. This discussion of standards is presented to help highlight the inherent political positions and political agendas in education. Clearly, education is a political action (Freire, 1993) and educators should be conscious of this act.

*One of our teachers shares the story of the first day he came to campus. He recalls getting two thick three ring binders. He asked, "What is this?"*

*The reply was, "It is the test preparation materials for your students." Upon his return to his classroom he says he threw the binders away. This teacher is credited with helping place over 70 high school students into Ivy League and other nationally renowned schools.*

So, the message is simple: we need an accountability system, but not a dogmatic process that is punitive, artificial, judgmental, and void of relationship. The idea is to be in a relational power position where a much more organic accountability system can be nurtured and implemented. And this is what we are working to develop and teach our youth.

Critical to this process is the awareness of the political culture of the

community (Elazar, 1984). An accurate assessment of the community's practices will help us develop a strategy for developing a plan of action that will help us navigate future educational as well as community development decisions. It is critically important that this process be public. Education is a public endeavor and the public must be informed of the state of affairs. The development of this plan must be a public action. The role of the leadership must be to steward the development of a public political culture that will act in the best interest of the public good, a moralistic vision of the future (Elazar, 1984).

Our plan will need to respond to the political system at both the macro and the micro level. Thus as we respond to issues set forth by the federal and state government, we must respond to the needs and issues of the students, parents, teachers, administrators, local businesses, and the school board.

### **Micropolitics and School Reform**

The study of micro-politics has much to offer to the process of school reform. As Scribner & Marshall (1991), Blase and Anderson (1995) and Fullan (1991) and others have persuasively articulated in their writings, reform efforts tend to fail if the micro political process is not tended to. Tyack and Cuban (1995) in *Tinkering with Utopia* state that most reform efforts are initiated because of the political landscape of the times. Our work in South Texas is no exception as we respond to generations of neglect and oppressive attitudes and actions that have kept a community underdeveloped, yet we are committed to developing the agenda in a proactive way, not a reactionary way. This is important because effective actions must be broad based and forward thinking.

As we respond and proactively tend to the political needs of our community, we must look at successful models like the Alliance schools movement, which has effectively brought the school into the political arena (Shirley, 1997). The Alliance schools movement has been one of the most successful school transforming initiatives in the country, and the organizers of the movement would agree with Blase and Anderson (1995) in their assessment that we must teach teachers to become “politically literate” as we develop a differently trained leader and educator, indeed, a citizen. It is through this political action and politically aware caring (Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes, 1999; Valenzuela, 2002) that helps create successful schools in spite of the ethnic composition and class of students and their families.

Additionally, we cannot overlook and must learn from the reform efforts of the past (Cuban, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Today we are reacting to meet the need of children as we experience a changing economy. This action parallels other historical efforts as we saw the country respond to Sputnik in 1957, school desegregation of the 1960s and 70s, the national at risk report(s) of 1980s, and the school finance and standards movement of the 1990s. Cuban (1990) reminds us that true transformational reform of our system has not occurred, and we thus reform over and over again.

We must diagnose the issues and develop the appropriate structures and processes to facilitate change, while also arming ourselves with the needed skills to implement the changes identified. Indeed, we will pursue a transformation that will withstand time, social and economic change, and most importantly, respond

to the ever so rapidly changing needs of our children. Our cultural and systemic strategies must be equipped with the appropriate continuous evaluation methods needed for a learning community to grow and transform itself as its ecology changes. To do this, we must also become versed in the concept of assessment literacy (Fullan, 1999).

### **Policy Analysis**

In outlining the political issues that are before us, and the many policies that have been passed to solve them, we must consider the paradox of policy (Stone, 1988). Many of the policies passed to fix social concerns have also contributed to the complex social, cultural, political, and economic conditions at hand. In spite of federal mandates to desegregate schools, and the support of this order by the *Brown* decision, the Edcouch-Elsa schools were still segregated in the 1960s. Similarly, federal policies have contributed to other issues including the existing housing patterns that have segregated communities based on class and race (Massey, 1993; Anyon, 1997). We experienced a similar dynamic in small communities too. Mr. Salinas shares with us in one of our oral histories: “Mexican Town was north of the railroads” (2000). Scheurich’s (1997) policy archeology also provides a process for deconstructing educational and public policies, both conservative and liberal, which have contributed to aggravate the isolation of economically disadvantaged families in our communities. The values and policies used are intent on helping communities alleviate some of their social stressors, but have stopped short of being effective because too many times we do not analyze the ontology of these policies. Thus, these policies become

problematic at times of implementation because of ontological incongruencies with the local political culture.

This South Texas community has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to education by passing four consecutive bond elections to build new schools. I would add it will also help develop its community's political economy. Much of the socio-economic realities are grounded and can be explained through the socio-historical process, but separating the educational reality from the economic reality has traditionally been a formula for disaster. I would argue that because the local economy of the past needed cheap labor, there was no need to invest in education, but clearly, during the last 25 years the politics have changed and the actions of the people have dictated a different agenda. However, the political forces have been difficult to transform and the high expectations have not been nurtured. A new leadership is needed and it must be developed pedagogically and based on the reality of the local people. Education is inherently political and this new politic will help us transform the institutions of schools.

## **ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION**

### **Economic Theories**

One of the goals of education set forth by Horace Mann (1857) when he delivered his famous speech on common schools was for schools to prepare youth for the workforce. This was the case then, and it is more so the case now as we move from an industrial to a technological society. The preparation of a skilled workforce is critical for the development of local and regional economies (Wilson, 1988). The community's concern on recruiting business is valid and

explained by the need for creating jobs. The skills needed to sustain this new economy are what economists Levy and Murnane (1996) write about as they put forth the concept of the “new basic skills.” Clearly Levy and Murnane’s epistemological position is congruent with the human capital theory (HCT) (Blau & Ferber, 1992; Knight & Sobat, 1995, Strober, 1990), which states that the more education a person receives the higher his economic productivity will be. This theory has dominated the economic policies of the federal government since the 1960’s and the War on Poverty programs, and there is ample research to prove that there is a positive correlation between the two (Kane & Rouse, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Owen, 1993). Further, because the HCT is a supply theory, local/regional, national, and international economies are dependent on the quality education of schools. This forces us to pose the question: what are we preparing our children for (Stout, Tallero & Scribner, 1995)? HCT theorists would predict low wage jobs for our students if their performance in school was low, but we feel our community has tremendous talent and is being educationally successful. So, why does a bad economy persist and low wage employment prevails. These inequalities can be better explained by economic theories other than HCT.

Other structural theories in the economics of education claim that the knowledge a person acquired through an education is not as important as the credentials he obtained, yet others would make the argument that schools, like the labor market, parallel a dual system (Boston, 1990; Lee & Smith, 1990; Blau & Ferber, 1992; Bernhardt, Morris & Handcock, 1995). One system is for whites or men and the second system is for the working class, people of color, and/or

women. Thus, schools perpetuate these practices and track students accordingly. This argument would be challenged by HCT as saying that the market is amoral and it is the worker who has tastes, preferences, and choices that determine their employment level and compensation. This is the construct of a supply-only model. But from a supply and demand perspective, it is clear that the mandate for our schools will be guided by a new cultural belief that we must be responsible for preparing our children to the level where there will be no doubt that they are well prepared and the only option is to compensate them accordingly.

But in order to get to that point, we must look inward and do an honest assessment by asking the questions the radical theorists would ask: is the educational system consciously or unconsciously contributing to the social inequalities of our society by discriminating against our working class and students of color? It is these systems that contribute to the inequalities that Bowles & Gintis (1976), Carnoy (1993), Anyon (1997), Barrera (1979), and other critical theorists espouse. This theory puts forth the claim that schools as we know them are anti-democratic and are set up to perpetuate the inequalities that are prevalent in our society and in South Texas; our history clearly falls within this paradigm. This forces us to look at our curriculum, tracking practices, segregation in our schools, gifted and talented programs, and other initiatives that have contributed to the inequitable performance of the education in our schools. Radical theorists present very provocative and sound information supported by empirical data that begins to explain some of the South Texas structural and organizational pathologies, but as powerful as the economic argument is, it is their

call for a more democratic education and educational system that is much stronger. They convincingly and forcefully make a call for a more democratic education (Dardar, 1991; McLearn, 2000; Giroux, 1989). Bowles and Gintis (1976) share the following point, “Why in a democratic society, should an individual’s first real contact with a formal institution be so profoundly anti-democratic?”(pp. 250-51) Economists, scholars, and educators clearly value this democratic practice as a transferable skill that will benefit students once they enter the workforce (Dardar, 1991; Doolittle, 1998). The arguments made by the radical theorists must be evaluated and used to make sense of the work we have been doing in our region.

Clearly our new leadership must understand the markets and the theoretical constructs that begin to explain and predict our realities if we are to construct alternative economic models that are congruent and responsive to our value system and needs. As Ernesto Cortés (2002) says, the market has its place but the market must be kept in its place. We must develop structures that not only supply the talent, but that also create the jobs that will bring the talent back to the region, and as important, employment that will compensate people with competitive wages. But within this new leadership we must also create a new understanding of economics and currency. And the new leadership we are developing is creating a new social capita that must be factored into the change process as we discuss and articulate the new economic paradigms. Indeed, not only do we need to consider multiple bottom lines as we move away for the single indicator of the dollar, but we must build on the energy, ideas and spirit f people.

## **Teacher Labor Markets**

A second economic assessment is a deeper analysis of the teacher labor market. If we are to impact the learning in this region, we must figure out an economic way, or otherwise to attract the best and the highest qualified teachers to improve the schools with the highest need. Following the supply and demand principles (Samuelson, 1995), teaching positions where the greatest need is, traditionally the math and sciences, should be paid at a higher rate in order to attract a larger number and a higher quality of candidates into the field (Levine, 1985; Rumberger, 1987) Under this model classical economists would recommend, based on the principle of the economic model, that we must raise the salaries of teachers we want working with our youth. But Tyack and Cuban (1995) warn us that teachers contest the economic argument. They make the claim that if the competition model is used in the schools, the spirit of collaboration will be lost. Teachers will not share lesson plans, and they will become more isolated. This defeats the higher purpose of why people go into teaching: to see their students succeed and grow as human beings. This argument has been inconsistent with the work we do and the supplemental pay we provide for LGC teachers who are employed by the district and whose salary is supplemented by LGC for extra summer duties. Indeed, until the state compensates teachers with competitive wages, we need to continue to supplement their employment if we want the best prepared adults to work with our youth.

Clearly, inequality in economics establishes numerous social conflicts that become competing interests that turn into a zero-sum game (Thurow, 1980) when

based on the traditional market economic principles of scarcity (Clark, 1995). This assumption that leads to reality unfortunately sets up a social cultural context that, because of its constant conflict, greatly increases the stress factor on communities. These economic stressors then create other social stressors that contribute to the challenges families face daily. The traditional literature would predict negative outcomes for these youth, but in a recent documentary (Edcouch-Elsa, 2002) the work of the LGC and the stories of four youth are highlighted and they challenge these perceptions. Below, I will elaborate on some social cultural and political issues that have been of great concern to us.

### **SOCIAL CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Even though we are at the turn of the twenty-first century, the principles laid out in 1857 by Mann are still entrenched in the values of schooling today. In particular, the roles of schools as a vehicle for assimilating immigrant children into a monolithic “American” value system and way of life; this has attracted much political attention. The assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964) has been what leads the curriculum that will educate the children of immigrant families (Apple, 1990; Spring, 1999). This curriculum is intended to assimilate all children to the Euro-American value system and has been supported by numerous economic and political movements around the country. These efforts we see by the creation of Hirsch’s cultural literacy publications, the omission of the histories of U.S. minority groups in traditional curriculums (Loewen, 1995), and the outright attack by the “English only” movement across the country which Macedo (1999) labels a “neocolonial movement.” Included in the latter is the outlawing of bilingual

education programs in California. Educators have also challenged the state sponsored curriculum as counter-productive in the education of language minority children (Cummins, 1989) because of its hegemonic overtones (Apple, 1990).

But these forces have not gone unchallenged. Critical race theorists have called for narrative and people's stories to be part of the education of our children (Villenas and Deyhle, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995), Afro-centric curricula have also been intensely discussed on college campuses and grade schools, and the constructivist movement fueled by neo-Vygotskian scholars has been a hot item for discussion. Also, race-based counter-hegemonic initiatives like the LGC have experienced success. LGC's use of Pedagogy of Place is intent on educating children in the oral traditions of the Mexican American experience and their culture. Clearly this movement is about nurturing the organic intellectuals of the region who have begun to write a very different history than that published in the state adopted textbooks. It is clear to me that there are loud voices in our community that feel their reality has never been part of the American educational experience. This clearly has implications on the learning experience of children, for, as Freire (1972) writes and Trueba (2000) echoes, men and women who do not know their place in history will never understand their role in society. We must teach our children our history.

The dynamic history of this community has experienced constant demographic shifts. Most recently, the Anglos moved out right after the school walkout of 1968. The political and racial tensions were so intense that the majority of Anglo families left town and took their money, thus impacting the

school tax base--a phenomenon also seen in urban communities all over the country during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anyon, 1997). This increased isolation of people of color and poor people has contributed to an increase of deficiency models (Valencia, 1997) that have been used to describe these populations. These theories attribute labels (Cox, 1993) to people based on cultural and physical traits. The lack of a cultural competence and appreciation for diversity has contributed to much conflict and has produced the under-education of minority children in our public schools.

Moore's Convergent-Divergent Theory can assist us as we begin to understand the dynamic of diversity in schools.

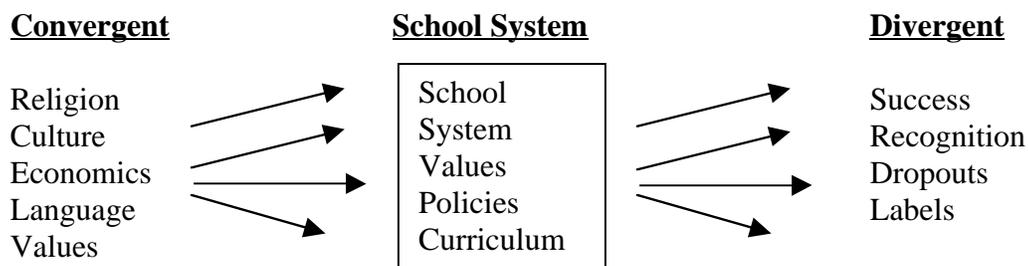


Illustration 1: Convergent-Divergent Model

As children and families come/converge to schools, they bring varying realities, values, religious beliefs, economic means, morals, folkways/traditions, political, and cultural beliefs. However, the school has its own set of values, rules, expectations, and practices that might mirror or not those of the incoming families and children. This theory explains that those students who best adapt and conform to the beliefs of the institution will diverge successfully; however, those who

cannot or do not wish to conform or assimilate will fail, drop out, or leave the system. This raises the question of who sets policy and for whom (Stout, 1995). This model can begin to help us understand the past success and present failure. If the value system of the white majority of the past is still prevalent and ruling what is now a minority majority student population, we can begin to see the disconnection between the convergent values and the institution's values. This incongruence leads to a culture of minimal success for children who have not assimilated to the mainstream--white middle class values--and high success to those who have assimilated.

These divergent value systems must be analyzed, modified, and rectified if we are to respond to the majority of our children in South Texas. Clearly other schools with similar demographics, majority-minority student populations, have been successful (Reyes, 1999; Scheurich, 1998) and we can continue to do so. This obviously will require evaluation, modification, and readjustment of values and practices within our educational process and communities. However, as we look to transform our system and community, we must insure that we do not penalize new minority populations or older generations. For this process Moore also proposes his SLEEPE principles as a systemic process for assessing and analyzing relevant social cultural issues in institutions or communities. This principle proposes the following framework:

- **S**ocial-What are the social ramifications of the issue?
- **L**egal-Is it?
- **E**conomic-How much will it cost and who pays?

- **E**thical-Is it?
- **P**olitical-Is there a conflict? What are the interest groups? What are the sources of power? And who has the power?
- **E**ducational-How will it benefit or harm education? Will it improve student learning?

An understanding of the social context, environment, and reality of the families who come to school is critical to the development of a culture that will be inviting, respectful, and conducive to student learning. In short, if we are to create the conditions that nurture student learning, we must become educated in what our families come to school with and we must have the “political will” (Stone, et. al., 2001) to modify the school values and transform the school culture to ensure that our students will succeed at school success (Mehan, 1996), and not succeed at school failure (McDermott, 1997). In our community we must be willing to deviate from the Euro-American value system that has bred student failure (Clark, 1995) and begin to build the hope of our communities, families, students, and teachers (Trueba, 1999; Freire, 1996). Indeed we must build a culture of caring (Valenzuela, 1999) and insure school success for every child and adult in our building. But to build an institutional culture of success and one that will nurture the leadership development of a community, we must investigate the organization literature that facilitates this growth.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY**

Barth (1990) writes that there is no better theory than a practical theory. I find it critically important that the development of our institutions be informed by

theory in a reciprocal way. It is with this intent that I present a thorough review of the literature so we can better understand the past, explain the present, and predict the future. Below I will first present some of the literature that has contributed to the organizational theory practices of LGC.

### **Exploring the Literature**

Organizational theory has provided much information on the development of business, schools, corporations, governments, and non-profits; but many of these models are prescriptive, closed, and inflexible. So, in this context, I must ask why we continue to do the same old thing. I paraphrase Fullan (1991) when he defines insanity as expecting change, but continuing to do the same old thing. It is clear to me that then even the most innovative ideas will fail if the organizational structures are not conducive to change. It is here where I propose that we look at alternative structures and organizational theories that are flexible, relevant, and conducive to including the community's needs, issues, assets, resources, and actions as they are identified.

Margaret Wheatley (1992), in her book *Leadership and the New Science*, does an excellent job of putting the organizational reality into the chaos model. Wheatley essentially throws out the old hierarchical paradigm and presents the organization in a natural setting. Her presentation is not prescriptive; on the contrary, it is provocative. It challenges the traditional and puts forward what is essentially a combination of an ecological and common sense approach to organizational theory. Wheatley proposes that it is chaos not equilibrium that nurtures creativity. Also, contrary to the bureaucratic belief, she proposes that

organizational structures are for creating order not control; consistent with this thought, she pushes for the creation of a new language that will inform and allow organizations to more articulate accurately and practice out visions, passions, and ideas. Our existing educational language has constraints. And consistent with the values of our new educational culture, she places relationship at the core of organizational structures.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge (1990) has much to contribute to our developing organization theory, and his concept of a learning organization is congruent with the values put forth by our organization. His contribution of ideas, strategies, and recommendations are truly vast in nature, but the issue of conversation and dialogue as a means for sharing information and building relationships is critical to any organization. The dialogue should become our most valuable research and assessment tool.

Another source that has been effective in helping develop my thoughts on organizational theory and practice has been James Thompson (1967). His publication *Organizations in Action* has survived the test of time. Many of his propositions still are very appropriate to present situations. His varying technologies and frameworks for defining our domains and tasks while always being cognizant of the environmental power dynamics provide invaluable insight to organizational development. Thompson also provides some strategies that will help us track the flow of our work as an organization and measure their impact. This process helps us develop a more comprehensive and accurate accountability system.

Other sources that have contributed to this literature review are Scott (1998), Lawrence and Larsh (1967), and Lawrence (in Golembiewski, 1993 publication). They have presented different aspects of contingency theory that continuously measure and gauge the ecological factors that impact the domains, power dynamics, and culture of organizations. A critical component of the contingency theory Lawrence points out, and Hodson (1996) validates, is the importance of allowing decisions to be made as close as possible to the people they affect.

Bolman and Deal (1991) have also contributed a different but valuable perspective to looking at the issues of organizations. In their publication *Reframing Organizations* they present four different frames/lenses that we must consider when evaluating situations. Their interdisciplinary effort in developing these frames presents a comprehensive and inclusive way to assess the condition of an organization and its staff. They present the structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames of an organization.

And an enormously valuable and relevant contribution to our thought process has been Warfield-Coppock. Warfield-Coppock (1995) presents a very unique but viable organizational perspective one needs to consider for informing organizational theory. Warfield-Coppock makes the argument for a theory of an Afrocentric organization. The author juxtaposes the Afrocentric ontology, epistemology, and axiology with those of a Eurocentric origin and makes the claim that the Afrocentric organization is an ideal that should be the vision to work toward. The author writes that the lack of these values in organizations has

fostered much racial oppression. The values are consistent with LGC's and these alternative structures can be easily replicated in other areas where historically racial and economic segregation has created homogeneous communities and organizations. This model is one we will continue to consult as we assess the ever-shifting social, economic, and demographic trends in our community. I will also add that communities through dialogue can create their own value-based theories.

Finally, this literature review would not be complete with out an acknowledgement of the importance of participatory action research<sup>26</sup> in the development of learning and growing organizations. Many researchers who practice emancipatory research strategies (Gevanta, 1993) champion this process, and it is a method that is viable in organizational theory.

### **Developing an Organizational Theory for Practice**

As mentioned earlier, it is in the place we call school where all these values, dynamics, and pressures come together; it is appropriate for our plan of action to begin its development in this section. The literature above has served two purposes; first, it has contributed to the ideas and theories academicians are thinking and writing about, and secondly it has helped us evaluate the actions and practices that have taken place in our work. This literature has placed our past performance into a socio-historical and organizational framework. It is the

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<sup>26</sup> The theory and practices of this paradigm of research have been substantially documented by a number of critical theorists: Gevanta, Hall, etc. At the core of this practice is the democratization of information, a process that neutralizes the power dynamics that the accumulation knowledge and information creates.

academic combined with the personal experiences and knowledge that has informed the work that follows. But before getting into the specific needs and actions of our organizations, I must group these thoughts into a theory for practice. My vision of education is for transforming our organization and institutions of education into “learning communities.” As Sergiovanni (1995) writes, we must construct a vision for our public schools that is not based on our business models. It must be a vision that is morally<sup>27</sup> based; it must be a vision that does not measure success by a single bottom line of production that is monetary; it must be a vision that encapsulates the values of our community, and a vision that must value multiple bottom lines. Thus, the implementation of this vision should use the state accountability systems as only one component for measuring our success. The measure of success must include the effectiveness with which we as a community respond to the mental health of our children, the economic challenges our families face, and the future challenges our society and its leaders (our children) will face. In our work, our definition of learning goes beyond the technology of a curriculum, and we teach our children the process of knowing how to know, learning how to learn, and knowing how to be. The state-mandated curriculum is the minimum standard, and we must go beyond it if our children are to become the citizens that will lead and sustain our democratic society; our teachers must become the public intellectuals that they deserve to be.

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<sup>27</sup> I am using moral in a similar context as Sergiovanni, with some minor differences; I base the term moral consistent with common goals and values, and not in a dogmatic nor prescriptive context. In my interpretation, this does not imply that conformity is required, but rather that diversity is valued as a strategy for moving towards a common vision: the raising of healthy children who can learn, teach, create knowledge and positively adapt to difficult situations.

Our process for change will be pedagogical in nature, place based, and informed by global ideas. Our students and families will inform the work; the curriculum will be theoretically sound, and our process will be informed by research. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, and partners from higher education will conduct this research. In short, we will use research as praxis (Lather, 1991).

However, in order for us to go beyond the traditional practices, we must analyze and evaluate our organization including structural framework, political framework, symbolic framework, and human resource framework (Bolman & Deal, 1997). In short, we must identify our organizational pathologies of inequalities, alienation, and over conformity or over ritualism (Scott, p. 321, 1998). We must look to decentralize our mode of operation and become more democratic in nature (Shirley, 1997). Our community values must include access, quality, collaboration, and conversation. In my opinion, this can only be accomplished by adopting an open system (Scott, 1998) that is naturalistic (p. 95) and based on the contingencies (Lawrence & Larsh, 1969; Scott, 1998) of our schools' and district's realities including students, families, teachers, private sectors, administrators, and public sectors. A diligent effort will be made to remove the organizational structures of the past that have prevented teachers from doing their work of teaching, learning, and mentoring. The naturalistic system acknowledges that there is more to organizations than policies and rules; employees, students and parents come to us with many of their own characteristics, both assets and needs. Thus, it is important that we build on the principles of the contingency theory that assumes that there is not one best way of

organizing and that the best way depends on the organization.

Thus, to fuel this organizational system we will develop, implement, and nurture a culture of conversation and dialogue (Freire,1993; Sidorkin, 1999; McLearn, 2000 Vygotsky, 1978; Bahktin, 1990; Wertsch, 1990) that will be the main mode of communication. The memoranda of old will be replaced and information will be delivered in person. Multiple opportunities will be created for direct feedback and dialogue. However, we must be cognizant of the need to create the conditions and skills for this culture to thrive in. Freire (1972) provides the following as critical in order for conversation to occur: love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking. The goal of our democratic process will be to maximize the opportunity for participation in the decision-making and learning process. Even though categorized a rational and closed process, Thompson's pooled interdependent model will be consulted as a way of developing local control and semi-autonomy, yet the needed inter-dependence with outside partnership that is critical for group learning, support, and collective action will be continue to be nurtured. In short, we are intent on developing a pedagogical process that nurtures a culture of conversation and dialogue that will inform the way we educate our children.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

As articulated before, this literature is eclectic and nontraditional in that it surfaces from the practice as opposed to framing the research questions and directing the work. This literature review has also empowered our work, and has provided us with a language that helps in the writing of proposals, and arms us

and youth to have informed conversations with business people and academicians alike. It is critically important to understand the literature, but it is as important to know how to use it as a tool to enrich and thicken the work in the classroom and in the community. So the literature review above has been a critically important tool in the building of ideas, theories, organizational structures, and research methods. This literature has contributed to the building the foundation of the Llano Grande Center.

## **Chapter 4: Story and Analysis**

### **PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN**

Above I have laid out a broad-based assessment of our community's reality and have put us in the middle of the educational literature. It is critical for all of us to look at ourselves through a variety of frames and lenses that we do not use on a daily basis. We live the social context that is articulated above; the frustrations of the stagnant organizational theories and school practices are abundant, and we are impacted by the political practices and policies done to us. But, it is critically important that as a learning community we begin to learn the language and the concepts that are placed on us if we are to be active participants in this great experiment we call a democracy. It is only when we begin to understand these models that we can begin to use them, challenge them, and create our own. Indeed, this is the impact of an emancipatory education; our work is about liberating ourselves from the paradigms and structures we have been operating under. It is only when we find hope and liberation that we begin to teach it to our students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and community partners. But to liberate ourselves from the existing political cultures, we must prove to ourselves and to it that we are committed to the highest of standards. It is within this spirit that now I put forth a plan of action that has surfaced through various conversations (Appendix A). This plan speaks to the macro level of our development and education work. This is a road map that I've used to help keep our work on course. This plan is only a guide for the ideas and details that surface during dialogue and in groups. Below, I will present the work at the micro level.

This work is grounded in relationships and participation.

Our community has a history of sharing ideas, service, and stories. The stories of our elders are pedagogically sound and are based on an oral tradition for teaching values and transmitting culture. This wisdom is passed on from generation to generation and is grounded on the values of honesty, respect and sharing. These values, combining with our formal understanding of pedagogical issues, help us construct the foundation for developing an accountability system that is broad-based and relational. This accountability system employs a constructivist paradigm for collectively developing a construct that we measure success on. Under this model, we are intent on redistributing the power of accountability from the state-mandated dogmatic test to our teachers, principals, parents, and students. Thus as we redefine accountability from a technocratic form to one that is collegial (Barth, 1990) and relational, we also redefine power from the Weberian model of power-over, to the Arendt model of power-with, or as Blase and Anderson (1995) refer to, democratic empowerment leadership.

So how do we do this? Based on our organizational model, we have to modify the process so that decisions get made as close as possible to the people and by people most affected by the action or policy. This construct is based on multiple criteria and is continuously negotiated based on who is part of the process. This accountability is based on accepting the challenge to complete a task to a satisfactory level and within a certain period of time. If upon review, the duties or task is not performed, we reframe, reassign, or provide the needed instruction or support so the task can get accomplished. Clearly when speaking of

accountability we speak of giving people oversight and enforcement authority, thus sharing the power (McNeil, 2000). It is clear that if we are to develop a new culture that is pedagogical in nature, and that is based on conversation, collaboration and change, we must do things differently; we must rid ourselves of the organizational pathologies that prevent us from achieving our goals, and put forth a new cultural practice. For starters, we have to rid ourselves of the isolation that the school structures puts our teachers in. We have developed a culture of collaborative learning and collective action consistent with Senge's (1990) learning team model. A similar model is used by Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes (1999) to put into theory their study of High-Performance Latino School, a study conducted with border schools in South Texas.

### **THE WORKSHOP**

*This was one of those trips where the kids had gone to bed with the understanding that Papi/(I) would drive myself to the airport. So I shut my eyes and before I can sneak a dream in, my eyes open and I stare at the green glow light from the alarm clock and my heart begins to race out of control. It is 6:00 a.m., and I have a plane to catch at 6:30. I jump out of bed and begin to gently, as gently as I can under the circumstances, wake my wife up and ask her to help me get ready by ironing my clothes. She opens her eyes and once she realizes my predicament, bee lines to the iron and begins to help me get ready. Of course, she does include an unsolicited editorial comment, "You're not going to make it, babe." I ignore the comment but she persists, "Honey, what time does your plane leave?"*

*Not knowing if she was joking or not, I reply, "It leaves at 6:30."*

*I hear her voice again "You're not going to make it; where are you?"*

*"I'm in the shower," I reply.*

*"What? Now I know you're not going to make it."*

*"Wanna bet? They'll wait for me, and my kids packed my bags last night, so I'm ready!"*

*So, I run out of the shower and it's 6:15. I put my pants on, slip on my shoes, grab my belt, and run out the door. "I'll call you to let you know where I parked the car," I tell her.*

*She replies, "I'll see you in twenty minutes; you're not making it."*

*"Honey, I'll call you from the Valley; the plane's waiting for me, so I have to go." As I kiss her on my way out the door, I just know that the plane wouldn't leave without me.*

*Was it faith, fate, or arrogance? I don't know, but the plane did wait for me as I rushed through the metal detector with my shoes untied, shirt tail out, and belt in hand.*

*Everyone knows I am running late, but even in this moment of stress and intensity the airline assistant manages to make a joke of it. As she takes my boarding pass she says, "Good morning, no need to rush, you got plenty of time; we've been waiting for you."*

*I quip right back with a grin and sigh of relief, "Of course," as I try to act really cool. "That's what I told my wife."*

*She replies with even a bigger smile, "Yea right!"*

Faith, fate, or arrogance: I don't know which one of these adjectives best describes my attitude to the situation. But certainly, all these characteristics contributed to my making my flight.

Faith, this is certainly a force that could hold the plane for me. I think there are forces within our world that are greater than I and they include the faith I have in the spirit of people, power of nature, and unconditional love of God. This, more than arrogance, I believe has contributed to my catching the plane. For it is faith that has allowed me to get to places I didn't know existed as a child. As a child I thought Hawaii was for the movies, Africa was for storytelling and Jerusalem was for the spirits; what else other than faith could have taken me to these parts of the world? It is faith in my ability, faith in those around me, and faith that the work I do and experiences I have will directly impact these who are around me: my family, my friends, co-workers, and community.

Fate, was it this that held the plane for me that morning? Probably not in itself, but I raise it because I see fate as a relative concept in the building and implementation of a constructivist paradigm. Fate is a concept that not only is accepted, but indeed constructed in the minds and actions of people; constructing success and working to exceed the status quo are a process of building fate. I knew the plane would wait for me. It was fate that got me to the plane on time; it couldn't have been any other way.

Arrogance is part of it in that my perseverance will prevail as it has so many times. People, situations, and conditions have challenged my ability, intelligence, or commitment to accomplishing or reaching certain levels of

success. This certainly was the case when my fourth grade teacher told my brother, “Miguel does not know how to read, he is going to fail;” or when my fifth grade teacher told my parents that I was “slow and needed to work on my self esteem;” or when my high school counselor gave me a college application to attend the local technical college; or even when one of my white liberal professors at the University of Texas shared with me that I didn’t know what I was talking about, he knew more about Mexicans than I did. You see, he had been studying us for over ten years. But even in the midst of the most dire of circumstances, I’ve learned how to survive. Maybe this might have contributed to my being arrogant, but certainly, I don’t think this is my dominant feature.

I frame this story and these three concepts as a way of transition. The narrative above includes three concepts that I feel weave through much of the work we do and I feel will help the reader contextualize the rest of the text. Additionally, these three concepts are abstract and at times difficult to quantify, a struggle that many qualitative researchers face and one I will attempt to do in this section by integrating data and analysis. Consistent with Merriam’s (1998) writings, I believe that the concept of data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process. I will present both in this chapter. This chapter will consist of a one-day training session in the life of LGC. The session is one day but the preparation for this training began well before my trip to South Texas. I will continue the story process but break down the day into thematic units. This chapter presents data and analysis, but more importantly, it privileges the stories of people.

Long before I began my trip for this weekend's training, there was an army of youth and adults working the logistics for the training. These logistics range from dealing with the selection of trainers, Saturday's planning, the workshop agenda, pre-training, trainings/acclimation of trainers, and budget issues. All of these duties are shared by youth and adults, and my analysis of this day will focus on the most significant issues and strategies we believe have contributed to the development of local leaders and the success of our work. These categories fall into four major areas: a safe space must be created for youth to share, learn, and teach; learning should happen within a familiar socio-cultural context and should be pedagogical; power must be shared; relationships must be nurtured. We must celebrate our collective actions; a reflexive process is critical for the growth of individuals as well as the group's maturity; humor must accompany work, teaching, and learning.

### **Background on the Day**

This weekend's training was funded by a major international foundation which has assisted us in implementing and advancing our educational process and leadership training agenda. This educational process is deliberately grounded in the development of our community and local leaders. For these workshops a menu of issues and topics has been given to us to choose from and accompanying this is a directory of trainers who have been identified as experts on these issues. This foundation also provided the resources for the services of the trainer. This weekend is particularly important because it focuses on two issues that are central to the daily operations of the Center and its work; the topics are participatory

decision making and policy education. It is clear to us that leadership must be collaborative and that everything is political. It is my observation that policy has become a vehicle to professionalize the rules of engagement and to eliminate common people from the political process; having made this assessment, we are intent on developing and utilizing different and more organic strategies for developing policy. This strategy is grounded in engaging the people most affected by the issues in conversation about concerns and possible strategies for responding to these issues. The stories that follow will help me make sense of the work we do, as well as helping us inform the next step we need to take in order for us to continue making change in the lives of youth, their families, and our community. This of course is with the understanding that this change is also happening within us and our families. Indeed, as Rogers (1991) writes in her book *Cold Anger*, the first revolution is internal.

### **Story of change**

One of the challenges qualitative analysis inherently carries is the struggle of analyzing the data too much and making it too artificial. Thus, the challenge here is to create the themes that will help the reader make better sense of the information without taking it improperly too far out of context. Thus, I've selected to blend both concepts of thematic presentation and story presentation. I have extracted the themes I feel are the cornerstones of the work we do, but then I will present them in a format that will help the reader understand the context of the day and the spirit of the work. Clearly if others do the same study and analysis, which many journalists have, they will arrive at other conclusions and

explanations mainly because of the ontological differences and the time we've spent doing this work. This however, is the story being told from the inside (Foley & Levinson, 2001); a difficult dynamic is that this is a story of collaborative work, yet only few stories can be privileged because of scope, time, and space. It is the story framed through my lens yet informed by my partners. The following section will include the main themes extracted from our work in developing young leaders. The ethnographic data presented is used to strengthen the analysis of the work that is done at the LGC while also helping construct a theoretical framework (Sidorkin, 1999). It is also important to note that this data is not only used here to tell the story and highlight the outcomes, this data has been used on a daily basis as we reflect on our work and analyze it to inform future practices. Thus, the action research data has bared it fruits and what is below is the ethnographic data as we paint the picture of our work.

### **Building Relationships**

“Oye Bro, when we finish, we need to go back and change the system.” This was a common saying for those of us from the Edcouch Elsa area who were undergraduate students at UT Austin during the mid to late 1980s. A group of us who grew up in this South Texas area periodically would sit around the proverbial table and share stories, experiences, ideas, and visions. We were committed to changing the reality of this South Texas community. This change was not because it was a bad place; on the contrary, it was a place that developed our spirit and we wanted to give back to the people and their place. We knew the talent that exists here and we knew the possibilities were endless. But most importantly, we knew

that our relationships to this place and the people were undeniably strong. It was these strong relationships with our families, friends, teachers, and business people that contributed to becoming owners of this community, its culture, and spirit. Beginning our work from here has been very effective for us. It is consistent with an assets based model; it is the strong relationships that will make our work sustainable and it is this same value that will help us create the space for honest and substantial discussions. Strong relationships also assist us in creating a higher level of accountability, a level that bureaucracy cannot get to because, void of relationship, the work done is not internally driven nor transformational.

The relationship we have nurtured has been the foundation of our work. Building relationships has been a deliberative process. It is important to share with youth and adults alike that building relationships with each other as well as themselves is critically important. As one of the youth put it, “When I came to this office I didn’t know what went on in here, but now I know of the work, but more important I know that I have friends who will watch my back.” In layman's terms, this is what it’s all about--having the feeling of safety and knowing that your friends “have your back.”

It is this relationship that builds the confidence for youth and adults to take risks in a safe environment (more on this later). Our work has been very organic and a lifetime of learning. Our parents taught us these skills through cuentos and dichos. We also experienced this growing up in the barrio, on the football field (Saldivar, 2002), or during unpredictable accidents.

*Back in fall of 1988, five of us were driving back to UT after spending a*

*long weekend en El Valle. It was around 5:30 pm on a Sunday afternoon and we're on the road heading north on 281; to be more exact, we are in the middle of that lonely stretch between Alice and George West. The old 1978 LTD we were driving busted an axle ring and we were stranded in an isolated rest area 15 miles from George West. I was the older one of the group so I made some recommendations and everyone agreed. We "jacked up" the car, removed the axle and I hitch-hiked into town. I made a call back home; "We are 150 miles away," I shared with my dad. I gave him the diagnosis but asked him to wait, for I was going to take care of it locally and would call him back to inform him of the status. By the time I called back, he had a friend ready to ride with him; the owner of the local auto parts store had gone into the store and given him several parts that could help us fix the problems. Two hours later we fixed the car, my father and friend headed back south and we headed north. The lessons learned were powerful. It was the relationship that allowed us to find the parts needed to fix the vehicle on a football Sunday. There is no substitute for healthy relationships.*

In a more sterile academic setting there are many who write about the power of relationship and community building process both in education and outside. But the model most fitting to the work we do is based on the following:

	Collective Vision	
Interdependence		Happiness & Personal Satisfaction
Negotiation of External Relationships	Decision Making	Negotiation of Internal Relationships
Friendship	Dialogue of Issues	Caring
Honesty	Willingness to Participate	Trust, Respect & Security

Table 1: Community Building Model<sup>28</sup>

The ideal place to be is the building and living of a collective vision. But this is only accomplished if the much needed building blocks are in place. No doubt, one can get to vision without spending much time on the foundations, but it will not be sustained. No doubt isolated and instant community is important; but if we are to build successful and sustainable effective organizations, we must work to lay the foundation blocks of this community building model. At the root of this model is the willingness of people to engage and participate in the process of knowing people. The expectation is that we be honest with each other because honesty begins to build trust, respect, and a safe space to engage in dialogue. The discussions that we engage in will then help us to know each other's story and

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<sup>28</sup> This community building framework has been in my wallet for over 10 years. It is not original for it surfaced during a conversation with friends in a workshop in Austin, Texas. I can not claim originality, but I will claim the power of its use. This framework has no power without action: praxis.

reality better. This understanding begins to develop friendships and the conditions for people to care for the safety and well being of others. This stage begins to help us know how to be; knowing how to be is about knowing oneself and one's history. This is a necessary stage if we are to engage in building and negotiating relationships within the organization and with folk from outside of the organizations. When we build strong friendships and care for the well being of others, we can begin to be involved in the decision making process. Most community building processes get to this point and cease to go to the next level. This is mostly because those in authority positions are not willing, or do not know how, to share power. This is something we've managed to move beyond (see sharing powers). It is the interdependence stage that we are very confident in navigating through. It is reaching a collective that has impacted our work with both the human capital and the organizational. To live at this level is very intense and requires a selfless effort by many people, but we must remind ourselves that we must also nurture not only those in our community we wish to impact, but also those within our network that are doing the impacting. We must compensate, celebrate and acknowledge the power of our partners, both youth and adults. The relationships need to be nurtured if the work is to be sustainable.

### **Creating Safe Spaces**

The creation of safe spaces can only happen if strong relationships exist. As articulated in the section above, honesty, trust, and respect help build safe spaces. It is these spaces that help youth to engage in substantial and worthwhile learning opportunities. This is applicable both in the classroom and in community

development activities. But in order to create this space for youth, it is important for adults to actively nurture the trust, respect, and security; indeed, it is critically important for adults to acknowledge that they are willing to share their story, participate in honest dialogue, and share power with youth. In effect, we have asked adults to be accessible to youth and to be learners first and teachers second.

*When I get to the school we have lunch and then sit around the table to brief me and others who have not been as involved with the daily operations as the students. The people managing this \$250,000 grant are all high school students. Orlando, a 16-year-old high school junior, became the co-project manager. It became a running joke when Orlando became Mr. Castillo. As word got out of the successful leadership training we were doing in South Texas, other youth development organizations began calling and would ask for Mr. Castillo without knowing he was a high school student.*

*Orlando first walked into the Llano Grande office as a scrawny 14-year-old Edcouch-Elsa High School freshman. He wasn't clear what the Center was about, though he understood that teachers and students consistently "hung out" in the space known as the Llano Grande. He walked into the office because he had exhausted his places "to go" on campus. He was not a particularly stellar student, nor had he ingratiated himself to some of the faculty. He was, for all intents and purposes, looking for a place that would accept his characteristically unacceptable high-energy behavior at the high school.*

*When Llano Grande staff members invited Orlando into the office and encouraged him to enroll in the Center's research methods class, he*

*enthusiastically accepted the invitation. Nine months later, a skilled 15-year-old Orlando delivered a public address before 350 participants at the Annenberg Foundation's annual Rural Challenge conference in Granby, Colorado. He spoke with his typical high energy and passionately pleaded that teachers and other educators create the proper space so that youth could play important roles in their own educational development. Orlando also emerged as a community leader, as he took an important role in giving shape to the Llano Grande Center's monthly community development seminars.*

The safe space that is created at the Center gives youth the opportunity to apply the skills they've learned. This environment allows students to take risks knowing that they are not alone and there's always someone behind them if support is needed. For this particular training, the trainers were selected by two youth. The process originated by a team identifying three finalists, and then José and Bedelia were assigned the task of calling and interviewing each finalist. They returned to the committee with a report and recommendation. They presented their experience and recommendation, and it was accepted. This opportunity for growth is grounded in youth having the opportunity to apply their skill in meaningful ways and with the appropriate support and mentoring.

The trainers, who were not aware of who had interviewed them over the phone, reported that this interview was one of the most difficult they had experienced professionally. The interviews were conducted by two or more youth.

### **Sharing Power**

Recently we have begun to experience a more overt and deliberate

conversation of politics and power in education (Shirley, 1997; Fowler, 2000; Stone, 2001) a reality we have lived with during the last part of the twentieth-century in South Texas. The political culture in this area has been traditional in the Elazar (1984) rubric and focused on sustaining the status quo. Understanding this dynamic has been critically important in developing and implementing our form of education and leadership development.

Training youth and creating the space for them to take calculated risk is at the core of leadership development at LGC. This space is grounded in strong relationships and in the understanding that young people have important and necessary ideas and knowledge that must be part of the local educational and development process. Youth have power and at LGC we are committed to sharing this power. This is critical to the development of our community as we develop the next generation of leaders. Youth we have accepted are young in chronological years but many are “mature” in experiences.

*After a full year of work on organizing and leading community seminars, 16-year-old Monique Garcia decided to request an application for a leadership program in the neighboring community of Edinburg. “I’m sorry,” said the representative from the Chamber of Commerce, “Leadership Edinburg is for adults only... You may need to wait a few years before you apply” (Garcia 1999). Disappointed, Monique then organized a group of youths and founded the South Texas Youth Initiative, an organization focused on building the leadership capacities of local youths.*

*After a year of programming, which included planning and implementing*

*numerous computer and leadership camps, the group decided to incorporate itself into a nonprofit organization. “We went to the nonprofit center at the university,” recalled Monique, “and the attorney told us we couldn’t do it...He basically said that because we were kids, that we had no business starting a nonprofit organization” (Garcia 1999). Six months later, 17-year-old Monique became gainfully employed as a trainer by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In that capacity, she traveled to places such as Colorado, Wisconsin, and Michigan to facilitate training sessions on youth leadership and earned \$1,500 per day for her work.*

The quality of these experiences has been questioned by child psychologists, like Garbarino (1995), but we have committed to make the experiences positive and educational ones while youth are with us. Garbarino approaches these conditions from a psychological perspective, but we challenge this position by crossing disciplines. We knew experiences and sometimes difficult situations are important to face when the appropriate conditions are set for youth. These appropriate conditions are established by surrounding youth with positive role models and making the situation pedagogical; this begins to develop the skills and resiliency of youth to navigate through new and/or difficult situations.

Setting these conditions up requires negotiating and sharing power; this is created in numerous ways. First we are committed to mentoring youths as they engage in new experiences. Mentorship is a reciprocal and pedagogical process. As Bedelia and José moved to interview our trainers, we explored the types of

questions we needed to ask, studied their resumes, and collaboratively created criteria that our trainer needed to meet. Additionally, we role-played an interview before engaging in the processes. The sharing of ideas, roles, and duties are from sharing power, but the process will be futile without accepting their decision. However, decisions are not accepted just because they are youth, indeed it would be patronizing; recommendations must be accepted because they are valid and stand on their merit.

So José and Bedelia present their recommendations, support their position, and convince the team that their choices are who we need to go with. Thus, we have the trainers. These two people will be asked to come to South Texas a day before the training, where they will be briefed on the history of the community, the guiding principles of our work, and feedback to their proposed agenda. This exercise is one that is modeled with youth and another opportunity to share power with the experts: the trainers and those of us who know our community.

Sharing power permeates through the different components of the organization. Budget, programming, staffing, and other issues are discussed and decisions are made in the collective. Indeed, this breeds creativity, ownership, and power.

*Recently an idea surfaced from one of our visitors. After spending several days with us in South Texas, this woman made the observation of our natural and seamless flow from English to Spanish and back. She said, "I would have to come to South Texas to learn Spanish." This idea was provocative. Several of our youth were asked to pursue the idea. They researched the issue, including a search on*

*the Internet, local survey, and asset mapping; they also surveyed the demand for this type of service. Upon their completion José, Edyael, and Olga, all high school seniors, proposed the development of a language institute. The proposal was to invite people of all ages to South Texas to learn Spanish and experience the local culture. Their research included a proposal on recruitment, fees, living accommodations, curriculum, and teaching.*

*Their idea was profound, the research was sound, and their passion was undeniable. We brainstormed and recognized that their work had all the elements needed for a grant proposal. The idea had merit and the plan had legs. We worked together and secured resources from a foundation. This plan included utilizing our local assets for both pedagogical and economic development ventures. This year, summer 2002, we are hosting The Second Annual Spanish Language Immersion Institute that is run by Llano Grande youth and staff. Sharing power has merit and currency; indeed, sharing power is relational and should be part of every classroom in our public schools.*

Sharing power is a concept grounded in Elazar's moralistic political culture and incongruent with the local practices but very much needed if we are to expand the participation of citizens in the education of our children and our political system.

### **Going Inward**

So it's Thursday night and after Orlando and company present the status of the planning for Saturday's training we launch into the sharing of stories. These stories include issues the various partners have been struggling with personally,

professionally, or otherwise. This “checking in,” as we call it, is part of acknowledging where each of our partners is as well as figuring out what we can support each other with; but on a more practical level, this checking in makes the meeting much more personal and humane. Acknowledging the personal story is critically important to the educational work we do. In fact, if we cannot tend to the personal at the micro level, we will not do justice to the macro; the foundation of relationships is built by knowing people’s stories, and it is by knowing people’s stories that we begin to build a culture and the foundation of a learning community. Indeed, we begin to build the foundation of organizations as well as respond to the self interest<sup>29</sup> of people. It was based on this neo-Vygotskian concept of story that we began our work and informed our practices.

The major feedback given this evening for the training included the following: we want less lecture and more in depth activities. We want to have the opportunity to go more in depth into the work we are doing, so give us time to explore the activities based on our local work, thus, frame concepts and activities presented within the work taking place locally.

This is not new input since many times we relearn lessons we’ve learned before. The concept of going inward is about understanding the self and grounded based in our reality, only then can we begin to make sense of world.

The oral history and research work taking place at the LGC is about privileging a knowledge and wisdom that is not part of the dominant school

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<sup>29</sup> I use self interest to designate a reason for people to become engaged because the work will directly or indirectly impact their reality. Self interest is not selfishness. This is also a core organizing principle of the Alliance Schools movement.

curriculum. The stories of our ancestors are powerful and substantial. They challenge the dominant cultural discourse, but stories without legs have little power. Thus, it has been our agenda to add power and currency to these local stories by publishing them, using them for classroom instruction, and helping students develop their own story. Socio-cultural context is both about setting and feeling. Several students share ideas, thoughts, and beliefs about the oral history process.

*On the nature of the oral histories*

When we interviewed 102 year old Luisa Garza recently, we realized what a gold mine we had found. Doña Luisa lived the entire 20th Century in relative isolation, as an intensely private person. On the other hand, she sat in her wheelchair and demanded that we listen to her treasured stories; she insisted that she become a public person. Like hundreds of other elders in our community, doña Luisa would like to share her stories; she would like younger people to learn from her experiences, her tragedies, and her triumphs. But in our society, doña Luisa and her peers seldom find the platform through which they can share, or the vehicle through which they can become public teachers. The Llano Grande oral history project is motivated by doña Luisa's desire to tell her stories, by her wish to become our teacher.<sup>30</sup>

The oral history process is a very serious exercise that requires

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<sup>30</sup> Luisa Garza Oral History, April 5, 1999. Interviewed by Daniela Guardiola, Cindy Garza, and Francisco Guajardo. Llano Grande Oral History Project, Edcouch, Texas.

great sensitivity. Generally speaking, interviewees make themselves vulnerable as they share their most personal stories. The power dynamics of the interview, then, becomes a complex activity that demands much thought and preparation. We dare not violate the spirit with which doña Luisa shares her stories.... In that regard, I heed the wisdom of José Cruz, who demands that interviewees not take a prepared set of questions into an oral history. An oral history should start from scratch, suggests José, who is a student at Edcouch-Elsa High School and a researcher with the Llano Grande Center. The process should allow people to tell the stories they want to tell, and we as interviewers, he says, should respect that, first and foremost.<sup>31</sup> José's classmate, Cristina Capetillo, agrees with José by adding that "that's when the oral history becomes fun, when you have to really be on your toes."<sup>32</sup> Alexis Delgado, another student researcher, counters by suggesting that some kind of prepared outline is critical to her as an interviewer.<sup>33</sup> She wouldn't want to be caught with nothing to say. "What if they're not talkative, or if I get nervous and have no outline?" Abbie García then offers a solution: "I think we can take notes with an outline of questions into the interview, but we shouldn't let the notes intimidate them."<sup>34</sup> "But we have to be careful," argues Belem García,

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<sup>31</sup> José Cruz, from class conversation, November 15, 2000. Archived in the Llano Grande Center video archive, Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, Texas.

<sup>32</sup> Cristina Capetillo, from class conversation, November 15, 2000. Archived in the Llano Grande Center video archive, Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, Texas.

<sup>33</sup> The Center prefers to view the oral history as a conversation, rather than an interview.

<sup>34</sup> Abbie García, from class conversation, November 17, 2000. Archived in the Llano Grande Center video archive, Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, Texas.

“because it’s already intimidating enough, with all the technology we take.”<sup>35</sup>

The oral history is also a situation that presents complex power dynamics. An interviewer can easily assume a position of power through the design and purpose of the questions posed. Might the research interviewer bring a some sort of political agenda into the interview? Is there specific information the interviewer wishes to find for specific research purposes? Perhaps.<sup>36</sup> Our purpose, however, is primarily to conduct research so that we can build relationships with people, give people a vehicle through which they can tell their stories, validate their stories, and use the research process as an opportunity to share knowledge and skills with students and with other people from the community.<sup>37</sup>

Creating the space for people to tell their stories was an expected goal of the Center from the beginning. The transformation that many of us would experience as a result of the process was not. Elders have changed, because they’ve told us their stories. The youth have changed, because they’ve learned from the stories. The curriculum is changing, because the

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<sup>35</sup> Belem García, from class conversation, November 17, 2000. Archived in the Llano Grande Center video archive, Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, Texas.

<sup>36</sup> The Center’s approach to oral history interviewing is constantly being examined. We have utilized James Scheurich’s essay “A Postmodernist Critique of Research Interviewing,” *Research Method in the Postmodern*, Falmer Press, 1997, for instructional purposes.

<sup>37</sup> Again, the process is consistent with Lather’s “research as praxis,” and it is consistent with the emancipatory pedagogy that Trueba discusses as he uses a Vygotskian framework; Patti Lather, *Getting Smart*, London, Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1991, pp. 50-80; Henry Trueba, *Latinos Unidos, From Cultural Diversity to the Politics of Solidarity*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998;

stories are relevant, insightful, and tangible instructional content. Student and adult testimonies unequivocally point to the power of the stories, the relationships, the reciprocity within the relationships, the growing importance and increasing value of the place they live in, and the improved connections between youth and adults.

As the Llano Grande Center continues to grow and as we continue to increase the space for more youth and adults to participate in this enterprise we call public education, we will continue to commit ourselves to developing a new pedagogy and a new epistemology. Both, however, must be rooted in our communities, on the values and traditions that we hold so dear, on the stories of our elders and the stories of our youth, and on the understanding that the work we do must lead toward our liberation from the debilitating social, institutional, and economic patterns that have marginalized many of our people. Indeed, we are committed to working toward our personal as well as collective emancipation (Guajardo, 2001).

### **Agenda: Carnival<sup>38</sup> Time**

It's late Friday night. The concept of going inward has disrupted the comfort zone of our trainers. Interestingly, as we go further inward the comfort zone of our visitors seems to have reduced. Their plans have been disrupted and to a certain extent, we begin to feel that we need to help establish the

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<sup>38</sup> I take the concept of carnivals from Bakhtin's description of the Rabelais' literary practices, as method/strategy for disrupting the traditional order of things. This can also be found in Jose Limon's book *Dancing with the Devil*, and López, Guajardo and Scheurich's article on successful migrant students.

expectations, agenda, and tempo of the day. The “lecture mandate” seems to have thrown a wrench into their training plan, and perceived inability of our trainers to take the concepts from theory to action has raised some concerns of the planning committee. But this perception is laid to rest shortly before midnight. After a good botana<sup>39</sup> meal and about two hours of discussion and sharing of ideas, we have an agenda. The ability of the trainers is well documented, but I cannot help but to make the analysis that the going inward (or going native if you will), is too much for our visitors to adjust to. The humor is difficult to understand, the code shifting from English to Spanish and back keeps them off balance, and the political ontology is too much and moves too fast to adjust to. I couldn’t help but to reflect and think that this is the reality our youth have to live within when they go to colleges or to work outside the Valley. This too has been the reality of many of our parents who do not speak English, yet they’ve managed to navigate through the dominant culture. Or maybe we are experiencing the resistance that we so aptly practice daily during our own struggles during difficult situations. Whatever the situation might be, this dynamic creates a classroom opportunity for us and our youth, a safe and supportive setting to practice our leadership skills.

Food always seems to be part of the business at hand; it is part of the cultural norms, and to some of us it is part of the traditional order of things. There seems to be power in the proverbial concept of breaking bread together. And this night is no exception. However, it seems to have been a disruption with one of our

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<sup>39</sup> Botana is a plate that feeds four to six adults. It contains chips, beans, fajitas, cheese, lettuce, tomato, onions, jalapenos and sour cream if your plate is acculturated.

trainers. Word is she is feeling weak and has an upset stomach. It is unclear if it is the food or the nerves.

Food, music, humor, and art will enrich the day. Certainly, policy education and participatory decision making were the issues of the day, but the traditional order of things is disrupted. The day begins with a pictorial presentation of the agenda and a roll call of the teams who are present. They briefly report on the status of their work or reflection on issues they are facing or simply sharing stories. The agenda for the day is neither clear nor orderly. Participatory decision making will blend and permeate all activities of the day, and policy education will consist of an overview of the issue and framing of the stages, but the activity used is a hybrid between Scheurich's concept of archeology of policy and the participatory research strategy of mapping.

It is a great display of teamwork; as one of our trainers explains, "It was great to see how people walked into the building and jumped into different roles. An overview of the day follows.

### ***Participatory Decision Making***

The day began with café and pan dulce—the site, La Villa High School, a town of 1,500, a few miles east of Edcouch. The mode of operation: intensely participatory. The workshop for this particularly day focused on two training modules: (1) participatory decision making and (2) policy education. The participatory mode of operation has been at the core of the philosophy of the Llano Grande Center since the organization's inception, when the initial grant proposal was drafted by a team of high school students, a teacher, several

community members, and the school superintendent.

The agenda for the participatory decision making part of the workshop was created by a wide range of characters, and a participatory mode was modeled throughout its creation. Two youths opened the day with a welcome, an introduction, and probing questions. Two teachers followed with a report from a recent conference in which 12 local participants networked with people from across the country. A community member then livened the crowd with song and dance. And she was followed by the hired trainer, who presented an overview of the important principles of participatory decision making processes. As she did this, a youth facilitator organized a larger group of facilitators who worked with small teams throughout the large conference room.

The day was built on years, months, weeks, and especially two days of preparation acted out by a wide range of people. First, the team in charge of the meeting site decided the most appropriate venue for the training session would be La Villa High School. "It's important we conduct it in La Villa," said Elmira Cura, a long time teacher in the La Villa schools, "because our youth need to go through the experience of hosting an important event" (Cura, 1998). The same team made decisions on the food served that day and determined that midday entertainment would be provided by regional raconteur Wally Gonzalez. The team charged with the responsibility of selecting the trainers (one of whom came from Nebraska, the other from Kentucky) made certain to provide last minute preparation with the trainers, after the team spent the previous day working with the trainers to ensure their role would be consistent with the principles and values

of the local participants. Another team was responsible for bringing supplies, the appropriate technology, and other such things to the workshop. And yet another team was charged with the responsibility to make certain everyone had transportation to get to La Villa High School. “We’ll bring the Monte Alto people who don’t have a ride,” said Raul Valdez, “Y yo traigo a los de San Carlos,” said Mari Mercado (Mercado, 1998; Valdez, 1998). Several other teams played similarly important roles.

Importantly, each team was comprised of mostly youths. Youths, for example, interviewed potential trainers; youths opened the day of work with introductions, reflections, and roles as facilitators; youths developed and presented sessions on how to use technology for community development; youths took the lead role in documenting the day through the use of video, sound, and other media; and youths played a central role in the debriefing exercise to close the day of work. While youth participate throughout the range of activities, they also play a central role in the decision making. Without the decision making experience, the work of youth leadership development would be incomplete.

### ***Policy Education***

“Policy is created at the most micro of levels,” said Llano Grande staff member Alicia Sanchez, “It happens when people sit face to face to build relationships...to dialogue about issues...that’s when policy is made” (Sanchez 1998). Alicia’s perspective on policy, which reflects the values and vision of the Llano Grande Center, governed the direction of the daylong conversation both on participatory decision making and on policy education.

The agenda for policy education, which was also created by a number of people, consisted of opening remarks by a Llano Grande youth who reiterated the spirit of Alicia's view. The trainer from Nebraska, a former small college president, followed with a historical overview of policy as a concept. A second youth then presented a perspective centered on the archeology of policy and on the mapping of policy. The section on policy then closed as a Llano Grande staff member drew connections between the previous talks, and then directed a group activity on framing old and new policies.

Interestingly, while the facilitator from Nebraska attempted to spew his traditional lecture on the culture and history of policy formation, numerous local seminar participants challenged his notions by suggesting alternative views on how to view the formation of policy. After several alternative presentations were delivered by youths and adults, it became clear that the best policy education occurred when the stories and realities of local people were being shared. "We are changing the way our school looks at youth leadership," said Monique Garcia, "because of how we have behaved through our work with the South Texas Youth Initiative" (Garcia, 1998). "We are now using evaluation for improving our programming," said 16-year-old Yzenia Peña, and she expected that institutional life at her school and in the community would subsequently learn from that experience (Peña, 1998).

Through the very organic exercise of learning about policy from each other's stories, important lessons on the formation and implementation of policy were learned. Though the exercise felt natural for the local participants, the lead

facilitator from Nebraska felt a certain dissonance, particularly when he found that his prepared presentation had been dramatically altered after the first story-sharing discussion where local participants seemingly redefined the meaning of policy education and subsequently subverted the lead facilitator's prepared presentation. After three hours of training, in fact, the Nebraskan found a chair for himself, and he spent the remaining four hours sitting in that same chair, having been rendered useless for the balance of the day.

### ***El Show***

Another highlight that brought people off the street was the noon entertainment of Wally González. Wally, who has numerous aliases including *Mr. Entertainment* and the *Short Legged Texan*, is a public intellectual in his own right. His music is local, cultural, comical, and extremely cerebral. I will use Wally's music to assist me in making an analysis of the work we do and the meaning it provides. His latest CD includes hits such as *Bury Me at WalMart*, *El Chupacabras*, *Fritos Pintos*, and the *Midget Accordion Polka*.

It is during the Saturday training that borders meet and cultural fronts come together. It is during these seminars that roles become interchangeable, youth become teachers, teachers become learners, political "leaders" become public participants; the elderly become intellectuals and the space is created for the monolingual Spanish speakers to share their reality. Indeed, the organic order of things begins to prevail over the institutional and public policy that is top down and void of relationship. It is during this period of intellectual vigor that politics, relationships, (anti-disciplinary) economic educational issues are all part of the

discussion. And art, music, public performance, and comedy are part of the pedagogical strategies used to teach, learn, deconstruct, and reconstruct theories and strategies as we collaboratively share stories about what has been, what is, and what our community can become in the future. It is an educational, pedagogical, and political-free-for all where Jamison's (1981) concept of the political unconsciousness is at its best. So, a la Paredes, I contend that Wally González uses the popularity of Wal-Mart industries as a stage for his counter-hegemonic social discourse. The title of his CD *Que Me Entierren en Wal-Mart* to me symbolizes a discourse that associated Wal-Mart with death. The death is clearly symbolic as we see Wal-Mart stores kill local mom—and—pop stores everywhere. They open a store, pay low wages, and employ a large number of part-timers to escape paying benefits. So in an ever evolving economy, the Wal-Marts are leading in the dismantling of locally-owned businesses. A second story paralleling this concept is in his other song, *El Chupa Cabras*. Here a line from the song says that he has seen the goat sucker at the parking lot of HEB. Similarly, in oral history stories collected locally, residents of the area report that when HEB came into town, the locally owned grocery stores closed shortly thereafter. With this also went the death of a locally developed economy because el HEB no *fía*.<sup>40</sup> This is part of the knowing and understanding of the world around us as well as the world within us.

Wally Gonzales is an individual who is a traveling show as he rides his

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<sup>40</sup> Fia is the Spanish term for credit, a concept that was common in the local economy, but the practice ceased to continue when the major chain stores came into town.

van, the Wally Mobile, has helped me make sense of much of the work we do. It is my belief that Wally has much more to contribute to our work. This counter-hegemonic discourse and political commentary is very consistent with our work and provides yet other examples one can use to flip the prevailing discursive regimes on their head. I would venture to say that Wally's Wal-Mart CD is a strategy he uses to gain economic currency and publicity. I will add that the title of his CD is not for the Wal-Mart industry, but instead for Wal(ly); and his Wal(ly)-Mart is about a virtual-reality. His Wal(ly)-Mart is at the school we find ourselves at today, at the local Wal-Mart parking lot where he plays music every Saturday<sup>41</sup> or at the "real" Wal(ly)-Mart, the flea mar(ke)t where Wally is free to perform and sell his products which include cassettes, C.D.s, midget accordions, and other Wally paraphernalia. His store, A.K.A. the Wally Van or Wally mobile, is always well stocked. Wally directly hints on this Saturday that "Tomorrow is pay day" not once but twice as he repeats his comment, "Tomorrow is pay day." With a sneaky grin he says, "You get it?" As we all know, Sundays are busy at the local flea mar(ke)ts.

Wally's performance helps me put much of our work into context. What we do is trans-disciplinary, local yet informed by global realities and forces. The leadership development work is grounded in a political economic reality that has been in flux for the last century and one that we must understand if we are to appropriately frame over pedagogical practices within a relevant context so youth

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<sup>41</sup> This performance was until recently. Word is that Wally and Wal-Mart management ran into a disagreement and his parking lot performances, which included selling his cassettes and C.D.'s, have been interrupted.

and adults alike will see it as worthwhile and engaging. Education should be about the past, present, and future; yet it must be grounded within a social cultural reality that is relevant to the reality of teacher and learner, if it is to have currency and value. The work we do is a case study that has proven pedagogically sound.

This dissertation is but a snapshot of a much larger story that contains multiple characters, partners and hundreds of stories. It is an understatement to say that it is impossible to capture the work that happens daily on the ground, but I can capture the commitment of people and the fact that this work has sustained the test of time. This work has been in progress for over 15 years, and it is safe to say that the future leaders of our community are being cultivated to continue this work alongside of the founders of the center. The test of time is critical, because as we've seen numerous reform strategies come and go, our work is consistent.

Another significant component of this work is that it is about changing the lives of people. It is not about numbers, but about stories. This is important because the production mode of operation pushed by the private sector in the name of efficiency strips people of their identity and commodifies them to a product. It is important for education to help people develop their story and strengthen their identity. For in a mobile society it is important for youth to know who they are so they can negotiate their place in society. In this regard, Trueba's words ring clearly; "Men and women who do not know their place in history will never understand their role in society." This Freirian language is critical to Mexican American students we have placed in Ivy League colleges and universities as part of our success and effectiveness, but it is also about so much

more. The placement of these youth in top colleges and university is but a metaphor of what the power of collective action can accomplish. And it is this collective action that I point to as the effectiveness of our work. It is the ability to imagine and create change in the lives of youth without them compromising their story; rather they create positive change because of the power of their story. And it is about creating the safe spaces for youth to learn, teach, and grow.

Our work is trans-disciplinary and pedagogically sound. We have developed a hybrid neo-Vygotskian model that is effective, relevant, and powerful. This educational process constructs knowledge, respects wisdom, develops leaders, and builds power.

This work is full of paradoxes. It is radical by definition in that it is grounded in decolonizing principles; but we build our work on respect for people, love of family, and passion for place. Our future work is both about continuing to develop the organic leadership and simultaneously building a strong economy. Thus, our youth and teachers are community builders, community developers, researchers and public intellectuals.

## **Chapter 5: In(con)clusion**

### **OVERVIEW**

In integrating the theory with practice and the academic with story, I am intent on pushing for the process and development of a practice of decolonization. The emphasis is consistent with scholars who push for a constructivist epistemology and the use of story. The privileging of this literature—local stories—is a first step towards moving away from the traditional order of things. I consider this exercise, of writing a dissertation, as an event that epitomizes the traditional order of things, and pushes graduate students to a point of stress and isolation. But I have decided that during this exercise I will disrupt this practice. This practice of isolation is in direct contradiction to the ontology of the document and the work I've put forth. I will continue to resist this isolation and order of things. This is why I find myself on an airplane flying to South Texas as I write this document. As I write my concluding thoughts, I propose to touch on some recommendations, and challenges we might face in the future. But before these thoughts, I will speak a little more about the process for exercising these ideas.

I have circulated this dissertation to some of my partners and have sat with them to discuss the thoughts, ideas, and concerns. This is important for a number of reasons: first, the opportunity for others within our network to experience the ins-and-outs of a dissertation is important. This process will help raise the expectation for others, and make it obtainable for those with-in our circle. Going through this process is an optimal teachable moment. It is a teachable moment for

me as I continue to move myself from the “master-narrator” to a weaver of micro-stories and a facilitator of educational experiences for my partners. This is a teachable moment because I learn and grow from the feedback I receive from my partners, and it is a teachable moment because others who have read this document can begin to look at the work we do through different lenses. This document has currency, and the expectation is that it will impact others who are part of the work.

As we place the final touches on this document, one reviewer suggested that the act of reading this document has buoyed him and fortified the efforts of the teachers and students of the center who are currently engaged in trying to build a community college in Elsa. After months of planning, politicking, and building community capacity for such an effort, many lessons have been learned. Contemporaneously, the leadership has felt much frustration. Reviewing this document, however, has “forced me to re-visit some important language that gives our mission and purpose strength...when the committee meets again tomorrow, we will refresh our language and continue to operate from a position of power, in large part because of how some of us have read through this narrative.”

The text in this document emphasizes a language and a process that is consistent with decolonizing methodologies (Saldivar, 1997; Smith, 1999). This style has been in an attempt to disrupt the prevailing discursive regimes in style, theory, and practice. This text is academic, but also practical; it is about leadership, but also followership; it is about race, though race is seldom mentioned; it is about technology, but more so about people; this text, like our

work, is about knowledge, wisdom, memory, story, identity, and experience. This text is about weaving together multiple worlds and realities.

This text and exercise has granted us the opportunity to develop a future agenda.<sup>42</sup> This agenda will be cognitive as well as experiential. Cognitively we will need to further the discussion on teaching, learning, and effectively dealing with the dominant forces our youth and we face daily. Theoretically, it is a question of counter-hegemony, but even this discussion deserves a framing that is not based on a zero-sum premise. This is a construct we must look at from varying lenses including Portes's (1996) segmented assimilation concept, Trueba's (1999) pedagogy of hope, and McLaren's (2000) pedagogy of revolution. The direction we pursue must include examining paradigms that are beyond the present frames, for the existing educational structures are archaic, oppressive, and non-imaginary. In the rest of this document I will share challenges and recommendations for future work that will help push the education of children and adults to a higher level of learning, teaching, and living.

## **CHALLENGES**

Some of the major challenges we must continue to be aware of are organizational stability, individual engagement, and negotiating partnerships. These challenges are not presented in order, nor is one more important than the other, but it is important for us to negotiate and navigate through each in an appropriate manner.

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<sup>42</sup> This agenda is referred to in Appendix A. This broad-based action plan is dated but it has served as a benchmark for us to keep track of our work and commitments.

Maintenance of the organization is important, but it is not more important than the work we do. In the last 15 years of non-profit organizational work I've done, I have seen a number of disturbing trends. First, most organizations are established to serve a purpose, but as they grow and develop, they do not have the capacity to change with the social changes around them. One of these trends is when organizations lose focus of their mission and are focused on their financial survival. Many times the need to follow the funding streams dictates the work and direction of the organization instead of the local vision of people. Thus far, the LGC staff and board of directors have been able to negotiate through some of these changes, but we still operate with the axiom that the mature organization will turn away money that is incongruent with its mission. Much of this organizational stability will come as long as we continue to build a strong community and balance this with the appropriate bureaucratic policies that will support the work of the LGC.

Another challenge will continue to be to keep operating on the principle of respecting people's story. It is not enough to help people develop their story, but we must respect it, and help create the space for putting legs to these stories. Engaging people with our work is easy for the success and stories that have come out of our community as very appealing and engaging, but the work is challenging, for it is about the lives of youth, and this is a serious and very difficult endeavor. So we must be committed to the development and support of our co-workers cognitively, emotionally, and economically. We must maintain and support the spirit of our partners if we expect to continue to impact the lives

of people.

The last and one of the most challenging components of our work is selecting our partners. The politics and nature of our work to a certain extent begins to dictate this dynamic. Case in point, we work with youth, thus making us committed to working in schools. This in and of itself becomes problematic. Some of the origin of the resistance to change is ingrained in school culture, especially in a small community where school board and school leadership issues often dictate personnel changes and distribution of resources. Since the center formalized itself in 1997, for example, the local high school has had five principals, and the school district has hired and fired as many superintendents.

Teaching and learning are, of course, impacted profoundly. Other examples: one of our teachers is teaching government and the class decided that a good class exercise is to sponsor a debate with the candidates who are running for public office locally. This is an idea that surfaces from the principle of pedagogy of place, and an opportunity for youth to begin to practice their role as citizens. This idea is shortly vetoed by the school administration under the claim that, "We should not be involved with politics." Another good idea squashed by the local administration was the one implemented by an economics teacher who works with the LGC. As part of applying the economic principles, he assigned students to develop their own businesses. This was a great idea until the students from his class were making more money than some of the clubs in school. A teacher complained and the innovative economics teacher was asked to stop this practice. Another great idea and tremendous learning opportunity was squashed. Then

there is the teacher who was teaching a concurrent enrollment history class. The students were enrolled in both a high school class, but were also receiving college credit. The argument was made that the teacher was not following the TEKS and his class was cancelled the following year. There was no assessment of the learning, the transformation of lives nor if the claim of not teaching the TEKS was valid. These are just some of the challenges we face in working in a system that is rigid and often inconsistent with learning, but it is a small price to pay for obtaining the larger goal of preparing our next generation of leaders. Nevertheless, we must continue to challenge ourselves to figure out effective ways of dealing with our public institutions. Alas, the public schools are among the last bastions of hope for the realization of a just democracy (Goodlad, 2001; Soder, 1996).

Another challenge in our daily work is managing the requests we receive from other educational institutions to help them replicate the model we use at their schools. Recently, for example, two students and two teachers from the center responded to a request from the local educational service center for training. After a series of conversations, the youths and teachers negotiated a contract whereby the center would develop a seminar series through which it trains teachers and students from 25 South Texas schools on how best to prepare for college. In exchange, the center receives payment of \$110,000. This story encompasses two of the essential elements of the work of the center: (1) to build youth leadership, and (2) to create economic opportunities. On the other hand, the center fields a flurry of requests, some, of which are international. We must

continue to struggle to develop the appropriate structures needed to respond to these requests in a substantial and appropriate manner without losing or compromising the work locally. Thus we must select our partners strategically.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Education for leadership development remains a critical issue today as we attempt to prepare citizens for engaging a complex world. Education must cease being about preparing workers, assimilating immigrants, and preparing children to be effective test takers. Education must be about helping youth develop their story and helping them put power to their story. When one of the center's staff members presented at a recent Salzburg Seminar, he shared the stories of south Texas youths with a group of people from 31 different countries. "Many of our students", he said, "Own very little, in terms of material possessions....they don't own big houses or big stores. But, they do own their stories, and nobody can take that away from them. It is their prized possession." People from across the world, particularly those from Sub-Saharan, Asian, and South American countries responded with great fervor. They too realized that story is among the chief assets they own. Story is universal and has been central to human learning since time immemorial. We as educators either recognize, value, and celebrate that reality, or we miss on a momentous opportunity. Certainly, this does not imply that teaching youth how to read and write is not important, but it does challenge the way in which children learn, and the reason for learning the skills. Helping youth create their identity is as important for their future survival (Holland, 1998; Trueba, 1999).

## **Public schools**

It is my recommendation that we must go inward as we reflect on the role our public schools must play in preparing our future leaders. My literature review begins to lay out some of the challenges, and my stories begins to frame some of the processes that have been so effectively nurtured to help youth and adults who come from the margins of our society be successful. Clearly, our public schools must examine their own ontology and develop an epistemology that is congruent with the students and parents who come through our doors and who pay our salaries. We must begin to move beyond the existing archaic structures if we are to be relevant and of service to our students and our democracy. Indeed, Goodlad (2001) and others see our public education as the *Last Hope* for saving our democracy.

As I lay out in my data, effective teaching, learning, knowledge creation, and leadership development occurs when the following processes conditions are created:

- 1 ) Building strong relations—This relationship building implies between youth and adults, youth and youth, and adults and adults.
- 2) Creating safe spaces—This concept will help youth and adults alike take calculated risks that will allow them to try new ideas that will help them in their growth process and leadership development.
- 3) Sharing power—Adults must be willing to practice a power

that relational and reciprocal. This role modeling is critically important.

- 4) Going Inward—This process is about helping youth and adults alike understand themselves better; for it is only when we begin to understand ourselves that we can begin to make sense of the world around us.
- 5) Have fun—This work must be fun. Teaching and learning must be framed in a pedagogical strategy that is congruent with the learner and that will be enjoyed and celebrated by all participants.

This work must be practiced and developed along the continuum of education. And I submit that this pedagogical change be embraced at our public universities and colleges. It is critically important that our institutions of higher education begin to examine the way we prepare teachers and leaders. Our systems of higher education must be about preparing and new breed of teachers and these new teachers, must be prepared to be community developers. I propose that our schools of education challenge themselves to develop the new teacher of the future as a community developer. The profession of teacher, in my eyes, is the most important in our society, but we must expand the knowledge of our teachers for them to become the cornerstones in their communities. Our teachers and administrators must understand about the social, economic, and demographic changes our communities and families are experiencing in order to begin to make

sense of the world, or the classroom if you will, around them. This recommendation is grounded in the premise that we cannot do effective nor sustainable education reform without looking at the political economies of areas.

### **Politics and Policy Recommendations**

The politics of education is at the core of this dissertation. It is how a group of citizens has organized and in a very progressive manner have worked to rewrite the educational history of a small community. This venture has been collaborative and participatory. Many of us would have never reached this kind of success under the traditional ontology of individualism that has dominated the values of our educational system. This is a value informed by the politics of the area's elite (traditional political culture), which are incongruent with the home culture of our students (moralistic political culture). As Stone (2001) writes, we have spent the last part of this century trying to take politics out of education, yet it is one of the recommendations they make: put politics back into education. Thus, it is critically important for educators to be aware of the dynamics, and this requires a competent understanding of political cultures and the principles that inform the political actions.

The understanding of the politics and its principles is needed if we are to proactively move to developing a new culture and process of policy development. Traditional policy development has evolved and is controlled by bureaucrats removed from the daily activity and needs of people and their communities. Our work has engaged youth and normal citizens in policy development at every level of the process. Youth have been engaged from the formulation of local campus

policy, to creating substantial economic opportunities, to testifying before the committee of higher education at the state capital. In short, we see the work daily as important agents of community change. This action of power is both educational and transformational in impacting the lives of many other youth who face similar issues.<sup>43</sup> Wilson (1998) and others have written of numerous examples of grass-root organizations that have had an impact on policy development, but again, they omit youth stories from their publication. I argue that much more work must be done in presenting the stories of power and action that young people can have in impacting community and educational change. Consistent with this argument, we must study and pay more attention to the politics of policy development process so we can begin to understand the ontology and future impacts of these legislative actions. These political processes must also engage a grass-roots action that includes ordinary people and not just non-profit organizations that have served as mediating agents that in the era of devolution are serving the role of government and cease to serve as advocates for common people.

We must continue this dialogue and teachers must be at the core of these discussions. And we must continue to share public policy stories that show people how positive change can happen instead of telling people that it can happen. We

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<sup>43</sup> In this case the two actions I make reference to are making decisions on traditional block scheduling on campus. After youth presented their research findings, the school decided to stay with block scheduling. A decision that was initially challenged by both the band and athletic director who wanted more youth to go through their system, but after the research was presented there position changes because they had no data to counter the argument. The second policy youth participated in was one that allowed high school students who did not have legal status in the US but whose paper work was in the process to attend state colleges and universities and pay in-state tuition instead of international students' tuition. This bill was passed too.



## Appendix A

### CONCEPT I: DEVELOPING SOCIAL CAPITAL

<i>Strategy: #1</i>	<i>Youth Leadership Development</i>	a) To prepare young people for the world of higher education and higher order thinking b) To include the talents, ideas, and energy of young people in the larger community development contexts, and c) to make the community development process sustainable by preparing our future generations to develop and implement their ideas and their visions.
<i>Strategy: #2</i>	<i>Parental Development Training</i>	To engage parents as partners in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children in our community.
<i>Strategy: #3</i>	<i>Teachers Professional Growth</i>	To increase the comfort zone and knowledge of teachers so that education can go beyond the existing four walls of the classroom. This process will make education relevant to students while also being responsive and inclusive of the students' community, including their parents, their folklore, their culture, and other assets.

**CONCEPT II: COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT**

<i>Strategy: #1</i>	<i>To recruit college students and graduates to come and serve in our community.</i>	This activity includes two purposes: 1 <sup>st</sup> to utilize the wealth of young talent, and their lessons learned while in college, to train their peers; and 2 <sup>nd</sup> to develop and maintain the connectiveness of youth to their community and culture while simultaneous nurturing the philanthropic spirit to giving back to their community (Campoamor, Diaz, & Ramos, 1999).
<i>Strategy: #2</i>	<i>To identify and rebuild dilapidated infrastructure and other neglected areas in our community.</i>	To provide an opportunity for youth to apply the community investment models they have learned in the classroom, including physical and social infrastructure.
<i>Strategy: #3</i>	<i>To identify and leverage capital to be invested in our community.</i>	To allow youth and residents to participate and apply lessons learned, and to expand the traditional education into an applied method and experience. Students and residents will learn by developing grant proposals and other solicitation correspondence to funders locally and nationally. This experience will help develop the culture of philanthropy in our community.

**CONCEPT III: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

<i>Strategy: #1</i>	<i>Map out social, natural and economic assets in our community.</i>	To help advocate youth, professionals, business people and policy makers on proactive mechanisms and strategies to developing long term plans that will help the local economy while also being sensitive to the natural and social resources of the area.
<i>Strategy: #2</i>	<i>To identify sustainable and viable rural economic development models</i>	To educate youth and other community residents on practices and ideas that have been effectively implemented in other parts of the world by communities who have experienced challenges similar to ours.
<i>Strategy: #3</i>	<i>To identify and leverage capital to be invested in our community</i>	To create jobs within the local workforce, and to simultaneously broaden and diversify the tax base.
<i>Strategy: #4</i>	<i>To develop employment opportunities.</i>	To begin to proactively and positively impact the living standards of families in our area.

**CONCEPT IV: COLLECTING AND DOCUMENTING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE**

<i>Strategy: #1</i>	<i>To provide training in community based research techniques and strategies..</i>	To begin the process of building the capacity of local residents to conduct research.
<i>Strategy: #2</i>	<i>To conduct research in the community as part of the class curriculum.</i>	To begin the process of identifying the latent assets and knowledge in the older generation of our community.
<i>Strategy: #3</i>	<i>To develop a Free Press.</i>	To give a voice to a segment of the community who has much to contribute to the education of the younger generation and the rebuilding of the community.

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## **Vita**

Miguel Angel Guajardo grew up in Elsa, TX. His family and he came to the Delta Area the last day of December 1968. He graduated from Edcouch Elsa H.S. in 1982: received a BS in secondary education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1988, and a Masters Degree in Education in 1995. His interests of study are the politics of education, community change, and the impact of policy on minority children.

His employment experience includes the local school district, seven years with a community-based organization Communities in Schools-Austin, and six years with the Urban Issues Program at the University of Texas at Austin. Miguel has also received a number of awards for his work in the community including Fellowships from the Salzburg Seminars and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's International Leadership Program.

Miguel's academic and professional experiences have taken him to different parts of the world including, Canada, South America, Southern and Northern Africa, the Middle East, Europe and number of places around the continental U.S. and Hawaii.

Miguel is active with church activities and education, he volunteers at his children's school, advises a number of community youth development initiatives, and trains youth and adults on service learning, popular education and participatory research methods. Additionally Miguel is a co-founder of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development at Edcouch Elsa H.S.; he has assisted the Center in establishing its short and long term vision.

Miguel is married to Joyce Guajardo and they have two children Emiliano (10) and Javier (6).

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