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This study investigates relationships and instructional practices at one rural school. Literature suggests parent involvement creates positive relationships and impacts the academic performance of Latino students. The literature identifies practices that prevent Latino parent involvement. The purpose of this study was to identify practices that build relationships with Latino parents and students and to understand the impact of relationships on instruction.

Relationships and instructional experiences are shared by Latino students and parents, teachers, and the principal. Differing backgrounds and cultural experiences create the need for cultural understanding. Implemented practices led to relationships and culturally relevant instruction for Latino students.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING PRACTICES IN ONE RURAL AND

PREDOMINANTLY LATINO SCHOOL

by

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Approved by

Dr. Ulrich Reitzug
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To my family for your service to community.

One Love, One Life, Carry Each Other

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Rural schools in North Carolina continue to experience an influx of diversity as never before. The 2009 Census figures recorded the Latino population as the fastest growing minority group in the United States. North Carolina's Latino population increased to 7.7%, doubling over the past decade. In rural Monroe County, North Carolina, the Latino population is 16.5%, over twice the State's percentage (U.S. Census, 2009). Growth of Latino populations in small-town America presents rural communities and schools with unimaginable challenges. Increasing Latino student enrollment has produced a state of uncertainty. Traditional methods and theories of teaching have not prepared teachers for non-English speaking students. Schools across the United States serve increasingly diverse student populations while the teaching force is becoming less diverse (Mercado, 2001; Nieto, 2004). This fact is evident in rural North Carolina schools where teachers freely admit to being ill prepared to meet the challenges of diverse student populations.

The landmark *No Child Left Behind* (hereafter referred to as *NCLB*) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) legislation requires that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a quality education. High quality equates to proficiency on state achievement standards and state academic assessments. Public

school districts and individual schools are measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (hereafter referred to as *AYP*). The question for traditional, rural area teachers is, "How do we adequately educate Latino students while simultaneously meeting federal *NCLB* mandates?" Language barriers, limited resources, and ineffective instructional practices for teaching to diverse populations heighten the anxiety levels of teachers, parents and students.

Problem Statement

The problem this study addressed was the practices that create relationships and the impact of relationships on instruction. The study identifies practices that demonstrate a direct link between relationships and instruction. Historically, rural schools serve only local families born within a community (Kozol, 1991). Due to the close ties, schools were considered fair and just in providing equal opportunities for all students. Traditional models of schooling and instruction remain deeply engrained in some rural schools impacting the educational experience far beyond the elementary years.

Demographic shifts lead to non-traditional student enrollments creating new expectations for rural North Carolina schools. School size and location impact many areas of education, including the characteristics of the school, instruction, and outcomes (Bouck, 2004). Cross cultural misunderstandings breed distrust between the home and school. The disconnect surfaces when traditional practices fail to embrace cultural diversity. Apprehension and frustration create toxic environments that define school culture in a negative way.

Most Latino parents begin the educational journey trusting schools to care for their children. Latino parents and students are eager and excited about the overall education experience. Latino students are taught that schools are fair and all students are viewed equally. The bleak reality is that this assumption is not always the case.

Latino students enter rural, North Carolina schools at different proficiency levels. Many enter with a balance of bi-lingual and bi-cultural expectations. Others enter with limited schooling experiences. Some Latino students enroll for a brief period of time creating a struggle with balancing home cultures while being in a place they feel they do not belong. Often, Latino students are viewed as one entity and titled a Hispanic subgroup rather than as individuals entering with rich traditions and experiences.

Limited teacher training beyond traditional methods leads to limited opportunities for students creating disastrous results. Non-conformity of diverse student populations to traditional schooling and instructional practices generates adversity. Latino students become discipline problems, disengage, or drop out of school which further isolates them from the rich learning experience these students deserve (Hondo, Gardiner, & Sapien, 2008).

Without the inclusion of culturally responsive educational opportunities, Latino students are limited. The gap in knowledge of cultural behaviors can alter relationships and instruction. The challenge for rural, North Carolina schools continues to be creating environments that are inclusive of all students, including the growing Latino student population. In this context, practices can improve relationships and instruction.

There are limited studies on the practices that build relationships and impact instruction for Latino students. Therefore, there was a need for this study. In order to address the problem as stated, this study focused on the following primary research questions:

1. What are the practices that build relationships?
2. What is the impact of these relationships on instruction?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study developed a richer understanding for schools struggling to implement practices that build relationships and impact instruction. Building relationships serves as a powerful catalyst in a school's culture to engage, encourage, and support Latino students throughout their educational endeavors (Herman & Tucker, 2000).

The school in this study is a rural kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. Midpoint Elementary School traditionally served Caucasian and African American students. The school remains the gathering spot for the small, farming town. The school demographics have totally changed. The Latino student population is at 93%.

This study examined the practices that build relationships at one rural, North Carolina school. Additionally, the study delved into the impact of relationships on instruction. The study provides a foundation for other rural schools struggling to develop practices that support relationships and instruction. While other rural schools will never exactly replicate the study site, information gleaned in the study can guide in the

development of a more personalized understanding in the building of relationships and the impact of relationships on instruction.

Dissertation Organization

The dissertation was organized as follows. Chapter I introduced the problem and the research questions. A description of relational and instructional barriers is provided.

Chapter II provided a comprehensive review of the literature as it related to the existing literature on relationships. Intellectual progressions within the body of research provided a richer knowledge base of understanding the current beliefs regarding relationships.

Chapter III described the research methodology. The primary methodology for this study was qualitative case study. The study provided an in-depth look at relationship building at one school. The study focused on practices that build relationships, as well as describing what impact these relationships had on instruction. The case study consisted of data collection through various sources that included interviews with Latino students, Latino parents, teachers, and the principal. Focus group interviews along with individual interviews provided Observations occurred randomly in various settings including during the instructional day, transition periods, and at after school events. Observations provided both formal and informal data and insight into behaviors that promoted or inhibited the building of relationships. Continual document and artifact analysis were on-going. The documents analyzed included unit plans, student learning maps, and activities describing delivery of content. Written communication was reviewed as one strategy to determine relational clarity. Additional written documentation involved informal and formal data

representative of patterns in student attendance, grades, discipline reports, and student recognitions. Document analysis continued throughout the research. Patterns were analyzed for evident shifts in trends and culture.

Chapter IV provides a detailed profile of Midpoint Elementary. Participant profiles include interview overviews describing the experiences of the principal, teachers, and Latino students and parents from multiple perspectives. The chapter begins with descriptors of the setting, people, interactions, and events that reveal practices that made one school a unique instructional setting.

Chapters V and VI present the analysis of the data through the two research questions. Chapter V examines the practices that build relationships in Midpoint Elementary. Chapter VI delves into the impact of relationships on instruction.

Chapter VII provides a summary of the study and shares conclusions from the study. Implications of the study include recommendations for capacity building in rural schools facing increased diversity. Recommendations for further studies provide potential research opportunities that may expand or disprove this study. The chapter concludes with final thoughts on practices that can serve the Latino population well.

Conclusion

There were many factors that contributed to this study. Latino students and parents, along with teacher and principal attitudes provided insight into practices that built relationships. Latino parents greatly influence their children. Similarly, teachers are powerful influences in the successes or failures of Latino students. The primary person who influenced educational performance, other than the student, was the teacher

(Baughman, 1996). Relationships can radically impact instruction. This study can inform the current body of knowledge as it conveys the practices that build relationships, impact instruction, and alters traditional practices in rural schools.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is extensive literature on the power of relationships. The body of research recognizes the importance of developing relationships with the Latino community (de la Vega, 2007). However, research surrounding dynamic and collaborative interactions that build relationships is limited (Turney & Kao, 2009). Historical and recent studies provide little research on the practices that create relationships. Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) found that current school structures draw mainstream parents to the school. These practices are not effective in attracting the participation of Latino families. Latino parents lack cultural knowledge in relation to schools in the United States (Valdes, 1996).

In increasingly diverse communities, revisiting dated practices is critical to student success. Ideally, schools should become mirrors of the home and community culture (Guerra & Valverde, 2008). The role of public schools includes that of equalizers of meaningful and relevant experiences that prepare all students for life.

Some schools have made Latino parental involvement an important part of the educational experience (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Bradley, 1997; VanSciver, 1995). In turn, involvement leads to building relationships and interactions beyond the school (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Bradley, 1997; VanSciver, 1995).

Regardless of diversity or socioeconomic backgrounds, most teachers believe their mission in society is to prepare students well academically, socially, and emotionally so they can become productive citizens (Larson & Ovando, 2001). Who determines the characteristics of a productive citizen? Larson and Ovando (2001) wrote schools typically reinforce practices that divide communities. Rural schools can no longer function in isolation. Challenges schools face today are beyond their own influence requiring greater courage to address than ever before (Bielang, 2010). Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have addressed and continue to address with great urgency what has become a crisis in Latino educational attainment and achievement (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Fullan (2003) found reshaping a school culture without reflection and acknowledgement of current practices and beliefs can create short term results for schools creating "surface-level" change (p. 31). The concepts are in place and everyone is talking the game but the ideas are never implemented with consistency. In effect, dated, traditional practices undermine the change process.

Larson and Ovando (2001) note:

> If teachers and principals are to free themselves and their schools from the habitualized practices and institutionalized logics of our past, we will have to turn our attention to systems and processes that make learning, growing, and changing central to educational practice. And if we are to deinstitutionalize the prevailing logics of segregation, exclusion, and hierarchy in schools, we will need processes that dismantle the thinking that keeps us mired in inequitable and ineffective practices.

Historically, schools are aligned with beliefs and values held within communities. To embrace diversity, schools must reflect socially just environments that promote the hopes and dreams of all students as gestures of justice (Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000). In my experience, predetermined beliefs often prevent rural schools from addressing new challenges. Recognizing the work of the above researchers, three distinct themes surfaced from the review of the literature and the analysis of data. These themes created a broader understanding of the problem.

The first theme evolved out of the importance of relationships. This dominant theme is the heart of the research (Osterman, 2000). The premise remains that together principals, teachers, Latino students and their parents can share in the transformation of traditional models of schooling reaping huge benefits for students. Practices that shape relationships can enhance the educational experience for students. In this context, relationships are defined and applied to the school setting as a catalyst for transforming school culture and promoting student success (Fullan, 2003).

The second theme focused on the conflicting perceptions of relationships and parental involvement. Experiences are enriched through relationships (Turney & Kao, 2009). Sharing in the schooling experience as active participants in the schooling process defines relationships and builds social capital (Turney & Kao, 2009; Yan & Lin, 2005).

The third theme reviewed the impact of relationships each views the other. The old adage "perception is reality" is evident as the literature reviews expectations, real or perceived by each group. How individuals and groups view one another significantly impacts interactions, trustworthiness, and common beliefs.

Theme 1—Attitudes and Practices

Relationships provide the most pervasive change in building a sense of community (Osterman, 2000). Relationships enable students from diverse backgrounds to bring their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences into the school setting, thereby discovering their common humanity (Osterman, 2000). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) found that it is in relationships with others that we come to know and understand who we are. Understanding students' emotional, social, and academic needs shapes practices. Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, and Joyner (1999) terms this "educational wellness." When students feel supported and nurtured in school, their outlook, life skills, and academic performance will improve (Comer et al., 1999).

Rural North Carolina schools are discovering the lack of human and financial capital to adequately prepare Latino students. Often times, rural schools and communities lack the resources found in metropolitan areas resulting in less communication with Latino families (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). Often changing dynamics become overwhelming for schools. As noted by Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez (2002):

> Dealing with diversity is one of the central challenges of 21st century education. It is impossible to prepare tomorrow's teachers to succeed with all of the students they will meet without exploring how students' learning experiences are influenced by their home languages, cultures, and contexts; the realities of race and class privilege in the United States; the ongoing manifestations of institutional racism within the educational system; and the many factors that shape students' opportunities to learn within individual classrooms. To teach effectively, teachers need to understand how learning depends on their ability to draw connections to what the learners already know, to support students' motivation and willingness to risk trying, and to engender a climate of trust between and among adults and students.

Intentionally or not, traditional practices marginalize Latino students. Five phases along the cultural continuum describe traditional practices found in rural schools (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Individuals may be at one point on the continuum but as a part of a school or community group may be at another.

- Cultural destructiveness: The elimination of another cultural group or the suppression of the culture's practices.

- Cultural incapacity: Treatment of members of non-dominant groups based on stereotypes and with the belief that the dominant group is inherently superior.

- Cultural blindness: Failure to see or to acknowledge that differences between groups often make a difference to the groups and to the individuals who are members of those groups.

- Cultural pre-competence: Behavior or practices that seek to acknowledge cultural differences in healthy ways but that are not quite effective.

- Cultural competence: Effective interactions with individuals and groups of people from different ethnic and social cultures; use of the essential elements as the standards for individual behavior and organizational practice.

Moving away from traditional cultural prejudices towards cultural competence leads to the development of practices that lead to positive relationships among diverse groups and demonstrates the willingness and acceptance to place students at the center of education.

Parent involvement has received a great deal of attention in studies of student success (Adams, Ryan, Ketsetzis, & Keating, 2000; Bogenschneider, 1997; Bowen &

Bowen, 1998; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001). Frequently parent involvement is marginalized. Too often, teachers believe that minority communities have very little to offer and that parents only add to the problems already present (Guerra & Valverde, 2007). For Latino parents, the capacity to overcome these barriers seems insurmountable (Ferrer, 2007). School culture dictates parent involvement. Researchers have found there is a strong link between parent involvement and academic success (Ascher, 1988; Baker & Soden, 1998; Chavkin, 1993; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hickman, 1996; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Valdes, 1996). Schmid (2001) identified three primary types of adaption challenging Latino parents: acculturation to the middle class; assimilation into underclass; and economic advancement with a distinct cultural identity. Diverse groups of parents often struggle to find their places in schools.

Schools should be collective communities where everyone can participate (Shields, 2009). However, inconsistent definitions of parent involvement lead to misconceptions about Latino parents' desires to be active participants in the schooling of their children (Rolan, 2005).

Struggling to meet the needs of all students, calls for schools to reach out to Latino families. Historically, teachers place parent involvement as the responsibility of parents (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Teachers equate poor student performance and apathy with parents' lack of concern or care (Thompson, 2008). In contrast, over a period of 28 years, researchers found Latino parents consistently held high hopes for their

children's education (Ada & Zubizarreta, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Moles, 1993; Nieto, 2004; Trueba, 1998; Valdes, 1996).

There is a strong connection between parent involvement and academic success (Ascher, 1988; Baker & Soden, 1998; Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Chavkin, 1993; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hickman, 1996; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Valdes, 1996). However, researchers found when teachers say parent involvement, they often put all of the responsibility on parents to connect with schools and to become involved with their children at home (Epstein, 2001). It is imperative that schools look for ways to engage parents in their children's education. Dahl (as cited in Shields, 2009) noted that many students and their families have fewer and less meaningful opportunities for input than others—some, for example because they lack knowledge of the educational system, some because they do not speak fluent English, and some because they have no legal status in this county. These barriers further alienate opportunities for parent involvement creating greater divisions between schools and homes.

Theme 2—Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is a significant factor in students' attitudes towards schooling and dropout rates (Hondo et al., 2008). Disengagement in school begins at an early age. Without the support of parents, academic and social gaps develop early leading to gaps and failures in school (Epstein, 2001). Latino youth tend to give up on school when they perceive teachers do not care about them (Hondo et al., 2008). Failure to adequately educate Latino students doesn't begin in high school. Failure is a result of on-going

issues and struggles during elementary and middle school years. Research upholds this

assertion (Fine, 1991; Gandara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998; Lucas, Henze, &

Donato, 1997; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002; Secada et al., 1998). The lack of

relationships can create insurmountable odds for Latino students.

There is considerable evidence that parent involvement leads to improved student

achievement, better school attendance, and increased graduation rates, and that these

improvements occur regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the

family (Hondo et al., 2008). Often, teachers simply view parent involvement as a

mandate that must be followed due to federal and state initiatives. Parents interested in

being involved are assigned meaningless tasks that fail to impact instruction. Parent

involvement is limited to participation in class parties, field trips, and signing off on

homework. Principals may view parent involvement as participation in parent

organizations providing funding resources for schools. Latino parents however, view

parent involvement in two distinct categories: academic involvement and life

participation (Zarate, 2007). While both are valued, life participation is of greater

importance than academic involvement. Failure to participate in either category goes

against the definition of parent involvement for Latino parents. Zarate's (2007) research

found that Latino parent involvement expectations far exceed school expectations.

Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) note that poverty, low levels of education, and immigrant

status strongly influence the nature and levels of parent and school interaction. However,

research indicates when parents engage with their children in learning activities at home,

provide basic needs, and communicate with the school; their involvement can mitigate

the negative impacts of poverty and prevent students from dropping out (Clark, 1993,

1987; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1999; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994;

Kellaghan et al., 1993). Latino families have a genuine interest in their children's

education but can face a mismatch between their expectations and those of the school

(Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1988).

Latino parents may not be engaged in schools the way that principals or teachers

envision. People have differing views of what parent involvement is (Scribner, Young, &

Pedroza, 1999). Barriers to Latino parent involvement appear very common. Researchers

(Bermudez & Marquez, 1996; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Lindeman, 2001; Simich-

Dudgeon, 1986; Sosa, 1997; Torres-Guzman, 1995; Zelazo, 1995) identified these

barriers to parent involvement:

- inability to understand English

- involvement equates to interfering with schools

- unfamiliarity with the school system

- lack of education

- too many responsibilities

- negative experiences with school

- school personnel's negative or condescending attitudes

- lack of transportation and child care.

Even though these barriers do not apply to every parent, they represent significant

attitudes for many Latino families. Additional research supported these findings (Floyd,

1998; Fuentes, Cantu, & Stechuk, 1996; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Lopez, 2001; Smith et al., 2008; Sosa, 1997).

How Latino parents adapt to rural schools will be directly related to how they interact with the school (Smith et al., 2008). The schools role is to identify the barriers parents need help overcoming and then develop ways to address these barriers. Latino parents value education and maintain support for schools (Ceballo, 2004). Clearly they care about and are supportive of their children's academic progress. A study by Okagaki and Frensch (1998) found that Latino parents feel poorly equipped, uncomfortable, and lacking confidence in their abilities to help their children. They want their children to have a better life and their own while maintaining their native culture and identity. Teachers must view students and parents from different cultures as gifts and strengths (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006).

Theme 3—The Impact of Relationships

The nature of relationships among teachers with Latino parents and students has a greater impact on the quality of the instructional experiences than anything else in the school (Barth, 2006). Knowing this, the critical role of experiences extends into the homes. To promote better relationships between Latino parents and schools, researchers have suggested that teachers develop practices to enhance relationships with Latino parents and students (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lucas, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997).

One way schools are reaching out to Latino parents is by providing guidance and reassuring them that they can do much more than they thought (Guerra & Valverde, 2008). Providing opportunities for Latino parents within the school setting encourages

involvement and creates the foundation for relationships. Further, Guerra and Valverde (2008) found that if parents are to be engaged and students successful, the change must focus on changing the school, not the students and parents.

Latino parents are like all parents with regards to how they view the school, their comfort levels, and their willingness to participate in school related activities. Meier (2002) writes by recognizing the simple act of respect and trust for one another speaks volumes to how Latino parents and students perceive their place in schools. Practices regarding school impacts relationships and creates life altering experiences for Latino students.

As noted by Lambert (1998):

It is through relationships that we can understand and respect each other's experiences, values, and aspirations. Within such authentic relationships, our self-concepts and world views nestle and evolve. We can make public and discuss our fundamental beliefs when we know we can count on others to respect us for who we are, regardless of our differences.

Acknowledging one another and creating a transparent school culture can demonstrate these acts. Chrispeels (1996) conceptualized five types of parent and school relationships: (a) two-way communication; (b) support of the child, family, and the school; (c) learning about each other and how to work together; (d) sharing teaching responsibilities; and (e) collaborating in decision making and advocacy. Evidence shows a strong connection when these types of involvement are present. Hickman (1996) found that achievement, attendance, attitude, and continuing education are indicators of school

and home connections. Creating relationships is a vital part of changing school culture to meet the needs of Latino populations.

The ability to bring about change requires moving from parent involvement to authentic relationships. Hanson and Lareau (as cited in Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) noted:

> All students deserve a sense of value, worth, and esteem. No individual is willing to begin a new experience without some level of trust. Culturally aware schools strive to create a community in which everyone has a voice. Ethnically diverse families living in poor socioeconomic conditions often face sustained isolation from the school culture, which can lead to miscommunication between parents and school. (p. 21)

What Schools Need to Know

Maneuvering through school can be challenging for Latino parents and students (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). Latino students look to the adults in their lives not only for a quality education but for guidance throughout the educational process (Thompson, 2008). Education for Latino students is much more than academic. Lumpkin (2007) asserted that the richness of the educational experience comes through actions that reflect care. Vigilance to Latino students' experiences can provide new avenues for educational experiences. Creating a "common purpose" requires educating the whole child. The report, *Issues and Strategies for Teachers that Work with Students and Families of Hispanic Origin* (2002) identified the following beliefs that teachers view as responsibilities in educating the whole child:

- Open the doors to learning

- Help students get an education

- Help students grow academically

- Facilitate language acquisition

- Enable students to do their best

- Help students feel comfortable communicating ideas and developing ideas

- Help students be successful in a multicultural society

- Help students that are limited in English

- Intervene in the educational process to ensure the academic preparedness of all students

- Provide all possible opportunities to students to learn academically as well as socially

- Help students have high and realistic expectations

- Enable students to realize that they are a contributing culture

- Help students take pride in learning their language

- Make students feel that they belong here

- Help and support students to become successful citizens

- Advocate for students' emotional and academic needs

- Encourage students to set goals and help reach goals

- Provide a safe, secure educational environment in which students are free to learn

- Assist students and parents in overcoming their fears of the educational process itself

- Help students learn to believe in themselves, develop self-worth, and strengthen self-concept

- Help students and parents communicate with adults working in schools

- Mediate between school and home

- Help students transition into the English speaking community

- Show students the opportunities available to achieve in our society

- Help students understand that there is a bright future for them

- Show students by being be a role model

- The beliefs in educating the whole child isn't limited to academics but is filled with engaging practices

The implementation of any strategies requires looking at the diverse nature of the students (Ramirez, 2003). A caring atmosphere removes barriers by promoting the development of student and teacher self-confidence and growth (Shields, 2009). As noted by Shields (2009):

> Schools must teach students both how to grow individually and how to recognize their common humanity, offering an opportunity for them to live and learn in equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial environments and to create a society founded on similar principles.

Latino parents and students are dealing with their own struggles (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Teachers must understand learning depends on the abilities of Latino students to draw connections to what they already know. By taking a closer look at students' families, teachers would gain a better understanding of the needs and development of their students (Ramirez, 2003). Teachers should capitalize on language and culture rather than viewing these as disadvantages.

What Latino Students Need

Relationships can only develop when we purposefully acknowledge the presence and importance of Latino students, recognize their needs, and understand their individuality (Noddings, 2005). Students will never trust schools or open themselves up to hear what teachers have to say unless they sense that they are valued and respected (Boyntan & Boyntan, 2005).

Most Latino students have experiences that conflict with the expectations in rural schools (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008). Understanding Latino student needs can help teachers provide a purposeful education guiding students to their own destinies (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008). Latino students know when teachers sincerely care about them. Actions are demonstrated through understanding cultural differences and acknowledging the richness of experiences students bring (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Students know when they are recognized, understood, and respected for their unique abilities and interests. Close relationships with teachers lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Positive relationships support students' adjustments to school and contribute to their social skills (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Developing caring dispositions opens the possibilities for authentic transformation. Supportive and trusting relationships among students and with teachers enhance Latino students' sense of belonging and academic achievement. Teachers who experienced close relationships with Latino students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, were more self-directed, and more engaged in the learning process

(Birch & Ladd, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004). Schools can do much to create and support those relationships (Darling-Hammond, 1997). When students feel supported and nurtured; we create an environment of educational wellness, moral and social development (Comer, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 2004). Ultimately students experience more positive outlooks, develop life skills, and improve academic performance (Comer et al., 2004).

The *President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans* (1996) identified the following characteristics for reaching students:

- Provide learning experiences that reflect individual cultures' learning styles and perceptions of competition, group welfare, sharing, motivation, and success.

- Encourage and support the development of bilingual programs.

- Immerse students in a variety of written and oral language activities that are meaningful, relevant, and functional in a pluralistic society.

- Treat all students fairly and establish a democratic.

- Expect the best from all students. Do not assume minority students perform less well.

- Group heterogeneously to enhance self-esteem and promote ethnic interaction.

- Demonstrate daily the necessity of democratic values and attitudes, a multicultural education philosophy, and an ability to view events and situations from diverse ethnic perspectives and points of view.

- Recognize as a myth the belief that culturally diverse parents and families do not care about their children's education.

- Encourage cross-cultural friendships and social interaction, cooperation, and socialization among boys and girls in the classroom, on the playground, and in the community.

- Address the special problems that culturally diverse parents and families may face, such as language difficulties and misunderstanding the U.S. school system.

- Acquire factual knowledge about learner differences such as culture, race, ethnicity, social class, and gender and commit to having educational experiences reflect these differences.

- Arrange classroom so that it reflects cultural diversity in bulletin boards and on the walls, and in selection of artwork and artifacts on display.

Relationships with Latino parents and students can provide a better understanding of the needs of both (Ramirez, 2003).

What Latino Families Bring

Latino parents do not understand the actual power and influence they hold. They bring cultural resources and strengths to the school, yet are devalued in education process (Guerra & Valverde, 2008). In this study, Latino parents hold the power of majority.

A strong case can be made that together Latino parents and teachers can establish practices that build relationships and greatly influence the instructional experiences of Latino students. Furthermore, principals and teachers should capitalize on the language

and culture Latino families can share. Christensen (2008) described an approach to

education. His work is not through an educational lens but through innovative practices.

In his book, he identified four high aspirations for schools:

- maximize human potential.

- facilitate a vibrant, participative democracy in which we have informed

  people.

- hone the skills, capabilities, and attitudes that will help our economy remain

  prosperous and economically competitive.

- nurture the understanding that people can see things differently—and that

  those differences merit respect rather than persecution.

Christensen's (2008) focus on innovative change offers opportunities for bridging the

divide between traditional schooling and customized learning. Creating conditions for

success in schools is critical in meeting the needs of diverse student learners. As noted by

Carolyn Shields (2009):

> Although many schools are failing Latino students, others are serving Latino
> students and families well. One way to serve Latino students is to embrace
> students' cultural experiences creating a positive exchange between Latino
> students and teachers. Democratic schools reflect similar values and strive to level
> the playing field to actively overcome barriers to the success of all students.

Another way to promote Latino students is through educational experiences that

are engaging and interactive (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Carrier, 2005). Culturally

responsive teaching creates meaningful educational experiences that benefits Latino

students by encompassing differentiated methods of instruction. Culturally responsive instruction does the following:

- improves the acquisition and retention of new knowledge by working from students' existing knowledge base,

- improves self confidence and self-esteem by emphasizing existing knowledge,

- increases the transfer of school-taught knowledge to real-life situation, and

- exposes students to knowledge about other individuals or cultural groups (Rivera & Zehler, 1991, as cited in Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Schools much teach students both how to grow individually and how to recognize their common humanity, offering an opportunity for them to live and learn in equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial environments and to create a society founded on similar principles. It requires developing critical awareness, reflection, analysis, and action. Democratic schooling must tip the scales toward equity so that all citizens have the opportunities and benefits of a deeply demographic society (Carrier, 2005; Curtin, 2006).

The most successful practices in serving all students include changing school practices to improve student outcomes (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

Neither Latino students, nor their parents understand the idiosyncrasies of schooling (Larson & Ovando, 2001). Cotton and Wikelund (2001) found that Latino parents can't clearly define their roles in the educational process. Because Latino parents believe the school is responsible for the academic education of their children, they may interpret their involvement as interfering (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Relationships add

much more to the instructional experiences of students. Teachers need to spend time developing relations of trust, talking with students about issues that are central to their lives, and guiding them toward greater sensitivity and competence across all the domains of care (Noddings, 1995). All students deserve a sense of value, worth, and esteem.

Conclusion

Culturally aware schools strive to create a community in which everyone has a voice. Leading researchers have found that when schools work with parents, everyone involved benefits—students, families, and schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). When parents are invited to participate at their children's schools, the involvement leads not only to improved educational experiences for students, but also leads to increased school engagement (Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2005).

Embracing Latino parent involvement provides an opportunity for the best of both worlds. Not only are parents sincere in the desire for academics, they believe in strongly in a moral and ethical partnership between school and home. Principals and teachers are provided with the academic and social support that is often lacking in public schools. Latino students enter school with strong parental influences. Schools need to draw more on Latino households' funds of knowledge capitalizing on practices that involve strategic home/school connections (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Connecting with Latino parents can create positive involvement and interactions that are beneficial to all.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This dissertation was a case study of one rural North Carolina elementary school. The problem this study addressed was the practices that built relationships between Latino students and their parents, and one school; and the impact of relationships on instruction. Two primary research questions were explored:

1. What are the practices that build relationships?

2. What impact do relationships have on instruction?

My goal was to become an active learner who can share in-depth stories from the participants' views (Creswell, 1998). Researcher Joyce Epstein (2001) framed the need for this study by stating, ". . . if we continue to encourage and conduct research on families, schools, communities, and their connections, we will build a stronger knowledge base and develop new ideas about improving policies, practices, programs, and results" (p. 563).

Why Qualitative Research?

As a naturalistic paradigm, qualitative research promotes inquiry within natural settings and allows the researcher to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Wolcott, 2001). This case study attempts to add merit to qualitative practices. Wolcott (2001) writes that case studies describe "routine and

problematic moments and meaning in individuals lives." A researcher attempts to build a

complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and

conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998). Implementation of case study

allows for the exploration of practices that build relationships and improve instruction for

diverse student populations. Sharan Merrill (1998) notes:

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situational relationships in their
> uniqueness as part of a particular context and interactions. This understanding is
> an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the
> future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for
> participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for
> them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in the particular
> setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others
> who are interested in the setting. The analysis strives for depth of understanding.
> (p. 6)

Why Case Study?

Although there are limitations in case studies, the strengths outweighed such

limitations. According to Collins and Noblit (1978),

> field research better captures situations and setting which are more amenable to
> policy and program intervention than are accumulated individual attributes,
> Second, field studies reveal not static attributes but understanding of humans as
> they engage in action and interactions within the contexts of situations and
> settings. (p. 26)

The significance of relationships was informed by the voices of participants, each

having rich experiences to share. Each person has a unique story, unlike any others. This

is particularly true of Latino students and families. Yin (2003) described a case study in

two ways. First, a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life

context. Second, a case study has multiple variables of interest, and sources of evidence. Identifying and understanding the dynamics that build relationships and inform instruction can enhance opportunities for Latino parents and students, as well as teachers and principals.

Prior research has focused primarily on the Latino culture (Carger, 1997; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995). Additionally, a great deal of research has focused on Latino dropout rates (Fine, 1991; Gandara et al., 1998; Lucas et al., 1997; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002; Secada et al., 1998). As cited in Jasis and Ordóñez-Jasis (2004), research on Latino parent involvement tends to focus on the disconnect between schools and homes including cultural differences and the lack of communication (Auerback, 1995; Dornbusch & Glasglow, 1996; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2004; Valdes, 1996).

In this study, the of Latino parents, teachers and the principal identified and defined the practices that built relationships within the school culture. Latino students informed the practices that impacted instruction within the classroom setting. Finally, a part of this case study explored unknown dimensions that emerged from data collection.

This study protected the confidentiality of Latino students and parents. Pseudonyms were used to protect the individuals. All information collected remains confidential. Permission was obtained from the school system prior to conducting the research.

Additional Influences

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) wrote the researcher cannot understand a given case without knowing about other cases. This case study allowed for investigation of unknown

dimensions that emerged from data collection. Emerging unknown evidences created the

need for collection of additional data to substantiate or disprove new dimensions.

Understanding the dynamics between Latino parents and their children, and the school

generated evidences that promoted or disproved the educational experiences of Latino

students in rural North Carolina. The school experience shared can add to the body of

knowledge informing rural schools in the need for relationship building leading to quality

instruction. Intrinsic interest in this case study created understanding that is important

within the "researcher's world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). A commitment to practices

that educated Latino students must include school experiences moving beyond issues of

race, ethnicity, and class. The study identified relational practices that impacted

instruction. Practices that promoted social, cultural, and educational opportunities for

Latino students were vital to the development of this study. Therefore, success referred to

students' challenging established systems and beliefs demonstrating social, cultural, and

academic success. It is relevant to point out that academic success was the primary factor

in defining success. Data gathered from participants during the study expanded the term

"success" by unveiling additional ideals and beliefs identified by Latino students and

their parents, and teachers.

Key Terms

The study was bounded by some definitions of key terms as follows:

Student Success—For this study, the primary factor of student success was the

North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) test.

North Carolina EOG—A test given in the state of North Carolina that measures proficiency in reading and math in Grades 3 through 8.

Student Discipline—For this study, this was operationalized as the number of times that a student was referred to the office for a violation of school rules and policies.

Student Attendance—For this study, this was operationalized as the number of times that a student is either present or absent from school on a given day or for a given period of time.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—The expected amount of progress on state mandated tests each year in various subgroups as outlined in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

School Culture—The shared customs, norms, and beliefs that define the actions of individuals in a school building.

Contextual Factors

The study is bounded by several contextual factors as follows:

1. The participating school in this study has a poverty rate of 93.6%.

2. The school selected has a Latino population of 93%.

3. The school is located in a rural county in North Carolina.

Assumptions of the Study

This study was bounded by a set of assumptions that guide the research and include:

1. Assessment data from the North Carolina End of Grade tests are valid and reliable.

2. Actions that are successful in one rural school in North Carolina can serve as a model for other rural schools.

3. Transformation of a school culture can be shaped through the practices between the school and the home.

4. Culture can be understood by interview, observation, and document and artifact analysis.

Research Setting

The purpose for the selection of a rural, North Carolina elementary school was based on several parameters. First, my research interest was in the promotion of instructional opportunities for Latino students. This interest evolved from my own experience as a principal and the challenges faced by newly enrolling Latino students and parents. The reality was clear that not all rural school principals or teachers understood the dynamics of teaching diverse students.

The study site selected was based on Latino student enrollment numbers and school data collected through the North Carolina Accountability Reporting System. The study site is within my home district. There were several schools in all geographic areas of North Carolina that had increased Latino enrollment but few had actually analyzed the data or shared practices that enhanced the educational experiences of Latino students. Most importantly, I sought out data that demonstrated some type of success of Latino students and examples of home to school relationships within the Latino community.

From my experience, students from the study site demonstrated recognizable difference in social and academic experiences. They represented a desire for success.

When compared to native students, Latino students held their own academically. These

acknowledgements created my desire to learn more about factors that lead to the practices

surrounding relationships and the impact of relationships on instruction. The study site

continues to meet required federal, state, and local sanctions while demonstrating

practices that foster relationships (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

(hereafter referred to as *NCDPI*), 2011). The ability to provide rigorous instruction while

building relationships led me to the selection of the study site.

Midpoint Elementary is a rural, K-5 school serving 405 students. The current

recorded demographic makeup of the elementary school is 93% Latino. The free and

reduced lunch population is 93.6%. Historical data reflects significant demographic shifts

over a ten-year period. School enrollment data recorded Caucasian and African American

student enrollment as the only two ethnic groups in the school until the 1990s. Latino

student enrollments grew tremendously in a short span of time, actually doubling the

number of students attending the school (North Carolina Student Information

Management System, September 02, 2010). Even with rezoning and the opening of a new

school in 2008, Latino students remained the majority at the school and make up 93% of

the population.

Demographic shifts in student populations have not created a change in the

teaching population at Midpoint Elementary. Table 1 provides an overview of the teacher

retention rates at the school.

Table 1 represents teacher retention rates at Midpoint Elementary. Teachers

leaving Midpoint Elementary within the 1-5 years retention range were the result of

transferred based on funding deficits or out of district moves. Teachers leaving Midpoint within the 21-30 years of service range were the result of district level promotions or retirements. As is evidenced by the teacher retention percentages, Midpoint did not have high teacher turnover rates. Ironically, the school has the least diverse teaching staff in the district.

Table 1

Teacher Retention Rates

Years of Experience	Retention Rate
1 to 5 years 97%	97%
6 to 10 years 100%	100%
11 to 15 years 100%	100%
16 to 20 years	100%
21 to 30 years	**95%**

Source: North Carolina Human Resources Management System

School accountability models are not sole indicators of Latino student success. However, in this study, academic growth was a primary factor in the selection of the study site. One single academic component is not representative of the social and emotional growth made by Latino students at Midpoint Elementary. North Carolina end of grade test results demonstrate fluctuation patterns of academic success for Latino students.

Data from 2001-2002 indicate Latino students performed at 51.4%. A three-year trend recorded Latino student achievement steadily increased each year from 2001-2002

to the 2003-2004 school years. Five-year comparisons have shown Latino students

performing within 10 to 12% points of Caucasian students. Compared to African

American students attending Midpoint, Latino students continue to perform an average of

12 to 20% higher on standardized tests (North Carolina Report Cards, 2010).

Furthermore, Latino students at Midpoint outperform district and state Latino

populations.

Table 2 provides an overview of Latino student data for Midpoint Elementary

School. The data reflected declines in Latino students' achievement results for two

consecutive years prior to 2007-2008. Early observations included changes in the North

Carolina End of Grade Mathematics tests as well as the scripted *NCLB* initiative

"*Reading First.*" The standardized test data presented opportunities to discover additional

key concepts. The decline in the 2008-2009 test scores could not be explained. When

compared to state data, it is evident that there was an overall state decline during the

2008-2009 testing results. Latino student data do not reflect circumstances that impact

proficiency. Factors that create deficits in academic performance and life situations are

not measured by standardized tests. Yet, proficiency percentages record noteworthy

improvements.

Federal and state standards create real issues for struggling schools. Midpoint

Elementary isn't an exception. Midpoint Elementary did not meet federal requirements in

one of 23 target goal for the 2006-2007 academic year. That target was African American

students. The onset of the *NCLB* mandates required offering school choice to all students.

No Latino parents elected to have their children transferred to another school within the district under the choice offering.

Table 2

Midpoint Elementary Latino Student Data

Academic Year	Latino Student Population Grades 3-5 Percentage Proficiencies	State Latino Achievement Results
2000	41.0%	24.3
2001-2002	49.0%	51.4
2002-2003	51.0%	64.1
2003-2004	54.0%	76.9
2004-2005	60.0%	68.6
2005-2006	63.0%[*]	47.1[*]
2006-2007	67.0%[*]	58.6[*]
2007-2008	71.0%	70.3
2008-2009	50.8%	48.9

* denotes declines in academic results (Data collected from NC Report Cards, 2000-2010)

Research Participants

The participants in this case study included Latino students and parents, teachers and the school principal at the study site. Table 3 provides an overview of the number and types of interviews and observations.

Table 3

Participant Process Table

Participants	Selection Process	Participation Level
Students	9 participants (2 males, 2 females, 2 migrant, 3 varied language ability levels)	1 Focus Group Interviews 1 Individual Interview
Teachers	1 teacher (0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21-30 years)	1 Individual Interview 1 Focus Group Interview 3 Observations
Parents	12 parents (2 parents per grade levels K-5)	1 Focus Group Interview
Principal	Assigned to school	3 Interviews 3 Observations

Student Participants

Latino students were selected based on multiple criteria. Selection for this study began by securing grade level, class lists of all Latino students in grades 3-5 attending Midpoint Elementary School. The first students matching the research selection criteria became potential participants from the lists. A total of nine students participated in this study including: two males, two females, two migrant students, and three participants with varied language abilities as demonstrated on language acquisition tests identifying them as English Second Language learners. The selection provided a cross section of varying ability and grade levels, experiences, and identifications. The criteria did not exclude student participants from falling into more than one category with regards to

special populations identifications. Rather participants represented the overall student

population.

A spreadsheet of the students selected as potential participants was developed by

the school's data manager. To select participants, I began with the generation of the

names of potential participants. The school data manager completed the spreadsheet

information of potential participants. The spreadsheet included student name, parent or

guardian name, grade level, teacher, physical address, mailing address, and contact

information including email and telephone number. Potential student participants were

provided informational packets to take home to parents or guardians in Spanish and

English. A brief description of the study, researcher contact information, a parent consent

form, a student assent form, and a response of interest in the study was sent with each

potential participant. Through the school notification system, the data manager contacted

the parents of potential student participants with a telephone message in Spanish and

English reminding them to return the interest response and survey within a ten-day

period. At the conclusion of ten days, a column was added to the spreadsheet identifying

interested students with parent consent to participate. Because one alternate was selected

in each category, more than nine students wished to participate in this study, the principal

narrowed the selection of participants to balance each grade level.

Teacher Participants

Teacher selection process was based on the following criteria: one teacher with no

more than five years teaching experience, one teacher with six to ten years teaching

experience, one teacher with eleven to fifteen years' experience, one teacher with sixteen to twenty years' experience, and one teacher with twenty-one to thirty years' experience.

Other factors such as race, gender, ethnicity or grade levels taught were not a part of the selection criteria. The rationale for this decision was that the school remains limited in teacher diversity.

Parent Participants

Miles and Huberman (1994) write that a researcher is not only sampling people but settings, events, and processes. Potential parent participants were selected by grade level teams. Two parents per grade level were invited to participate for a total of 12 participants. An overview of the case study for interested parents was held prior to a parent night at Midpoint Elementary. Consent forms were secured for researcher compliance. The nature of this study called for the researcher to thoroughly explain and demonstrate over sensitivity to the IRB process and procedures. Translators were available to assist with presentation of information and completion of necessary forms. Status with regards to citizenship of Latino residents was not a factor in this study. The need for confidentiality and voluntary withdrawal was emphasized throughout the meeting. Once consent forms were complete, the researcher recorded the necessary information and forms were placed on file by creating an additional spreadsheet with parent participant information.

Principal Participant

The principal was interviewed three times during this study. Three observations were a part of the study. School observations led to additional opportunities to observe

the principal engage with teachers, Latino parents and students. Extensive conversations were a part of my visits to the school.

Data Collection

Creswell (1998) visualizes data collection as interrelated activities that gather good information. The protocol for data collection was drawn from multiple sources of information including document and artifact analysis, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and observations. Case study documentation along with Institutional Review Board approval allowed the data collection process to begin.

Interview types varied and expanded dependent upon the subjects and the information provided. Each focus group or individual interview began with a review of the study and the consent to participate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Due to the nature of this study, it was important to make certain that participants were comfortable with the process. Participants who experienced discomfort in a focus group or individual interview setting were provided opportunities for additional interview site and type location.

Student Participant Questions

At the suggestion of the principal, I interviewed student participants during extended day sessions. Interviews were designed in two ways: (a) two focus group interviews, and (b) one individual interview. Student participants were assigned to one of two focus group interview sessions and responded to the following questions:

- Tell me about your school.

- What are some things that your teacher does that you like? What are things s/he does that makes you want to learn?

- Why do you try hard in school?

- Does your teacher believe in you? How do you know s/he cares? Do people count on you in this school?

- How do your parents help you to learn?

- Would you change anything about this school? What are three things you like? What is one thing that you like here that you wish another school would try?

- What are the grownups like here? What are their jobs? Do they expect a lot out of you?

- How does your school work with your family?

- What are some things you would like for me to know about your school?

Answers to these questions were recorded during focus group interviews and individual interviews. The responses were transcribed at the conclusion of each focus group and individual interview session.

Teachers Participant Questions

Teachers working at Midpoint Elementary School were selected based on years of experience. Participants attended an initial meeting to hear about the case study. Those agreeing to participate received the necessary forms to complete.

Table 4 indicates selection criteria for this study; the selection process for teacher participants was based on the recommendation of the principal through demonstrated

actions and analysis of data. Consideration was given to teachers wishing to participate

once approved by the principal.

Table 4

Midpoint Elementary Teacher Selection Process

Teachers selected	Experience
1 teacher	1+ years
1 teacher	6+ years
1 teacher	11+ years
1 teacher	16+ years
1 teacher	21+ years

Source: North Carolina Human Resources Management System

Teachers in the school were interviewed once as a focus group and once

individually. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) describe the need for focus group

interviews as a way of capitalizing on richness and complexity of group dynamics and

communal knowledge and practice. The intent of the focus group interview was to

discover the real world perspectives from the teachers. Capitalizing on the collective

knowledge of the focus group provided perspectives that may not have been shared

individually.

Yin (2003) tells potential researchers that interviews are an essential source of

case studies as most case studies are about human affairs. Well informed respondents

provided insight into relevant information. Individual interviews allowed for

confirmation of evidences or discover contradictory information. Individual and focus

group interview dates and times were scheduled to discuss the following questions.

- Tell me about your school culture.

- Describe the focus of your work at Midpoint Elementary School.

- Can you talk about the impact of the changing demographics and how you
  view your role as an adult working in this school . . . with such a shift in the
  overall student population?

- Is this a student centered school? What characteristics make a student-
  centered culture?

- What is the role of Latino families in the education process?

- What has been the most challenging for you in teaching Latino students?
  What is the most rewarding?

- Tell me about your teaching.

- What is your teaching style?

- How have you changed your teaching to meet the needs of Latino students?

- Describe your hopes and expectations for students.

- Describe what I will see when I visit your classroom.

- What will the students tell me about their learning experience here?

- What do you believe are the most significant practices that impact Latino
  students?

At the conclusion of each focus group interview and individual interview session,

recorded answers were transcribed to better assist the researcher in identifying themes

and patterns. The need for clarification and respondent validity was documented and discussed with participants for accuracy. A total of three observations of teacher participants occurred. Debriefing sessions occurred to further clarify the raw data as necessary.

Parent Participant Questions

Parents were interviewed as a focus group with interpreters present. The focus group interview was offered as a seminar selection for parent participants. Questions were asked in Spanish and English with translators assisting as needed.

- What is your role in your child's education? What is the school's role?

- How are you involved in your child's education?

- How important do you believe family engagement is for student success?

- Can you tell me about school's culture? What can you tell me about your role in the school culture?

- How comfortable are you visiting and speaking with teachers and the principal?

- Is the school providing a high quality education for your child?

- Do you believe that the adults at Midpoint Elementary sincerely care about your child?

- What are some practices that you believe are making a difference for your child?

- Do you believe that your child is being challenged?

- Is your child being prepared for higher education?

- Overall, are you satisfied with the school? Do you have ideas that you feel would make the school more inviting to parents?

Open-ended interview question design provides for collection of intensive data (Maxwell, 2005). Listening to the collective voices of Latino parents provided rich information that may have otherwise been overlooked. Additional opportunities for individual interviews were scheduled upon request. Individual interviews were encouraged. Citizenship and residency status guided the decision to request only one focus group interview with Latino parents. Observations and conversations provided additional information for the study. Responses were tape recorded and field notes recorded as dictated by the reaction and engagement of the interviewees.

Principal Participant Questions

Principal interview questions began the process of understanding the practices at Midpoint Elementary School. The following guiding questions were asked during the first interview. The two remaining interviews provided an opportunity to debrief with the principal to clarify responses, interpretations, and observations.

- Can you describe how you view the school culture?
- What do you believe are the most significant practices that lead to Latino student success?
- How do you prepare faculty and staff to teach to your diverse student population? Can you talk to me about the school culture and any changes that have occurred?
- What are the strengths that Latino families bring to this school?

- Tell me about family engagement at Midpoint Elementary. What is the difference in the role of parents here as compared to less diverse school populations?

- Does your school share a philosophy in teaching and learning to Latino students?

- How do you want Latino families to view Midpoint Elementary?

- What are some of the most important ways you lead others to embrace Latino students?

- What are students going to tell me about Midpoint Elementary? What are parents going to tell me?

- Are you willing to speculate on what the findings will be in this case study with regards to successes and areas of priority?

Interview responses led to greater analysis during observations. It was essential to the study that principal responses were evident practices rather than superficial perceptions.

<div align="center">**Document and Artifact Analysis**</div>

Document and artifact analysis are non-intrusive sources of data. School newsletters, teacher notes, school forms, polices, discipline referrals, volunteer logs, event participation, meeting minutes, and attendance records provided insight into the overall school climate. School event records were critical in illustrating practices that communicated the level of relationships and opportunities for involvement.

Finding unique perspectives though artifacts requires analysis of significant documents. Artifacts provide an insider lens to the beliefs, values, and morals of the school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Recurring themes, concepts, and ideas were analyzed.

Observations

Observations provided opportunities to view behaviors, interactions, and draw inferences providing new perspectives that were not a part of the interview process. Maxwell (2005) writes, "While interviewing is often an efficient and valid way to understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw from inferences about the perspective that you couldn't obtain relying exclusively on interview data" (p. 99).

Observations occurred from an outside observer perspective. Observations were random throughout the instructional day and into the evenings. Additionally, observations included shadowing participants in grade level classrooms, within cultural arts periods, during meal times, and during afternoon extended day. Various settings and times allowed for additional opportunities to view interactions. Interactions of Latino families visiting the school throughout the day were observed and recorded in field notes.

School events clearly conveyed the levels or relationships established with Latino families. Teacher practices demonstrated contrasting degrees of relationships with Latino parents. Interactions with students and families beyond the school day provided further data. Multiple unknown dynamics emerged during school event observations.

Observations provided a broader understanding of the relationships, attitudes, and practices at the school.

A reflection journal was used to record significant findings, interesting patterns, and issues that guided additional clarification and refinement.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) encourage researchers to collect and analyze data simultaneously. Data collected were compiled immediately at the conclusion of each observation including reflective notes to expand on the data collection during subsequent visits. Field notes were detailed and recorded immediately following each observation as a way of identifying patterns and seeking unknown but relevant data. Recording reflections occurred at the conclusion of each visit.

Data Analysis

In this single case study, data collection and analysis were conducted in a continuous and simultaneous manner. Organizing interview transcripts and observation notes was the first step in compiling the data. Interview tapes were reviewed prior to transcription. During the listening and reading process, notes were prepared to record data patterns and develop connections between relationships and instruction.

Maxwell (2005) suggested managing data by breaking it into pieces and grouping it together to use during later stages of analysis seeking specific targets in the data. He presented three categories for data analysis; organizational, theoretical, and substantive (Maxwell, 2005).

Substantive categories were a part of this study in identifying patterns and ideas that did not fit with patterns found in other categories. Emergent connections of patterns

and themes continued to be analyzed as additional data were collected. Substantive categories were developed based on the participants' beliefs about Midpoint Elementary School. Substantive categories created a general theory about participants' thoughts and beliefs regarding practices and instruction. Substantive categories allowed for ideas that were overlooked.

Coding was used to identify themes, patterns, and categories (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The experiences of Latino students and parents added to the identification of patterns in understanding of relationships. The impact of such discovered factors can uphold the belief that instruction is significantly impacted as a result of relationships. Unknown dynamics emerged during data analysis providing for additional exploration and discoveries. These "points of tension" added new dimensions to the research (Janesick, 2000).

Researcher Subjectivities

Conducting the study within the district in which I am employed created opportunities and potential drawbacks. Established relationships created the potential to enrich or impede research design. Having some knowledge of the school, the principal, and teachers, created a less intrusive point of view for teachers. There was a sense of transparency throughout interviews and observations. Separating research from the other aspects of the school limits major source of insights, hypothesis, and validity checks.

Potential drawbacks could have been researcher subjectivity because of the familiarity of the school. Additional concerns included preconceived beliefs about instruction and knowledge of some teacher practices at the school. These concerns did

not alter my objectivity. However, concerns were to the principal and the teachers. The principal and teachers held some of the same apprehensions. Multiple strategies for data collection created a more impartial review of the data. Maxwell (2005) states that the fundamental process in all of these tests is looking for evidence that can challenge the conclusion of the study or make the potential threats implausible. In order to ensure the validity and establish the trustworthiness of this study, I adhered to the following strategies.

Intensive, Long-Term Involvement provided more complete and varied types of data about specific situations (Maxwell, 2005). Familiarity with the school principal and teachers allowed for easier access into the school setting. Prior visits and observations provided greater access and the capacity to move beyond the surface data.

Rich Data Collection and Analysis provided a revealing picture of what is going on in the study setting (Becker, as cited in Maxwell, 2005). Positional authority required knowledge of the school data as required by federal, state and local mandates. Ancillary data collection and analysis allowed for the comparison of formal knowledge with reality. A quantitative study would record hard, numerical data. Prior awareness of the formal, quantitative data of this school led to more objective analysis of the factors and considerations that provide a richer explanation of the school, its culture, and the people involved.

Respondent Validation created an avenue for feedback about the data and conclusions drawn from respondents (Hammersley and Atkinson, as cited in Maxwell,

2005). Familiarity with the school created the need for respondent checks. The need for objectivity led to the request for additional clarification and interpretation.

Triangulation from a diverse range of individuals and settings using a variety of methods was a part of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Triangulation did not automatically increase validity (Fielding and Fielding, as cited in Maxwell, 2005). To prevent researcher subjectivity, observations were varied as a response to get a better understanding of relationships in different settings around the school. Participants were a part of focus group and individual interviews to provide more open communication.

Using these four strategies, the data from this study was shared for interpretation and emerging themes creating greater clarification of the findings based on a community of voices and interactions within Midpoint Elementary School.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it established an understanding for schools to use in enhancing the ability of schools to build relationships with Latino parents and students. Likewise relationships impact instruction. This study examined relationship building practices at one rural, North Carolina school. The research provided recommendations for other rural North Carolina schools attempting to develop a model for Latino students. Creating environments where customary structures are challenged, where caring relationships are allowed to flourish and where conversations can take place opens doors to new possibilities (Ayers et al., 2000).

Conclusion

Midpoint Elementary continues to have positive and negative outcomes with regards to educating Latino students. The physical school setting is not that different than any other rural, North Carolina school setting struggling to educate Latino populations. The uniqueness of Midpoint Elementary came from the collective attitudes and beliefs shared within the school family. Understanding these dynamics significantly added to the body of knowledge with regards to educating principals, teachers, and Latino students and their parents. The impact of the study guides other rural schools to reflect on practices within the school setting that can build relationships and impact instruction.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIBING THE DATA

Midpoint Elementary School and Its People

This dissertation examined one elementary school in the Midpoint region of rural North Carolina. Latino students attending the school experienced steadfast success. The problem this study addressed was twofold; the discovery of specific practices that foster relationships and to what extent relationships influence instruction.

The following questions were explored:

1. What are the practices that built relationships?

2. What is the impact of relationships on instruction?

The first research question sought to discover specific practices of the principal, teachers, Latino students and parents that led to relationships. The second research question focused on the capacity of relationships as a means to differentiate instruction.

A brief history of the school is followed by descriptions of the principal, teachers, Latino students, and Latino parents. Interview overviews are shared.

Midpoint Elementary Historical School Profile

Midpoint Elementary School is a kindergarten through fifth grade school. Generations of Caucasian students attended the original school. Prior to 1968, the school served first- through 12th-grade students. Desegregation began in the community in 1968 when a new high school was opened. African American students began attending

Midpoint Elementary in the spring of 1969. The school housed first through eighth grades until kindergarten became a part of the school in 1975. The opening of the first middle school in 1993, created an opportunity to remodel the school. The newly remodeled school served pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The school remained consistent in membership of Caucasian and African American students until the mid-1990s. Temporary Latino enrollment increased during seasonal periods. Soon after, Midpoint Elementary began experiencing rapid growth nearly doubling in student enrollment. The remodeled school was designed for three hundred students. Enrollment had doubled to over six hundred students by 2004 (School Information Management System).

Increased enrollment led to the opening of a neighboring school during the fall of 2008. District lines were redrawn to decrease enrollment numbers at Midpoint Elementary. Student enrollment temporarily decreased from 619 students to 282 students (School Information Management System). Presently, Midpoint Elementary enrollment totals four hundred eight students. Latino students make up 93% of the student population. The economically disadvantaged rate is 93.6%. Enrollment numbers progressively increase and change weekly during the school year. Registration numbers demonstrate significant increases at the beginning of each school year and temporary enrollments throughout the school year (North Carolina Window on Student Education Report).

Participant Profiles and Interview Overviews

Midpoint Elementary Principal Profile and Interview Overviews

Principal Don Allen grew up in a middle class Caucasian family in a nearby town and attended neighboring schools in the area. He appeared much younger than early-forties. He explained that he had no intention of working in education. After one semester of college, he dropped out and returned to the area. Two years later he realized that he had made a huge mistake. Returning to college, he studied to become an elementary teacher. Mr. Allen completed student teaching in second grade at Midpoint Elementary. Upon college graduation, he was hired as an English as Second Language teacher. He taught third grade for six years at the school. During that time, he earned his Masters of School Administration. He became the assistant principal in 2000 remaining in the role for five years. He was named principal, mid-year during the 2004-2005 school year.

One of the many challenges Mr. Allen faced was the school's lack of accountability for English Language Learners. He began conversations with the faculty but there was no real sense of urgency to serve Latino students and their parents. Artifact analysis revealed that Latino parents attended traditional school events, but the relationships stopped there (rosters). As described by Principal Allen:

> Latino parents would attend school events but there was no sustained plan in place to teach their children. We had no plans to create an inclusive school culture even though our school community was majority Latino (D. Allen, individual interview, February 28, 2011).

As with any new principal, Mr. Allen experienced some resistance upon his appointment to the principalship. The previous principal had been at the school for over

twelve years. The former principal was a delegator allowing for the development of a

strong power base of teachers. According to Principal Allen:

> We have worked hard to build the school culture and support parents and
> students. A priority that I believe will be identified as a downfall will be the lack
> of Latino teachers. The school has a wonderful faculty but lacks diversity. (D.
> Allen, individual interview, September 09, 2010)

Teacher Profiles and Interview Overviews

Unlike the transient population of Latino families, the teachers working at

Midpoint Elementary School represent stability. While the influx of Latino students

required the hiring of new school personnel, the majority of teachers working at the

school remains consistent.

Ms. Black—1 to 5 years. Ms. Black grew up in a neighboring community but

was not familiar with the work at Midpoint Elementary prior to her arrival. She was a

teacher assistant for six years prior to completing her teaching degree. This is Ms.

Black's second year at Midpoint. She was transferred to the school during the budget

crisis from an affluent school within the same district (Monroe County Schools Personnel

Report).

During the 2009-2010 year, Ms. Black taught second grade. Prior to moving to

Midpoint, she experienced limited teaching success. At Midpoint, she demonstrates great

potential. She attributed her new found success to her understanding of the strength of the

family atmosphere and her passion for exploration and creative learning (individual

interview). Her second grade class consisted of 100% percent Latino students. The

students demonstrated the largest amount of growth when compared to other second

grade classrooms within the school during the 2009-2010 school year (mClass Reporting

System). Ms. Black was hesitant to talk about the success of her students. She quickly

gave credit to the second grade team, the students and parents. She stated:

> The people make this school. When I came here, I was overwhelmed. I didn't know the support level of Latino parents and students. I didn't want to let them down. The minute I met them, I knew we would work together and we have. We support one another and that makes the difference. The parents are learning supporters. They are willing to work for their children and expect their children to work extremely hard. (K. Black, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Mr. Auman—6 to 10 years. Mr. Auman has taught fourth grade for seven years.

He completed a Masters of School Administration in 2009. He has no desire to leave the

classroom to pursue a career in administration. Mr. Auman noted:

> When we had a tour of the school, we walked by the cafeteria. I looked at all of the faces—big and small—and my heart raced. I knew this was the place for me. The number of Latino students sold me even more. I had been here as a student and the school is not the same. Everything is different with the exception of the faculty and staff members. (P. Auman, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Mr. Auman is a National Board Certified Teacher and worked as a trainer for

North Carolina Teacher Academy. He is well respected as a teacher leader in the

building. The relationships within his classroom and throughout the school were evident.

Ms. Vance—11 to 15 years. Ms. Vance grew up across the street from Midpoint

Elementary. She taught third through fifth grades for six years before teaching migrant

students for two years. Three years ago, she became an instructional coach. Due to

funding, Ms. Vance transitioned into a third grade classroom during her eleventh year of

teaching. Ms. Vance continues to use her knowledge as a former migrant teacher and an instructional coach in her daily instruction.

Her passion for her students and their parents led her to run for the town board to help guide the integration process for Latino families. She noted:

> Growing up across the street gave me more of a vantage point to actually see the changes in the town and school. The diversity has been amazing in a good way. Our dwindling town seemed like any other small town only with Latino students. One thing I have learned through the process is that children are children regardless. We take them from where they are as far as they can go. The learning does not stop when they leave here, middle school, or high school. The journey is never ending. The parents believe it more than the students. School means more to these parents and students. They are respectful of others and they value education. I cannot validate with some scientific jargon saying that they want education and success more than other cultures, but I believe they do. Learning means something. (L. Vance, focus group interview, November 09, 2010)

Mrs. Richards—16 to 20 years. Mrs. Richards began her teaching career at Midpoint Elementary eighteen years ago. She had taught second grade until the 2008-2009 school year. She experienced her first year of teaching third grade during the 2009-2010 school year. Her class had no diversity. All of her students were Latino and all scored 100% proficient on the end of grade tests (North Carolina Testing and Accountability Report). Mrs. Richards is well known in North Carolina as a teacher leader. She spent weekends and summers helping new teachers at the North Carolina Teacher Academy. Even though Mrs. Richards quickly pointed out that she is not yet forty, she represented the nurturing mother figure to the faculty and Latino families. The respect she carries in the community and the school is known by all. She mentors others to move beyond traditional practices and encourages tailored instruction to meet the

needs of individual students (observation/interview). Her style isn't reflective of a

powerful woman or a master teacher, but that of a loving and caring individual who leads

others to new ways of thinking. She approaches teaching from the homes to the school.

Mrs. Richards explained that home is essential in individual student targets set each year

with students. "I visit homes prior to school starting and throughout the year to provide

resources for the parents" (D. Richards, focus group interview, September 23, 2010). Her

colleagues jokingly share that Mrs. Richards is nicknamed in the Latino community as

the "pizza lady" (focus group interview, September 23, 2010). Over three years ago, she

took pizza to a former student. Her goodwill gesture remains costly. Each time she visits

the students they expect pizza. "I've bought a lot of pizza" (D. Richards, focus group

interview, September 23, 2010).

Mrs. Wilson—21 to 30 years. Mrs. Wilson was completing her twenty-fifth year

of teaching. She has taught kindergarten through eighth grades. Her strength remains her

ability to teach students to read. Colleagues described her as "gifted" in teaching reading.

(E. Wilson, observation, October 6, 2010). "With hard work and the right teacher pushing

the craft, anyone wishing to learn to read can prevail" (E. Wilson, individual interview,

November 16, 2010).

Visits and observations in Mrs. Wilson's classroom demonstrated the trust and

respect Mrs. Wilson has established with the Latino community. Often Latino parents and

students would be learning to read with Mrs. Wilson (observation). When asked about

her reputation with Latino parents and their trust of her, Mrs. Wilson described her ability

to build trust and teach reading to students that others label disengaged, struggling, and

unwilling. "Nothing is farther from the truth of these students. They simply have to be willing enough to work a little harder to achieve the same results but on a delayed timeline" (individual interview). Mrs. Wilson explained:

> By fifth grade reading has been a subject instead of a skill for several years. By third grade, teachers can no longer afford to teach the foundational pieces of reading. Basic skills are not considered a part of intermediate grades. Once state assessments hit, teachers are busy preparing for higher level skills that are considered necessary for student mastery. I make every attempt to teach the basic primary skills and the intermediate skills. I do not teach content, I teach students first and content second. That is the only secret there is. We begin at the beginning and build on what students know. The same holds true for the parents I teach. It is all about creating an environment where reading skills flourish and are practiced daily. (E. Wilson, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Mrs. Wilson's relationships with Latino parents and students demonstrated her dedication to creating relationships with Latino families and her belief that relationships can lead to improved instructional activities for Latino students and their parents. Her colleagues and Latino families shared genuine respect and love for Mrs. Wilson and her gift of reading.

Student Profiles and Interview Overviews

Students were eager to share their stories and experiences at Midpoint. Student actions revealed the value of school and the importance of school in their lives.

Efrin—Grade 5 – Varied Language Abilities. Efrin began his public school experience at the age of six. He is eleven years old and completing the fifth grade. Efrin is outgoing and carefree. He was animated and somewhat comical. Occasionally, he would steer the focus group interview. Efrin's reflections are far beyond those of a typical eleven year old. Casually, he described his schooling experience. There were brief

enrollments at six schools across the United States. Eventually, Efrin's parents moved to the Midpoint community with extended family. The families along with his grandmother lived above an automobile garage. Efrin's father found consistent work allowing the family to move into their own home. This move represents the first time Efrin's family live in a single family household.

He enrolled at Midpoint Elementary when he was eight years old and entering third grade. The abruptness of the transitions left Erin with limited English and a tremendous learning gap. He stated that the other schools "didn't fit" (Efrin, focus group interview, September 23, 2010).

Smiling broadly, Efrin told about his schooling experience at Midpoint. "At my school my parents can use the library for books and the computer lab too! We come to my school for something all the time. I fit" (Efrin, focus group interview, September 23, 2010).

Daisy—Grade 4 – Varied language abilities. Daisy enrolled at Midpoint Elementary four months ago. She is one of six children in the household attending Midpoint Elementary. This is her family's first experience in the United States. The family lives with relatives that have been in the United States for over twenty years. Daisy's aunt and uncle own a grocery business and are involved with the school and community. Daisy appeared overwhelmed by the entire process. She shared the names of the teachers she studies with daily. Throughout the focus group interview, Efrin and Mayra assisted Daisy by translating or speaking to her in Spanish. She needed occasional

words to complete her thoughts in English. When asked how students know teachers

care, Daisy responded:

> Ellos quieren que yo lo intente y se quedan conmigo. Mi primer día, yo no quería
> venir aquí. Yo tenía miedo. La Sra. West y la señorita Jamie estaban en la puerta
> esperándome y a mis hermanas cuando mi tía nos trajo. Quería llorar y una de mis
> hermanas lo hizo porque teníamos miedo de que no sabría cómo regresar a casa.
> La Sra. West nos ayudó a encontrar nuestras clases. La señorita Jamie nos reviso
> todo el día. Ellas se tomaron el tiempo para trabajar con nosotros. Ellos nunca nos
> hicieron sentir mal. (Daisy, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

> They want me to try and they stay with me. My first day, I didn't want to come
> here. I was afraid. Ms. West and Miss Jamie were at the door waiting for me and
> my sisters when my aunt brought us. I wanted to cry and one of my sisters did
> because we were afraid we wouldn't know how to get home. Ms. West helped us
> find our rooms. Miss Jamie checked on us all day. They took time to work with
> us. They never made us feel bad. (Daisy, focus group interview, September 23,
> 2010)

The intensity of the instruction with Daisy became clear during a conversation

several months later. Daisy swung her arms and spoke in English as she described the

adults in the school.

> Ms. Furr stopped by the store to see us. She talked to my uncle and my mama.
> Some men from her church brought bunk beds. It is the first bed I ever had. Ms.
> Furr brought us covers. My covers are my favorite color of pink. Ms. Furr didn't
> have to but she did. (Daisy, individual interview, February 28, 2010)

Alberlardo—Grade 4 – Varied language abilities. Alberlardo loved meeting

new people. Respectful of his peers, he acknowledged and nodded in agreement with

others until one question was posed, "How does the school work with your family?"

Alberlardo noted:

The first day of school I was in another class, but Mrs. Chesley wanted me to be in her class so I moved. Mrs. Chesley has a new baby and my mama is home in the bed now. She is going to have a baby and can't be up or moving around. I am taking care of my little sister. Mrs. Chesley talks to me about having the new baby and she sends stuff to my mama. She comes by to see us and brings us stuff. (Alberlardo, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Mrs. Chesley created a powerful home to school connection. The relationship between Mrs. Chesley and Alberlardo's mother led to an increased interest in instruction. Alberlardo shares:

My mama makes certain I learn. I know everybody because my mama talks to everybody and is always asking them what I need to be working on to learn. Ugh! She comes to the parent resource center all the time and checks out more stuff for me and my little sister to use. My mama should want the same for herself that she wants for me and my sister. (Alberlardo, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Mayra—Grade 3 – Migrant. Mayra appeared to be a typical third grader. She attends Midpoint Elementary each year for short periods of time. Her visits last from a few weeks to a few months.

Mayra's participation added reality and a sense of place. She spoke very little regarding her parent's migrant status or their staggered return to Mexico. She spoke freely about Midpoint Elementary. More than anything, Mayra wants to "stay" (Mayra, focus group interview, September 23, 2010). Migrant work takes her family across the eastern and mid-western states. She quickly points out that Midpoint is her home. She explained:

When people ask me where I am from I tell them here. I want to be like those kids on TV that have a mama and a daddy and a house. I want not to move and to stay

at this school with my family. Every year when my brothers and me get back it is like a like a holiday celebration. Everybody wants to know about my family and Mr. Allen remembers all our names. Mr. Allen says, "Mayra I've missed you girl and your desk has missed you." I always pick the teacher I really want and you know what, every time that is where my desk is waiting. It is like magic. (Mayra, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Mayra shares that everyone wants to hear about her travels. Mayra shared that the teachers "care a lot about me and don't want me to be sad about moving all the time" (Mayra, individual interview, February 28, 2010). "Mr. Allen and Mrs. Perez tell me that I can visit those other schools but this is my home and they will be right here when I get back. That is what I love about this school" (Mayra, focus group interview, September 23, 2010).

Jorge—Grade 3 – Migrant. Jorge enrolled at Midpoint Elementary this year. Midpoint is his first experience in public education. He was schooled by his grandmother. Jorge sat quietly and intently listening to others during the focus group interview. Raising his hand to speak, he described how he knows his teacher cares by the extra time spent making certain he understands reading and math concepts. Jorge explained:

Mrs. Griffey found books for me in English and Spanish. I love to read and I love to use the Play Aways. I am not so good in math. Mrs. Dawkins tried to help me in math but it is hard for me. I love school and there is nothing I would want to change. (Jorge, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

"What about the food?" students shout. Jorge didn't have a complaint about the food either. "I love the meatball sandwiches. They are my favorite" (Jorge, focus group interview, September 24, 2010).

Timetao—Grade 4 – Male. Overly timid describes Timetao. He is not representative a typical fourth grader. Smaller than his classmates; his hair is slicked back in a style much like James Dean. He appeared as a miniature adult in a child's body. His collar was buttoned to his neck as were his sleeves. Timetao didn't wear tennis shoes but black wing tips. He was meticulous unlike boys his age. His participation in the focus group provided limited insight into his thoughts regarding his schooling experience. Others in the group spoke of Timetao's soccer skills and truly idolized him. He emerged as the silent hero to the focus group. Timetao's entire demeanor changed when we shifted to soccer and school. Timetao provided the highest praise for his teachers and their work with him. He described his teacher as always trying to present information so kids are interested.

> Mr. Auman takes the time to show me when I don't get something. That is what makes me try so hard to do well. He told me there is nothing wrong with wanting to know more about something than others do. He counts on me to learn and he never gives up on me even when I am ready to give up. Last Saturday, he brought his girlfriend to see me play soccer. He was proud of me. Mr. James, our PE teacher told me to keep working and I would probably end up with money for college and that I need to live in Italy and play soccer. He tells us to "dream big." (Timetao, focus group interview #2, September 24, 2011)

Timetao wasn't the only student in the room to complete the sentence. A few of the older students joined in unison. Later, Timetao shared his respect of Mr. Auman but he was particularly fond of his English Second Language teacher. "Ms. East counts on me to be here and do my best every day. She is my favorite teacher. I have been in her class since kindergarten. She takes extra time to help me" (Timetao, individual interview, February 28, 2010).

The alarming recognition that Timetao remained an English Second Language learner was surprising. Timetao struggled with reading. Mr. Auman had addressed the concern multiple times and had referred Timetao as a potential candidate for the Exceptional Children's Program. By the conclusion of this study, Timetao was identified as a special needs student. Mr. Auman expressed harsh words to Ms. East as he believed that her relationship with Timetao and his family prevented her from accessing other avenues of support. Moreover, he felt Timetao had been cheated at the expense of Ms. East' desire to hold on to traditional instructional practices (Observation, November 12, 2010).

Daniel—Grade 5 – Male. Daniel introduced himself as a skate boarder and an only child during the focus group interview. Other participants starred oddly after his introduction. By far, Daniel appeared to be the most Americanized student participant. He didn't appear to value the Latino heritage of which other students spoke. Instead, Daniel spoke about skate boarding. School for Daniel is a place to see his "new" friends. "I only come to school to hang out with my friends" (Daniel, focus group interview, September 24, 2010). He didn't make a connection to any of the participants and appeared to be a free agent. During the interview Daniel described the school in three statements: (a) "every grown up here cares," (b) "the teachers will not let you give up," and (c) "they don't judge" (Daniel, focus group interview, September 24, 2010). The participants shook their heads in agreement but didn't interject beyond Daniel's thoughts. We talked about one thing that each of them would like to see change about the school. Cafeteria food was the most urgent change needed for the others. Daniel answered:

I would like to change the way kids' judge. Kids that look like me are judging me and my family. My friends that are black and white don't judge me. The people in this school have helped my family. They have not judged my family. My dad says the school is our family and the people here are our true friends. The teachers keep pushing me and will not let up on me. (Daniel, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Iris—Grade 5 – Female. Iris had a striking vocabulary and loved to display her knowledge. She was very protective of smaller students and involved in every aspect of school. As noted by Iris:

I love coming to school. We are always doing something different and fun. Today we had our pictures made eating oranges. Mr. Allen is trying to get grant money for the school to have healthier snacks. Things like that make our school fun. My sisters and brothers say once you leave Midpoint learning isn't fun anymore. (Iris, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Iris and the others were asked to elaborate on things that make the school special and what other schools could do to make instruction meaningful. Iris responded:

Our teachers differentiate so we have different activities that help us increase our potential. We keep our progress in data notebooks in my class. Everyone has a data notebook and we monitor how we are doing on predictive assessments so we know and our teachers know where we are. (Iris, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Others joined in with Iris and explained how they use data to improve. They demonstrated ease describing the process of student-led conferencing. Iris shared that middle and high school is mostly lecture. Her sisters and brother do not participate in small group instruction. Her sisters told her that middle school is boring. As described by Iris:

They hate school and wish they were back in elementary school. My brother says he only goes to high school to play sports and because our father makes him go. He hates his courses there. He says the "classes are boring". I don't want to be like them and hate school but I hated school in third grade. I had a terrible teacher here for the first three weeks of school. She would fuss and yell all the time and she gave everybody bad grades. We did worksheets all day. She made kids cry but not me. I don't know why she left but I prayed every night and then she was gone. I hope that is not what it is like at middle school and high school. Their teachers should make learning fun like how we are learning now and not how they want to teach. (Iris, focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

Maribel—Grade 3 – Female. Maribel's participation in the focus group interview shocked several of the student participants. Maribel boasted that she was always in trouble during kindergarten prior to coming to Midpoint. It was a prized possession that she used to drive a wedge between herself and others. "I get in trouble during free time, and at afterschool things. I always get in trouble when we have a substitute teacher" (Maribel, focus group interview, September 23, 2010). She thrived on negative attention. Maribel was the interjector in the group. She was very quick to argue a point and correct the other participants. Yet, Maribel spoke of respect. When directly asked about relationships and instruction, Maribel was adamant, "Teachers should teach everyone and be fair" (Maribel, focus group interview, September 23, 2010). The older boys spoke of the student responsibilities to be fair to teachers. It was obvious Maribel's reputation is known across the school. Maribel replied:

I know how to be fair! Mr. Allen was disappointed in me when I was mean to a substitute. It made me cry but he didn't get mad. He asked me what we should do about what I did and I had to come up with an answer so I stopped being mean, but I drink beer. (Maribel, focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Everyone burst into laughter, even Maribel. While Maribel was anything but the perfect child, her behavior continued to improve as did her grades.

Parent Participants and Interview Overview

Mrs. Robleto. Mrs. Robleto attended Midpoint Elementary as a student in the early 1990s. She is from a large family that remains active in the community. She attends classes at the local community college and hopes to become a nurse. She volunteers and is instrumental in making Latino families aware of school events. She encourages Latino parents to take advantage of opportunities that will help them and their children succeed.

The Latino community placed great trust in Mrs. Robleto and her family. She vocalized the role of parents and the school in educating children:

> The school's role is to partner with parents to create a balanced teaching and learning environment. Experiences help students to learn. When I was a student here I had the experience of farm work and so my experiences were limited. But, if I would have been able to figure out how the life I knew fit with the school, it would have been easier for me to figure out my place or how do I say, maybe how I fit. Now I understand that I could have added a lot because I probably saw more places and experienced more than other kids in the school. When I was a student everything was new for all of us. Mostly the school was white and black. Everyone is from somewhere and looking back I wish I would have talked more and told about me, my family, and my culture. I have learned that we need to move students forward using home as a learning resource combined with book sense. (Mrs. Robleto, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mr. Perez. Mr. Perez moved to the community two years ago. He has four children at Midpoint Elementary.

> I work in Robertson about 20 miles from here. I moved my family in with my brother's family and enrolled 3 of my children at that school. I decided it was best for our children to return to this school. They learn here and they are happy here. There are things for them to do. The school invites parents to things all the time.

Last year, my wife and I completed a parenting course here. Some of the things we learned about were helping your children in school, gang information, what to ask at parent conferences and we took some other classes. Everyone that attended the Latino classes ate dinner together. At the end of the courses, the parents were honored with a celebration and we had a graduation ceremony. Mr. Allen took our picture with our children to show off our diplomas. It was very emotional to us and meant so much. (Mr. Perez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Ms. Reyes. Ms. Reyes has two boys at Midpoint Elementary. She was raising the boy alone but didn't elaborate. She provided limited information about her background. Ms. Reyes had little time for involvement in the school but communicated with teachers often. She noted:

I want better for my kids so I try to help them see that they need to study hard and behave. I take time to work with them. What has helped me the most here is the GED class at night. The school has a place to keep my boys so I can go to class and know that my kids are safe. They like knowing that I am taking classes at their school. They also like seeing me learn and try to help me study. We study together. I want to get a better job so I can spend more time with them and hope I can do more at the school. We want to stay here. Since we moved here, we don't have many people we know other than a few people who work in the school and the people I know at work. They have helped me. My kids are learning and expected to do the best they can. Their teachers help them when I cannot. It makes me ashamed at times but their teachers tell me the only shame is if I don't finish my GED. (Mrs. Reyes, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Hernandez. Mrs. Hernandez has a very pleasant demeanor. Her kindness and sincere love of her children was touching. She speaks fluent English and had more formal education than many other Latino parents. Her parents made certain that she was educated in public schools in Texas and California. She married a farmer and together, with her parents, they own a small farm. Her husband runs a landscaping business as well. She attends every school sponsored event and she volunteers in the parent resource

center providing information and resources that parents may find useful. Although she appeared shy, often she translates at meetings or volunteers her time to sit with non-English speakers during parent offerings. Mrs. Hernandez stated:

> The success of my children and Midpoint Elementary as a whole comes from balance and respect of culture and academics and the people who work or come here. Family is as important to the success of our students as teachers or the principal. They are with our children a few hours a day. We are with them when they move up to the middle and high school. It isn't just the school's job to keep up with our children. It is up to us to know how our children are doing and what they are doing in school. If we don't bother to keep up, we can't blame the school when something goes wrong. (Mrs. Hernandez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mr. Neito. Mr. Neito ran a local bakery. He had four children ranging from twenty to eight years old. Mr. Neito's family moved to the Midpoint in the early nineties. He described the experience in this way:

> We didn't understand school and the school didn't understand us. My oldest was just beginning school during that time period. It was bad. We came here as strangers. The school was not prepared to take on Latino students. I am not saying anyone was wrong or right. We didn't know what to do. It didn't take long to begin changing, but it wasn't easy. I served on the parent committee for the first four years. It was hard. On the one hand we were viewed as invaders. In our eyes we believed we were outcasts and unwanted. None of that was true. I am proud of the progress made. Each time another of my children became school aged and began coming to school, I could see improvements from parents and the school. (Mr. Neito, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Rodriguez. Mrs. Rodriguez has experienced highs and lows with her children. She is the mother of five children with, "five different personalities and learning abilities" (Mrs. Rodriguez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010). It was obvious that Mrs. Rodriguez had two sets of standards for her children's education. She had one set of

expectations for her children and another set for the school. "The school has done a good job of challenging my children. I have always felt good about the care of the school until Roberto started kindergarten" (Mrs. Rodriguez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010). Mrs. Rodriguez kept her youngest son at forefront of the focus group interview. She spoke regarding her discomfort in communicating with the school and her dissatisfaction. Mr. Romero asked Mrs. Rodriguez to elaborate.

> I have never had problems communicating about my children. There have been times that I disagreed with a decision made by the school about one of the children but the problems were minor. I get called by the school too much about Roberto and I get tired of it. I have been called more since he started school when he was five than all the other children together. (Mrs. Rodriguez, focus group interview, October 5, 2010)

Mr. Romero tactfully moved the conversation forward by gently saying to his sister in law, "like others in the room, I have seen Roberto in action." He continued:

> I think the school wants the same things for Roberto that you do. What do you want to see happen for Roberto? I hope you want him and the other children in his room to learn. You are a big part of making that happen. Others have received calls also, some good and some bad. (Mr. Romero, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Everyone nodded while Mrs. Rodriguez glared at her brother-in-law. She didn't vocalize her anger. "The problem communicating with the school stems from Roberto's bad behavior that bothers me. I know I need to work with his teacher and Mr. Allen if I want this problem corrected" (Mrs. Rodriguez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010).

The selection of Mrs. Rodriguez as a parent participant came from through the growth of her other children. Ironically, Mrs. Rodriguez was selected by two grade level

teams due to the success of two of her older children. She continues to have issues with

the school, Roberto's teacher, and the principal.

Mrs. Alvarez. The mother of two boys, Mrs. Alvarez moved into the Midpoint

district during her sophomore year of high school. She excelled academically and took

courses in the areas of science, mathematics, and nursing. Graduating in the top ten of her

class she continued her education at a regional college where she studied nursing.

Mrs. Alvarez worked part time as a translator at a neighboring elementary school

until she completed her nursing degree. Unlike most school employees, Mrs. Alvarez

selected for her first born to begin pre-kindergarten at Midpoint Elementary. She noted:

> I believe in this community. It has been good to my family. We like being a part
> of the school. My husband has his mother and his two brothers that live here. On
> my side of the family there is me and my two sisters. Family is important to us.
> My younger sister took my place as the translator at the other school when I went
> into nursing. My oldest sister is a bank teller right across the street. All of our
> children come to this school because it is home. The same is true for my
> husband's brothers. The ladies at the school teased me about not taking Michael
> with me to preschool. I completed my degree in pediatric nursing. I work across
> the street from a private school in Ashton. There are many public schools in the
> area but I want my children to know their school and that this is their home. (Mrs.
> Alvarez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mr. Romero. A grandfather, Mr. Romero and his wife have raised three adult

children. His youngest daughter, in her late twenties, was seeking an advanced degree in

business. While she was away, Mr. and Mrs. Romero were raising their granddaughter.

The Romero's own and operate a grocery store and restaurant under one roof. Mr.

Romero appeared as anything but a grandfather from central Mexico. He and the entire

family seemed more representative of a traditional Italian family. They were warm,

funny, and personable. Much like her grandparents, Eliza was slender and tall. Her

grandfather introduced the entire family. The majority of focus group participants knew

the family well. Mr. Romero beamed with pride saying, "I am here as an acting parent

representing Sella while she is away finishing up her MBA. Eliza is staying with us" (Mr.

Romero, focus group interview, October 05, 2011). Everyone appeared sincere

acknowledging Sella's decision to return to school.

Mr. Romero's maturity demanded respect. Perhaps the wisdom he brought or

having three educated adult children represented credibility. He represented knowledge.

Education worked well for his family. The long range view he shared made others realize

a greater reality. Mr. Romero explained:

> A good education is the only way. It is right here for your kids. All you have to do
> is take the opportunity, set the expectations high, and stay involved. I tell you that
> my kids are proof. We didn't and still don't have material wealth but we always
> stayed involved in our kids school lives. That is all you have to do. Young lady
> (Ms. Reyes), your kids are seeing you trying to do better for them. They are
> learning from you the value of education. It pays off. My kids didn't get to attend
> school here. We lived in Austin for over ten years before moving here. It was
> easier to travel back and forth. Our kids went to a few schools there, one school
> made a big difference. The other schools did not involve parents at all. Those
> schools made my wife work even harder with our kids. We knew if we left it to
> those schools, our kids would not be prepared for life. In a way, I should thank
> them for opening our eyes to bad schooling versus good schools. No one had ever
> made them aware that they were dissatisfied with how they treated kids and
> families. I have not been involved weekly in Eliza's education. It has been a while
> since I have been in an elementary school. From my perspective, this school
> promotes all kids. You that have not seen your children through high school and
> to college of any type do not realize what a great school can do for your kids. I've
> come here less until this year. I probably came to the school twelve times a year
> until this year. Not being here as much until now, I had forgotten how much this
> school does for kids and parents. You must want something better for your kids or
> you wouldn't be sitting here, the teachers must or they wouldn't be here in the
> night, and the lady asking the questions wouldn't be here if she didn't see
> something worth talking to others about here. This school is good for the soul. I

sincerely believe Eliza is happy and challenged. She is getting the education she needs here. (Mr. Romero, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Castro. Mrs. Castro was the mother of three girls and expecting twins. Her English was somewhat broken as she interchanged Spanish and English. She giggled as she told the group that she and Hector decided to have one more child. "Nosotros rezar por un niño, pero ahora tienen un niño y una niña en el camino. Parece que va a venir a la escuela por un tiempo" (Mrs. Castro, focus group interview, October 05, 2010). "We prayed for a boy, but now have a boy and girl on the way. It looks like we will be coming to school for a long time" (focus group interview, October 05, 2010). Embarrassed by her own words, she blushed until everyone expressed excitement. Mrs. Castro's focus is her family. Mrs. Castro doesn't leave her home without her children and her husband. She notes:

> Estamos con mucho gusto de venir a esta escuela, Estoy involucrada en la escuela y me encanta ver las actividades que mis hijos participar. Hay algo para todos. No manejo, pero nosotros vivimos suficientemente cerca como para que yo vaya a todo patrocinado por la escuela y la iglesia. Llegando a un Nuevo lugar daba miedo. Nosotros no sabiamos lo que pasaria y todavia no lo se. Todo lo que los dos sabemos es lo que queremos nuestras hijas a ser parte de una Buena escuela y aprender. Estamos muy agradecidos todos los dias a esta comunidad (Mrs. Castro, focus group interview, October 05, 2010).

> We are very comfortable coming to this school. I am involved at the school and love seeing the activities that my children participate in. There is something for everyone. I don't drive but we live close enough for me to come to everything sponsored by the school and the church. Coming to a new place was scary. We didn't know what would happen and still don't. All we both know is that we want our daughters to be a part of a good school and learn. We are grateful every day to this community. (Mrs. Castro, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Flores. Mrs. Flores appeared much older than her years. She was a conservative dresser without the flare of American styles. Mrs. Flores represented a grandmotherly type farmer's wife. Her hair pulled in a bun fell loosely by the end of the day, an indicator of a day's work. Her dress, a short sleeved smock was covered by a light sweater. Sharing that she had seven children didn't seem strange to others in the group. She and her husband were searching for an avenue to become a part of the school community but remained guarded about their careers, home, and family. Mrs. Flores appeared proud of her children, but didn't want to get overly involved in a conversation about her children as much as she was interested in speaking about the school. Mrs. Flores became emotional as she expressed all the school has done for her family. In broken English, Mrs. Flores stated:

> I have to trust the school. These people haven't done anything but help me and my children. Their education is in the hands of the school. I don't know how to help my children with a lot of their school work so I have to trust the people that believe in them. We try to be good parents. The only way we know to help our children is to come to the school and do what we can. We want our children to be proud of us. (Mrs. Flores, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Vargas. There were six children in the Vargas family. The oldest child attended the middle school with the remaining five children attending Midpoint. Mrs. Vargas shared comments that focused more on the need for parent participants to be engaged in school events. She shared her view of Midpoint Elementary through the struggles and abilities of her children. She described the differences in her children by their learning preferences. She wants each teacher to view her children as individuals and recognize that her children are as different. According to Mrs. Vargas:

I overreact if my children don't do well. My children learn differently like teachers don't teach the same. Unless I stay on top of my children, I would not know if there is a problem. I have attended a lot of the parent meetings and have learned a lot about what my kids need to know. They are going to college and need to take advantage of everything the school has to offer. That is the message that parents and families need to hear. They need to know if they don't come to the school and aren't involved, they are cheating their children. (Mrs. Vargas, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Mrs. Soto. Mrs. Soto's only child attended Midpoint. During introductions Mrs. Soto immediately pointed out that Patricia is and will be her only child:

I believe the number of children matters. My parents faced the hardships of raising seven children. I love my big family, but the demands placed on my parents took away from us getting to go to the school and other places as a family. I think we all missed out on a lot. The amount of attention and care for us took all my parents' time. My parents valued education, but the opportunities were not there for them. I thank the school and the people here for all they do. They provide so much for parents and students. They go beyond what should be expected. They love the students and are kind to the parents. My child is being prepared to set goals and become anything she wants. This school is what a real school community looks like. There are ups and downs and many struggles for most parents, but these people make things easier with a smile on their faces. They are sincere in what they stand for. That is what I like about this school. It is the realness of taking situations, trying to make them work and moving on. School people cannot make everybody happy all of the time, but even when people get mad or complain they know deep down that their kids are getting a good education. (Mrs. Soto, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS: PRACTICES THAT BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN MIDPOINT ELEMENTARY

In this chapter, practices that most significantly impact relationships with Latino students and parents are introduced. The principal and the teachers share their beliefs and attitudes regarding the practices that create a school community. Practices identified in this chapter include student relationship building practices, parent relationship building practices, and school relationship building practices.

Practices that Build Relationships with Students

Practice #1—Creating a Classroom Community that Respects and Honors Diversity

Teachers recognized the importance of establishing trust and respect within the classroom setting. The inclusion of culturally relevant practices created diverse learning opportunities for all students. Teacher participants viewed their students as unique individuals influenced by their culture and community. The teachers recognized that students differ in the way they learn, not in their ability to learn. Traditional practices downplay the abilities students bring and ignore students' learning needs.

As a class family, students became accepting of differing perspectives and open to new ideas and beliefs. Relationships alone cannot lead to improved academic achievement. Nevertheless, the underlying premise of relationships within the classroom community created greater levels of involvement and a greater desire to participate. Student ownership was evidenced through the development of activities that fostered

relationships and promoted active engagement. Consequently, the emotional, social, and academic needs of students who were a part of classroom communities demonstrated higher levels of growth, were more social, and displayed less behavior issues.

In this study, the concept of classroom communities was not as important as the practices that fostered teacher and student relationships (see Table 5). Table 5 provides an overview of the practices.

Table 5

Strategies that Promote Relationships

Strategy	Students	Parents
Build relationships with parents and students	Provide choices in learning	Provide continual and relevant learning opportunities
	Promote student ownership	Include parents in school planning
	Develop classroom norms	Encourage volunteering
	Listen and talk to students	Create a parent resource center
	Develop mission statements	Provide translators
	Laugh and love teaching	Extend hours in the computer lab and media center
	Identify group and individual learning targets	Plan activities and events that embrace diversity
	Celebrate success	Engage parents as part of their children's learning
	Encourage risk taking	Invite parents to share their cultural knowledge with teachers
	Empower students	Recognize Latino parents as valuable resources
	Implement accountability models	
	Allow for self-ownership	
Be seen	Attend student programs, events, church services, and games	Visit homes and the community
	Attend school sponsored events	Attend Latino community events
		Plan and attend school sponsored cultural celebrations

Table 5 (cont)

Strategy	Students	Parents
Be Seen	Encourage students to join local community groups and volunteer	Participate with parents in school sponsored and community events
	Participate in students' cultural celebrations	
Communicate	Listen and talk informally with students	Take time to speak with parents
	Praise students for a job well done	Discuss student progress and instruction
	Write notes	Communicate goals
	Provide planners for student assignments and information	Provide information to parents in Spanish and English
	Nurture through guided instruction conversations	Listen to parents' desires and concerns for their child's learning
Establish classroom ownership and accountability measures	Promote autonomy through small group instruction	Invite parents to the classroom and school
	Allow for self and group monitoring	Provide a preview of instruction
	Promote a culture of success	Create a welcoming environment
	Demonstrate care	Vocalize appreciation
	Communicate learning targets and goals	Demonstrate respect
	Explain instructional choices and rubrics	Provide multiple ways to assist in the classroom
	Provide options for self-selected learning	Include parents' cultural funds of knowledge in the learning process
	Create classroom norms for learning and behavior	Invite parents to share with the class
	Create a classroom mission statement	
	Include culturally relevant instruction	

Source: Midpoint Teachers (2010)

A primary behavior that influenced teachers' desires to serve Latino students well was the true concern for the students. One teacher explained that students were family in the classroom community.

Mr. Auman noted the majority of the classrooms at Midpoint demonstrated components of classroom communities. Effective classroom communities were evidenced by the relationships between teachers and students. (P. Auman, interview, February 16, 2010). In his classroom, students wanted Mr. Auman to know about their lives, families, and experiences that shaped their interactions and behaviors.

One practice that lent to the creation of classroom communities was the sharing of cultural information during the introduction of new concepts. Teachers promoted sharing prior experiences and knowledge to create cultural awareness. This act allowed students to recognize the diverse experiences within the classroom community. Experiential limitations were not looked upon as a disadvantage by more proficient students. High functioning classroom communities revealed genuine interest in helping one another.

Students identified teacher personalities as an indicator of their willingness to communicate openly and achieve. Two character traits that students believed were important in the classroom communities were the love of teaching and laughter (focus group interview, September 24, 2010).

Another practice identified as critical to classroom communities was the teachers' willingness to listen. One observable practice was weekly classroom meetings. The students discussed a variety of topics during their class meetings. Decisions were made through collaboration and consensus of the class. During a third grade class meeting, the students discussed a walking field trip. They brainstormed ideas for the trip. Ms. Vance did not participate in the selection process. Her only requirement was a justification as to how the walking trip would improve their classroom learning.

The creation of classroom communities was evidenced in the practices and actions of the teachers. The personal care and academic welfare of the students reached far beyond routine issues or concerns. Teachers expressed pride in the social, emotional, and academic growth of their students. For teachers, the classroom community was important in how the Latino community viewed them as teachers and viewed the school. Evidences of the practices held by the teachers were demonstrated through the decline in discipline referrals, improved student growth, and the continuous cultural connections shared within the classrooms.

The principal reported that teachers' attitudes had improved when strong classroom communities were established. He stated teachers took more time to talk and listen , they were highly engaged in decision making efforts at the school, they were positive, and appeared happier in their work.

The creation of classroom communities remained a challenge for two primary teachers at the school. Both expressed their need to direct younger students and felt young children lacked the capacity to self-monitor. Opposite to this belief, four teachers from kindergarten and first grades had well established classroom communities. Students in these classrooms had set expectations and demonstrated far advanced social and academic skills.

In casual discussions, teachers shared stories of their students. The stories did not reflect negativity, but told of special moments and successes of their students. It wasn't uncommon for teachers from all grade levels to congratulate students on minor accomplishments.

Students acknowledged the importance of a sense of voice in classroom communities. They felt empowered by the informal conversations they had with their teachers and their capacity in the decision making process. (focus group interview, September 24, 2010)

According to students, their attitudes improved when they felt they were valued. It was clear through the statements of Latino students that they found value in the experiences shared at the school. Classroom communities were inclusive of all students.

Practice #2—Giving Student Ownership

The significance of prior experiences is important in the creation of bicultural educational environments. Researchers assert that there is too much emphasis on instructional practices and not enough on the perspectives of teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Further, they assert the importance of students' ideas, perspectives, and experiences as essential to student ownership.

Ownership was demonstrated in Ms. Black's second grade classroom. Parents and students were invited to share folk tales from their cultures. Legends, customs, and traditions led to rich discourse regarding beliefs, customs, and traditions. Experiential knowledge led to co-construction of the combined knowledge in the classroom.

Another practice that created a sense of ownership was demonstrated in Mr. Auman's classroom. Students were provided a preview of upcoming concepts. Mr. Auman assigned teams to partner on fact finding missions. The purpose was to provide peer support, exchange cultural information, and to create relationships. Every student

had something to add to the learning experience. Students exchanged cultural knowledge and created team connections that enriched the classroom.

Ms. Vance promoted student ownership through a facilitation model. As the facilitator, her role was to provide time for guided conversations and instruction. The students assumed the roles of self-directed learners. One student explained that the students owned the learning. Student selected assignments and rubrics led to motivated students and equal partnerships.

The promotion of student ownership created opportunities for students to participate in school based decisions. One example came from a group of students who disliked the school mascot. A student noted that a cub was not representative of the student body. A process was developed by the students to change the mascot. A new mascot was selected and adopted by the students. The students appreciated the acceptance of their ideas and the trust placed in them. The act demonstrated student ownership within the school setting.

Student ownership actually improved both the teachers' and the students' perspectives. Teachers habitually view instruction as the measurable result of a successful academic year. Rethinking measurable student growth in terms of academic, social, and emotional accomplishments constructs new ways of thinking about teaching and learning. In this study, teacher participants shared the practices that allowed for classroom ownership and accountability for results (see Table 5). Students felt trusted and empowered when they were responsible for specific projects and tasks. They exhibited pride in their abilities to make choices and to follow through on assignments and projects.

Traditionally, schools and classrooms are not neutral learning environments. Regardless of the classroom community or student ownership, requirements for learning and expectations driven beyond the school can monopolize classroom autonomy. Student ownership added a new dynamic to the school setting as empowering and equalizing acts for all students. Federal, state, and local requirements remain. Yet, student ownership serves to provide some flexibility and self-accountability for students.

Mrs. Richards stated that even the smallest acts promote ownership. One example she provided was the selection of a book for a report. She did not dictate the type of book or provide guidelines for the report. Students decided what they would like to teach the class more about. She stated the important lesson from the assignment was not the report, but the ability of students to become decision makers and problem solvers. Students demonstrated greater motivation when they held ownership in the school and classrooms.

Practice #3—Student Developed Expectations

There are a number of studies that uphold the value of teacher and student relationships (Coleman, 1998; Manke, 1997; McGlynn, 2008). Traditional approaches to schooling fail to call on students for their ideas about learning and behavior. One practice that built trusting relationships between teachers and students was the creation of classroom mission statements and norms (see Table 5). Teachers described the relevance of classroom mission statements as setting the tone of the classroom and establishing goals for learning. Students first worked individually to identify their beliefs about teaching and learning. Dialogue identified and shaped the practices that students believed

were critical to classroom learning. Student developed mission statements were prominently displayed in each classroom.

Student developed classroom norms replaced teacher generated rules. Norms described the students' beliefs about learning and behavioral expectations. Students worked as a team to set the tone of the classroom. Several students felt the creation of both the mission statement and class norms created a family or team atmosphere and created a sense of classroom community.

Teachers were supportive of student expectations. The teachers had great respect for their students. Teachers saw improved behaviors across the school when students set the expectations of one another. Additionally, teachers reported that students' attitudes demonstrated greater responsibility. Student driven expectations provided opportunities to share opinions about learning and behaviors. Students and teachers believed students play a significant role in the shaping of their classrooms and the school. Efrin termed this, "self-ownership." Students were serious in their beliefs that their efforts would improve their lives and impact students in lower grades.

The students felt strongly that because they were allowed to set the expectations as a team, failure to follow through would go against the entire classroom community. Iris expressed that her teacher trusted the class to set the expectations for behavior and learning. Failure would represent the entire class, not just one student. Iris continued by saying that class meetings were important to make certain everyone lived up to the mission and norms set by the students.

Practices that Build Relationships with Parents

Practice #1—Welcoming Parents

Successful teachers believe that parent involvement is the key to their children's success (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto & Rolón, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). There were demonstrated efforts to welcome and involve Latino students and parents. As with all cultures, interactions influenced relationships. According to Mrs. Robleto, "Latino parents want to be involved. Our involvement changes because of our comfort levels and trust in the school" (Mrs. Robleto, focus group interview, October 05, 2010).

Parents are often uncomfortable in the school setting. To create a welcoming and non-threatening environment for parents, several practices were implemented. A parent resource center was placed in the school lobby. Latino volunteers were available to assist parents with personal and school based needs. Several outside entrances allowed parents access to a computer lab and the media center. Volunteers were available to assist parents in these areas as well. Mrs. Hernandez stated, "The services have encouraged more parents to attend the school" (Mrs. Hernandez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010).

Another practice to welcome Latino parents was through providing opportunities for attending events at the school. Extended hours provided time for parents to visit and use school resources. According to Mrs. Perez:

> Our children are successful because the school makes sure we are a part of their education. We cannot attend many of the day meetings but we do bring our kids to the activities after work. We use the media center and the computer lab with our children and we come to all the parent nights. It is our job as parents. The school is a warm place. No one questions you. If you are of Spanish decent and move in and out of the area, you know about this school. (Mrs. Perez, individual interview, October 28, 2010).

The principal and teachers at Midpoint are sincere in their needs for parent partnerships. They know that all parents want their children to be successful at school. The willingness and openness to welcome parents and invite parents into the school was evidenced by the activities and events made available to parents.

Latino parents felt the principal and the teachers want them involved. They recognized the efforts made by the school to welcome them. Latino parents were appreciative of the translators, seminars, and assistance both in and out of the school setting. Latino parents felt the principal and the teachers were culturally sensitive to their needs and apprehensions.

Practice #2—Engaging Parents

The principal and teachers took great pride in practices that engage parents. Respect of Latino parents was evident in conversations. Villegas and Lucas (2007) suggest that outreach efforts to improve parent involvement must be culture-specific. Much like the students, Latino parents enjoyed visiting and participating at the school. The principal noted:

> Our approach in creating relationships has changed. Latino parents were invited to student conferences and school events but we were not maximizing partnerships with the Latino community. We realized that relationships are vital and necessary to the success of the school. (D. Allen, interview, February 28, 2011)

One practice to engage parents involved a grant funded project. The project included building of a stage for readers' theatre. The stage was built adjacent to the media center and a freshly planted butterfly garden. The new amphitheater project was titled, *All the World is a Stage*. As one parent volunteer explained:

Students and parents have access to the stage throughout the year including the summer months. Families come here often to use the playground and soccer areas. This will give them another place to enjoy at the school. (Observation, March 10, 2010)

Another practice that engaged Latino parents were the on-going learning opportunities provided by the school. Classes and seminars provided learning opportunities for Latino parents. Trainings encompassed parenting and life skills to assist Latino families. Support was available to assist Latino parents as they transitioned or settled into the school community. One noteworthy practice is the annual Parent University. Participants in this program attend classes weekly for three months. Topics vary depending on the needs of the parents. The most popular topics included purchasing a home, conversational English, and first aid training (Observation, September 15, 2010).

Classroom environments demonstrated the practice of team and family. How do so many dynamic personalities create success for Latino parents and students? Ms. Vance noted:

I involve parents in my class to the extent they feel comfortable and as much as possible. One father would volunteer all day if he didn't have to work. When the weather is bad, I can expect him to volunteer. He speaks little English but he does a wonderful job as the cultural expert. The students enjoy his taking time to work with them. The majority of my students are bi-lingual. They converse in Spanish with non-English speaking students. He is their security blanket. Another father is not at all comfortable in the class so I call on him for help in other ways. When you visit my classroom, you will see stations throughout the day. Stations are designed based on student data and instructional needs. The advantage of having parents involved allows me to focus on pulling students for guided instruction. I provide guided instruction daily prior to stations. Having parents involved allows for small group work. Having a Spanish speaking adult in my class is a luxury. (Ms. Vance, individual interview, November 09, 2010)

A shared philosophy of quality instruction, content driven practices, and culturally connected experiences created rich and engaging opportunities for students.

Latino parents felt confident in stating that the principal and teachers were accepting of all parents and worked diligently to make parents a part of the school. Teachers were viewed as loyal friends. They were referred to as role models by Latino parents and students.

There was much discussion of the opportunities for Latino parents at the school. Learning opportunities were specific to the life challenges they faced daily as residents in the area. For that reason, Latino parents were positive in their attitudes towards the school. Latino parents believed that the course offerings at the school provided motivation for parents. The school continued to increase parent participation during the study as they believed Latino parents were untapped sources in the school.

Latino parents viewed the school as an extension of their families. Unconditional acceptance expressed how Latino parents viewed the principal and teachers. Further, parents believed there was sincerity in the school's efforts. Latino parents had faith in the school, the principal and the teachers. They trusted and depended on the school to guide them as they maneuvered through unfamiliar challenges. Most Latino parents felt that teachers clearly communicated with them and kept them involved in the educational process.

As noted by Mr. Neito:

> The community became united because of the work of the school. This school reaches people beyond a neighborhood. The school has been involved in everything that has happened for the Latino community. We depend on the school

and they depend on us but not at the same level. They want us involved and provide many activities for families to attend. The gap I see surfacing is that the school continues to give more and we continue to take more. It shouldn't be that way. We should be the givers. (Mr. Neito, focus group interview, October 5, 2010)

Practice #3—Developing Home to School Connection

Practices that promoted the home to school connection were not isolated to the school setting alone. The immersion of the Latino culture presented additional opportunities for establishing home to school connections. One central characteristic that evolved from the analysis of the data was that relationships were often created with Latino parents away from the school setting. Invitations to promote relationships were not isolated to the school setting. School events were held at local churches, civic clubs, and around the community. Teachers frequently attended local soccer games, church programs, and celebrations (Observation, September 18, 2010).

One example of a collaborative event was the School's Great! rally. The event was sponsored by the town to promote involvement and relationships in the school. Regardless of socio-economic level or ethnicity, everyone was welcome. Held in a vacated parking lot, many Latino parents attended the event. Parents and students received school information, inexpensive educational prizes, and school supplies. Interestingly, Latino parents provided giveaways for the event as well. Latino parents provided teachers with daily school supplies for the classrooms and provided supplies for students.

Home visits were a practice that created a connection to the school. The willingness of the principal and teachers to go into the Latino community and visit their

students' homes often created an initial contact that led to parents' attendance at school functions.

Earlier studies identified discontinuity between the home and school (Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). This is not the case at Midpoint. A final characteristic gleaned from the data was the dependency on parent involvement at the study site. The principal was unwavering in his commitment to Latino parents. According to teachers, Latino parents are viewed as an asset to the school. Human capital brought by Latino parents enriched the school culture.

The principal and teachers demonstrated strong home to school connections. Observations verified that actions outside of the school led to the trusting relationships within the school. Likewise, the principal and teachers were viewed as extended family in the Latino culture. The practice of making home to school connections provided the initial communication needed for parents to feel invited and participate in the education process.

There was a realization by the principal and the teachers that the benefits Latino parents brought improved the culture and environment of the school. To be seen at Latino events, program, services, and in homes confirmed the attitudes of the principal and the teachers with regards to relationships. Teachers understood the importance of instruction. However, they recognized that without the support of Latino parents, student would experience fewer opportunities for understanding their worlds and learning of the new experiences ahead.

Practices that Build Relationships with the School

Practice #1—Emphasizing Multiple Channels of Communication

Involving Latino parents created opportunities to establish relationships in the school. Communication with parents was viewed as an important aspect of a child's educational progress. Parent communication involving parents in their child's educational process results in better scholastic achievement (see Table 5). When parents share their "funds of knowledge" with the school community, teachers get a better idea of students' background knowledge and abilities, and how they learn best (Moll et al., 1992).

One practice that led to greater communication with Latino parents was a yearly seminar, *Parents as Partners* led by Mrs. Richards. The seminar provided parents with guiding questions to ask when speaking with teachers about their children. She encouraged parents to visit and question often. Her session brought over one hundred parents to the school (sign in sheet, observation, September 15, 2010).

Latino celebrations were another practice that opened communication with Latino parents. One such event, Hispanic *Heritage Month* is held from September 15 through October 15. The month long celebration provides various activities. Parents and students have opportunities to learn more about historic events and the roles of famous Latinos in North America. The school provides a theme for the event each year. During this study, the theme was Latino cultural arts. The school provided community and family activities including entertainment, discussions, and networking opportunities. The goal of the annual event is to open communication with Latino parents.

The practices of announcements, newsletters, and telephone calls provided Latino parents with traditional communication. The communication did provide necessary and limited information to parents. However necessary, the principal and the teachers didn't view these means of communication as relevant practices that built relationships.

Communication between Latino students, parents, and teachers confirmed a direct link for success, motivation, and a desire to build relationships. The principal and teachers appreciated the efforts by parents to communicate with the school by non-traditional methods. Likewise, the outreach efforts of the school opened communication with Latino parents and was viewed favorably.

Latino parents described the options the school provided for communication. Translators provided school information to local Latino stores and churches. School announcements were a part of the weekly services and were posted in the Latino community. Latino parents were also provided with portable translators upon request to hear information in Spanish while at the school. Alert Now provided Spanish and English options for receiving telephone messages.

Latino parents appreciated that instructional information was available to them in the school's computer lab. The school also provided licenses that allowed parents access to school software and websites. The parents expressed that these efforts confirmed the principal and the teachers in their desire to openly communicate.

Practice #2—Embracing Mutual Respect and Care

Multiple studies highlighted the need for relationships between Latino parents and teachers (de la Vega, 2007; Moll et al., 1992; Zentella, 2005). The significance of

relationships was confirmed in both the qualitative data and the literature. Parents knew Latino students were well served at the school.

Common purpose as a practice led to respectful and caring relationships with The school displayed a clearly articulated focus for Latino student success. Much like Latino parents shared sentiments and hopes for their children. They also held expectations for the principal and teachers.

Demonstrated mutual respect and care upheld practices that led to greater cultural understandings (see Table 5). Latino parents viewed the school as the first place their community and children were welcome. Practices to promote the Latino culture were common within the school setting. Likewise, education offerings for parents provided a preview of rural North Carolina immersion. Specifically, Latino parents and students appreciated the efforts of the school to include Latino activities and celebrations, as a part of the school culture. They were pleased with the education their children were receiving. The common strand recognized by all participants was reciprocal knowledge and acceptance of differing cultures.

Another practice of mutual respect and care came through the actions that were observed or recorded multiple times. One such example was shared by Ms. Reyes. She stated:

> The difference at Midpoint is that we fit just like anybody else that comes here. That is what makes the difference. Nobody cares where you live or how much money you make. I'm finding out they don't care about the color of our skin. They care about teaching my boys and that is what is important to me. I'm not saying it hasn't been hard, it has. When we moved here I thought the school was pushy. Someone was always sending notes or calling to invite me to come to the school. One day, the principal and a teacher came to my house. My boys knew I

would be upset and I was. I guess not upset about the visit, but more that we do not have a good house or stuff. All they wanted was to give me some resources to help my boys with reading. They have helped me realize that I am somebody. (Mrs. Reyes, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Based upon the gathered data, it was clear Latino parents believed the principal and teachers embraced the Latino community. There was little discrepancy in the attitudes of participants that respect and care were core to relationships. Another characteristic was the use of the relational term trust. The term was interchangeably referred to by all participant groups and identified as critical. Each group spoke of care.

One demonstrated incident of respect and care involved the parent of five. The mother came to the school and began taking uneaten food off other students' trays. Her actions brought attention to the larger needs of her family. Within a short time the principal and teachers visited the family providing food and support.

Parents knew the school held a sincere interest in their children. One notable example was the work of Mrs. Richards. Years may pass but Mrs. Richards continued to communicate with former Latino students and their families. She monitored their progress and encourages the use of education as a tool opening doors to new opportunities. "I still hold expectations of my students. When they graduate from college, I hope I am remembered as one of many teachers that led them to the need for higher education" (Mrs. Richards, individual interview, November 16, 2010).

Practice #3—Promoting Community Support

Community support for Latino families had changed some relationships within the community. Latino parents believed the support evolved as a direct result of the

school practices that invited them to be a part of the school family. Latino parents understood the concerns that came with change in the community and school. A volunteer from a local church stated the community was somewhat vocal as Latino enrollment increased before realizing that Latino families came at the invitation of local families in farming, poultry, or textiles.

Most teachers and the principal live in the community. Their relationships extend into the community through civic clubs, church functions, as neighbors, and friends. The teachers were the first to recognize that Latino students would benefit greatly from the interactions and friendships established between parents and children in the community. Historically, student scouting units, little league teams, and service clubs served only local students. Ms. Vance recognized the need to include all students in activities within the community. She and other teachers began efforts to make certain Latino parents and students were aware of activities for students. Some of the teachers volunteered to be leaders or coaches as a way to include Latino students. A retired teacher, Mrs. Short stated, "Midpoint Elementary always had a strong outside support base with community and faith based organizations. The school made certain that community members were contacted to be volunteers or mentors in the school."

Community support provided by Latino residents included being available at the school to assist with parent and student needs. Additionally, they were available to assist and support teachers. One of the most positive practices observed was during a teacher workday. Several Latino parents led forty-five minute, teacher learning sessions focusing on the Latino culture (see Table 5). The sessions were voluntary. The Latino community

also provided lunch for the teachers. The sessions offered information on traditions,

cultures, literature, and basic Spanish. The most thought provoking session was a

discussion and book study led by Mrs. Hernandez. Her session was titled from the book,

"*LISTEN UP* TEACHER!," by Shirley Garcia and David Cottrell (2002). An easy read,

Mrs. Hernandez had actually checked the book out of the schools' professional library.

The theme Mrs. Hernandez shared growing up Latino was from a quote in the book by

James Comer. "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (Comer,

as cited in Garcia & Cottrell, 2002, p. 32).

Changes in the attitudes of the community initiated amenable relationships

between local residents and new Latino residents. The relationships evolved mostly

through their children's participation in scouting, sports, and civic clubs that began due to

the attitudes of the teachers and volunteers who recognized a need. A volunteer from the

church noted:

> The school was the first organization able to change habits and traditions. The
> people that are intimately involved in our community and love this school want to
> do what we can. That is pretty much the way of things in small town America.
> The Latino people have brought a lot to our town. They have earned the respect of
> those who know them. (Field notes, September 09, 2010)

The practices of the people deeply involved in the education of children demonstrated a

supportive community working to improve the lives of Latino students.

Practices that promote relationships with Latino students were not limited to the

instructional day. Relationships between Latino students and teachers involved academic

and social aspects. Students were encouraged to seek new opportunities and hold

ownership in one another, their learning, and their school family. Latino parents were involved through their willingness to be a part of the school community. The principal and the teachers encouraged and promoted the importance of families as a part of the school community and as continual learners. Finally, relationships with the school were reciprocal. Involvement of Latino families and the school reached into the community. New relationships were formed out of the work of the school. Acceptance of diverse families was evidenced through the practices that demonstrated the teachers' beliefs about relationships.

CHAPTER VI

DATA ANALYSIS: THE IMPACT OF RELATIONSHIPS ON INSTRUCTION

Prior to the rising enrollment of Latino students, instructional change at Midpoint Elementary had been limited to a new textbook, a new district initiative, or the length of the school day. Mrs. Wilson stated, "Instructional practices have a richer meaning for Latino students. It didn't take very long for anyone to realize that instructional change meant rethinking our practices" (E. Wilson, focus group interview, October 5, 2010).

Redefined Instructional Practices

Planning and implementation of instruction was essential at Midpoint Elementary. Instructional design required tapping into the knowledge of Latino parents to make relevant connections. The literature upheld teachers' beliefs that parents play critical roles in the education of their children (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004; Ceballo, 2004). Parents and teachers demonstrated a willingness to learn from one another in a united effort to educate students. This act was very empowering to parents. "The school is doing all it can for our children and trying to encourage us to be a part of the learning process" (Mrs. Hernandez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010).

Latino students excelled when instruction was meaningful and engaging. Students recognized the positive connection between the school, their families, and their academic success. Mrs. Alvarez noted:

> Our children are successful because they see that parents support the school. The school views us as a part of the school family. We value their work with our children. (Mrs. Alvarez, focus group interview, October 05, 2010)

Culture and content-rich instruction created varied learning activities that were tailored to individual needs and based on data. Research suggests that teachers who work effectively with Latino students implement three non-traditional practices: highly interactive, student centered, and collaborative (Padrón et al., 2002). Teachers stated that relationships with students were an essential part of their instructional practices. Beneficial instruction for Latino students must have relevance and purpose. As noted by Mr. Auman:

> Planning takes on a new meaning. In the beginning, it is harder to plan. You have to be willing to think more and dig deeper during lesson development because you are integrating cultural connections also. The work in teaching Latino students is upfront, making lesson delivery is much easier. I accomplish more and students master more when I present well developed plans. (P. Auman, individual interview, November 16, 2010)

Implemented Data-Driven Instructional Practices

Throughout planning sessions, teachers discussed student mastery levels, placing students accordingly based on the need for levels of remedial instruction or acceleration. Teachers demonstrated ownership in the entire grade level. Planning allowed teachers to make cultural connections and created alternative ways for presenting content (Observation, September 14, 2010). "Planning is sacred. It is the only time we sit as a group, analyze data, and exchange ideas" (K. Black, individual interview #3, January 18, 2011).

Teachers upheld the belief that data driven planning had a significant impact on building relationships and enriching instruction. They recognized the use of data to plan the most beneficial instruction for Latino students. The use of formative assessments, predictive assessments, and progress monitoring allowed teachers to identify students struggling to master specific goals and objectives. Teachers used the data to make adjustments to instruction and to provide timely interventions.

Another practice was the use of a class-wide data chart along with individual student data charts. The class-wide data chart tracked mastery progress on learning targets. Informal mastery was assessed through group achievement. This act held the entire class accountable as a community seeking to attain one common goal. The environment for learning was non-threatening to students. Traditional methods of data tracking identifies above average, average, and low average students. Classroom data provided teachers with a snapshot of the overall class performance. Additionally, formative assessments allowed teachers to know individual student mastery levels.

Assessment data was used in two ways. First, grade level teams discussed and compared data during *PLCs*. Plans were implemented to re-teach or accelerate students as identified by the data. Student data represented one component of the *PLCs*. Teachers reviewed one another's data to determine their own strengths, teaching styles, and teaching preferences. Student groups were matched to teacher strengths. Each month, students were assigned to activities as a grade level. The assignments were to accelerate, or provide remedial services. Students viewed the day as a reward. Class activities lasted for one hour prior to students' rotating to another classroom with a new group of

students. The entire process sounded chaotic. In actuality, students were provided a card with colored dots. The dots directed students to appropriate classroom by color coding.

This practice was observed in the fourth grade. Their twenty day assessment contained previously taught and current objectives. The assessment also contained upcoming content. The data provided teachers with information on each student and allowed for the planning of appropriate activities. Activities were reviewed and agreed upon by all teachers and were designed based on students' instructional needs. Fourth grade teachers worked as a close knit community through the planning and implementation of academic reward days. They exchanged ideas and shared resources and displayed pride in one another as teachers. Most teachers at the school provided intense classroom instruction setting rigorous but realistic goals for individual students.

Students demonstrated the ability to articulate and discuss classroom learning targets (see Table 5). Mrs. Wilson's fifth-grade class expressed difficulty mastering stem and leaf plots during a class meeting. They identified areas of need and collectively came up with an intervention plan. Consensus was met. Students partnered to re-teach one another. Mrs. Wilson's role was to facilitate and monitor. The students reassessed their mastery target and a decision was made to keep the original target of 95% mastery. As an informal mastery check, students decided to create individual stem and leaf plots to share with their assigned partner. Mrs. Wilson worked with pairs of students providing individual learning time. Mrs. Wilson believes the students hold high expectations for one another as a collective class (E. Wilson, observation, December 10, 2010).

The principal acknowledged the planning process was becoming easier for the teachers. He described quality planning and inclusionary practices that extended to the Latino community. He consistently monitored data and was skilled in asking how specific practices created student mastery for struggling students.

Involvement of Parents in Instruction

Research indicates the critical role of parents in the achievement of Latino students (Alfaro et al., 2006; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004; Ceballo, 2004). Based upon the data, it became apparent that there were collective efforts that fostered student success. The principal and teachers believed relationships with parents significantly influenced instruction. For them, the funds of knowledge Latino parents provided to students definitely impacted success.

One primary behavior that influenced instruction was the expectation that parents were involved in the teaching and learning process (see Table 5). Education extended beyond daily instruction. Unlike traditional classroom planning, many teachers planned targeted instruction. Those teachers felt planning included developmentally appropriate instruction that focused on the whole child both during and after school hours.

Historically, rural schools focus on culture and language as barriers to student success. This was not the case at Midpoint. Parents were encouraged to participate in the instructional planning and delivery process. The majority of teachers viewed parents as an additional resource for the students. Teachers sought parent input as a way to enhance instruction. One of the most common areas of need was literacy. Regularly, vocabulary

surfaced as a critical deficit. Cultural interpretation provided greater understanding of the students' capacities to clearly define vocabulary.

Observed planning sessions demonstrated the intensity of the process. Mrs. Flores stated, "The people at our school care about the students. They aren't going to let the children fail with or without parent support. They spend a lot of time on the students" (Mrs. Flores, focus group interview, October 05, 2010). Teachers and willing parents spent a great deal of time each week to match Latino learner needs to instructional activities. Parents were not directly involved in reviewing individual student data. Their roles were to support through clarification and interpretation, development of pre-made activities, and the gathering of resources. Data analysis conversations were on-going during weekly *PLC* meetings. Planning flowed directly into the instructional day and included a daily school to home connection. The extension of school to home connection provided parents with an overview of the learning. In this regard, learning extended into the home setting and often into local Latino agencies and churches. Under this premise, Latino community members were called upon as valuable cultural resources for the school.

Parents visited classrooms daily. They were not held to a schedule or a "to do" lists. Participation levels depended on the comfort levels of the parents. Several of the parents enjoyed working with small groups, remediating students, or providing guided instruction to re-teach previously teacher taught skills. One of the most important roles of parents was providing encouragement to struggling students. Some ate lunch with a student while others came in to read a book. The number of parents who volunteered to

participate during planning was surprising. A few offered ideas to help the students

understand new concepts. Others attended for a preview of upcoming concepts.

Differentiation and Student Choice in Instruction

Typically, the most common instructional approach found in schools that serve

Latino students is the direct instructional model. In this approach, teachers manage

classrooms through whole group instruction and control all of the classroom discussion

and decision-making (Haberman, 1991; Padrón & Waxman, 1993, as cited in Padrón et

al., 2002).

Entering classrooms during instructional time demonstrated the depth of planning

and reflection of teachers. Students were engaged in differentiated learning activities that

provided options for lesson delivery and mastery checks (Observation, March 17, 2011).

As noted by Ms. Black:

> Our class does hands on and small group activities. Each day I plan some type of
> informal assessment so I will know which students need additional help and what
> skills need to be reviewed at home. (Ms. Black, individual interview, November
> 9, 2010).

Students demonstrated ownership in learning. Iris described the ownership in this way:

> We have choices in our learning. We all learn in one big group and then divide
> into smaller groups. Two of my favorite times are when it is my turn to learn with
> my teacher by myself and when it is time for our group to work with our teacher.
> Other times, we work with a partner, in groups or on a team. The teacher will let
> us work quietly and alone if we want. Most of class loves it when it is their
> group's time to use the computers and the interactive board. I just like my turn
> with my teacher better. Every day he says he gauges our learning. He lets us
> decide if we understand concepts. We have different ways to record our
> understanding. We get to vote three ways: either yes we understand, maybe we
> understand, or no we do not understand. We use choice boards to decide how to

demonstrate what we know. My favorite activity is to write on big pieces of newspaper or on tiny sticky notes. I like that much better than a sit down, be quiet, paper and pencil test. It is the same thing, only different. If a person doesn't know something, they are not embarrassed because our class is a family. When new students come to our class, they may know a lot or not so much about something we are working on. That is really fun because they know stuff that we don't know or we may know stuff they don't know. In our class, we care about each other. I don't think it is like this in other places. (Iris, focus group interview, September 24, 2010).

Like all students, Latino students thrived when experiences were meaningful and engaging. Efrin described his first days at Midpoint:

I couldn't read and I didn't want anyone to know so I disrespected my teacher. At other schools, teachers would send me out. Instead of being mean back, Ms. Williams just stopped teaching. The other kids were talking about a story that we were supposed to read. She told us to get into groups. She worked with my group first and she didn't ignore me. I didn't understand the story. Ms. Williams asked what we knew about the word dip. Someone talked about potato chips and dip. Someone talked about their grandpa dipping snuff. I didn't know what that meant either but everybody laughed and I did too because the boy acted like he was spitting. I felt happy when I left school that day. The next day Ms. Williams brought potato chips and dip. It was the first time I ever tasted dip. She brought salsa dip and tortilla chips. I got to hand out little cups of salsa. Then she showed us a man jumping off a cliff into the water. He was a cliff diver. Ms. Williams said that the man was taking a dip. That is what the story was about. We all learned about a new kind of dip and learned about words with more than one meaning. I never acted mean to Ms. Williams again. (Focus group interview, September 23, 2010)

Another way in which teachers promoted instruction was through classroom learning communities. Latino students upheld the belief that instructional time remained sacred and essential to learning. Students participated in small group activities that allowed for multiple groupings and multiple learning models. With routines and expectations clearly established, students were responsible for tracking their data and

monitoring overall class learning. Students openly communicated regarding their learning mastery, gaps, strengths and weaknesses.

Students held high expectations of one another and of teachers. They felt teachers valued their opinions and provided decision-making opportunities in the learning process. Latino students were exposed to opportunities for high engagement and active participation. They described their schooling experience as fun with a lot of laughter. Students mentioned occasional misbehaviors but rarely mentioned discipline incidents.

There are multiple references in the research notes that speak to the direct impact of relationships and instruction (Rueda & Monzó, 2000). Educational experiences were fundamental to the success and well-being of all students. "Every person has a description of relationships and their impact on instruction. I feel secure in saying that we all agree that we have a job to do and want to do it well" (Mrs. Wilson, individual interview, October 11, 2010).

The importance of instructional design requires intense understanding of students, their backgrounds, current mastery levels, and the skills needed to be successful beyond elementary school. Beyond local, state, and federal expectations is the realness of instruction. Recognized practices encompassed much more than academics in learning. The practices described include connections to life and culture. Attitudes are fundamental to relationships in the context of instruction.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Summary

This study addressed the practices that build relationships and the impact of relationships on instruction. This study gave voice to the influence of relationships and the effect of relationships on instruction. In addition, the following research questions were explored:

1. What are the practices that build relationships?

2. What is the impact of relationships on instruction?

One school was selected to participate in the study. Selection of the study site was based on the growing number of Latino students enrolled at the school and the continual growth of the students.

The principal participated in three interviews. Five teachers participated in one focus group session and one individual interview. Twelve Latino parents participated in one focus group session. Nine students from grades three through five participated in one of two focus group interviews and individual interviews. Additional individual interviews were scheduled for respondent validation. Observations occurred randomly and at various times. Document and artifact analysis were continual and a part of this study.

Conclusions

Numerous studies address the complexity of relationships. Likewise, there are countless practices that promote parent involvement. This study aligned relationships and instruction to the documented and observed practices that were most significant at one school. Parent involvement practices alone would not have created the necessary outcomes for Latino students. Relationships encompassed much more than parent involvement. Practices created relationships and changed the school culture. It was clear that the principal and teachers embraced the Latino community. Inclusive practices opened communication leading to the building of relationships. Maintaining relationships was a necessity for the school to provide instruction that was meaningful and relevant. Lest the reader think all was perfect, as is the case in all schools, there were areas in need of improvement and observable issues surfaced. The school principal and teachers at the school were sincere in their efforts of to secure Latino partnerships. The principal created opportunities for Latino parents and students and encouraged their participation in the school. He also demonstrated a strong sense of community outside of the school setting.

No doubt, the principal's actions brought about limited change. He had moved the school beneath surface-level change. Yet, noted concerns emerged through the coding and analysis of the data. The teachers identified issues with sustainability of the school vision due to the principal's inability to hold crucial conversations. Resentment surfaced as teachers believed they had worked diligently to promote the learning of all students. Practices of participants confirmed their commitment to changing the school culture. For teachers, the allowances made for ineffective teaching was unacceptable. The argument

made was not one of ill intent. Rather, teacher apathy was an issue in two primary classrooms. Traditional teaching practices provided little engagement for Latino students. Substandard teaching practices had not been addressed or formally documented by the principal. No monitored growth plans were in place for these teachers.

Earlier in the study it was brought to the forefront that Timetao had remained an English as Second Language student since entering kindergarten. Now in fourth grade, he lacked the needed literacy skills and was recently recognized as misidentified. In actuality, the student and three other students were incorrectly identified and placed. Additionally, personalized education plans for many of the students were not current. This finding brought about the need for more through monitoring of special populations teachers.

As with any change there are conflicts and debates. The population shifts are not accepted by some residents. Attendance documents continued to reveal transfers of local students to private schools or less diverse schools within the district.

Even with conflicts and issues, the school had undergone change to serve the Latino community and demonstrated great success. The depth of the success didn't come from the unique leadership abilities of the principal. The teachers were vigilant in their instructional practices as are many teachers across the state. Practices alone would not have created the success for Latino students. The distinction of the school came through the attitudes that led to the practices and strategies implemented.

The development and design of learning activities created environments that were student centered and highly engaging for Latino students. The teachers' desires to

implement culturally relevant knowledge into daily instruction provided strong connections with Latino students and parents.

The teachers in this study shared uncomplicated strategies based on the practices that significantly impacted relationships with Latino students and parents. Latino students were valued for who they were and what they brought to the classroom. It was clear from the statements made by the students that they enjoyed school and felt a part of the school community. The students were motivated to do well and recognized the efforts of the principal and teachers at the school. Latino students focused mostly on their time in the school setting spent with teachers. Several students recognized the times their teachers attended outside events to support them. They shared the pride and happiness they felt when teachers cared enough to attend after school events and activities.

An important component to the dynamics of the school was the human capital and knowledge brought by Latino parents. While two parents expressed some concerns about their children and the school, the majority of parents interviewed and those at the school during observations expressed limited concerns and vocalized the benefits of the positive educational experiences and the school environment. Studies demonstrate that parent involvement is a necessity in building relationships and securing quality instructional experiences for students (Domina, 2005, as cited in Turney & Kao, 2009). Positive relationships influenced student success. The importance of building the school culture through communicating collaborative beliefs and values demonstrated genuine trust and respect for Latino parents and students.

Implications of the Study

There are several implications that emerge from this study. The Latino population continues to increase in rural North Carolina. The challenge for principals and teachers is to create opportunities to build diverse school cultures that are inclusive of Latino parents and students.

Creating Principal Capacity

To meet diverse student needs, principals must be transformational in their practice. Leading change requires guiding teachers to become reflective practitioners taking into consideration their beliefs and biases. Building relationships with Latino parents is fundamental in educational experiences and success of Latino students. Therefore, in traditional, rural schools, the capacity to serve diverse student populations must clearly communicate culturally relevant practices that build trust and embrace diversity.

Shaping Teachers Capacity

A second implication that emerges from the study is for teachers. In this study, the principal is the instructional leader. Conversations are driven by data analysis. Teachers are responsible for planning for instruction. Relevance to Latino students is considered in the process. The inclusion of Latino parents in the planning process is out of the ordinary but provides for differing perspectives that enrich the educational experiences.

Delivery of instruction that is proven and demonstrates quality is essential to the work of rural teachers. Targeting instruction to meet the individual needs of Latino

students creates the need for culturally relevant experiences. Instructional connections create a balanced learning approach.

Student centered learning requires a level of trust from both Latino students and teachers. Engagement ultimately impacts student success. Formative and summative assessment results customized students' activity choices. However, instructional choices should be made with a clear understanding of the student's current level of performance.

The importance of planning and delivery of instruction is vital to the success of Latino students. These findings were consistent with the literature indicating that specific approaches to instructional delivery can effectively impact the results of student achievement for various student groups (Curtin, 2006; Lessow-Hurley, 2003).

Encouraging Parent Capacity

Another implication is for Latino parent involvement. For a school to build culture and promote student success, principals need to clearly communicate and model expectations for all. Mutually beneficial relationships are essential to the process. The dynamics of relationships are no longer limited to administration and teachers. Latino parents hold powerful voices and collectively hold the potential for a strong education power base. Rural schools need Latino parents as resources in the transformation process. They know their children, their customs, beliefs and traditions. They can be influential in the educational process. Therefore, rural schools need to be real. They need to demonstrate transparency and create an environment that welcomes the Latino community.

Communicating with purpose is crucial in involving parents. Latino parents struggle to understand their sense of place in school settings. They are interested in their child's education but lack the capacity to express their thoughts at the school. Parents are trusting of the school system. Schools need to capitalize on Latino parents and assume that parents want to be a part of the school process. Increasing involvement of Latino parents may lead to relationships that impact Latino student success. Some straightforward strategies to open communication include:

- Creating a warm, caring, inviting, and receptive school environment.

- Planning home visits to facilitate communication.

- Providing parent liaisons or parent coordinators.

- Offering communication in a bilingual format.

- Securing interpreters.

- Scheduling activities and events for Latino parents.

- Providing support – transportation and childcare.

Expanding Relational Capacity

A final implication involves relationships. Principals and teachers need to be sincere in their efforts to change the school culture, teach Latino students, and welcome Latino parents. Schools can be marred in traditional models of teaching and learning. Rural schools facing an influx of diverse student populations need to begin the crucial conversations of recreating school culture. The process is hard work and isn't for everyone. Practices must focus on students and the strength to do whatever it takes to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Change carries degrees of emotion. The

participants in this study noted that schools will recognize divisions, alliances, and biases that no longer match the vision and purpose of school. While painful, the emergence of a recreated school culture outweighs the dissension. Pure relationships should never disenfranchise groups of willing participants.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are many recommendations for further study that emerged from this study. A longitudinal study of Latino student participants in this study would be of great interest to the principal and teachers of Sand hills Elementary. It would be informative to see if the implemented practices were impactful enough to guide students through middle and high school years and beyond. Such a study may be difficult as the students are so transient that the losses of instructional time could hamper the pureness of the data.

A further study might be the implementation of student choices and self-directed learning at the high school level compared to traditional high school models for instructional delivery. Instead of providing a semester long syllabus of what will be done, teachers could more closely track formative assessments in a variety of ways to design instructional opportunities for students. Instructional objectives would remain in units of study, however, in class assignments would not be based on a pre-planned semester. It would be interesting to see how students experienced ownership and engagement in the learning process. Another aspect would include motivation based on student selected tasks to demonstrate mastery.

A study of best instructional practices in engaging Latino students could serve teachers in rural schools well. Understanding which practices most significantly impact

Latino student learning would inform struggling schools through proven practices. No school can replicate the preciseness of Sand hills practices or strategies due to differing beliefs, teaching styles, and degrees of involvement. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see what themes and patterns would emerge if the strategies were implemented in other rural schools. Additionally, regardless of diversity, the practices and strategies implemented at Sand hills are good for all students. One additional thought might be to take these practices into low performing schools and track student growth.

A last study of recommendation would be culturally responsive teaching at Midpoint compared to a school maintaining traditional teaching methods. A quantitative study focusing on outcomes of specific student groups would serve the body of research well.

Final Thoughts

This study provided insight into the changing dynamics in one rural school. The process of changing the school culture demonstrated a collective effort based on a belief that Latino parents had much to offer in the educating of Latino students. The impact of reciprocal relationships between Latino parents and the school create meaningful educational experiences for Latino students. As relationships were establish, classroom instruction was enhanced. In turn, students' experiences were enriched leading to increased student growth and success.

The challenge for rural North Carolina teachers comes in creating learning environments that are inclusive of all students and that invite parents to be active participants in the schooling process. Eliminating racial, ethnic, and economic inequities

is only the beginning in transforming a school culture. Teachers should believe that neither students nor adults come to school hoping to fail, but wish to have meaningful experiences. Teachers must conclude that students are in school to learn and that it is everyone's job to keep such focus and align actions to it (Mohr, 2004).

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