

A CASE STUDY ON PERSPECTIVES BY FEMALES OF MEXICAN DESCENT ON  
ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION INFORMATION

A Record of Study

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the process Latino parents utilize to gain access to postsecondary education information during their children's elementary schooling. Significantly, the support Latino parents provide in terms of in terms of resources, networks, and collaborative relationships with school and community providers is of paramount importance. Focus group and individual interviews were conducted for this study. This qualitative study employed social capital as the theoretical framework premised on the work by social theorists James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putnam. Findings indicated Latino immigrant parents face challenges such as language, culture dissonance, limited education, and immigration status which deter and limit the process of negotiating access to postsecondary education. Conclusions noted that social capital was evident in the following areas: (a) critical cognizance indicated by differential connections and understanding of access to resources; (b) primacy of action characterized by intricacies of action in pursuing access, (c) misguided intentionality resulting from conflicting cultural dispositions, and (d) relational investiture that suggests lack of investing in resources for accessing higher education information. Educational leaders play an important role in the process of providing postsecondary education to parents beginning at the elementary school level. A comprehensive, parent inclusive, college access plan is critical and necessary for flow and exchange of postsecondary education information.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family and mentors. It is also dedicated to all the youth who venture to seek a postsecondary education in spite of all the challenges they face. It is dedicated to all educators who dare to believe they can make a significant difference in the lives of children and families.

I have been blessed to have had an amazing family that has shadowed my unwavering efforts to improve the educational opportunities of Latino children in impoverished communities. Education is a social justice issue, and they commit and give of themselves daily in ways that surpass my expectations. Their hard work and efforts are to be commended.

I dedicate this study also to all educators and mentors who have guided in my educational career. The first was Martha Schumacher, my fifth grade teacher. It was her love of the teaching profession and manner in which she respected the students that inspired me to be a teacher. Mrs. Lisa Taylor gave me the confidence and fortitude to compete, always doing my best work. I dedicated this degree to Dr. Gail K. Beil. She facilitated the scholarships that helped me pursue higher education. I will forever be grateful for the world she opened up for me. Many volunteers at Wesley Community Center reached out to our family in ways that changed our life forever.

I dedicate this accomplishment to all my mentors including Sue Ann Payne, Rebecca M. Cazares, and Sylvia McClure who were my principals when I was a teacher. I also want to acknowledge James LaVois whose expectations of me surpassed any

expectations that I had of myself. His belief and support of my educational leadership will never be forgotten.

The children, their parents, and families that I met throughout my educational career have humbled me to be a servant to the community. I have and will always be grateful to all who changed my life by allowing me to be a part of their lives.

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## NOMENCLATURE

ACT – American College Test

SAT – Scholastic Aptitude Test

GED – Grade Equivalency Diploma

ESL – English as a Second Language

ELL – English Language Learners

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Access to postsecondary education information is crucial to individuals aspiring to obtain degrees in higher education. It is statistically true that undergraduate degrees yield better job opportunities and higher salaries for all people that are able to obtain them (Contreras, 2011; Day & Newburger, 2002). Latinos, in particular, are the most rapidly growing population in the United States yet their access to secondary and postsecondary education represents unique challenges (Contreras, 2011). The involvement of parents and the actions relevant to the support they give their children during their schooling are critical to optimizing their educational attainment.

The support Latino parents provide in terms of access to postsecondary education is of paramount importance in terms of resources, networks, and collaborative relationships they have with school and community individuals. Significant factors Latino immigrant parents face act as barriers to access (Leinbach & Bailey, 2006). These include culture dissonance, language, and lack of familiarity with the educational system in the United States (Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Solorzano, 2007). These are challenges that can deter the process of their negotiating proper access to information (Contreras, 2011).

Increasingly, researchers and policy analysts have been concerned with the extent of access to higher education for Latino students (González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Family engagement is critical to any child's educational success and plays a major role

in motivating children to articulate intentions and a college going identity (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Greene & Winters, 2005; Reid & Moore, 2008; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Specifically in the context of college access, familial engagement is considered significant to guiding students in the process of obtaining a college degree. Auerbach noted that “schools, colleges, and programs rarely reach out to Latino parents in meaningful, culturally appropriate ways to help narrow the information gap and level the playing field for college access” (Auerbach, 2004, p. 126). However, Auerbach further noted that in terms of access to higher education, efforts to reach Latino parents may be of the greatest benefit if they help parents gain essential knowledge to guide their children in the college preparation process (Auerbach, 2004).

Aspirations and expectations that parents have for their children are important for creating a culture of educational success (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004). Susan Sy (2006) indicated that research has implied Latino parents highly value education for their children (Asmitia, Cooper, Garcia & Dunbar, 1996; Lopez, 2001; Rabow & Rodriguez, 1993; Sy, 2006; Valencia & Black, 2002). Additionally, family processes play an important role in academic achievement of Mexican American youth (Hurtado-Ortíz & Gauvain, 2007). According to Green and Winters (2005), the support parents convey plays a major role in motivating their children and articulating their intentions (e.g., college identity, college degree, postsecondary education) (Green & Winters, 2005).

To a great extent, access to institutions of higher education continues to be increasingly difficult for Latinos (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Many face economic, linguistic, educational, and cultural challenges. Children of immigrants are known to

rely heavily on their parents and other family members for emotional and psychological support. Latino families have a lengthy tradition of respect for and identification with both nuclear and extended family, termed *familismo* (familism) (Santiago-Rivera, 2003; Sy, 2006). Immigrant parents' educational support for their children is limited by significant losses sustained through economic pressures and language barriers which alienate them from schools their children attend (Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Ream, 2006; Solorzano, 2007).

In their studies, researchers indicate Latino parents' lack of postsecondary education information can either add value or hinder the support they give their children in making critical choices about higher education (Auerbach, 2006; López, 2001). Hurtado-Ortíz, and Gauvain (2007) noted that Latino parents play an important role in their children's education and their influence in developing goals to for a college education (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). Latino parents can make a positive contribution to the postsecondary education experiences of their children. However, because the Mexican American community is undereducated relative to the total population, they have limited access to postsecondary education information (Hurtado-Ortíz & Gauvain, 2007; León-Guerrero, 2009). Schmitz (2006) also added that Latino families face complex relationships due to immigration status, socioeconomics, cultural deprivation, and perceived expectations (Schmitz, 2006). This research study focused on resources Latino parents access (e.g., information, knowledge of curriculum and assessments, financial aid, family support systems, relationships, school and community

agencies, college events, college and career conferences, higher education institutions) through social networks.

The population statistics of Latinos is of an alarming nature given it is rapidly increasing while at the same time the education of Latinos is not keeping pace with its population growth (National Statistics, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; The Pew Hispanic Center, 2011; Zentella, 2005). It is projected that in the future Latinos will make up nearly one fourth of the population in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). The 2010 United States census indicated that as of April 1, 2010, 50.5 million (or 16 percent) of the population were of Hispanic or Latino origin (U. S. Census Bureau, May, 2011). Additionally, Fry and Gonzáles (2008) reported that 70% of 10 million documented Latino students enrolled in public schools speak a language other than English at home (Fry & Gonzáles, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The education for Latinos is a significant problem given that they presently make up the largest ethnic minority in the United States, yet they are the least likely to graduate from high school and attend college (Nielson & Fernández, 1981; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Sánchez, 2002). Furthermore, Latinos perform poorly throughout their school years. At all educational levels, Latino students lag behind their White and Asian peers (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Researchers have found that for Latinos an academic gap emerges as early as kindergarten and widens systematically through graduate education (Chernoff, Flanagan, McPhee, & Park, 2007; Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, Kewal-Ramani, & Kemp, 2008; Suarez-Orozco, Gaitán, &

Kim, in press, 2007). In the twelfth grade, Latino students average only an eighth grade reading level and are more likely to drop out of high school than students from all other groups (Fry, 2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia, 2001; Olatunji, 2005).

Latinos have the highest high school dropout rates and the lowest college attendance rates of all racial and ethnic groups (Perez-Huber et al., 2006). These are alarming statistics for Latinos. They need to graduate from college at much higher rates in order to compete in today's global economy. Unfortunately, Latinos are the "most under-educated major segment of the U.S. population" (Inger, 1992, p. 1) and "more than twice more likely to be under-educated than all groups combined" (Chavkin, 1993, p. 1). Significantly, access to postsecondary education is imperative for Latinos seeking a degree in higher education (Ward, 2006).

Latinos are growing eight times more rapidly than the population as a whole (Hersch & Merrow, 2005; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004; Ream, 2005; Sanchez, 2002; U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). They are the nation's largest minority ethnic group. It is projected Latinos will be the largest minority group in the next three decades (Passel & Cohen, 2008; Veléz-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002). In 2008, they numbered 46.9 million, or 15.4% of the total U.S. population, up from 35.3 million in the 2000 Census (Hernandez, 2006; Lopez & Taylor, 2010; U. S. Census Bureau, 2000; U. S. Census Bureau, 2005b). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the numbers of Latino students in American schools are increasing quickly and will almost double by 2025 and double again by 2070 to make up almost 30 percent of the U.S. population (Ream, 2005;



Sanchez, 2002; U. S. Census Bureau, 2000a, 200b; U. S. Census Bureau, 2002; U. S. Census Bureau, 2012; Veléz-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the process Latino parents utilize to gain access to postsecondary education information during their children's elementary schooling. I sought to identify outlets in terms of resources that Latino parents utilize to guide their children in their aspirations and pathways to a college career. Lack of access to higher education information can deter parents from guiding their children in their path to a college education. Green and Winters (2005) noted that "parental support provides potential benefits and exerts unique influence on students, if such support occurs consistently over time" (p. 161).

### **Research Study Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What postsecondary education information is provided to Latino parents about postsecondary education?
2. How do Latino parents of elementary school-aged children acquire information about postsecondary education for their children?
3. What do Latino parents do to access postsecondary information?

### **Access**

The term, "access," can be defined in the field of postsecondary education as knowledge of, entry processes, admission requirements, resources, financial aid, and

social networking beneficial to preparing pathways for matriculation in higher education (Field, 2003; Long & Riley, 2007; Tienda, 2001). For this study, access constitutes acquiring knowledge that facilitates individuals to obtain resources and information from social networks (Hallinan & Kubitschek, 1999). According to Lesser (2000), access refers to receiving valuable information and knowing who can use it. It also identifies the role of social networks in providing efficient information and distribution processes for members of those networks (Lesser, 2000). He further noted that relationships and network ties influence access that individuals can combine and exchange knowledge (Lesser, 2000). From an operational lens access is seen as actions that result from its use and capacity (Perna, 2006).

Lareau (2000) cited the importance of social capital as a significant attribute in access to college information (Lareau, 1987; Lareau; 2000a). Access in terms of density of networks and number of relationships enables the exchange and sharing of information. This flow of social capital has the propensity to assist Latino parents in their access to higher education information needed to assist their children throughout their education pipeline. However, many Latino parents have limited educational experiences, which may affect their ability to assist and guide their children toward a postsecondary education (Delgado-Gaitán, 1993; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Significantly, many Latino families face economic, linguistic, educational, cultural, and social issues (Project CREO, 2002). Current researchers have indicated that the convertibility of family social capital into academic success may be inhibited

among immigrant families (Coleman, 1988; Stone, 2001; Woolcock, 1998). This is because the children of immigrants are known to rely heavily on their parents and other family members for emotional and psychological support. Immigrant parents' social capital investments in their children's education are commonly limited by the significant losses they sustain through their immigrant status, as a result of serious economic pressures and language barriers that alienate them from the schools their children attend (Dika & Singh, 2002; Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Ream, 2006; Solorzano, 2007).

In their studies, Lesser and Prusack (1999) described how communities of practice support social capital in groups. They emphasized how communities encourage networks among individuals with similar interests. The community can also connect individuals to other resourceful networks (Auerbach, 2004; Lesser & Prusack, 1999; Yosso; 2005). This is relevant for Latinos needing access to information within the community where they live. It is especially important if the information is not available and disseminated in their children's school. If there are organizations (e. g., Project GRAD, Graduation Really Achieves Dreams, TRIO, Path to Scholarships) promoting postsecondary education in local communities where Latinos reside, they can be viable networks critical for Latino parents in terms of access. Significantly, in a community of practice, individuals are characterized by tight-knit relationships that activate social capital through working together toward common goals and facilitating interactions by participation in networks (Lesser & Prusack, 1999). Latino parents can benefit from having access to these communities of practice in order to identify other individuals with relevant postsecondary education information and knowledge, thus helping them make

connections with one another within that community (Erickson, 1996; Lesser, 2000). Unfortunately, most of the reaching out is to students and not parents (Auerbach, 2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Additionally, the importance of family in the Latino culture makes it central in taking into account the impact that a family support system exerts on student resolve to complete their college education (Castellanos & Jones, 2004; Jones & Fuller, 2003; Nora & Crisp, 2009). Cejda et al. (2002) also investigated factors that influence Latino students' decisions to attend and persist in college. They found that familial support, encouragement, and motivation to not do what other family members did (drop out of school and not attend college), were found to be primary influences on students' decisions about attending college (Cejda, Casparis, & Rhodes, 2002). Moreover, the quality and type of education they receive prior to enrolling in college (academic capital) is a factor that has shown not only to keep students engaged in a higher education but also predict college success (Caldas, Bankston, & Cain, 2007; Castellanos & Jones, 2004). Added factors include family responsibilities, working while taking courses, commuting long distances to campus, poor performance in coursework, and perceiving a sense of prejudice and discrimination on campus (Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora & Hengstler, 1992; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Nora, 2002, 2004a; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Nora & Lang, 2001).

Staying on course is another challenge Latinos face after they matriculate in college. Many encounter issues that impact college retention. The rising cost of college tuition places students who are economically disadvantaged at risk of dropping out of

college or avoiding higher education altogether (Gladieux & Perna, 2005; Perna, 2004). Moreover, factors that may impinge and have influence in retention of Latino students on higher education matriculation are culturally related (Rendón & Hope, 1996). Other factors include limited English proficiency, irregular attendance patterns, being raised in a single parent home, and their parents' limited education (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Zehr, 2007).

The importance of a support system through encouragement and actions by parents has long been established as significantly impacting on student persistence (Cabrera, Nora & Castañeda, 1993; Nora, 1987; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Researchers Gloria et al. (2005) assessed the degree to which social support, university comfort, and self-beliefs were not only interrelated but also predictive of undergraduate Latino students' decisions to persevere in higher education (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005). All three constructs were significantly interrelated and predictive of student attrition. However, most importantly, *la familia* (family) was identified as a major source of support affecting Latino/Latinas persistence decisions (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996).

### **Significance of the Study**

Tierney and Auerbach (2005) contended that Latino parents play a significant and central role in influencing their children's aspirations in access and the pursuit of a postsecondary education (Auerbach, 2004). Access to college preparation information is significant for increasing the postsecondary enrollment rates of Latinos who are underrepresented in higher education. My study is significant, because it was conducted

with parents whose children attend Prekindergarten through fifth grade. These parents did not have children enrolled in middle or high school. Most studies focused on access to higher education have been conducted at high schools or colleges and universities.

I did not find any studies on access to postsecondary education done with parents at the elementary school level. Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) maintained that few studies have been conducted that link best practices to positive parent engagement and access to higher education information at the elementary school level (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Having information about college early in their children's education experience may expand opportunities for Latino children to attend college. Consequently, it is hoped this study will essentially bring attention to the conception of access to postsecondary education by Latino parents and that schools districts and other higher education providers will inform parents as early as the time their children first start their elementary schooling.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### College Access

College access is the ability to enter, approach, and pass to and from an institution of higher education (Perna, 2006).

#### Capital Theory

These terms are indicative of various forms of capital such as social capital, human capital, cultural capital, critical, capital, intellectual capital, social media capital, financial, economic, physical, academic capital, etc. (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Farkas, 1996; Field, 2003; Nora, 2004; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

### Case Study

A case study is an “in-depth and longitudinal examination with data gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document collection and analysis” (Glesne, 2011, p. 22).

### Consejos (Advice)

Consejos is a cultural strategy tool used by Latino families to give advice to their children. (Auerbach, 2004; Delgado-Gaitán, 1990).

### Culture

Culture is a conceptual terms that indicates dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, and beliefs used to give meaning to one’s life as well as the lives of others (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991).

### Familism

The term familism is utilized to indicate a lengthy tradition of respect for and identification with both nuclear and extended family, *familismo*, (Santiago-Rivera, 2003; Sy, 2006).

### Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge refers to a repertoire of information and behaviors that enhance and facilitate access to postsecondary education information and the educational system (González et al., 2005; López, 2001; Nuñez, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

### Habitus

The term habitus is descriptive of a common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shape an individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1986; (McDonough, 1997).

### Latino/Latino

This term is used to indicate people who trace their descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures (Suro, 2006).

### Intergenerational Access

James Coleman refers to intergenerational access as parents passing on the human capital they have to their children and the resources that result from socialization within families (Coleman, 1990).

### Interrelationship Transfer

James Coleman noted this concept as the exchange of resources through social networks which consists of information gained from relationships with individuals including relatives and family (Coleman, 1990).

### Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is a range of behaviors and actions that include volunteering at school (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, 1995).



### Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education is synonymous to higher education, an advanced level of academic instruction following high school, often referred to as college or university (Longman dictionary, (2002), p. 1122, Copenhagen, Pearson, Inc.).

### Mexican Descent

Being of Mexican descent indicates of Mexican origin (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997).

### Social Capital

For this study social capital is defined as individuals' networks, relationships, and actions that constitute access through the flow of information (Coleman, 1990). Bourdieu defined social capital as resources that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance, recognition, and understanding of social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986; Smith, 2007).

### Social Networks

James Coleman indicated that social networks are social relationships that act as pathways which allow flow of information (Coleman, 1988).

### Social Relationships

Lesser referred to social relationships as constituting a form of social capital that provides information which facilitates action (Lesser, 2000).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The struggle for college access is a major challenge for Latinos (Auerbach, 2004). They are the most rapid growing population in the United States, yet the least likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Villapando, 2003). Thus, it is important to identify barriers that impede access of Latino students to a postsecondary level education (Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Solorzano, 2007). Parents are considered to play a critical role for supporting and guiding their children in the admission process needed for matriculation in college (Auerbach, 2004). The high school education community provides parent inclusive programs in the area of access to postsecondary education (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). However, Latino college attendance rates continue to lag (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The timing for access during the elementary schooling is important to this study because that is the time parents are more engaged in school related activities, thus they can build information capacity in terms of postsecondary education (Oliva & Nora, 2004).

Latinos face serious academic challenges in their education (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Lopez, 1995). Alarming school dropout rates, low college participation rates, and widening gaps in academic achievement continue to plague Latino students (Auerbach, 2004; McMillen, Kaufman & Klein, 1997; Nasser, 2006; Porras-Hein, 2003). They are the largest ethnic minority in the United States, yet they

are the least likely to graduate from high school and go to college (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Villapando, 2003). In the United States, there are approximately 23.4 million children under the age of 6, with 22% of this population being children of immigrants (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2007). These statistics shed light on the force the Latino population has become in the American educational system. Of Latino groups (e.g., Cubans, Central Americans, South Americans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans), the Mexican immigrant population is the youngest group, with the median age being approximately 24 (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2007; Santiago-Rivera, 2003).

Low expectations and deficit thinking have impacted Latino students' challenges in public education (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). Among other issues affecting Latino students are segregated schools, school finance inequities, and tracking into vocational and special education classes (Fernández, 2002). Additionally, many Latino students who are qualified to attend college are prevented from enrolling due to lack of adequate finances or other social or demographic hurdles (Green & Winters, 2005).

Compounding situational factors in the form of stressors due to language, immigration, and poverty contribute to the complexity of Latino youth's underrepresentation in colleges and universities (Cubias, 2007; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Dryfoos, 1990; Espinoza-Herold, 2003; García, 2001; Roln, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001a; Valdés, 1996).

Social inequalities and lack of access to resources hinder the educational achievement of many Latino children (Contreras, 2010). Engaging Latino parents in

opportunities to learn more information about the U.S. educational system and the process needed for high school graduation and college access can prove to be of significant value to Latino parents as they guide their children throughout their schooling. Therefore, my study focused on how Latino parents obtain access to postsecondary education information.

It is important to consider how Latino parents are involved in guiding their children in their education experiences. Therefore, I began this literature review begins with an analysis of research conducted on how Latino parents are engaged in access to postsecondary education information beginning at the elementary school level. Additionally, the study also focuses on research pertaining to possession of resources in the form of social capital that Latino parents utilize to become knowledgeable of the process needed for their children to graduate from high school and pursue a degree in higher education. Saunders and Serna (2004) noted that for Latinos, social capital is as important as academic ability in the college enrollment decision (Saunders & Serna, 2004). Shirley (1997) added that research on social capital in education has failed to articulate a developmental process of change necessary in promoting stronger social ties and improved academic achievement in urban schools. Thus, in this study, I sought to link social capital to relationships between Latino parents with other individuals and groups that possess postsecondary education information.

The social capital theoretical framework in this study is premised by the work of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. Bourdieu (1992) applied social capital to understanding the idea that educational disadvantages or inequalities exist and are

passed down from one generation to the next. The notion of cultural capital first stood out as a theory which was essential in accounting for the inequality of performance at school of children from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1992). Coleman (1988) noted social capital as being derived from networks that provide information, social norms, and achievement support. According to Coleman, social capital exists in the relations among persons and the value of the aspects of social capital structures are the resources individuals can use to achieve their interests (Coleman, 1988). Coleman posited social capital within the context of education relevant to social structures and relationships that facilitate actions of individuals.

Social capital for this study is defined as individuals' networks, relationships, and actions that constitute access through the flow of information. Given that networks constitute a vehicle for accessing information, social capital has the potential of providing opportunities that add value and aggregate parents' existing knowledge base in regards to postsecondary education. The extent and type of postsecondary education information accessed by Latino parents could be contingent on the number of individuals and resources accessible through existing social networks.

Wuthnow (2002) is cited Popilarz and McPherson (1995) in *On the Edge or in Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships*, making the analogy that "social capital may be said to function in an exclusionary way when it consists of limited networks that provide valuable information to some people but not to others" (p. 79). According to Putman and Goss (2002), the idea at the core of the theory of social capital is that social networks matter and create

both individual value (Putman & Goss, 2002). Therefore, the quantity and quality of social capital in terms of access to college information may be the product of the interrelatedness of family-family, family-school, and family-community connections (Coleman, 1988). Social capital is critical to this study because it can be a vehicle, key for Latino parents to become a valuable resource support for participation and support of their children's postsecondary education.

Auerbach (2004) noted that across social groups, parents are one of the top three sources of college information. In the literature, Auerbach (2004) cited McClafferty et al. (2001) in *Parent Involvement in the College Planning Process*, pointing out that the college information gap is especially wide for lower SES immigrant parents who are not fluent in English and who have specialized needs on issues related to financial aid, racism, culture (Delgado Bernál, 2002), and undocumented status (Auerbach, 2004; McClafferty, McDonough & Fann, 2001). Latino parents are more likely to have lower expectations for their children attending college because they lack knowledge about the process needed to pursue higher education (Auerbach, 2004). Auerbach (2004) cited Gándara (1995) noting that this is the single most important barrier to college access for Latino students. Access to postsecondary education information by Latino parents is explored in this study.

### **Latino Parents and Children**

Researchers have shown that parents have the greatest impact on their children's aspirations (Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006). Withstanding is the myth that Latino parents are not involved and do not care about their children's education. On the

contrary, Latino families firmly believe in the importance of education for their children (Ceballo, 2004; Sy, 2006). Many Latino parents, especially first generation immigrants, have limited educational experiences. Thus, their limitedness may be a contributing factor in their ability to support and guide their children's education beyond high school (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Delgado-Gaitán, 1993; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 1997; López, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Noting that parental support plays a vital role in motivating children in their education, the scope of Latino parents' effectiveness in promoting the pursuit of higher education achievement is relevant in this study in terms of access to resources (i.e., social capital) and information they can provide and articulate to their children for attaining a postsecondary education degree (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

Immigrant families of Mexican descent with school-aged children manifest similar concerns directly related to specific stressors experienced by the population, stressors related to culture, language, and the individual's or family's immigrant status in their new community and country (Cubias, 2007). Stressors such as conflicting cultural values between home and school (Espinoza-Herold, 2003), low socioeconomic status (Dryfoos, 1990; Garcia, 2001), isolation due to language, intergenerational conflicts resulting from differing levels of acculturation (Roln, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001b), fear and anxiety related to undocumented status (Olivérez, 2006; Valdes, 1996) and poor academic achievement specifically impact the Mexican immigrant population. These stressors, while being harmful to the overall health of family functioning, also impact the ability of Mexican immigrant students to be

successful in U.S. schools (Cubias, 2007; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Dryfoos, 1990; Espinoza-Herold, 2003; Garcia, 2001; Roln, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001a; Valdes, 1996). For the purpose of this discussion, each of these stressors will be explored as a function of the family's and child's interactions with the U.S. education system.

### **Segregation and Isolation**

Children of Mexican immigrants continue to have a segregated educational experience in U.S. public schools. This segregation and isolation are further amplified by cultural incongruence between home and school (Espinoza-Herold, 2003; Garcia, 2001; Parcel, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001b). The segregation at the neighborhood (*barrios*) level means that the social and cultural capital, resources, networks, and educational opportunities among Latino families are unequally distributed, weak, or possibly lacking (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Though Mexican immigrants enter the United States filled with hope and excitement surrounding the expectations of new possibilities and future potential for their children (Edwards, Ong, & Lopez, 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001a), this hope quickly begins to diminish as the children struggle to balance living between two differentiated cultures, their traditional culture at home and the United States mainstream culture at school (Delgado-Gaitán, 1988; Tinkler, 2002; Trueba, 2002).

### **Cultural Values**

Mexican immigrant children have a lengthy tradition of respect for and identification with both nuclear and extended family, termed *familismo* (familism)



(Cornelius-White, Garza, & Hoey, 2004; Santiago-Rivera, 2003; Sy, 2006; Williams, 1990). These students tend to embody characteristics typifying their collective worldview, including cohesiveness and interdependence (Battle & Pastrana, 2007; Gracia & De Greiff, 2000). In American schools, they are quickly immersed in a cultural environment steeped in independence and individuation (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). These values conflict with traditional Mexican cultural values, often prompting children to evade the cultural of their home life for the expectations of their school culture (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Espinoza-Herold, 2003). The conflicting home and school cultural expectations faced by the children often lead to dissonance and disequilibrium within the family (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). Thus, families are left mitigating the existing mainstream culture while oftentimes trying to retain their own culture identity, values, belief systems, and norms in order to assimilate to the majority culture (Fox, 1996; Schmitz, 2006).

### **Immigration**

For many Latino immigrants in the United States, cultural stress is additionally amplified by their undocumented status (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; González, 2009; Passel, Capps, & Fix, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Schmitz (2006) noted a complex relationship exists for Latino families between their undocumented status and educational aspirations (Schmitz, 2006). The Pew Latino Center, 2005; Passel, 2005) reported 80-85% of all immigrants from Mexico in recent years have had undocumented status. Approximately 1.7 million people, or one sixth of the undocumented immigrant population, are under 18 years of age. According to Suro

(2007), about one out of every five Latinos is undocumented, including about one-half of all foreign-born Hispanics. Nearly one-out-of-every-three Latinos lives in a family with at least one undocumented relative. Thus, illegality has become one of the defining characteristics of the Latino population. Children who are undocumented often fear being distinguishable from their peers due to apprehension that recognition may bring deportation and separation from family and friends (Green, 2003; Valdés, 1996).

### **Language**

Educational attainment of Latino students is affected by multiple communication variables (Lareau, 1989). Oftentimes, language is a challenge Latino students and their parents face (Schmid, 2001), because they do not speak English. Lack of information is often due to inability of immigrant parents to communicate effectively with the language of the school community. Misunderstandings related to communication due to language difference may leave students and parents unclear about policy on education and attendance requirements. Latino, non-English speaking parents are left with insufficient access because they speak only Spanish, their native language (Gibson, 2002).

Davison et al. (1999) found a lack of clear understanding of school policies among Latino students and parents due to a lack of communication between home and language. Thus, when faced with difficulties in communication and culturally insensitive institutional policies, Mexican immigrant students may choose to disengage from the educational process (Davison, Guerrero, Howarth & Thomas, 1999).

Furthermore, related to culture and language difference, Brittain (2001) added that Latino families experience a transnational social space in the United States in relation to

their country of origin by maintaining communication with extended family in that country via social media (Brittain, 2001).

### **Socioeconomics**

Socioeconomic stress is a significant variable in the academic success of children. Students who live in poverty are reported to experience lower rates of academic success (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Additionally, the Children's Defense Fund (2004) reported that children who live in poverty are more likely to lack adequate food, health care, and housing, and they receive lower scores in reading and math. Minority students, specifically African American and Latino students are twice as likely to live in poverty and attend high-poverty schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Rong & Brown, 2002; Schmid, 2001). The poverty rate for Mexican immigrants hovers at 25.8%, the second highest poverty rate for immigrant populations in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The percentage of Mexican immigrant children under the age of 18 living in poverty is 35.4% as compared to a rate of 10.6% for non-Latino Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

In addition, most Latino parents have inaccurate beliefs about crucial information, such as the cost for college. As noted by Green and Winters (2005), students find themselves concerned over college costs, parent savings for college, and parental socioeconomic status. This suggests that students' perceptions about parental support in regards to college financing limits the college preparation while in high school (Green & Winters, 2005). Thus, the issue of timing and preparation is a factor for Latino parents and their children who could otherwise access existing school resources

for information gathering and adequate academic preparation (Green & Winters, 2005). For this reason my study was conducted early in the elementary education school. Also, parents tend to be more involved in their children's education during the elementary school years, Kindergarten-sixth grade.

In her study of social capital, Maricela Oliva (2004) noted college access and success has only recently been explicitly articulated in terms of the continuum of activities that take place beginning at Kindergarten through college. Success in college is as much about what happens with students from Kindergarten through high school as it is about what happens from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of college to baccalaureate graduation. Therefore, this study reinforced Oliva's (2004) findings about early access to postsecondary education information. According to Oliva (2004), early intervention programs are critical for college success. My research also drew on Freire's concept of social capital in relation to parents' involvement with the education of their children (Freire, 1998).

### **Parent Involvement**

Researchers have supported that parent involvement is critical (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Effective parent involvement can result in improved academic achievement of low socioeconomic students (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, Duchane, 2007; Epstein, 1995; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). The NCLB (No Child Left Behind) includes provisions that focus on family involvement. The connection between school-family-community collaborative efforts and student success has been clearly documented, with parental involvement correlating positively with school completion

rates and school success, particularly for Latino students (Bryan, 2003; Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Keys & Bemak, 1997; Moles, 1997; The U. S. Department of Education, 2005; White House Initiative, 1998). These connections appear even more important to the success of Mexican immigrant children, far from a home country and culture that highly value collectivism and familial involvement.

In many ways, the extent of parent engagement at schools has a significant impact in access to college information. My study takes into consideration Latino parental involvement. Some of the research has indicated that the problem of lack of Latino parental involvement is not because they lack interest. Instead it is lack of social capital of knowing how to effectively participate in their children's schools (Delgado-Gaitán, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007). There is evidence that suggests parental involvement, encouragement, and support are the most important predictor of students' college aspirations. Tierney (2005) suggested that because families are secondary constituents, activities geared toward them almost never rise to the top of any list. He recommended the development of effective parent education programs that model all aspects of college preparation (Tierney et al., 2005). It is clear these programs can and should be doing more to invite parents into the college planning conversation through more sustained, culturally specific parent activities (Tierney, Corwin & Colyar, 2005).

## **College Information Programs**

Latino students continue to lag behind in college attendance (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2005). Despite increased precollege awareness and preparation programs, a college information gap persists for Latino students and parents. It is imperative to consider how college preparation program efforts contribute to the understanding of the college going processes not just for students but for parents also. Tierney (2005) cited a traditional and narrow focus on financial aid and access to postsecondary education information has failed because of ineffective actions that address the academically, socially, and psychologically factors deemed necessary to succeed in college (Tierney, 2005). However, Tierney et al. (2005) noted that educational institutions have continually appropriated significant economic resources for informational college related activities designed to inform and guide students in pathways to college (Tierney, Corwin & Colyar, 2005).

Customarily, most programs designed to enhance college readiness begin at high school ninth grade level with the greater program components of the information intended for students. Some of these programs include a parent segment intended to inform parents of the college going processes (e.g. financial aid, career choices, college and universities, matriculation requirements, admission process). Consequently, Latino parents are not prepared to support their children in college pathways until high school. This leaves them with minimal to no information to share with their children at the elementary and middle school educational experience of their children. Thus, the

resources via social capital investment funds (e.g. postsecondary education information) for their children are limited.

Nonetheless, college preparation programs that schools implement to improve parental involvement opportunities among Latino parents are resourceful for providing college related information, building networks and developing relationships between the schools and homes (Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, 2006; Morrow, 1999). While literature supports structured college preparation programs that begin as early as ninth grade level, many schools build partnerships with parents around access to postsecondary information at all K-12 grade levels. Oliva (2004) and Nora (2004) noted K-16 college information programs have been in existence at all levels, elementary, middle, and high school. Some of these include TRIO programs, Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), the National Center for Urban Partnerships, 2003 GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness Undergraduate Programs), The Futures Project, and the PUENTE Project are examples of some K-16 school and community partnerships. However, Oliva and Nora (2004) have questioned the effectiveness of these programs in light of the continuing dropout rate and dismal college attendance in Latino communities. Both researchers maintain school and home college awareness programs have not achieved their intended levels of success. Programs such as these are limited in the number of students and their parents taking part in the activities and events (Oliva & Nora, 2004).

Federal grants such as GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a program that begins at middle school (seventh grade) and

sets the stage for high school performance and college participation, is aimed at equalizing access to higher education for low-economic students. Participating in this program students receive tutoring, mentoring, and college information including attending college career events and college visits. In addition to students, GEAR-UP is charged with providing information on postsecondary education to parents as well as promoting parent involvement college related activities. Unfortunately, this program is dependent on approval of funding by the federal government and is not intended to include elementary school level parents.

The Futures Program was a very small, experimental college access high school program and ethnographic study. The F & F program, the parent component of The Futures Program, provided Latino parents with basic knowledge about college in general, college planning, and specific colleges. It offered meetings for parents centered on the concept of planned pathways to college. Speakers stressed college options and financial assistance available. The meetings included panel discussions with other Latinos. They also included study groups, small group debriefings, and time for building informal networking, relationships, and socializing with other Latino parents. They were given opportunities to listen to other parents of Latino college students. These resulted in parents becoming knowledgeable about options and strategies for attaining higher education for their children that they might not have known about previously or deemed with their reach (Auerbach, 2004). Thus the program created pathways (social capital) that empowered parents in their venture to take a more active



role in the decision-making and support of their children's college aspirations, visions, and goals (Auerbach, 2004).

Another example of a high school college access program is Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams). This program is unique because it includes all the students enrolled in the entire vertical team (e. g., feeder elementary, middle, and high school) school community. The Davis High School feeder pattern schools in the Houston Independent School District was the first vertical team to participate in the program. The primary goal of the nine schools in the vertical team was to reduce the number of Latino student dropout rates and increase the number of student graduating from high school and going to college. Project GRAD started focusing on college access at the elementary school level with students and parents (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Annually, while Project GRAD was still in the elementary and middle school levels, the entire school community within the geographic boundaries of the 9 schools devotes the first Saturday in October for its "Walk for Success." Teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, and community volunteers go knocking on doors taking the message of college access to parents in the K-12 feeder pattern school system. Students receive the visitors shouting, "*La beca! La beca!*" (the scholarship). Information about the high school scholarship program is shared with parents. They are asked to unite efforts with their school and sign a covenant (contract) binding them to the school community in efforts to work collaboratively with the school for their children's successful academic achievement. Parents receive information about college access and mutually agree to support the children through the entire K-12 educational

experience making it possible for students to qualify for the \$4,000 Project GRAD scholarship and meet criteria for college enrollment. Parents participate in on-going parents involvement activities provided in the K-12 schools giving further information about higher education.

Another college information program is being implemented at local community of faith church. *Path to Scholarships* is a college awareness program developed by June McBride and is currently being implemented in a local community church where the North school is located. Students and their parents participate in college access activities that include academic information and pre-requisites needed for higher education matriculation. Similarly, the program is designed only for high school students in the congregation.

An annual college provider event in Houston, Texas is *The Houston Hispanic Forum*. Annually Houston students and their parents from the Houston Independent School District and surrounding school districts are invited to attend. The forum provides opportunities and workshop sessions for students and their parents to get information on college careers. University set up booths and exhibits to provide information to prospective students. Latino families are informed of access to higher education institutions, financial aid, processes for entry, and pre-requisites for college enrollment. College scholarships are raffled to students in attendance. Parent and students leave with resources they can pursue in their children's education future plans.

Programs and program providers such as these are critical for Latino parents so they can support and guide their children in the area of college knowledge when children

are at elementary school. For the most part as in the Puente, Futures, TRIO, GEAR-UP, In Transit, Path to Scholarships, and Project GRAD programs, the information on postsecondary education is shared at the high school level when students are beginning their 4-year high school educational program that might not be geared toward a higher education destination, postsecondary education. It is during the high school years that students begin their coursework for high school graduation. They begin to establish their GPA (grade point average), SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT (American College Testing) assessments, college and financial aid applications, etc. needed if they intend to pursue a degree in a college or university. For Latino parents, as is for all parents, waiting until their children are in high school to be able to access postsecondary education information may deem to be too late. Issues of access to postsecondary education information is the focus of this research study.

Immigrants of Mexican descent are the largest ethnic group in the Latino community in the United States (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011; Taylor & Fry, 2008). However, they are at high risk for academic success. A postsecondary education may deem to be illusive and unattainable given the increasingly high Latino dropout rates (Hurtado-Ortíz & Gauvain, 2007). Parents play an important role in their children's education and parental influence in the postsecondary education goal setting and attainment (Hurtado-Ortíz & Gauvain, 2007). According to a study conducted by Hein (2003), this group needs parent and school relationships to be strengthened in order to create an educational support system needed to pursue higher education (Hein, 2003).

### **Access to a Postsecondary Education**

Tierney and Hagedorn (2005) agree that achieving the goal of increasing access to college for underrepresented Latino students is a complex task (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2005). Auerbach (2004) cited P. Gándara (2004) noting the single most important barrier to college access for Latino students is lack of knowledge of the process needed to go to college. Auerbach (2004) also noted that across social groups, parents have been referred to as one of the top three sources of college information and help for students. According to Leticia Solorzano (2007), limited research has been conducted focusing on gaining more understanding on parent involvement from the perspective and voices of Latino parents. For the most part, Latino parents have not had a direct voice in the research regarding their involvement in their children's higher education preparation (Auerbach, 2004; Gándara, 2004; Solorzano, 2007).

Laura Perna (2006) explored the concept of access in terms of college preparation in her study. She defines *access* by an operational term meaning the "ability to enter, approach, and pass to and from a place, or an institution." Perna (2006) considers access as a resource factor which influences entry. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) referred to access as institutional funds of knowledge (Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995). Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar, (2005) noted access efforts should be examined so that access can be promoted and enhanced early in students' education (Tierney et al., 2005).

Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) as cited by Auerbach, concluded that in a nationally representative survey of Latino parents of high school students, more than two

thirds lacked basic information about college eligibility and planning (Tornatzky et al., 2002). McClafferty, McDonough, and Fann (2001) in Auerbach (2004) pointed out that the college information gap is especially wide for lower SES immigrant parents who are not fluent in English and who have specialized needs on issues of financial aid, undocumented status, and college life (Auerbach, 2004; McClafferty et al, 2002). The struggle to access higher education information is pervasive in Latino families living in impoverished communities. Auerbach's (2004) research supports the notion that ways in which low socioeconomic status, immigrant, LEP (limited English proficient) Latino parents engage with a college access program is critical for narrowing the college information gap. This is particularly true in the area of access to the process involved to pursue higher education and financial assistance.

Additionally, this case study is aligned with Auerbach (2004), Oliva (2004) and Nora (2004) citing that with supportive school networks, Latino parents can explore college access during their children's elementary educational school experience (Oliva & Nora, 2004). Recognizing this is important for Latino students' success in high school and college, this study is guided by theoretical constructs that researchers have used to explain the influence on college choice brought about by various types of capital, primarily, social capital. Expanding family networks and relationships can also impact their scope of existing social capital. When parents build upon their social and cultural capital, they build advocacy capacity around inequities in schools' educational practices that could be contributing to dismal Latino student academic achievement (Glod, 2007; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Oliva, 2004; Nora, 2004).

Consistently, school districts continue to promote a Kindergarten-twelfth grade school system. Few have been proponents of a Kindergarten-16 system. The vertical team school system concept that connects parents beginning at the elementary level, on to the middle schools, and continuing to high schools stops short of engaging parents in further extending the educational path leading to college. Navigational strategies throughout PreK-16 can result in the acquisition of value-added social, cultural, human, intellectual, and critical capital needed to better understand the intricacies of the college going process. The research for this case study is significant because it was conducted with Latino parents at the time their children start on the PreK-16 educational path, the elementary school.

Green and Winters (2005) believe parents play a major role in their children's education and in motivating them to articulate their intentions to pursue a postsecondary education (Green and Winters, 2005). Nuñez (2009) cited Stanton-Salazar (2001) noting funds of knowledge as form of social capital parents need to help their children navigate the educational system. She defined funds of knowledge as the repertoire of information and behaviors that enhance and facilitate access to postsecondary education information (Lopez, 2001; Nuñez, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Thus, this research study sought to identify postsecondary education information Latino parents can access, how they go about learning the information, and what resources and networks they utilize in the form of social capital to enhance their understanding of the processes needed for their children to pursue a higher education degree (Morrow, 1999a).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The social capital concept is the theoretical framework for this study. It is premised by the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) in understanding the idea that cultural (dis)advantages or inequalities exist and are passed down from one generation to the next. This according to Bourdieu also extends to the educational system and to this study. The notion of social capital first stood out as a theory which was essential in accounting for the inequity of performance at school of children from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Another sociologist, James Coleman (1988) applied social capital for the purpose of explaining student academic success. For low income Latino parents, the social capital they possess is critical for supporting their children in education and careers choices. The inquiry of social capital of Latino parents in this case study would at the very least suggest an ontological position which says that Latino parents hold social capital, and the social capital they have is a meaningful component of their cultural context and social community (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Mouw, 2006).

William A. Vega (1995), in Zambrana (1995), *Understanding Latino Families*, noted a broad area of Latino family research has focused on the role of families, social networks for communication, socialization, distribution of resources, preservation of cultural norms, and immigrant resettlement. Education in the form of knowledge and information is a social resource that is accessible through social networks and embedded in resources. In studies, researchers have indicated this resource is scarce for Latino parents. Numerous researchers such as Coleman (1988), Stanton-Salazar (2001), Perna

(2006), and Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar (2005) have all noted that Latino parents lack social capital in terms of resources for social connections, networking, and specifically the flow and exchange of information related to higher education. In their studies, social capital is defined as resources that provide knowledge to individuals through social networks, connections, and relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). However, because of the broad nature of the definition and applicability of the social capital theory, the focus of this research study is centered specifically on Latino parents in the educational community context (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Social capital is critical to this study because it can be an access vehicle, significant essential for Latino parents to become a valuable resource support for participation and support of their children's postsecondary education. From Lareau's (1989) perspective, the importance of social capital is a vital attribute in accessing college particularly because it facilitates the flow of information regarding opportunities and choices (Lin, 1999; Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 1989). Social capital theory was the theoretical framework used for this case study because it was consistent with its functionality in terms of access to resources and information.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is one form of various capital theory concepts such as human capital, economic capital, cultural capital, intellectual capital, academic capital, etc. It is prevalent in studies done by Bourdieu (1986). He acknowledged that the volume of social capital depends on the size of the network of connections individuals can access



and on the volume of the capital possessed by those to whom one is connected. Thus, social capital was used as the theoretical framework for this research study for the purpose of determining resources, connections, and networks available and accessible to Latino parents aimed at assisting, guiding, and supporting their children toward the higher education process.

Assumptions that guided this study considered access to postsecondary education as a critical factor. McNeal (1999) noted social capital is needed to access postsecondary education information and is lacking among minorities and low SES (socio economic status) parents due to limited resources within their social networks. Thus, the research for this study intended to identify resources in the form of social capital that Latino parents possess in terms of social networks, connections, and relationships. It also focused on how the parents utilize the resources to access postsecondary education information. In this study, I noted specific places and times the resources are used, most notably, during the time their children attend elementary school. The three researchers that have developed a theory of social capital more extensively are Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1990), and Robert Putnam (2000). Although the three did not agree on the definition and applicability of social capital, they all applied the term in the education arena. Bourdieu wrote from within a broadly Marxist framework. His work began by distinguishing between three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. A basic concern was to explore the processes making for unequal access to resources, differentials in power, and the ways in which

these fed into class formation and the creation of elites (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Hero, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Ward & Pretty, 2001).

Although the term social capital originated in the early 1920s, the development of the concept can be attributed to Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003; Portes & Landolt, 2000). Bourdieu and Coleman's extensive work has been in the areas of sociology and social theory. Coleman was well aware of Bourdieu's contributions to social capital (Field, 2003). Social capital is framed within Pierre Bourdieu's social theory conceptualized as social class (dis)advantages leading to education inequity (Bourdieu, 1986; Contreras, 2005). Bourdieu proposed that generational transmitants, privileges, social networks, and access to resources are incumbent on the volume of social capital and network size possessed by individuals (Field, 2003). Social capital is the theoretical framework used for this study because it takes into account social resources, networks and relationships Latino parents may or may not possess which can help them guide and navigate their children's educational pipeline leading to higher education.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) used among other forms of capital the concept of social capital as early as the 1970s. For Bourdieu, the capital that a person has helps him/her to move forward in life. This concept includes network of connections and volume of capital. His conceptual social capital framework described how privilege is transmitted from one generation to another in families. When children are born they inherit a social space from which they gain access to different capital profits (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as social relationships which provide, if necessary, useful supports. He later redefined social capital as the sum of resources that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance, recognition, and understanding of social hierarchy (Field, 2003). Additionally, Bourdieu (1986) noted the size, connection, resources, and volume of social capital depends on the size of the network of connections, individuals can access.

The conservative social theory views inequality as an inescapable part of the human condition. Inequitable access is part of the human condition of poverty for many Latino families. Bourdieu (1986) viewed social connections as needed for investing. He deemed social capital as an asset of the privileged and a means of maintaining their superiority. Social capital changed from metaphor to concept and noted the interplay with other forms of capital (e.g., cultural, human, intellectual, economic) (Bourdieu, 1986; Field, 2003). His use of the term social capital was an explicit attempt to understand the production of classes and class divisions. Social capital, while being constituted by social networks and relationships, was never disconnected from “capital.” Bourdieu’s conception of capital was such that he almost conceives of capital and power as synonymous (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 1987).

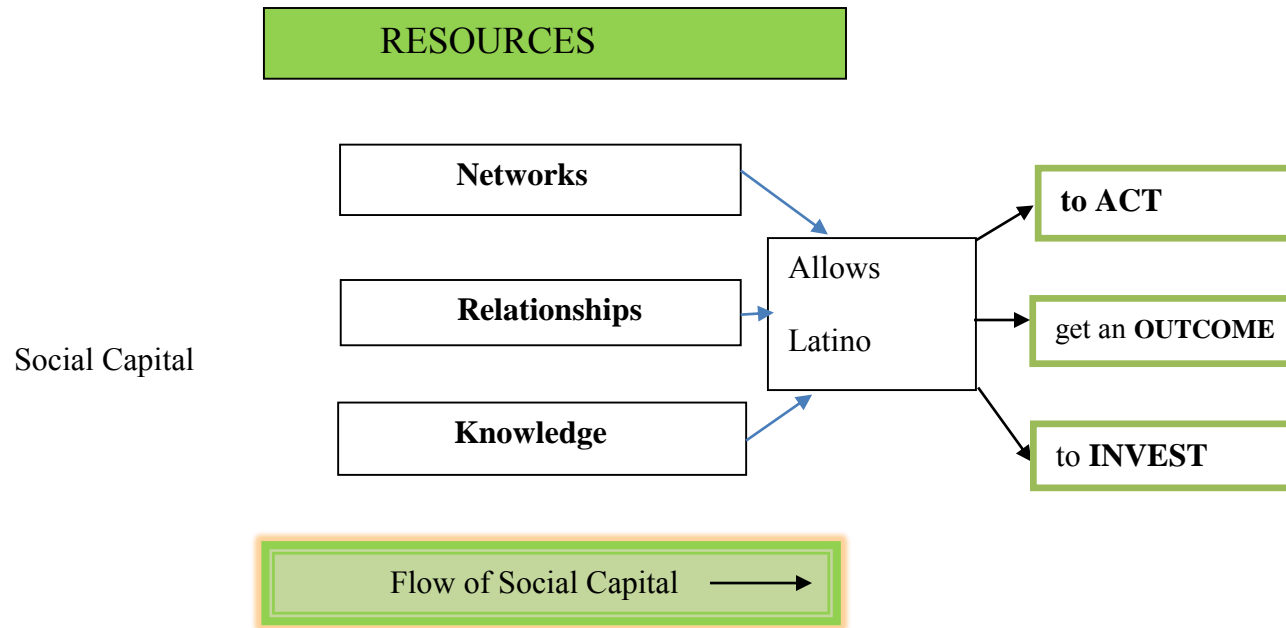
The individual most noted for bringing social capital into the mainstream American social sciences is social theorist, James Coleman (1990). In *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman (1990) hypothesized social capital within the context of education relevant to resources, social networks, and relationships that facilitate actions

of individuals. Coleman refers to social capital as being derived from resources such as networks which provide information and academic achievement support. He defined social capital as constituting any aspect of social structure creating value and facilitating the actions of the individuals within that social structure (McNeal, 1999).

James Coleman's (1988) contribution to the development of social capital was to theorize it in a way that illuminated the processes and experiences of low income individuals in terms of resources they possess. He argued that those living in marginalized communities could also benefit from its possession. Coleman further noted that social inequalities and lack of access to resources continue to hinder the educational achievement of minorities (Coleman, 1988). This attribute pertains to Latino children.

According to Coleman, social capital exists in the relationships among persons and of resources individuals use to achieve their interests (Astone, Nathanson, Schoen, & Kim, 1999; (Coleman, 1988). Relatedly, Putman and Goss (2002) cited Coleman (1990) as using the term social capital to highlight the social context of education (Putman & Goss, 2002). Like Bourdieu, Coleman also highlighted the importance of social networks (Coleman, 1988).

James Coleman's social capital theory is conceptualized as a process that is inherently functional. Coleman's (1990) concept of social capital is defined by its functionality. It is comprised of different entities. All consist of some aspect of social structures and facilitate certain actions by individuals. He defines different sets of actions, outcomes, and relationships as social capital. Social capital for him is inherently "whatever allows people or institutions to act" (Coleman, 1990, p.784). For Coleman social capital "simply allows actions to take place by providing the needed social resources (Coleman, 1990, p.785). Coleman suggests that social capital is used to describe networks and connections that exist in communities and families (Coleman, 1988; Battle & Pastrana, 2007). Resources include social networks, connections, relationships, and knowledge. Figure 1 depicts the flow of social capital.



*Figure 1* Flow of social capital resources.

According to Coleman (1990) for resources to be productive networks, relationships, and knowledge must allow individuals to act, to get an outcome, and to invest with expected returns. Social capital serves for a particular purpose. It is considered as a resource that individuals can draw upon as needed to enhance knowledge (Coleman, 1988). The flow of social capital allows individuals to develop social networks by making connections to other people in the networks. Relationships are developed as individuals become connected to networks. Networks become the social structures by which individuals access information. When individuals participate in the process they obtain access to information. In order to mobilize and convert resources (new knowledge), they must first access those resources and then use them to take action (invest). Furthermore, to convert the newly acquired capital and get desired returns, individuals must invest by taking purposeful action to get desired returns. For exchange of social capital and flow of resources, networks are needed. So for Latino parents, social networks and connections are necessary to access, convert, and invest that newly acquired knowledge and information in their children's education via guidance, support, and mentoring.

Researchers have noted Latino parents lack social capital when it hinges on social connection, networking, and specifically the exchange of information related to higher education. Adler and Kwon (1999) defined social capital as “the sum of resources accruing to an individual or group by virtue of their location in the network of their more or less durable social relations.” (p.36). In addition, they noted that like other forms of capital, resources can be invested and converted into returns (Adler & Kwon, 1999;

Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, social capital as a resource to action for access was at the core of this case study.

James Coleman (1988) referred to social capital as being derived from resources that provide information, social norms, and achievement support. He defined social capital as constituting any aspect of social structure creating value and facilitating the actions of the individuals within that social structure (Coleman, 1988; McNeal, 1999). According to Coleman, social capital exists in networks and relationships among individuals and the value of social capital structures are the resources individuals can use to achieve their interests (Coleman, 1988).

Specifically for this study, Latino families need access to these resources in order to access postsecondary education information. Additionally, research in family-based explanations has examined the relevant social support system of social capital as an element found to positively affect academic attainment (Bourdieu, 1992). Researchers in subsequent studies have indicated student success in college is also determined by factors related to social class, race, and gender (McDonough, 1997).

Coleman (1990) further noted that without networks there is no social exchange or “flow” of capital. Dense and open networks have the ability to provide information relevant to college access. Critical to parents is the identification of these networks and location where they exist. Closed networks, referred to by James Coleman (1988) as intergenerational closure can foster the flow of information. He also noted intergenerational transfer of resources is a result of socialization within families. The families are social structures that constitute resources and the social network. Parent



networks provide opportunities for connections to individuals that have valuable resources. Families must mobilize resources in order to turn them into capital.

Loury (1977), Bourdieu (1986), and Coleman (1988) all argued that social capital is not embodied in any particular person, but rather is embedded in people's social relationships from which individuals are able to derive resources and support (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Loury, 1977; Portes, 1998; Schmid, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Williams, 2005; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Research in this case study will seek to find a correlation to research conducted by Coleman in the theoretical concept of intergenerational access, transfers of resources, and intergenerational closure (Carbonaro, 1998). What Coleman (1990) noted as interrelationship capital consists of information acquired from relationships with individuals including extended family members. Social capital in itself is a resource facilitating action. Connectedness, networks, relationships, social exchange, social support, embeddedness, density, ties, trust, and groups are all considered dimensions of social capital (Astone, Nathanson, Schoen, & Kim, 1999). Social capital also refers to the collective value of social networks and the resources accessed through those networks. The actions of individuals and groups can be greatly facilitated by their direct links to other individuals in social networks. Education is a social resource that is accessible through social networks.

Robert Putnam (2000) has also contributed to the theory of social capital. Putnam's background lies in political science. Putnam's use of social capital was largely an extension of Coleman's social capital. He acknowledged the influence of Coleman's writing in the social capital concept (Putnam, 2000). According to Field (2003) Putnam

theorized that social capital contributes to collective action by increasing the potential costs to defectors, fostering robust forms of reciprocity facilitating flows of information. Putnam defined social capital as features of social life such as networks, norms, trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Field, 2003).

Putnam (2000) became the dominant voice in the concept of social capital. In *Bowling Alone* Putnam argued “the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value” (Putnam 2000, p. 18). He further defined the term as referring to connections among individuals, social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000; Arneil, 2006). Putnam’s research also referenced the importance of networks, norms, bridging, and bonding. To Putnam, kinship (i.e., family and friends) is less important than acquaintanceship (Putnam, 2000).

All three Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam have been criticized for “gender-blindness” of their work. Feminist critics have noted that much civic engagement research is highly gendered” (Field, 2003, p. 41). Both researchers have not made specific references to any particular gender in their work. In addition to gender, neither conducted any research with Latino families. A focus of this study was built on their theory, specifically in the area of social capital theory with Latino females of Mexican descent. All three consider social capital consisting of personal connections and interpersonal interaction. They are also criticized for developing a somewhat undifferentiated concept of social capital. Table 1 demonstrates similar social capital attributes and characteristics shared by Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam.

	<b>Pierre Bourdieu</b>	<b>James Coleman</b>	<b>Robert Putnam</b>
Social relationships	√	√	√
Density and durability of ties	√	√	
Reciprocity	√	√	√
Convertibility into educational performance	√	√	√
Social class factor	√	√	
Volume of social capital dependent on number of connections	√	√	√
Social structures facilitate actions	√	√	
Bridging and bonding			√
Benefits are tangible returns	√	√	√
Derives strength from context	√	√	√
Differential access to resources	√	√	√
Exchange value of social capital	√	√	√

*Table 1.* Social capital concepts

Robert Wuthnow (2002) has also contributed to the social capital theory. He suggested that we look critically at the concept of social capital to seek and develop alternatives that do a better job of bridging the privileged and the marginalized (Wuthnow, 2002). Wuthnow also noted that social capital function in an exclusionary way when it consists of limited networks that provide valuable information to some

individuals but leaves out others. (Adler & Kwon, 1999; Halpern, 2005; Wuthnow, 2002).

According to DeFilippis (2001), social capital must be reconnected to economic capital for the term to have any meaning (DeFilippis, 2001). Loury's (1997) original use of the concept was part of his effort to demonstrate that the idea of equal opportunity was an impossibility (Loury, 1987). When his definition is combined with Bourdieu's (1985) understanding of capital as essentially about power, one can begin to approach policy and organize efforts designed to rectify, or at least, mitigate, the inequities in access to capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social capital represented an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network" (Field, 2003, p. 17). Field acknowledged that the value of an individual's ties (or volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the number of connections they can mobilize and the value of capital (e.g., *cultural, social, and economic*) possessed by each connector (Field, 2003). Shirley (1997) noted that Jacobs (1961), Loury (1977), and Coleman (1990) all recognized three different types of capital. These include; *physical* capital, which describes the value of buildings and tactile infrastructure, *financial* capital, which describes the value of money, and *human* capital, which describes the economic value of an individual's physical and *intellectual* capital skills (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Shirley, 1997). *Intellectual* capital is a form of *human* capital (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997). The various capital terms have been used in studies accordingly as they apply to the phenomenon being researched. These terms are listed in Table 2.

Social	Cultural	Critical	Human	Intellectual
Economic	Academic	Financial	Physical	Social media

*Table 2.* Forms of capital

Social capital differs from other forms of capital. When considering social capital, one can propose that certain kinds of social relationships possess economic value. Those relationships can be formal, as in membership in PTAs, labor unions, congregations, Boy or Girl Scouts, community groups, and civic organizations. The term homogenous social capital can explain ties between individuals of the same background and status, and heterogeneous social capital denotes to bridges between boundaries of class and ethnicity (Coleman, 1990; Jacobs, 1961; Loury, 1987; Shirley, 1997).

### **Cultural Capital**

McDonough (1997) cited Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory as being important in many studies that focus on how and why class status plays a role in educational achievement. Cultural capital then became significant in understanding why Latinos with limited resources may not be able to access sufficient information to impact their children's education achievement significantly, in terms of graduating from high school and pursuing a higher education degree. This case study focused on Latino families of low socioeconomic status which translates to not inclusive in middle and upper class status. For Latinos, culture is a mitigating factor that impedes their access due to its marginalization in the mainstream culture.

Bourdieu (1986) in McDonough (1997), maintained that cultural capital is an element that middle and upper class families transmit to their children. This substitutes for and supplements the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations. McDonough (1997) also cited DiMaggio (1982) in *Choosing Colleges*, who found that cultural capital not only mediates the relationship between family background and school outcomes, but it also may have its greatest impact on the educational attainment by affecting the quality of college attended by students (Bourdieu, 1986; Contreras, 2005; DiMaggio, 1982; McDonough, 2004).

According to John Field (2003) for Bourdieu, inequality was to be explained by the production and reproduction of capital. Bourdieu initially adopted the concept of cultural capital to explain the unequal academic achievement of children from different social classes and from different groups within social classes. The “density and durability of ties were both vital” (Field, 2003, p. 17)

Many factors contribute to the widening of the college access gap for Latino students. Auerbach (2004) believed Latino parents provide their children with cultural capital in the form of *consejos* (narrative advice) and other strategies that are for the most part unrecognized by schools (Auerbach, 2004). Nora (2004) referred to cultural capital as being the context represented by a student’s perception in regards to a significant support and encouragement from family and community upon which they can draw to influence their desire to attend college and to formulate a support system (Bourdieu, 1988; Kingston, 2001; Nora, 2004). This includes the credentials students have acquired prior to making their college choice. Nora (2004) acknowledged a more

comprehensive array of psychosocial factors (e.g., social, cultural, critical capital, and habitus) influence students' college choice significantly (Nora, 2004). These factors can be the springboard for school community interventions and activities provided to Latino students and their parents. These factors are critical given that Latino parents are kept out of the information loop which typically takes place at the high school level, the time parents are least likely to attend school events, and engage in parent involvement activities. They are also taken into consideration in this research study.

Furthermore, while parents reside in the same community, they did not live close to each other. The parents shared that they only interact with each other at the school. Thus, they do not develop or cultivate relationships outside the context of the school. Schools can serve as conduits to develop networks that provide necessary resources (information) to parents. They have the capacity of developing relationships with parents and resource provider groups.

### **Critical Capital**

Morrell and Rogers are cited by Auerbach (2004) referring to critical capital as a form of parent knowledge of advocacy acquired through questioning, critiquing, and challenging the system via discussions about race, class, power, and inequality. When individuals in schools provide forums for families to openly discuss critical social justice issues, Latino parents enhance their awareness of barriers to the educational system and higher education (Auerbach, 2004; Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Normore et al., 2007; Solorzano, 2007). According to Shirley (1997) liberals and radicals are attracted to

critical capital theory because they seek to strengthen community organizations and focus on social justice issues (Shirley, 1997).

### **Social Media Capital**

Most recently, individuals seek information through alternate venues such as social media. Technology has improved accessibility to information via computers, websites, and other electronic communications. The value these resources can provide can be beneficial and add or extend value to existing knowledge. Unfortunately, access to media may be limited thus diminishing possibilities to gain significant information.

The internet now allows for social networks to communicate without meeting face to face. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, e-mail, and others are allowing exchange of resources to transpire through network communications (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Thus this has become a new vehicle for social capital. Anyone can join organizations and memberships, and stay connected through the internet. For John Field (2003: 1-2) the central thesis of social capital theory is that relationships matter. The central idea is that social networks are a valuable asset. Interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks can bring great benefits to people. According to Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001), the internet has facilitated in the production of social capital (Shah et al., 2001). Wasko and Faraj (2005) have also examined social capital and the contribution to networks of practice through the internet (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).



## **Habitus**

In addition to social capital, Nora (2004) noted recent studies have revealed that social, psychological, and emotional considerations are also at the heart of students' college choices. The conceptual framework for Nora's study proposed that when choosing a college, students use cognitive and intuitive processes, the *heart* as well as the *head*. It was hypothesized that the heart of the choice process also includes psychosocial factors that inform and affirm students' decisions and elements that previous qualitative researchers have categorized as *habitus* (Nora, 2004). It has also been noted to be a person's character or way of thinking.

McDonough (1997) cited Bourdieu's use of habitus as a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world that individuals get from their immediate environment. Bourdieu used the term habitus as a common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shape an individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1986; McDonough, 1997). Identifying the "*habitus*" of Latino students is important in the development of interventions and activities for Latino families as school communities seek opportunities to narrow the college information gap and create college pathways.

Furthermore, in order for individuals to get access to resources, they must be able to navigate the flow of information channeled through various structures. There is indication that the flow is multidirectional within a community. The flow of information can be fluid, intentional, transactional, mutual, purposeful, planned, or fragmented. Access to information can be spontaneous and motivated by action. Information can

flow from the home, parents, school, community, and/or resource providers (Martinez-Cosio & Martínez, 2007). A challenge for Latino parents is to identify the organizations that holds the knowledge, get to the embeddedness of the resources, and develop connections for ease of access. Actions guide interactions. For outcomes, actions must be motivated, instrumental, and purposeful. Knowledge and information is embedded in resources. The transfer of resources and benefits rests upon the intent of the individual. It must be viewed by individuals in terms of being critical and important to have and to act upon for results.

Pippa Norris (2003) referred to social capital as noted by Putnam (2000) as consisting of bridging and bonding groups (Norris, 2003; The World Bank, 1999). According to Coleman (1988) social capital referred to norms and networks that enable collective action by individuals because they are informative and communicative and have the capacity to lead to social interactions (Coleman, 1988). Consequently, there is a flow of information, knowledge, and exchange of ideas among individuals. This communication is also known to contribute to a sense of community enhancing and accessing information. Social capital focuses on social networks and connections among members in the social structures.

### **Social Community Structures**

Dense and open networks have the ability to provide information relevant to postsecondary education information. Critical to parents is the identification of these networks and where they exist. Closed networks are referred to by James Coleman as intergenerational closure. In these networks information can freely flow from one

structure to another. When networks are open, the information stays in the structure. Access is dependent on the actions taken to secure the information. Latino families are faced with needing trusting relationships built on *confianza* (trust) in order to participate in existing informational networks.

Social capital is defined in the literature as networks that provide knowledge and resources to individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Coleman (1988) posited that social capital is actualized in the interactions among individuals through networks and connections and that it is a call to take action (Coleman, 1988). Coleman's assumption is taken into consideration in this research study as I sought to identify existing networks and relationships Latino parents have available to them and specific actions they take to access postsecondary education information.

Relationships are needed for the flow of capital to be functional in ways that bring about actions and outcomes. Partnerships are created through relationships. If they are mutually supportive they can be collaborative in nature. Therefore the types of relationships developed are critical. Relationships that promote, recognize, and support access to relevant postsecondary education information are necessary. Congruency between individuals facilitates making desired connections. The exchange of information from home, school, and community is also necessary. The nature of the relationship in as far as being collaborative and open enhances opportunities to access resources.

According to Lesser (2000), the community serves as an intra-network clearinghouse by identifying those with relevant knowledge by bringing people together

to develop and share information. Individuals in the community help make connections with one another. Thus, the community acts as a reference mechanism for the exchange of knowledge which constitutes social capital. Lesser also contends that relations among individuals facilitate action which ultimately results in access to informational social resources and transactional exchanges of social capital (Lesser, 2000). Figure 2 outlines a framework for transactional exchanges of social capital within social structures in a community.

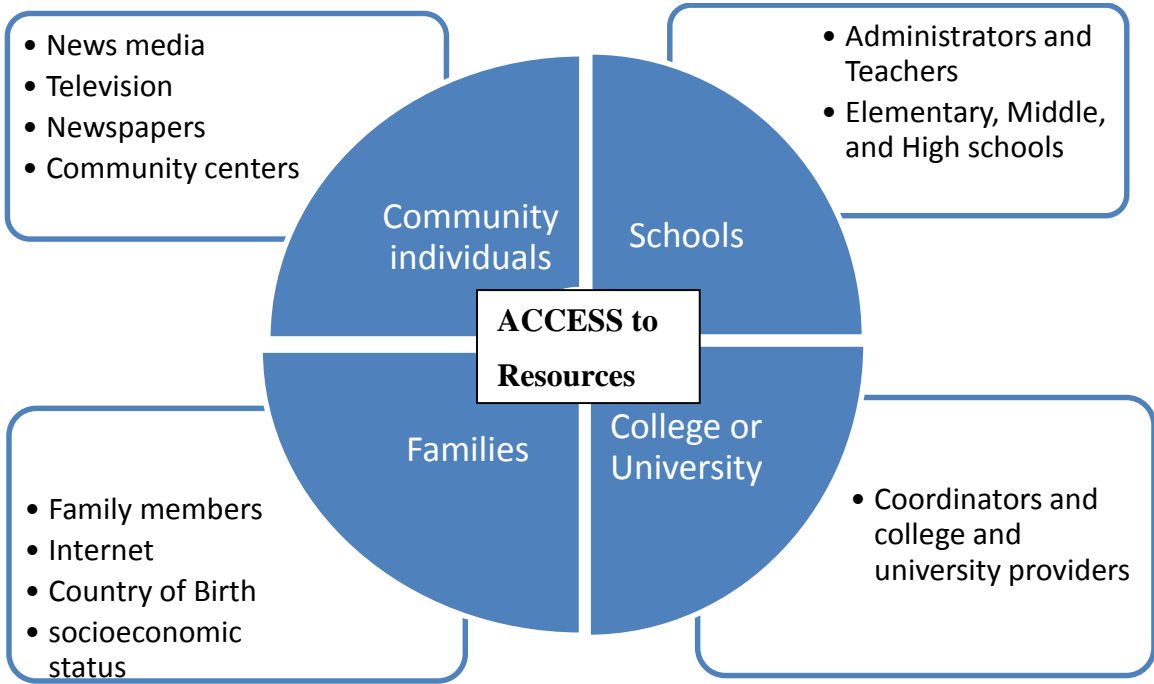


Figure 2. Social community structures

According to Coleman, social structures facilitate actions of individuals and defined social capital is defined by its function. He further noted that social capital demands cooperation between individuals who are nevertheless pursuing their own self-

interest. In addition, Coleman (1988) noted that social structures facilitate certain action of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1988). Social structures in the community can help parents develop relationships and ties that enhance the flow of information.

While researchers found social capital to be difficult to measure and assess, Putnam (2000) examined social capital in terms of the degree of involvement, newspaper readership, and membership in a group (The World Bank, 2007). When the use of social capital embodies success from exchanges of information and resources, it is said to be productive and beneficial (Adler & Kwon, 1990; Coleman, 1988). Coleman also noted social capital is not located in individuals, rather in the relationships with others (Adler & Kwon, 1990; Coleman, 1988; The World Bank, 1999a).

Shirley (1997) contended the research on social capital in education has been heavily quantitative and that qualitative research on social capital is in its infancy. Although it has done much to illustrate and explain the power of social capital, it has not articulated a development process of change, which could promote stronger social ties and improved academic achievement in urban schools. This is true in the case of Latino students. According to Shirley (1997), “For those who teach, learn, and study in America’s schools, the practical ramifications of social theory and research are matters of urgent concern,” (p. 27).

Social capital can be generated in low-income communities in the United States (Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2001). “We need to be very careful about how we define and use the term social capital,” (Coleman, 1988, p.782). Social capital has

evolved through its use by Loury (1977), Bourdieu (1986), and Coleman (1988). Gonzalez, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) noted social capital scholars (Ceja, 2004; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Schmid, 2001) have argued that “underrepresented students do not adequately possess or have access to the informal and formal social networks that may serve as conduits for college opportunities” (p. 148).

A culture of college knowledge exists in middle-class families. They use it to guide their children toward a college education. The lack of college knowledge in most low socioeconomic Latino communities (*barrios*) is a major challenge for parents in terms of the social capital they can provide their children. The social capital Latino parents provide their children varies in the areas of aspirations and expectations. It can either add value or hinder the support they give their children in making critical choices about college attendance.

While research indicated that Latino parents have high educational aspirations for their children, their limited social capital could indicate that college attendance is not a realistic possibility for their children. Social capital is an important factor in academic achievement (Battle & Pastrana, 2007). The school community can be a significant resource to enhance social capital that parents provide. By involving parents and building supporting networks, school communities can enhance parents’ social capital because networks act as conduits of information. However, according to McNeal (1999) social capital tends to be lacking among minorities, parents with low socio economic status (SES), and single-headed households because there are not enough resources within the scope of their networks (McNeal, 1999).

As the Latino population continues to grow in U.S. schools, so has the overrepresentation of Mexican immigrant youth in status dropout rates and among students experiencing academic struggles and academic disengagement or failure (Garcia, 2001). Early intervention programs are needed for parents that have no post-secondary experience, opportunities to learn about college, and realize that college is a possibility for their children (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2005).

Latino students face serious challenges in the public school system. High dropout rates, low college participation rates, and widening gaps in academic achievement continue to plague Latino students. The college choice process is a complex endeavor for students and their families. Limited research in college access efforts currently provided during students' early education experience (elementary) are lacking, totally nonexistent, or insufficient. The sustained effective efforts of these school-parent-community programs and partnerships may result in the closing of the college information gap for Latino families.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

Fry (2008), indicated while attainable levels of education for Latino students have increased, they continue to have a greater risk of dropping out of school and pursuing postsecondary education. Many Latino parents, especially first-generation immigrants, have limited educational experiences, which may affect their ability to support and guide their children's education beyond the high school years (Delgado-Gaitán, 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Family processes play an important role in the academic achievement and aspirations of Latino youth and has been defined as parents' investment of resources (i.e. *social capital*) in their children's education (Grolnick et al., 1997). Therefore, in this qualitative case study, I examined the process Latino immigrant parents utilize to access postsecondary education.

This research study may be viewed from a critical theory perspective. Creswell (1998) referred to critical theory as defined by Thomas (1993). He noted critical theory can be "defined by the particular configuration of methodology postures it embraces," (p. 241). The critical researcher may decide to design the study from an ethnographic perspective (Creswell, 1998). Thus, this case study I sought to understand how people think, interact, form networks, build relationships, and act accordingly (Thomas, 1993). Based on the research findings, I examined the data sources to identify the perspectives of Latino parents and how they access postsecondary education information, the phenomenon being studied.



## Case Study

A case study was used because it has elements characteristic of a bounded system. Hays and Singh (2012) noted that a case is a bounded system and “allows the researcher to study individual(s), events, activities, or processes of a bounded system” (p. 44). Thus this study is bounded by the Latino school community where the parents reside and participate in learning information about higher education.

This qualitative case study focused on Latino parents whose children attend two elementary schools in an urban public school district. Both schools sites represent the context (natural setting) and constitute the bounded system for the study. The schools have distinct boundaries, different administrative leadership, and both address parent involvement in unique ways. The school sites are indicative of what Hays and Singh (2012) refer to as having boundaries that function, have working parts, and some sequenced or coherent patterned behavior (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Yin (2012), the emphasis in a case study is on examining a phenomenon as it exists in its natural context in order to identify the boundaries between context and the phenomenon (Yin, 2012). The phenomenon of this case study was access to postsecondary education information early at the elementary school experience and within the context of the school site (which constituted the school structure) where the Latino participating parents’ children attend.

This case study was also aligned with Merriam (2009) noting how participants view a phenomenon or process within a social context. Hays and Singh (2012) cited Yin (2012) in *Qualitative Inquiry in Clinical and Educational Settings*, noting the researcher

must also study the case by examining “a phenomenon as it exists in the natural context to identify the boundaries between the two (i.e., between the context and the phenomenon)” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 44; Yin, 2012). Based on this, in order to identify the phenomenon in case studies, the researcher must take into consideration the social context. The phenomenon or process cannot be understood without taking into consideration the social context where the research is conducted. Thus, the focal point of this study was to find out how Latino parents access postsecondary education information during the time their children are enrolled at elementary school.

In addition, a case study was also distinguished by how it is “researched in depth and the data are delineated by time period, activity, and place” (Hays and Singh, 2012, p. 44; Plummer, 2001). Glesne (2011) cited Schram (2006) in *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*, noting that a case study is a way to encapsulate human behavior and “its strategic value lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from the single case” (p. 22). The researcher must therefore focus on the uniqueness of the case and linkages to the social context it is a part of. This was significant to this case study because the phenomena access to resources in the school and/or community cannot be fully understood and identified without the social context where it exists (Glesne, 2011).

This case study is framed on the theoretical framework of social capital. Portes (1998) has noted social capital as the ability of individuals to access resources through membership in networks or broad social structures (Portes, 1998). Coleman’s functionalist conception of parental social capital is a network based resource comprised

of social connections that facilitates student achievement. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as any form of social structure that creates value and facilitates the actions of individual that reside within that social structure. He further noted that social capital is created when the relationships among individuals change in ways that facilitate action (Coleman, 1988). For this study emphasis was noted to the school context and network structures which facilitate or impede access to social resources (information). The extent and nature of existing social resources embedded in the network were also noted in the data analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this qualitative study consisted primarily of structured focus group and individual interviews (Merriam, 2009). “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 160). Secondary strategies employed to collect data were observations and document analysis. Most of the data for this study were collected over a period of five years at numerous school sites. Other settings for data collection were conference locations, colleges, and universities. Additional data were collected from informal interviews with principals, teachers, and college information providers.

### **Interviews**

Initially, a meeting was held with the principals to inform them about the research study and acquire their approval to conduct the interviews with parents at their campuses. Upon their approval, parents at each school were provided with background information including basic information about the study, interview questions, and IRB

protocols. The principal at each school campus assigned a parent liaison for scheduling the focus group interviews, solicit volunteers, and obtain participants' contact information. The time frame (60-90 minutes) for the interviews was indicated as a requisite for full participation. Two parents from each focus group participated in an individual interview. Some of the questions were modified during the interviews in order to illicit elaboration of responses.

Interviews were the preferred method for data collection. They are widely used in qualitative data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Nunkooning, 2005; Sandelowski, 2002). Questioning allows the researcher to probe deeper. The interviews began with introductions. I built rapport by telling the participant a little about self before the interview process started. I gave a brief description of life growing up in the United States as a Mexican immigrant who did not speak English and grew up very poor. According to Esterberg (2002), for a successful interview, the researcher must develop a relationship between with participants (Esterberg, 2002). A brief sketch was drawn displaying the setting of the participants. There was discussion about personal disclosure. While most participants shared frankly, there was hesitation in sharing amongst at least four parents. Participating parents asked specific higher education questions themselves during the interview process. The interview ended noting appreciation their responses and support of the study and research.

## **Observations**

I observed PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences, special celebrations such as end of year promotion ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, school festivals, book fairs, open house, math, science, and literacy family nights. I also attended district and national parent conferences, parent workshops, and trainings on postsecondary education information. Particular emphasis was noted if any college information was provided at these events. A reflection journal with anecdotal notes of field observations was maintained. I was purposeful in the time frame (1-3 hours) spent observing events.

## **Documents**

Various types of documents were reviewed for congruence and insights, relevant to the research questions, and that could support the findings (Merriam, 2009). Essentially, content and comparative analysis were used to analyze the information in the documents (Merriam, 2009). I collected documents in the form of handouts from parent and student college information events. Schools' parent handbook, parent notices, and monthly newsletters were also reviewed. Journals with field notes and annotations from observations were collected for document review. These were utilized to identify higher education information shared with parents. They were also reviewed to detect reoccurring patterns and themes.

## **Procedures**

Focus group interviews were conducted for this case study and were in Spanish. I transcribed all the recordings personally and translated them to English. Some questions were modified during the interview process to reflect an increased

understanding of the responses. The interview questions used for the focus group interviews consisted of the following:

1. Is your child going to attend college after graduating from high school?
2. What do you think your child needs in order to attend college?
3. What information would you like to know about college to help your child start thinking about going to college?
4. How do you acquire information about college (individuals, the media, TV, radio, newspapers, internet, etc.)?
5. From which individuals have you received information about college?
6. What resources do you think you might need that would assist you in helping your child to attend college?
7. What college information do you receive from your child's school?
8. What school events do you participate in that help you gain access about college?
9. What community events do you participate in that help you gain access about college?
10. Do you access information about college through the media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)?
11. Do you think that it is too early (elementary school) to start talking to your child about college?
12. Do you have any family members, relatives, and/or friends that have attended college?

Principals, teachers, and staff were also interviewed informally to explore how information about postsecondary education is distributed to parents at elementary schools. I sought out perspectives from school staff for comparison to the parents' responses. Additional parents were informally interviewed at various school events in order to acquire additional perspectives about higher education attainability. The questions asked of them were not as structured yet were similar to those asked initially in the focus group interviews.

### **Data Sources**

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as being a process that utilizes data from multiple sources. All of these were used as data sources for this study. The use of multiple data sources also serves to incorporate triangulation. This further supports conventional trustworthiness criteria as evidence from different sources (i.e., internal, external, reliability and validity) which are grounded in the data analysis. These methods result in insights and information needed for transferability and applicability in a particular context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hach, 2002).

### **Case Study Participants**

The population of this study included a convenient sampling of Latino parents from two different elementary schools within the same urban public school district in Houston. There were two criteria for parent participation: (a) Hispanic origin and (b) needed to have children enrolled at the elementary school level only. Participants could not have any children enrolled and attending middle or high school. Based on information provided by the school district's research department, the interviews could

be conducted in the school library without official approval from the school district itself. Although a large number of parents were encouraged to participate in the study, the convenient sampling that volunteered included females only. It was coincidental that only five parents from each school consented to participate in each focus group and that they were all immigrants of Mexican descent.. One parent from each focus group participated in an individual interview. Additional demographics and characteristics of the participants are included in Table 3.

<b>1. Gender</b>	Females
<b>2. Age</b>	25-35 years
<b>3. Nationality status</b>	Immigrants (undocumented)
<b>4. Ethnicity</b>	Mexican
<b>5. Education level</b>	Sixth-tenth grade completion
<b>6. Socio economics status</b>	Title I (low-income, poverty level)
<b>7. Language spoken</b>	Spanish only
<b>8. Focus groups</b>	2
<b>9. Individual interview participants</b>	2
<b>10. Total focus group participants</b>	10

*Table 3. Case study participants*



Protocol ethics prevented asking the parents who participated if they reside in the United States legally. Some responses to interview questions suggested the parents were undocumented and illegal immigrant residents. There was compelling evidence ascertained that they are unauthorized immigrants living in the United States and retain undocumented status (The Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). It was determined from their inquiries about the possibility of access to higher education without a social security card that some of their children and they, themselves are undocumented. Thus, illegal status was conceptualized as a defining characteristic of the Latino parents interviewed. Researchers have noted that being undocumented is a marker of exclusion and marginalization (Dryfoos, 1990; Passel et al., 2004; Suro, 2006).

### **Criteria for School Selection**

Stake (2005) contended researchers select cases that offer the greatest opportunity to learn and which they have the greatest accessibility (Stake, 2005). The two elementary schools were selected because of their accessibility to the researcher. The schools' demographics included in Table 4 were obtained from the school district website. Table 4 depicts the two schools' demographics.

<b>North Elementary School</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Southeast Elementary School</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	752	Enrollment	1,000
<b>Latino (Race/Ethnicity)</b>	74%	Latino (Race/Ethnicity)	96%
<b>Bilingual Program</b>	56%	Bilingual	48%
<b>Title I program</b>	100%	Title I program	100%
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch &amp; Breakfast</b>	97%	Free/Reduced Lunch & Breakfast	92%
<b>Attendance Rate</b>	97%	Attendance Rate	97.1%
<b>Gifted &amp; Talented students</b>	5%	Gifted & Talented students	5%

*Table 4. Schools' profile and demographics*

Both schools selected for participation were purposely identified because they are *Title I* funded schools where more than 90% of students qualify for the free and reduced federally funded breakfast and lunch program thus, at the poverty level. The student population ethnicity was also similar. Both schools have been identified by the Texas Education Agency as “Acceptable” based on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) student scores. Both schools provide Developmental Bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The schools were from different and adjacent geographic locations in the school district. One was located on the southeast side of the district. The other school is located on the far north of the district.

## **Schools' Context**

The school in the Southeast location is a fairly new structure. It was one of the last schools constructed in 2002 and funded from the district's 1998 bond program. It was a replacement school for an existing old building structure. Student enrollment had increased beyond the capacity of the school. Several temporary buildings (also known as permanent portable buildings) were added to hold the growing student enrollment. Two of the portable building still remain. These house the Even Start program, an early childhood program that enrolls students as early as one year. Parents from children enrolled in the Even Start program were interviewed for this study. The community surrounding this school includes many apartment complexes. The school is located in a major boulevard accessible to Metro bus transportation and four blocks away from a major interstate freeway.

The school is a very large two-story state of the art facility. The entrance leads to a spacious glass covered wall library. The front hallways is adorned with a very large (6 feet diameter) built in clock. To the right of the entrance is the cafeteria which is also used as an auditorium. Rows of individual folding chairs are set up for parent monthly meetings which are well attended (average of approximate 100 parents). Parent meetings are conducted in three languages, English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The school in the North area is an open campus built in the early 1970s. The cafeteria is located across the breezeway adjacent to the main office. Open hallways lead to individual student classrooms, the library, and restrooms. Parents congregate on benches situated on both sides of the covered awning pathway leading to the entrance of

the school. A large playground structure is located in front of the school site. The school community consists mostly of residential housing. There is a large trailer park located 2 blocks from the school. A federally funded health clinic facility is one block from the school.

North Elementary School is a vertical team feeder school that participates in the Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) program. These schools have a Project GRAD parent liaison manager that shares postsecondary education information with the parents beginning at the elementary level. The individual informs parents of career and college related events and conferences are taking place. Project GRAD's initial goal is to decrease student dropout rate and increase the number of students that graduate from high school and enroll in a higher education institution.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (1998), Yin (1989) recommended interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and documents as data sources for case study analysis. For this study all of these sources were used, all of which involve an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 1989). Additional data used for the study is personal experiences by the researcher, introspective, observational, and written documents that add meaning to the research.

The analysis of the data included seeking out any apparent discrepancies between the two schools. Although most of the interviews were scheduled, there were times when impromptu individual "interviews" were conducted with other parents, principals,

teachers, school staff, individuals attending workshops, and college and career related conferences and events. Notations from informal interviews were also utilized.

Additional data from observational field notes and journal notations were included in the data analysis. The researcher looked at the density of information embedded in responses.

A thematic analysis process was utilized for encoding data. The encoding required identifying patterns and themes indicating an explicit code (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes were generated inductively and deductively from the data. Thematic codes were applied from themes that emerged from data interviews, field observations and event handouts collected at various parent events and functions. Thematic analysis allows communicating and disseminating ideas and results. Furthermore, it helps in developing “thematic codes with which to observe and perceive people, groups, organizations, cultures, or events.” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. viii). Codes, themes, and categories emerged as the data was transcribed.

The coding process that facilitated the comparison of data from the study was based on Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital and access to resources. Data were coded based on Coleman’s (1990) interrelationship, intergenerational concepts, social networks, connections, and relationships derived from social capital theory. Data were additionally analyzed using Glaser and Strauss (1967) “constant comparative method.” This process facilitated analyzing the congruence between the data to the existing theory of social capital.

A deductive method was also used to identify patterns or themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thematic data analysis was used to categorize and code themes that emerged from the interpretation of the parent interviews. Parents' interview responses were coded. The methods of analysis employed throughout the dissertation are linked to the themes from various capital frameworks, using conceptual tools derived mainly from the work of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000). I chose this theoretical framework because it appears to offer the greatest explanatory for the case study in terms of access to resources through networks and relationships.

Further processing of identification of emergent themes, patterns, and codes were also examined using Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis using primarily three approaches: (a) theory driven, (b) prior data and prior research driven, and (c) inductive. According to Boyatzis (1998), "the inductive method provides the most fundamental method of developing themes and a code" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. x). He also noted thematic codes are used to develop thematic analysis of individuals' thoughts, behaviors or interactions such as, what individuals think about and what they inquire about. Additionally, thematic analysis is a way analyzing qualitative information by a way of seeing patterns, conceptualize themes, developing codes, and of making sense out of seemingly unrelated information (Boyatzis, 1998). Upon the identification of themes and codes the researcher's work continues with the validation of the code and then the interpretation of its meaning (Boyatzis, 1998).

Data coding also qualified emerging social capital theory concepts when themes emerged from the transcription of interviews. Notations were made if there was a relationship to social capital, differential access to capital, relationship' social exchanges of information, existing networks, connections to others, relationships, interactions within community, etc. Additional notations were made from inductive data analysis of unanticipated and unforeseen emergent themes.

The qualitative information analysis included first categorizing the interview data by general emergent themes and correlations to social capital subcategories. In addition, the raw data collected used to determine thematic analysis "is a person's own words or actions or observable aspects of his or her life in an organization or culture." (Boyatzis, 1998, p. xii). The data was then transcribed from Spanish to English and placed on 4" by 6" different color index cards. The cards were again separated and subcategorized for further single units of meaning and ideas related to theoretical and conceptual concepts of the study. Index cards were given a corresponding card number for additional reconfigurations of the data responses.

The process of thematic analysis and coding was derived from Boyatzis (1998) recommended procedures and approach to use of information in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998). Subsequent emergent themes were noted by the data analysis were knowledge of postsecondary education and facilitative actions taken upon access of the data. Ties to networks and relationships were noted as well. The timing to access resources by the Latino parent participants was evident as taking place late in high school and before higher education matriculation.

Additional information came from analysis of field notes, school parent handbooks, demographic data reports, and journal entries. The naturalistic inquiry process led to analysis where the data were aggregated to incorporate a thematic approach. The data were subsequently coded based on Coleman's research on interrelationship and intergenerational closure (i.e., members of a groups who communicate shared norms and closed networks) and various other concepts on social capital used to access college information (i.e., diffusion of information, bridging, funds of knowledge, friends of benefit, social relationships, networking, social ties, and social connections). The interviews were conducted in Spanish considering parents did not speak English. The interview data (responses) were analyzed in Spanish.

### **Role of Researcher**

In this research study, I am the instrument for the data collection. Thus, I was the human instrument to be trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). An essential and "major trustworthiness criterion is credibility in the eyes of the information sources, for without such credibility the findings and conclusions as a whole cannot be found credible by the consumer of the inquiry report" (p. 213). I, the researcher for this case study have also lived similar experiences as the participants in the study having been a female immigrant of Mexican descent initially being Spanish speaking only. In addition, I worked with families in immigrant communities, attended schools in an immigrant community, and continues to live in a community comprised mostly of Latino immigrants.

John Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social



or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting,” (p. 15). Creswell has noted the role of a qualitative researcher is that of being the key instrument and the researcher should keep the focus on learning and meaning the participants held about the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). With respect to the self (the researcher), reflective journal entries provided data about the human instrument, the researcher.

Significantly, in order to have more accuracy in the data analysis, the translation of the language from Spanish to English is critical. Researcher Elsa M. Gonzalez y Gonzalez (2006) cited Vijver and Leung, (1997) indicating that a major methodological issue in studies conducted in a different language to be referenced in English, is the accuracy of the translations. In the translation of language the researcher is compelled to embeddedness in translation of context and culture. Gonzalez y Gonzalez and Lincoln (2006) noted that “because there is no formula to translate culture, the collection of data in a local language and the presentation of the analyses in a second language become important issues to analyze” ( p. 194). They contend the process of data analysis involves linguistic translation “not only of the language, but, but also and mainly of the culture” (p. 194).

Compounded with translation of the data is the role of the translator and language difference. Therefore, these aspects are included in the methodology section so readers can better comprehend effective meaning of the results influenced by translation issues. Information provided in another language (e.g. Spanish) can carry emotional connotations that do not translate in direct equivalent to the English language (Gonzalez

y Gonzalez & Lincoln, 2006). Gonzalez y Gonzalez & Lincoln (2006) expressed the importance of the language of the researcher and translator of the raw information. They convey that without intimate knowledge of the culture and the language, effective concept development may elude the researcher. I, the researcher in this study am both of female and of Mexican descent as were the participant. The first language spoken by the researcher is also Spanish from Mexico. Therefore, caveats and accessories of the Spanish spoken by the participant interviewed were understood by me and noted in the interpretation and translation of the data analysis.

### **Validity Issues**

Trustworthiness was facilitated through prolonged engagement of interview and triangulation of data sources, documents, and observation journal entries. The analysis between the two schools substantiated the trustworthiness criteria indicated by Lincoln and Guba (1988) noting the “findings on the inquiry can be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) respondents in the same (or similar) context” (p. 218). Both contend trustworthiness can be established by the “degree to which the findings of an inquiry stem from the characteristics of the respondents and the context and not from the biases, motivation, interests, and perspectives of the inquirer” (p. 218). To substantiate these two criteria, the data had to be extensive (10 participants) and include an extensive amount of information to be reviewed and documented. This was done through extended informal individual interviews and substantial field observations.

### **Peer Debriefing**

I sought the input of two peer debriefers. They were uniquely qualified to respond with credibility as both were elementary school principals. Further, the enrollment of their schools was more than 90% Hispanic student population and children of immigrant families. Additionally, both of their schools were in the same urban public school district as the two schools in the research study. They are very supportive of parent involvement and value parent engagement. Both employ various strategies to encourage parents to visit the campus, attend parent meetings, and support their children with schoolwork at home. They make effective efforts to make their school inviting to parents, translate communication shared with parents, and provide culture related events and activities as reflected by the parents' ethnic background.

### **Member Checks**

Additional efforts were taken to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the data collected. A strategy employed was member checking. This strategy is also key for establishing trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Member checking is a strategy that involves ongoing participation with study participant to ensure the researcher has captured their intended meaning (Hays & Singh, 2012). As for this study, member checking was utilized when participants were asked to clarify responses during the interviews (Nunkoosing, 2005). Individual interviews were also conducted to validate accurate portrayal of participants' prior responses.

### **Assumptions**

The design and methodology of this study attempts to connect the theoretical concept of social capital to the access of postsecondary education information. Access has implications for Latino students' educational achievement and academic success. Social capital is at the core of this study. Although Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Robert Putnam (2000) have conducted extensive research in the area of social capital, the individual who brought social capital into the mainstream American social sciences was James Coleman (1988). He posited social capital within the context of education relevant to social structures and relationships that facilitate actions of individuals. Coleman's (1990) concept of family social capital indicated that it is a convertible resource needed to facilitate the flow of information necessary for academic achievement. Additional research employed social capital specifically in parent involvement by employing variables that reflect parents' connections through social networks.

### **Limitations**

The research was conducted with parents solely at the elementary context. Most of the existing research in this area has been conducted with parents whose children attend high school and middle school. Participants interviewed were all females of Mexican descent. Parent participants were not asked to provide personal information concerning their residential or legal status in the United States. Family status (i.e., single parent, marital status) was not discussed. Participants were not asked about employment or household income. Although for a school to qualify as a Title I school, students have

been identified for free and reduced lunch and breakfast according to approved application indicating low household income as provided by the parents.

The research contributes to the growing body of social research theory and in particular to “access” to information and resources through networks and other social transmitants. Additionally, it has the potential to considerably enhance knowledge of how social capital provides networks in the educational arena as it relates to enhancing and understanding postsecondary education information by Latinos. This research study was performed using comparative analysis and was guided by research on social capital. It brings out Latino parents’ voices and perspectives as to access to higher education information. To produce parents’ own words as data, this study utilized the qualitative research analysis method.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### **Analysis of the Data**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the process Latino parents utilize to gain access to postsecondary education information during their children's elementary schooling. I sought to identify outlets in terms of resources that Latino parents utilize to guide their children in their aspirations and pathways to a college career. Lack of access to information to higher education can deter parents from guiding their children in their path to a college education. The data were analyzed using James Coleman's (1990) theory of social capital particularly in the education community context. I also sought to understand how Latino parent access postsecondary education information. Prior research relative to social capital in terms of access to resources, networks, and relationships was used to guide the identification and development of the themes and coding.

#### **Case Study School Sites**

This study took place in an urban public school district that has "developing a college bound culture" as one of its strategic district goals. The district does not have a standard program that addresses specifics for its "college bound" goal. It is left up to each individual school to develop strategies to address college readiness. Consequently, each school initiates an array of activities. The two schools selected for this study are situated geographically opposite of each other, north and south of the school district.

Both elementary schools consist of grades Pre-Kindergarten-fifth grade. Both were also selected because the demographics of the student population and socioeconomic status at both schools are similar. The parents interviewed attend the schools on a regular basis so they can participate in an ESL (English as a Second Language) course. All parent interviewed were female immigrants of Mexican descent.

Although both schools support the district's college bound culture, the campus located in the North area participates in an additional college readiness program, Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams). The perspectives provided by the two principals in both participating schools indicated that sharing information at the elementary level is too early in a child's education path. They noted the responsibility to involve parents in college access related activities falls on the middle and high schools.

### **Coding and Categories**

For this case study, I used a qualitative thematic strategy to categorize and interpret the data. This approach was selected to identify a coding process and interrelatedness of the themes and categories (Boyatzis, 1998). This process allotted broad themes to emerge inductively from the participants' responses. Themes that emerged from the interviews contributed to the coding and analysis. Data were sorted, separated and assigned codes so that specific pieces of interpretation could be easily retrieved (Merriam, 2009). Numerous categories, themes, and subthemes emerged as the data were analyzed (Boyatzis, 1998). Connections formulated from codes, categories, and subcategories enhanced interpretation and responses to the research questions.

The data analysis commenced by identifying segments in the data from the research questions' responses. I identified segments of the data and analyzed individual words or units of which were potential answers or part of an answer to the research questions. A unit of data is any potentially meaningful segment of data. At the beginning of a study the researcher is uncertain about what will ultimately be meaningful. A unit of data can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident (Merriam, 2009).

The categories, themes, and subthemes correlated to existing theoretical social capital framework became the findings of the study. The information is also inclusive of the characteristic features of the themes and subthemes which were identified from the data analysis. Emergent themes found are interrelated and conveyed the dynamics of social capital, access to postsecondary education information, and factors influencing intentional access while children attend elementary school. Themes, subthemes, and characteristic features are referenced in Table 5 below.



Themes	Themes	Subthemes
<b>Limited Capital:</b> *Social networks, relationships, and connections *Social Context *Social Structures	<b>Critical cognizance</b> is differential connections and understanding of access to resources.	Uncertainty  Limited knowledge
<u>Characteristics</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differential and restrictive access</li> <li>• SES and immigration</li> <li>• Speculative beliefs, disbelief, choices, misconceptions, and expectations</li> </ul>		
<b>Engaging Capital</b>	<b>Primacy of action</b> is the dynamics of action to pursue access.	Timing Early access
<u>Characteristics</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delayed and/or lack of action</li> <li>• Indecisiveness to action</li> <li>• Mobilization of resources</li> <li>• Existing priorities</li> </ul>		
<b>Cultural Capital</b>	<b>Misguided intentionality</b> results from conflicting cultural disposition.	Aspirations Language Economic Constraints
<u>Characteristics</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigating incongruence of culture</li> <li>• Critical cultural dissonance</li> <li>• Misconceptions and motivation</li> <li>• Exclusion by inclusion in the community</li> <li>• Disconnect</li> </ul>		
<b>Relational Capital:</b> *Intergenerational Capital *Inter-relational Capital	<b>Relational investiture</b> – is suggestive by lack of investing in social resources	Social Ties Parent Involvement
<u>Characteristics</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differential ties: weak, strong, dense, fragmented, nonexistent, social, and informational</li> <li>• Resources from relatives, friends, and relationships</li> </ul>		

Table 5. Themes and subthemes

Social capital related themes were previously noted in the literature review. Some of these capital concepts were also prevalent in the data analysis as indicated by participants' responses. These themes included (a) limited capital, (b) engaging capital, (c) cultural capital, and (d) relational capital. Coleman (1988) argued that social capital is a resource that inheres within the social relationships parents maintain with other individuals. For Coleman and others, social networks help produce social capital to the extent that social relationships encourage the exchange of information, shape beliefs, and facilitates access to resources (Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). By probing the relationship between social capital resources and access to social networks, parental beliefs, and cultural characteristics, I explored and compared the characteristics and interrelatedness of the prevalent themes.

The findings revealed significant differential and restrictive access to postsecondary education information for Latino parents. This was indicative by the way they navigate, make choices, decisions, and actively participate in the social context of the home and school community. This study revealed how the theoretical framework of social capital was evident in the following areas: (a) critical cognizance depicted by differential connections and understanding of access to resources; (b) primacy of action characterized by intricacies of action in pursuing access, (c) misguided intentionality resulting from conflicting cultural dispositions, and (d) relational investiture that suggests lack of investing in resources for the purposes of getting higher education information. These factors contributed to the engagement of intermittent actions taken by Latino parents to pursue more postsecondary education information early during their

children's elementary education school experience. Additional subthemes were identified that further supported these four major themes.

Lin (2001) noted James Coleman's theory lends insight into the constitutive nature of the social capital that parents possess. In their responses, participants shared what they knew of postsecondary education from family members. The parents questioned their preconceived assumptions about the opportunities of their children getting a college degree. They discussed and shared aspirations, career expectations, and remote possibilities for their children to attend a college or university. Some noted uncertainty and concern with access attributable to academic ability, socioeconomic status, financial factors, immigration status, and language (Segura, 2002). All expressed a desire to currently learn more information on postsecondary education as well as where and how to access it.

Social capital plays a significant role in accessing needed resources that are embedded in social networks, relationship, and entities. James Coleman (1988) pointed out that social exchanges are pervasive throughout everyday social life and that individuals control resources that interest them and satisfies their interests (Coleman, 1988). He further postulated that there are different kinds of structures of action. Intriguingly, the intellectual (human) capital the parent participants possessed in the area of postsecondary education from family and kin accounts for their disparaging intentions to take action to learn more information early, at the elementary school level. Furthermore, their intentions are misguided because their intentionality is restrictive to the social context and social structure where they interact, the school.

I employed social capital in this case study to identify resources Latino parents acquire and use in terms of access to networks that possess postsecondary education information. The parents at both schools revealed misconceptions of the timeliness of access during the elementary educational school experience thus, hindering attempts to get higher education information early. Consequently, they delay access until their children are in high school resulting in further depleting efforts to access at the high school level. This is critical because parent engagement decreases from elementary, to middle school, and high school level.

### **Limited Capital**

Parents in this case study had limited capital when it came to resources accessed from ethnic culture, relatives, friends and relationships. The culture especially as it pertains to Latino families is highly familistic and routinely confronted by hardships stemming from immigration, poverty, and minority status. The participants were confined within their community of residence (*barrio*) due to their insecurity and fear, an outcome resulting from their non-documented status. Their restrictive access was also due to the disconnect they have to social networks and connections. Their relationships are limited to acquaintances and other parents in their children's school and within their local sphere of influence. Thus their relational capital is constrained and confined.

For many of the Latino parents who participated in the study, social networks are nonexistent. The data analysis revealed that while both campuses are indicative of being communities of common interest, resources through networks between parents, schools,

and universities at the elementary school level have not been established thus leaving parents with little to no access to postsecondary education information. However, the analysis specified that the parent respondents' thinking about early access was a condition for insubstantial primacy of actions.

### **Social Resources**

The theory of social capital was used to understand the parents' primacy to act in order to gain access and mobilize better resources (Lin, 2001). Education is a social resource that is accessible through social networks (Lin, 2001). Latino parents did not have access to more supportive networks that afforded them critical resources to access to postsecondary education information. Nonetheless, they had a notion relative to knowing that higher education and a college degree can be of significant value.

According to Coleman, social structures facilitate actions of individuals. He defined social capital is defined by its function (1988). He further noted that social capital demands cooperation between individuals who are nevertheless pursuing their own self-interest. In addition, Coleman (1988) noted that social structures facilitate certain action of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1988). Social structures in the community can help parents develop relationships and ties that enhance the flow information. Social networks are necessary to attain resources to be acted upon by individuals and the action will be realized.

Social networks are necessary for individual to attain resources. Several studies have reported that Mexican American immigrants have smaller social networks and less resources than non-immigrants (Golding & Burnam, 1990; Griffith & Villavicencio,

1985; Vega & Kolody, 1985). To identify what parents knew about postsecondary education information, it was necessary to find existing resources (i.e., networks, connections to individuals, social interactions, and relationships), social structures, and venues available and accessible to them. Additionally, the geographic and demographic context is critical for Latino families' access to resources.

Resources and networks that can be formed are confined to the local community. In actuality, their responses indicated they understood the social structure and that a higher education will lead to a higher social status. For the most part, the case study participants' association in a group or network is at their children's school. Therefore, their sense of unity and togetherness is limited to the time spent at school in parent gatherings, parent group meetings, and parent classes (Field, 2003). Coleman concluded that the community is a resource of social capital that could offset some of the impact of social and economic disadvantage within families (Coleman, 1990).

### **Social Context and Social Structures**

Necessary for framing the data, it was important to identify the role of schools as a social context for Latino families to network and develop relationships. For this study the schools were distinguished as a setting and context that offers opportunities for parents to interact with other individuals (i.e., school personnel, parents). According to Sheldon (2002), parents' social networks affect the level of parent involvement at their children's school. Parent engagement and attendance is higher among parents of elementary school students because they can speak with other parents of children who attend the same school as their own children (Sheldon, 2002). Also, Feuerstein (2000)

noted that parent involvement in school activities such as volunteering and participation in parent/teacher organizations increased if teachers maintain a higher level of contact with parents. Parent contacts with other parents may be of value for social networking, building relationships, and accessing resources (Perna & Titus, 2005; Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008).

The community where the parents live is also considered the social context. It was evident from their responses that they disassociate themselves from the mainstream society and refrain from developing relationships with others outside their community. The context of their relationships is defined and explained by their “separateness” and balkanization within the existing (*barrio*) communities where they live. The context provides the backdrop for their isolationism (separation) from other families in that community. This critical condition has consistently placed the parents in a position of not knowing. According to Coleman (1988) a social network derives its strength from its context (Coleman, 1988). Additionally, Field (2003) noted social capital is a differentiated phenomenon that varies in its fluidity, and in the contexts in which it is found (Field, 2003).

For this study, *barrios* are neighborhoods and/or communities largely inhabited by other Latino families like their own. For the most part, these communities are ethnically isolated and segregated. Very few non-Latino families live there. Much of the language spoken in the street and in the neighborhood (*barrios*) is Spanish. According to Gándara & Contreras (2009), the world outside their immediate community is known to them by technology (i.e., television, satellite cable, and internet).

The social context in which they live may shape the current thought of their existence, vision of their current future, and exert social, cultural, and personal stressors and challenges (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

In analyzing the data, it was important to note the existing social context where the parents reside. They are confined by the cultural community (*barrio*) primarily of other Latino families. It is a neighborhood which is inclusive of various Latino owned small businesses. There are local food vendors (*taquerias*), vans that sell tacos and other Hispanic food on street corners. Local supermarkets and business such as bakeries (*panaderías*) cater sales to the Latino community selling Hispanic food products, vegetables, fruit, and sweet bread (*pan dulce*). Not very distant are flea markets where Latino families congregate on weekends (*pulgas*). One can find trailer parks, a nearby used car lot, a used tire shop, a small used appliance store, a community health clinic, meatmarkets, (*carnicerías*) local cultural herb stores (*yerberías*), snow cone stands and fruit drinks (*refresqueria*), and piñata stores. Mobile vendors on bikes ride around and sell snow cones (*raspas*), ice cream and snacks (*chicharrones con chile*) in the nearby streets. Some of the structures are tagged with graffiti. There are a few abandoned houses that have broken windows while others have their windows boarded for protection and safety.

### **Critical Cognizance**

Findings revealed critical cognizance was an emergent major theme accounting for parents' speculative misconceptions, beliefs, disbeliefs, uncertainties, limited knowledge, choices, expectations, and aspirations concerning their understanding of



access connections to resources needed for attainability of a postsecondary education. The findings suggested that parents conceptualized the notion of postsecondary education critically. Critical cognizance is the decisive element of knowledge that parents confront when it comes to justifying their disbeliefs of postsecondary education possibilities for their children. Critical here does not mean to criticize the knowledge or information they know from their own experiences. Critical was used by the parents to critique, decipher, and understand the information which leads them to doubt the possibilities based on critical personal factors such as socioeconomic constraints, immigration status, language, lack of resources, and disconnect. Their responses indicated they reflect critically with preconceived notions they have about the children being able to pursue a college degree. Their resistance to access information also revolves around the notion that their children are too young at the elementary school to start thinking about going to college.

The school sites for this research were conceptualized as social structures. The schools manifested the social context and structure entity where parents can network with others, access, and exchange information. Ream (2006) focused specifically on social capital in school social networks, families, and communities for diffusion of information. His study analyzed the level of family social capital in the form of parental involvement in schools which are apparently significant in identifying access to postsecondary education information (Ream, 2006). The social structures they mitigate are their children's school. There they participate and attend parent involvement events and activities. The schools are where they congregate and share information.

With certainty, none of the parents in the south campus mentioned getting information at their elementary school. Only two parents in the north campus indicated they have received information about college at their elementary school. A parent coordinator from Project GRAD attends monthly and shares information with them about the importance of their children going to college. When asked how else they might be able to learn information about college one said “that if asked, the teachers would give them information.” Another noted.

When I was little and I went to school I had a friend that realistically could not do anything. And I remember that in the second grade in elementary, the teacher told her mother, “Do not put this one in secondary school because she is not going to make it.” And she graduated from college as a doctor. Then realistically the teacher only looks at the half of it.

When asked if any of their children’s teachers have shared information about college with them, none have done so, nor have they sent notices with the information. “In past years they [the school] use to put out a bulletin, but this year they haven’t sent out any. [Project GRAD coordinator] gives us information about what Project GRAD is all about. Sometimes when there is an event like the one they had at [\_\_ Middle School], he will invite us.”

In the north campus, parents have received flyers inviting them to attend events that provide information about college. However, they do not attend as noted by one of the parents, “They only say you are invited or something to that effect.” It was evident efforts to reach parents at the elementary level to college related events have been

attempted. The parent in the north campus that has researched information about college explained:

What happens is that the information is more out there. And one thinks that if your child is not in high school you don't attend. Then I say, if you do not inform yourself beginning at the elementary level, what will you know and how will you take your children on that path (college) that you have to make.

*(Lo que pasa es que la información está más allá. Uno piensa que no necesitamos ir porque su hijo no está en la secundaria. Entonces digo que si no te informas desde la primaria, que les vas a decir y como vas a llevar los niños por el camino que tiene uno que hacer.)*

Additional responses from parents in the north campus indicate they respond to invitations,

Only when they say elementary is when we attend.” Another parent noted, “I for one had the idea that beginning or investigating that is when they leave the Middle School. I am presently thinking that at the elementary school level I will not get very much informed.” It is assumed by most that information on higher education is intended for parents who have children attending high school as mentioned by one of the respondents, “The way they pass out information to youth when they are older, I also have thought that (college) information is for that moment in time [HS].”

The savvy parent who utilized the internet adds:

But when they say elementary school we need to be more informed so we can program the future. Visualize and dream is what we need to realistically do.

Having knowledge about postsecondary education may prove to be advantageous to aspirations, expectations, and parental support if the information is accessed early on their children's elementary education. Ceja (2004) has noted the importance of the role that parents play in the development of educational aspirations of Latino students (Ceja, 2004). Social capital is critical to this study because it can be a vehicle, key for Latino parents to become a valuable resource support of their children's postsecondary education. It is noteworthy that the parents acknowledged the importance of a college education and desire that their children can attend college.

Their beliefs and knowledge are critical and contribute to their uncommitted actions to seek out postsecondary education information during their children's elementary school experience. Auerbach (2004) cited P. Gándara (2004) noting the single most important barrier to college access for Latino students is lack of knowledge of the process needed to go to college. Auerbach further noted that across social groups, parents have been cited as one of the top three sources of college information and help for students (Auerbach, 2004). Due to their critical cognizance, their misaligned beliefs and expectations have deterred efforts to access information. This has resulted in dynamic dissatisfaction with the educational system thus hindering efforts to acquire and access higher education information.

Gándara and Contreras (2009) also noted that Latino mothers have much less education than mothers from all other major groups. However, according to Buriel and

Cardoza (1988) research has shown that “mothers” play the most influential role in the achievement of their children. One parent shared, “I don’t really know how to inform myself about what is needed to go to college. I don’t know what to tell my child to be able to guide him.” (*Yo no sé qué decirle a mi hijo para guiarlo hacia esa meta, el colegio. Más bien, yo no sé cómo informarme.*). Finding revealed that critical cognizance resulted in two subthemes; 1) uncertainty and 2) limited knowledge.

### **Uncertainty**

The data revealed there was an extent of uncertainty and disbelief on the part of the parents for the attainability of college for their children at the time they are enrolled at the elementary school. This was an apparent subtheme identified from the data analysis. Parents perceived the uncertainty to access higher education as being attributable to academic ability, socioeconomic status, financial factors, immigration status, and language. They have aspirations for their children to attend college and express determination to do what they can to support them in the realization that higher education can help their children improve the current economic situation. Their misaligned disbeliefs and choices about the possibility of their children to attend college and their expectations deter any efforts to access postsecondary education information early at the elementary school.

Uncertainty was additionally identified from the parents’ apprehension of whether or not their children would succeed in college if they are not intelligent enough, have high level of cognition, or academically able to pursue a college education. One parent was concerned about access and asked, “Isn’t college for students who are

intelligent?” further noting that her child, who is in first grade, struggles academically in school. While another parent considered access to scholarships as being directly tied to intelligence. She discerned, “We don’t know who qualifies for them (scholarships). Is it for the children that are more intelligent?”

Moreover, beliefs that parents held influenced their actions. Critical cognizance ensues from their misconceptions and disbelief. Their intentions become misguided and their actions delayed. As one parent shared, “Many students drop out of school at high school because they don’t think they can get a good job. They leave because they do not see any hope.” (*Se salen porque no ven esa esperanza.*)

There was also an acknowledged uncertainty in higher education possibilities for their children due to their current low socioeconomic situation they face. Their economic constraints further added to their disbelief in the possibility of college education for their children. Among reasons Latino parents gave when expressing their uncertainty was limited resources needed to support and pay for their postsecondary education. This was expressed by one of the parents indicating:

Another very important part is the money. I have 2 daughters. Then, from here I will be further in my earnings for working and finding more money. The other option would be a loan from the bank. It could happen. But if my daughters are born with intelligence, I want a scholarship or more information about scholarships. What is the path to the scholarships? Why is the university so expensive? And, I want my daughter to go to the best university.

Immigration status, prior existence of fear, and cultural experiences contribute to doubtful expectations by parents interviewed in the study. They speculated the possibility of their children going to college. Parents inquired about security due to undocumented status. There was an uncertainty due to a heavy and prevailing issue, their undocumented, immigration status. They see the undocumented status as presenting challenges to matriculation in postsecondary education. One parent asked, “Do you need papers to study?” Uncertainty to access higher education prevails due to undocumented status.

Immigrants that do not have a social security card. Let’s say like my son. He does not have a permit or papers [parent is noting son is non-documented and illegally in the US] to be able to keep going forward. Are children without papers able to attend college? They say that if you do not have social security you can’t get a job. Can you enter the university without social security?

### **Limited Knowledge**

The findings also revealed parents had limited knowledge relevant to the access of higher education. Thus, limited knowledge emerged as a subtheme. Their limited knowledge about the United States educational system and beyond (postsecondary education) was indicated by their skepticism regarding their children’s possibilities to reach the goal of pursuing higher education giving way to the dilemma of resistance in becoming informed. This deconstructive critical knowledge and dissonance were also attributed to their certainties that the children at the elementary school are too young to think about going to college. One parent said that her child will probably change her

mind many times about what she want to do when she grows up. It was also noted by one parent that,

The youngest child changes his mind all of a sudden. He wants one thing, then another. Right now he is just not focused and I don't know what he wants to do. (*El más chiquito cambia de repente. Quiere una cosa u otra. Ahorita todavía no está enfocado y no sé qué quiere hacer.*)

The parents interviewed lacked knowledge of how to navigate the K-12 public education system. Possible reason for lack of knowledge may be based on what Gándara and Contreras (2009) noted, that 40% of Latino students come from homes in which parents have not completed even a high school education as was the case in most of the parent interviewed in this study. The Latino parents interviewed were only familiar with the educational system in their native country, Mexico. That system is not congruent to the educational system in the United States. One parent shared that she did not know the educational system beyond elementary school and asked the researcher information on the continuing extended school structures, middle and high school. One parent commented,

I don't know much about the schools here in the United States. What is the educational system here in these schools? Where do the students study when they complete the elementary school, the fifth grade? (*Yo no sé mucho de las escuelas en los estados unidos. ¿Cuál es el sistema aquí de las escuelas? ¿Donde estudian después de la primaria?*)



Based on the parents' responses, it was noted that their limited academic education influenced the narrow knowledge they have around the educational system including higher education. Contreras has noted that low education levels, particularly less than a high school education, suggest that Latino parents are not familiar with the requirements for college in particular or perhaps the postsecondary education system in general (Contreras, 2011). None of the parents mentioned that they graduated from high school. One of the parents indicated she enrolled in a community college but did not stay because they requested a social security card which she did not have. Another parent said she and her husband "did not attend school beyond elementary.

Additionally, Gándara and Contreras (2009) have stated that Latino parents with relatively low level of formal education have far fewer resources and information needed to assist and pass on to their children. The education they have had in Mexico is not congruent to the educational system in the United States. In Mexico, compulsory and free public education is only for first through sixth grade (*la primaria*). After the sixth grade, children attend three additional years, seventh through ninth grade (*secundaria*), but must pay a minimal tuition to enroll. Consequently, they compare the educational system in the United States to the educational system in Mexico. Although some of the parents interviewed have had relatives that have attended a college or university, they still did not know any of the requirements and processes required for college entry.

Parents seemed to be willing and open to learn the educational system because they want to support and guide their children's learning. However, one parent indicated postsecondary education information is nonexistent at the elementary level, "in the

elementary schools there is nothing about colleges,” thus, making it difficult for parents to support their children at the beginning of their education experience. Lack of knowledge of higher education during their children’s elementary school experience was a certainty for all parent respondents. They knew that they don’t know.

Latino children have parents who themselves have lower educational attainment. There was a variation in the parents interviewed in the educational level they themselves have completed. Latino parents are most likely to have less than a high school education. Such low education levels, particularly less than a high school education, suggest that Latino parents are not familiar with the requirements for college and the postsecondary education system in general.

Another parent shared about her difficulty in the United States as far as needing to have an education and how speaking the English language is a necessity, “Realistically I think that for us it is the language.” All parents interviewed for the study were participating in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class so they can learn to speak English.

It was evident that parents wanted to know more about college access. Their responses indicated they desire help in accessing more information about postsecondary education. All agreed that higher education information is not available to them. In particular, the parents specified that they could benefit from having someone going to the elementary school and inform them more about the postsecondary education process. They did not know any individuals with college knowledge that they can contact in the school nor in the community who. The parents emphatically noted they need to know

postsecondary education at the elementary school level. “We need awareness of what is necessary for them (their children) to attend college. We need to be able to get more information. If they are going to give us classes on Fridays, they need to give us information about college.” Another parent inquired:

Well, what all do children need to attend college? I don’t know what to tell my child to be able to guide him until he reaches that goal. In other words, I don’t really know how to inform myself about what is needed. I would really like for you to come again to share that information.

Other parents asked about additional information they need in order to support their children in navigating the educational system continuity. “Requirements. I need to know the requirements that are necessary for going. I am not very informed here about the documents they need to enter college.” Another mentioned the need to find out how to access information about scholarships:

I need to know about scholarships [*vecas*]. I have heard about scholarships for going to college. I just don’t know too much about them. We don’t have money to pay for college. (*Yo necesito saber sobre las vecas. Yo he oido mencionar que hay vecas para ir al colegio. Pero no se mucho sobre eso. Nosotros no tenemos dinero para pagar el colegio.*)

Another parent indicated that their children’s schools need to be more proactive in providing information to students about careers.

The information about college, careers, and vocational education could be given to the children in order to know what is it that they realistically like and

want to do. They need from an early age to begin to make decisions. But I wish they could give them a good vocational education in the schools. That would be a very good project.

This case study provided clear evidence that lack of information to postsecondary education information was inconsistent at both campuses. The north campus parents had more knowledge about a postsecondary education than the parents in the south campus. The difference is the GRAD coordinator that attends their campus monthly to share information with them.

Some of the parents interviewed for this study had some knowledge of higher education institutions. In their responses, they noted that there are colleges and universities in the state of Texas. “I have only heard about the University of Houston and Houston Community College. Another parent has “heard of the university in Bryan” while another indicated “there is one in Texas and the Rice one.” One of the parents said she went with the third grade as a chaperone on a field trip. She said she “went to Rice University and I loved.”

Knowledge of careers was prevalent in responses. However, responses indicated limited knowledge about careers paths. Participating parents knew about some careers and articulated various careers of interest. In their responses, they noted careers their children have indicated they want to pursue:

I have four children. Two of them tell me they want to be spies and the other one wants to be an architect that makes plans to build homes. The other

one, the smallest says she wants to be a SWAT police. He asks me what he needs to be a SWAT. I tell him, ‘Right now you need to study and finish school.

One of the parents said she has a son that wants to be a lawyer. Some of the parents asked how many years it takes to complete a college career to become an architect, a spy, a police officer. A teaching career was also indicated by another parent:

My youngest, I am ashamed that she wants to sell ice cream in the street.

The others laugh and make fun of her. They tell her that it is better to be a teacher of little children. She wants to be a teacher.

A parent added her children want a college career:

And I just make those comments with my children. And they tell me, “I want to be an architect. I want to be a teacher.” Another wants to be a doctor.

Another said her son wants to be an astronaut.

Of significance, the data analysis and findings revealed that parents ascertain their role of supporting their children at the elementary level as being significant to their children’s success in school. However, they did not connect that success to the continuation of higher education. They look critically at the knowledge they have. They use critical cognizance to critique the knowledge they have about beginning the journey to higher education at the elementary level. Thus, the parents do not benefit from any critical cognizance relative to the educational path limiting their potential to acquire postsecondary education at the elementary school level.

Their existing social networks were limited to family and kinship. Although information is embedded in the networks, for these parents, access was not feasible due

to lack of connections to individuals within those networks. The social structure and content of the networks are also necessary to connect to individuals who may be sources of information. The school community can be the agent for change the current situation, in ways that involve parents, form expectations, and develop networks. For these parents, college information providers were not established in the community where they live and within their reach. The case study parents only reach out to other parents in their children's schools. Significantly, the elementary schools were the social structures that have the greatest numbers of parent involvement participation.

### **Engaging Capital**

Social capital has the propensity to facilitate actions by individuals. According to Krishna (2002) social capital is not directly observable. People carry the social capital inside their heads (Krishna, 2002). The social capital theory focuses on the resources embedded in one's social network. Access to and use of significant resources benefit the individuals' actions. Thus, it is incumbent on the individuals to take action in order to obtain necessary benefits being sought. Lesser (2000) has also defined social capital by its function and has noted it as a resource for action. By analyzing the data inductively from themes, it was evident that participants delay action to pursue and access information noting that it is not necessary to obtain during the elementary educational level. They did not engage in seeking out information from social resources, relationships, networks, and/or higher education providers. Thus, engaging capital, by seeking out information was not noted by the parent participants in this case study.

### **Primacy of Action**

The primacy of action was an emergent theme characterized by dynamics of prevailing actions to pursue and access postsecondary education information. Gándara & Contreras (2009) have attributed the delay in aspirations for Latinos as an indicator of the time it takes for them to acquire information. This, they noted as resulting from weak social capital networks (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Responses from participants interviewed in this study indicated that even though they have aspirations for their children to attend college, there is a delayed engagement to access higher education information due to critical dissonance (e.g., making excuses and conflicting misconceptions). This was also determined by their consideration that elementary school is too early to start accessing higher education information. Their actions or lack thereof can be explained by uncertainty and disbelief about the attainability of college for their children during the elementary school level.

Consequently, they make justifications for not making attempts to access. Their *primacy of action* attributes to the indecisiveness and wavering hesitations by the parents to take action towards getting postsecondary education information early at the elementary school. This conception is shared by a parent as indicated,

I for one had the idea that beginning or investigating that is when they leave middle school. I am presently thinking that at the elementary school level I will not get very much information.” (*Yo por ejemplo tenía la idea que de empezar a investigar es cuando salga el niño de la secundaria. Yo estoy pensando que en primaria no me voy a informar tanto.*) This is also indicative of

the critical cultural dissonance they experience. Additionally, their fluctuating and hampered intentions become misguided dispossession of actions. Data findings uncovered two subthemes factoring in to their primacy to take action; (a) aspirations and (b) early access. While they aspire for their children to go to college, they also refrain from access because they think elementary school is too early to begin the pipeline to higher education.

### **Timing**

The data analysis revealed the element of time as a subtheme and a determinant and apprehension to learn information early. This emergent subtheme was noted by most parents when questioned about what they know about college access at the elementary school. Their primacy of action to access higher education information is limited by their predetermined beliefs. However, most parents agreed that it is too early to get information about college at the elementary school level because “the children are very little. Maybe that is the reason.” Another parent stated, “I think children at elementary school will already get an idea about what they want to be. I think they do it a little at a time.” Still another noted, “It is good that we start thinking at the elementary level about the university.” (*Es bueno que enpézemos a pensar sobre la universidad durante la primaria.*)

Regardless of the critical cognizance they possess, the data revealed their primacy of action for access is delayed. However, they view talking to the children about going to college is important. Most were in agreement about the significance of



talking to their children (*consejos*) about higher education while there are attending elementary school:

I think that right now would be good for us to start getting informed because we want for our children to have a career. All of that costs money. I should already start a savings program to pay for their studies. I think.

It was evident that parents want to know more information about the process needed to continue to higher education. Another parent shared what she thinks about getting information early:

I really want it but I just don't know. I would like to be more informed because I would not want for my child to grow up and not attend the university because I do not know anything about it. I am going to try everything possible to get informed. Yes. I want that. For that reason, I tell my husband, "I want to learn to speak English."

Still another parent noted that hard work and effort will pay off. In the Hispanic culture, this is explained by what is noted as *consejos* parents give their children (i.e., advice, encouragement, and motivation). She noted:

It is good that now, for the first time we begin telling the children since they are little that they should go to the university. Because realistically I just tell them, "Work hard and put forth much effort (*"Trabájale duro u échale gana, s y ponle mucho esfuerzo"*). You have to be something." They should be what they want, right? Like an architect and all of that. But also, they really don't know what a university is.

## **Early Access**

Yet another subtheme was the absolute belief by most parent respondents that they should wait until high school to learn information about college leaving the *primacy of action* to access to a later times in their children's education. Most respondents concurred that it is too early to get information about a postsecondary education when their children attend elementary school. Their intentional delay hampers any efforts to participate in college related activities that may be offered to them during their children's elementary school experience. One parent did not think her child would benefit from getting information at the elementary school:

Yes. But he is always changing his mind. All of a sudden he wants one thing, then another. Right now he is just not focused. I really don't know what they want to be when they grow up. I think I will begin talking to him at the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They begin to mature then. They start making decisions then. It is not easy to tell them, "This is what I want you to do." They are already making their own decisions. I think my child is just beginning and already likes to learn. He also draws a lot.

One of the parents felt that when children are at elementary school they do not really know what they want in life. Therefore to talk to their children about college during this time would be futile:

For one, he likes school. Right now. But, it might probably be different when he is older [Parent is referring to her son liking school.]. The other thing is

that he says when he gets bigger he wants to earn lots of money. Only by getting an education can he attain a career that he can make a lot of money.

Therefore, they did not have knowledge of the process and requirements for a postsecondary education. This could be the result of a limited education level by the parents themselves. However, it is notable they realize that learning English can enhance their opportunities to find employment as both groups had just ended their ESL (English as a Second Language) class.

Regardless of their misconceptions about early access, parents seemed to be willing and open to learn the educational system because they want to support and guide their children's learning. However, one parent indicated postsecondary education information is nonexistent at the elementary level, "in the elementary schools there is nothing about colleges," thus, making it difficult for parents to support their children at the beginning of their education experience. They tend to see the educational system in the United States through lenses of their own educational experiences when they lived in Mexico. The findings revealed that the primacy of action on the part of the parents to access higher education information at the elementary school level influences and/or hinders opportunities and choices and attempts to gather more information about the college going process.

Social capital needs to be activated and deployed for it to produce exchange of information. Members of the community (immigrants) are aware of their common situation but have minimal interaction with each other and within the community. Their undocumented status renders the Latino immigrant families as silenced and marginalized

minorities resulting in fear and anxiety (Valverde, 2004). Thus, their social interactions outside their family are limited. They have the desire and express determination to do something about their current economic and family situation. However, their responses indicated there is little to no interaction within the community.

### **Cultural Capital**

According to John Field (2003) for Bourdieu, inequality was to be explained by the production and reproduction of capital. He initially adopted the concept of cultural capital in order to explain the unequal academic achievement of children from different social classes and from different groups within social classes. Nora (2004) referred to cultural capital as being the context represented by a student's perception in regards to a significant support and encouragement from family and community upon which they can draw to influence their desire to attend college and to formulate a support system (Nora, 2004). Gándara and Contreras (2009) noted that low-income and minority parents often lack the cultural capital (knowledge of how the system works and what it values) and social capital (access to important social networks), resources needed to help their children (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Their inclusiveness in the social context, the *barrio* community where they live often excludes them from the social structures where access is available. Suro (2007) has noted that being undocumented is a marker of exclusion and marginalization. The parents interviewed compare their existing situation to their personal life experiences, expectations, and the community where they live. Communication is a challenge because Spanish is the only language they speak. Because of their uncertain beliefs,

they also refrain from mobilizing resources that may be available to them. Thus, it can be inferred that the parents are unsure of timeliness to access higher education information. There is apprehension on their part to take action and seek out information. They intentionally delay access to postsecondary education information. Part of it could be due to their disbelief about the possibility of their children attending college. It can also be the result of the disconnect they have with individuals in the larger school community where they live. The parents' confinement in their community (*barrio*) is a significant culture barrier and challenge. They are actively engaged in their community by inactive participation.

Latino parents mitigate the incongruence of their culture to their mainstream culture. In addition, they are confined and isolated in the community (*barrio*) where they live, bounded by the limits of their community (Portes, 1998). Their personal disconnect is consequential of fear and insecurity due to their non-documented immigrant status. They are left confined within parameters of the cultural capital they possess from their country of origin, Mexico. This is relevant because it results in a conflicting cultural disposition in terms of timing of actions and accessibility to resources due to inability to communicate in English.

By the nature of their limitedness to networks and organizations outside their community, their participation is indicative of social isolation from others, exclusion by inclusion. Furthermore, Robert Suro (2007) noted that being undocumented is a marker of exclusion and marginalization. Additionally, Suro (2007) contended that undocumented immigrants face an insuperable barrier to full inclusion and participation

in American society and is the basis for an identity as a people apart. If they are undocumented, Latino families may live in fear of separation from their family and deportation (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Newton, 2001; Passel & Cohn, 2011; Suro, 2007). Thus, they find themselves in a state of *exclusion by inclusion* unable to mobilize any resources that may be available and accessible to them in their community. Their undocumented status (residing illegally in the U.S.) induces a sense of fear to engage and venture out beyond the public school and the community where they live. Consequently, Contreras (2011) noted that a blatant discriminatory approach exists toward undocumented Latino immigrants. According to (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), the isolation of the social context where they live shapes their ability to navigate the educational system including access to postsecondary education. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Nonetheless, Contreras (2011) asserted that their accounts represent sacrifice, selflessness, and the *ganas* (the will) to persist despite the ongoing challenges they encounter (Contreras, 2011).

### **Misguided Intentionality**

For this case study, I employed social capital anticipating an understanding of how Latino parents utilize social resources and exchange information in networks and relationships. Social capital lies in the capability of relationships between individuals. It was anticipated that the parents would socialize with others in the school context and the community where they live to exchange information about higher education. Thus, they could guide and support their children toward college at the elementary level. However, the findings revealed otherwise. The perspectives of intentionality and disconnect were

misguided by virtue of their cultural capital. It was noted that information they hold is from family and kin. They are left to leverage social capital by their limited knowledge, uncertainties, information they need, how, and when to access the information. Their efforts are further deterred by their limited communication. All participants spoke Spanish only. Thus they have fundamentally and traditionally deeply misguided intentions about making connections with other individuals to get information. Two subthemes identified through their misguided intentions to get access were; (a) timing and (b) language.

From their responses, it can be determined that their life experiences contributes to misguided intentionality and polarized thoughts about possibilities for a higher education attainment by their children. The dynamics of access is also a consequence of mitigating congruence and/or incongruence of the mainstream culture to their own culture. The actions they take to mitigate and navigate the educational system and learn the process leading toward a postsecondary education ultimately hinders opportunities to seek out information. Not only do they lack knowledge on the educational system in the United States, but they also remain encapsulated in their own educational experience. Thus, their lack of intentionality of actions leads to acquiring postsecondary education information by chance or default.

Furthermore, while parents reside in the same community, they do not live close to each other. The parents shared that they only interact with each other at the school. Thus, they do not develop or cultivate relationships outside the context of the school. Schools can serve as conduits to develop networks that provide necessary resources

(information) to parents. They have the capacity of developing relationships with parents and resource provider groups.

### **Aspirations**

Having aspirations was another subtheme identified in the parents' lack of taking action to access information. All parents agreed affirmatively that they want their children to go to college. When asked if they want their children to attain a higher education degree, they all said, "Yes." The data analysis indicated the parents want their children to attend college. However, they don't believe that pursuing a college education is a possibility for their children. In spite of their current socioeconomic situation and immigrant status, they still aspire that their children advance academically and pursue a postsecondary education. One parent shared:

I want my children to go to the university. They need a good base of studies. This will begin at the elementary school. And then try to be able to continue and go forward so they can go to the university. (*Yo quiero que mis hijos vayan a la universidad. Necesitan una buena base de estudio. Esto va a empezar en la primaria. Y después pueden continuar y seguir adelante para que puedan ir a la universidad.*)

They are committed to their children's education and want to make sure their children go to school, do their homework, (I tell my daughter to move successfully forward, to study) and be successful in their academic learning (*Yo le digo a mi hija que siga adelante, que estudie*). They talk to their children about the importance of an education and doing well in school. This explains their knowledge about the value of an



education. These actions are determined to be resources of their culture, or funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Thus, critical cognizance can be seen as anticipation that if their children get a good education, they can succeed in school and advance to higher education. For this reason it is essential that Latino parents gain access to postsecondary education information early in the educational path of their children.

One of the parents stated she “would need more information about careers” [other parents nodded in agreement] to be able to help her children by giving them information about college. Still another parent stated she has conversations with her children about the possibilities of going to college:

Well me. I always speak with them and I tell them that to reach a goal they always have to keep going (*consejos*). Well beginning with the rules more than anything. And realistically I do not know much about careers at the university. And I just make those comments with my children. And they tell me, “I want to be an architect. I want to be a teacher.” Another wants to be a doctor. As it is, realistically I don’t in this case. I am not informing myself of the light. But, I would like it if they reached the university.

Other parents responded in agreement stating, “Well, the same. I also want my son to reach the highest level. And, well, I also need more information about the university.” Yet another parent adds:

Well, I also feel the same. Yes. Because I always tell my daughter to continue to move successfully forward (*consejos*). To study. The oldest. Because my other daughter is barely beginning. But that they make a tough

effort. Because I say that learning is the most. And also we, the parents, like parents, support them so they can study everything. And do well. And I also need more information about careers that are needed and what is needed to be promoted to the next grade.

One parent indicated the importance of communicating with her children.

Another parent mentioned that “The more information we have the better.” (*La más información que tengamos, lo mejor*) While another parent feels “communication is where they can find persons who can give them bad information and they derail them.” (*Yo pienso que personas pueden desviar a los niños por medio de mala comunicación.*)

### **Language**

Another subtheme that emerged from their misguided intentionality of actions was the language of communication by the parents and school community. An integral part of schools is to provide programs and events aimed at increasing parent involvement. Consequently, for Latino parents who speak Spanish only, communication must be not only in English, but also in their native language. Communication with parents, oral and written, in both campuses for this study is in English and Spanish. Interviews with parents gave no indication that meetings and school events are conducted in English only. Communicating with parents in their native language is a key factor for parent involvement. As one interviewed parent noted:

What I have always said is that information has to come from the home because to begin with they are small children, their parts and everything for their name or being by the street is where they are given information. And it is

already there all twisted and everything. I feel that the communication is the maximum.

An indicator of those who successfully navigate the path to and through college may be the language of communication. Some participants indicated that information channeled to them if in English. All parents were attending the school because they want to learn to speak and write English (Schechter, Sharken-Taboada & Bayley, 1996). Both groups of parents were at the elementary school because they were participating in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class.

They have a sense of hope that by learning English they can acquire a better job for themselves. One of the parents shared a personal story about the need to learn to communicate in English. She became very emotional in sharing about how she felt traumatized in a previous job she held in the United States. She expressed how she feels dehumanized when working in a restaurant. She indicated that in Mexico, she worked in an office, a job which she considered respectable and reputable. The following depicts her frustration in her current job situation which she attributes to a lack of being able to speak English:

Realistically I think that for us it is the language. Well, my husband has brought his schooling from there [Mexico]. Then for him that [education] was very valuable quickly

It is not that easy for me. I wish I could continue. And, I, as I tell him, it is not like that form me. I worked in a restaurant three years ago. I did not like it. No, I really didn't because in Mexico I worked in an office. So, it is very

different. The truth is that it makes you traumatized. Because you come from there [Mexico] where you don't do anything like that. And you come here [US] and the realistic truth is that you come to do cleaning work. Yes. It is very sad. Then I told my husband that in that role, I feel very traumatized because realistically I am not finding myself the way I would like. And for that reason, I am working really hard at learning English. Because realistically, I tell him that I am not being a clown. I tell him it's not that, it's that you come with another education from there [Mexico] and then you come here. I really feel like I've been thrown on the floor. And like I shouldn't be here [restaurant] doing this. But for sure I don't want to stay like that. I want to move forward.

This story depicts frustrations experienced very likely by other parents due to their inability to communicate in English. They are driven by their current economic constraints. Their low socio economic status leaves them just getting by enough to pay the monthly bills. It also portrays a sense of hope by the parent to not remain in the dehumanized situation, but to improve the current economic status via a better job.

### **Economic Constraints**

Economic situation was a subtheme that was prevalent and influential in the parents' beliefs about accessibility of higher education. Poverty and economic insecurity are constants throughout the social context in which may Latino families live (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Increasingly college affordability is a key issue. Contreras stated that "affordability is both a concern and a barrier for Latino students and their families in pursuing higher education (Contreras, 2005, p. 78, (Perna, 2004;

Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Zarate & Pachón, 2006). According to Gándara & Contreras (2009), “there is a growing proportion of Latino students who receive no financial aid because they are undocumented” (p. 244). Thus, Latino parents have economic constraints that inhibit their ability to significantly help and sustain their children with college financial tuition and costs (Contreras, 2011).

This issue was shared by parents at both campuses. There was discussion about college tuition. Some were concerned about its cost:

I know that many parents also think, “Oh no. If I don’t have any money, my children will not go to college if I so little.” Then also the children are growing with that idea in mind, “Because my parents weren’t able to go to college, I can’t attend either.”

Some of the parents knew more about financing a college education than the south group:

We know there are scholarships. We don’t know who qualifies for them.

Is it for the children that are more intelligent?

Another parent inquired if access to scholarships is based on income:

Does it have to do with how much the father earns? Some scholarships that are given are based on the father’s salary.

One parent added access is more than money but “what they want in life to succeed. Simply because there is no money, no, I will not go there [college]. But like she says, scholarships exist. Then it’s not the money, it is what one wants.”

Interestingly one of the parent indicated she is going to start now to save money for college tuition, “I think I am going to start saving because if in the future the children, they can for whatever reason or not may get scholarships then there will something to support the children. In other words you know that it will be there [\$ saved].”

If money becomes an issue one parent indicated her children can return to Mexico to get a college education there:

They have told me, for example, that if my girls can’t study in a university here they can study in Mexico because it is less expensive there. If they can’t attend college here, I am going to take them back there [Mexico] to study.

Additionally, one parent said, “When I came to Houston I went to a Houston Community College but I had to leave because it was too expensive. Another parent stated she thinks “that college is too expensive.” Yet another thinks “it is too difficult to pursue a career for people who have few resources. Socio economics is a concern as indicated by another participant:

I think that the children who go to universities if for people who have more economic resources.

They have the desire and express determination to do something about their current economic and family situation. They want for their children to get a good education. They want their children to attend college and get a college degree. They see this as resulting in a better life than the life they presently live. One parent noted, “I

always dreamed of graduating but I was not able to attain it because of economics [lack of money]. But I would really like for my child to graduate and make it to the university. I will motivate him.” As mentioned, her spouse is also supportive and encourages their children while in school:

My husband and I did not attend school beyond primary school [elementary]. In Mexico you have to pay to keep going to school beyond elementary. I tell my child he has a great opportunity here to study, what we did not have in Mexico.

### **Relational Capital**

Relational capital was conceptually noted from various factors of relationships that are needed to access resources. Relationships with individuals who have knowledge of postsecondary education were minimal to scarce. However, responses indicated the postsecondary education information they know comes from James Coleman’s (1988) concept of interrelationship and intergenerational capital. The postsecondary education knowledge they have is from family and relatives that have attended a college or university, while one of the parents actually attended a community college.

Linking social capital refers to relationships between individuals and groups. This was noted when parents attend an ESL class or volunteer to help out in school related events, including the preparation of instructional materials for teachers. There is an identified cohesive group that might qualify as a network evident from the fact that parents were interviewed immediately after having participated in an ESL (English as a

Second Language) class at their children's school. All were interested in learning English. Spanish was the parents' only language spoken.

The data analysis did not identify information embedded in any of the parents' existing relationships. The participants did not indicate in their responses that they seek out relationships and connections that may provide access to social resources. Only one parent shared there is an individual, a Project GRAD parent coordinator, who has shared with them the value of a college education and has invited them to events such as parent conferences where they can learn information about a postsecondary education. Of all parents interviewed she was the only one who has attended. Every parent in this study spoke at length about the importance of getting an education, however, none indicated a relevance to the value of relationships. And none of the parents interviewed in this study believed or noted that relationships were at the core of their access. There was no evidence that indicated the density of the social ties and relationships, whether they were strong or weak ties.

Ream (2006) believed the convertibility of actual resources embedded in social networks, via social capital, transforms into other forms of capital and has been subject to considerable attention among theorists who study relationships, social networks, and social exchanges. In addition Ream (2006) stated many researchers employ the concept of social capital more explicitly in their parent involvement research by using variables that reflect parents' connections with their children's friends' parents. In his studies, Ream (2006) focused specifically on social capital inhering in families, communities, and school social networks. Ream's study analyzed the level implications of family



social capital in the form of parental involvement in schools which is apparently significant in identifying access to postsecondary education information in the elementary schools (Ream, 2006).

Intergenerational and interrelationship capital are sub-concepts of social capital. These two were conceptualized by James Coleman (1990) to explain how individuals gain access to information through family, relatives, and kin. Coleman further noted that for these concepts “*closure*” is needed to facilitate the flow of information (Coleman, 1990). These two sub-concepts were also identified as themes relevant to this study. Data analysis of parents’ responses indicated intergenerational and interrelationship capital existed in their family networks and relationships. Thus, these two social capital categories were applicable to how Latino parents learn and access higher education information.

### **Intergenerational Capital**

James Coleman’s (1990) social capital concept of *intergenerational* access has to do with parents passing the cultural and human capital they possess to their children. The distribution and exchange of information amid family members is a subtheme of social capital and of this study. Families can provide resources to their children. Parents at both campuses did not indicate that information about higher education is shared by family members. They only know of individuals who have attended college. The information about college is a resource they have not mobilized and turned into capital. Parent networks provide opportunities to contact individuals with valued resources about

postsecondary education. It was evident that family social networks were not existent since most of the family they know who attended college still live in Mexico.

When parents were asked if they knew anyone who has attended college one parent indicated she has a cousin who is currently attending a university. Another parent indicated her husband's cousin is attending college. She added that she also knows individuals who attend college in Mexico and are studying architecture. However, none of these individuals are family members. Another respondent said her husband attended college in Mexico but he did not finish. Another parent has a sister attending college in Mexico. She is studying to be a teacher.

One of the participating parents has a "niece who is presently in college." Another participant noted her "husband knows about college from a friend of his. His friend has his children already in college and will probably give him some information about college when he sees him." Still another parent indicated that she has learned about higher education from her "brother, because when he was in high school, I used to help him. It [college information] is also available in the library. He used to go to the public libraries. He also continued to inform himself how to pay for the university."

Intergenerational capital has been provided in some of the families interviewed as indicated by one participant:

I think so because his father and I have always been after him to study and learn. The best for the future is to study and learn. We always put the example for them. We tell them that if we could study a career in higher education [*carrera superior*] we would have loved to study in a university. That

is a dream that is very frustrating for us to not have graduated with students from our generation. They [classmates] finished. We had a gathering. Some are lawyers and engineers. We talk to them [children]. We tell them to take advantage of their education (*consejos*) because our parents were not able to support us. And we want to do everything possible to support them so they can continue to get ahead. The future is in an education.

Although parents have relatives that may be attending college, they still did not know requirement for college access. There is a family disconnect for the participants given most of their family members still live in Mexico.

### **Interrelationship Capital**

Another social capital concept by James Coleman (1990) is interrelationship capital. Interrelationship access refers to the transfer of information between relationships. According to Gándara & Contreras (2009), in most cases, it is the children who acquire information from friends who know about what it takes to go to college. They further noted that unfortunately Latino students also have friends with much less social capital to share (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

It was evident from responses to interview questions that parents do not have extensive family networks where higher education information is known. Participants were asked if they have accessed college information from any family member and if they have any family members that have attended or are presently attending college. One parent indicated her husband was in college for engineering in Mexico. She said that what she knows about college, she has “learned from her husband.” When asked if

they have any relatives that attend college in Houston, one said she thinks her cousin is in San Jacinto (San Jacinto Community College). Another said she has a cousin who was attending a university but did not know if he already finished.

One of the parents shared what Coleman (1990) notes as interrelationship capital. This consists of information gained from relationships with individuals including relatives and family. As indicated in her response:

I remember my brother used to say that. I want to be an engineer. I want that. And when he finished Middle School, my mother would tell him, where are you going to go to college? He would say, "I have to go to Booker T. Washington High School because they have an engineering program." And she would tell him, "That school is not yours because we live very far from there." And he would say, "No, but I have to go to that school because from there I will go to the university." And my mother would say, "But that school is very far from us." And he would say, "It doesn't matter." Because he found that school and he went there. My parents were not involved in anything. Because my mother would say, "I don't know." My father didn't know anything either. So, he went to that high school. He studied there in the magnet program. They had a group of young students there. They gave him scholarships there. He studied at Rice University. He graduated from Rice University. He was 100% with scholarships. They did not give him any loans. They paid him for 4 1/2 years of college. They paid everything for him. He did not pay anything. I also have a nephew there and he is doing very well. They told him if he wanted to go to Rice

University, Texas A&M, or Princeton. He did not go to Princeton because he said, “I don’t want to go.” I want to stay. And my mother would tell him, “Well, if you want to go, that is your decision.” At Rice University, he would study and they would tell him that he could live in the university. They told him if he didn’t live in the university, they would give him the money so he could use it where he was living. He would receive his check. He received several scholarships. They gave him \$1,000 in one and thousands in others.

### **Relational Investiture**

The Latino parents’ interviewed in this case study reiterated the relational investiture emergent theme when acknowledging their lack of intentions to invest in networks for the intention of getting information. According to Putnam and Goss (2002), the idea at the core of the theory of social capital is that social networks matter, they create both individual and collective value, and one can “*invest* in networking” (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 8). In order to get benefits from social capital, individuals must invest dividends (time and energy) in the development of relationships. Coleman additionally contended that forms of social capital have the property that their benefits can be captured by those who invest in them (Coleman, 1990).

Consequently, relational investiture is needed for parents to gain access to information. Linking social capital refers to relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations. The parent respondents consistently reported they did not access information from friends and school personnel. The findings revealed that Latino parents in the study refrain from investing in networks and relationships because of their

socioeconomic situation and lack of social ties in their community. Thus, three subthemes that emerged from relational investiture were; (a) economic constraints, (b) social ties, and (c) parent involvement.

Findings from their responses indicated they don't know much information about prerequisites to enroll in college. Dismayed by the current immigration situation they face, Latinos parents in this study are doubtful of opportunities to access higher education. In addition, they speculate whether a social security number is needed to attend. Their undocumented status has left some of their children without being able to apply for a social security card. It can also be inferred that their own (the parents) undocumented status influence their sense of feeling secure, or in fear of deportation for being undocumented. This was indicated by the responses of two parents:

Apart from that, I don't know if it will impede them from being able to work. What they also need is security, [Parent is referring to social security number] like immigrants that do not have a social security card. Let's say like my son. He does not have a permit or papers [Parent is noting son is non-documented and resides illegally in the United States.] to be able to keep going forward. Are children without papers able to attend college? They say that if you do not have social security you can't get a job. Can you enter the university without social security?

Another parent inquired about a college education for herself but indicated improbability due to undocumented immigrant status.

An assumption of social capital networking is that individuals have finite time and energy to invest in social relationships (Putman & Goss, 2002). The study used the social capital theoretical framework in order to understand how Latino parents use embedded information in resources and if they invest those resources to generate returns, (i.e., access to postsecondary education information). The findings revealed that parents do not invest in the development of relationships due to beliefs about the timeliness of needing the information (e.g. elementary school level). Thus, parents do not spend time investing in relationships that will benefit them in accessing postsecondary education information (Nuñez, 2009).

Interpersonal relationships form when some purpose or interest attracts them to one another. These resources can be intrinsic or extrinsic (e.g., information), or materialistic. Resources are gained from the exchange of information between two or more social actors. The need or desire for these resources is what motivates individuals to seek relationships with others who can provide these resources. The basic premise underlying the social exchange theory is that most social relationships are exchange relationships between individuals. Resourceful benefits can result from relational investiture by which individuals through various types of relationships invest time in effort to venture out, seek, and gain needed information.

### **Social Ties**

Social ties are considered as a useful resource and form of social capital available through social relationships. This subtheme that emerged from the data was significant to social ties. Researchers have found that strong ties in networks and connections can

be profitable and are an important factor in the pursuit of postsecondary education for Latina/o students (Knight et al., 2004). Bourdieu noted that social connections are needed and considered the density and durability of network social ties as both being vital to access information (Bourdieu, 1986). Families, however, are rarely incorporated into college outreach efforts in any significant way. This is important to research findings because the parents interviewed did not have dense ties. Their networks or connections were either weak or nonexistent.

In addition, the number of ties in a social network is relevant in terms of added value and its ability to provide information. Putnam (1996) has noted that social capital contributes to collective action by increasing and fostering durable forms of reciprocity enabling the flow of information. He also referred to social capital as a features of social life consisting in networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to collectively take action and more effectively pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 1996). Analysis of the data in this study also revealed that the Latino parents interviewed did not possess strong social network ties (Lesser, 2002).

Individuals would need to know who possesses the information and how the information flows and is distributed. The parents interviewed lack social networks and pathways essential to facilitate access to resources (Lareau, 1987). However, studies done by Lareau (1987), Shumar (1996), and Useem (1992) found that mothers who were more integrated into informal parent networks at their children's schools knew more about school tracking policies than isolated mothers (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Both



studies suggested that parents who network with individuals at schools and maintain ties with other parents use them as a source of information and advice.

### **Parent Involvement**

Relationships matter and the degree of parent involvement is important in a student's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parent involvement was identified as a subtheme contributing to access to resources parents need. This facilitates attempts to extend their relationships through social ties and connections. The number of ties of social contacts in a social network is relevant in terms of added value in its ability to provide information and beneficial to parents. The nature of interactions between individuals is dependent on the dimensions of social capital they have and the flow of information through social networks and relationships. Additionally, individuals or organizations who are well informed and can serve as a source of information can potentially seek out others in the community who can benefit from the information at hand. This contributes to the reciprocity and flow of information between individuals in the community, the development of relationships, and formation of networks for creating connections and conduits for the flow of information. Thus, investing in social resources is critical for accessing higher education information.

Parent engagement is an option in the school district where this study was conducted. Families are not required to participate in parent activities. They are highly encouraged and motivated to attend. Parent involvement tends to be at greater participation at the elementary school level. Parents attend regular monthly parent meetings as part of parent involvement participation. There are numerous ways schools

can facilitate parent engagement in schools. School events include holiday programs, math, science, and literacy nights, classes offered such as ESL and computer courses, and parent-teacher organizations.

The greatest parent participation, involvement, and attendance at school family events occur when children participate and/or perform in the event. Their presence and attendance at the school is an indicator of support for their children. Their participation also facilitates the development of social capital, networks, and relationships which they can access resources in the form of knowledge about postsecondary education. The types of parent activities schools provide have the potential of becoming networks for parents to access information.

Conceivably social capital might be accessible through developed and deepened relationships parents build form in the schools. Faced with the prospect that Latinos are the most undereducated major population in the United States, to a great extent, their resources and social networks are limited. Significant in possession of these social resources is the action individuals take in response to access of the acquired information. For Coleman (1988), social capital is functional and is incumbent on the action individuals take once they have it. Bourdieu (1986) acknowledged that the value of an individual's ties (or volume of social capital possessed) depends on the number of connections they can mobilize and the value of capital possessed by each connector (Bourdieu, 1986).

Even though they attend the schools regularly, the Latino parent participants in this case study have not had anyone share postsecondary education information with

them. Only at the north campus has there been an individual who share information with them about opportunities to attend college if they stay in school and graduate from high school. Observations and informal interviews with parents at elementary schools indicated the schools talk to the students about college. However, none indicated parents receive specific information on how to access information about college or about the process needed to attend a university.

Access to knowledge and information begins early in PreK-5 elementary school. Access may be determined by the outcomes of social group, gender, race, advantages, disadvantages, social position, social structures, and amount of social networks. While in the north campus there is a coordinator that shares information about possibilities and opportunities to go to college, at the south campus one of the parent indicated she has never received any higher education information, “My daughter is in third grade. I have seen that the teachers do not motivate my daughters by talking to them about the university. They don’t say anything about the university.

The media was not a resource that parent participants utilize to access information. One of the respondents indicated that sometimes she gets information by mail. Another indicated she hears about college on the news on television, “Sometimes they say things about college.” None mentioned they read information about college in newspapers, not even in the community Spanish newspapers. One said she has “seen announcements on the freeways signs [billboards].” While another said she has passed by [driven by] the university that is close to the school, “the one on the side of the

freeway [45 South]. It is a new building.” This parent was referring to the newly constructed Houston Community College close to the school.

Most of the parent participants indicated they do not get postsecondary education information through communicative media. One parent has seen information on Spanish television:

Channel 45 makes many bulletins announcing career fairs. They make these announcements. They give provide information for about 30 to 60 minute solely over information about college.

In the north campus only one parent has read information about college on the newspaper but was not sure what the information entailed. “Since it is all in English, I don’t know a lot of what it actually says.” Another parent indicated that a lot of information about college is shared in television, however it is all in English. None of the participants have accessed college information from community Spanish newspapers. One parent said they have received information at the elementary school through the school bulletins. Another parent said they no longer receive information in school bulletins.

Only one parent from the north group indicated that the internet is a resource. She has utilized the internet to get information about careers and colleges:

Mine is that I have already checked in the internet, careers and schools after here in the elementary. And I am thinking that another school will follow. I have 2 schools in mind. But when my daughters qualified for the Gifted and Talented program, after that, I checked. I got much information on the internet.

For whatever there was that was over GT. Which schools were Vanguard schools? What was a Magnet school? When I am looking at that I am focusing for science schools, music schools, math schools, and all those. But because my daughters are still very little, I don't know in what they are high in. Thus, for me it is difficult. But if a teacher would do a study or something to see what area is it that my daughters are strong in. Maybe it is mathematics or maybe it is science. Like the one in third grade, I am confused because she likes math but she also likes to read a lot. She likes science and it also excites her. But, much better, I am lost with her. And the little one, I see that she likes mathematics. Math is easy for her. But also, she is still in first grade. But if someone would make something for me that is more focused. Yes. It would help me to help them for those programs such as Vanguard, Magnet, that are more leveraged and would be able to also take advantage of my daughters' intelligence.

### **Summary**

Parents are a vital force in the influence and help they provide their children toward developing an understanding of college. Therefore, Latino families can benefit from increasing their social capital by learning more about college. Being more resourceful will help in their interaction and communication with their children when it comes to making critical choices about college. Parents' interaction and support for their children in collaboration with the school community is essential. However, lack of information and understanding of college knowledge may impede parents' support of their children's college aspirations.

The implications of the findings in this study were fundamental to the understanding how families and community entities interact and connect to one another for the benefit of increasing opportunities for students to graduate from high school and pursue higher education. Insights from data analysis disclosed that social capital dynamics for Latino families is limited to family social capital. The information they knew in the area of higher education is restricted to what they have learned from family and kin. Lastly, they did not actively pursue postsecondary education information at the elementary school level.

In addition to interviews, informal conversations disclosed that while parents have expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children they also have many concerns regarding the education of their children. While the parents in the study actively participate and attend their children's elementary school, the notion of postsecondary education is not something they give much thought to yet. Their immediate concern is for their children to get the best education they can, and possibly attend a college or university. Nevertheless, Latino aspirations for the continuation to higher education indicated that they desire their children succeed academically and want them to get a college degree.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
FUTURE RESEARCH

**Overview of the Study**

This case study gave voice to ten Latino parents who participated in their children's schools through parent involvement related activities. The study examined the perception of the parents in providing their children support in the area of higher education. The intent of the study was to identify what the participating Latino parents knew about postsecondary education, how they access the information, and what resources they use to acquire college related information. The study included parents of Mexican descent who had children attending only the elementary school level, Pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade. The results of this research were intended to provide information on access to postsecondary knowledge. The notion that college information can be accessible and effectively acquired by parents at the elementary level was central to this study.

In recognition that parents provide invaluable support to their children's education, the college information Latino parents access can prove to be advantageous in college aspirations, expectations, choices, decisions, and preparations for their children in terms of pursuing a postsecondary education. While every parent that participated in the study stated that they understood the importance of a postsecondary education, the data clearly indicated that the participating Latino parents are deficient in resources in

the form of networks, relationships, and connections that enable access to postsecondary education information.

Access is a significant concern and central to attaining a college degree. The term *access* simply defined in the field of postsecondary education constitutes the retrieval of resources consisting of knowledge of the admission processes to enter a college or university, prerequisites needed, requirements for matriculation, and financial information for tuition. For this study access constituted resources that facilitated the parents in acquiring college related information through social networks, relationships, and connections. Access also refers to not only receiving valuable information but also knowing how to use that knowledge. Social relationships and network ties also contribute to accessing essential college information. The term “access” has also been characterized by an operational lens in terms of actions, outcomes, and results attained by its implementation and use (Perna, 2006).

The data were examined using social capital theory, primarily conceptualized by James Coleman (1988). Coleman (1988) determined social capital as being derived from networks that provide information, social norms, and academic achievement support. He defined social capital as constituting any aspect of a social structure that creates value and facilitates actions of the individuals with that social structure. For Coleman (1988), social capital exists in the relationships among individuals. He also noted that resources are valuable to individuals if they use them to achieve their interests (Coleman, 1988). This was best applied to the extent that the Latino parents in the study used the resources they already possess. It is relevant to this study that the data be



looked at through James Coleman's (1988) theoretical premise for social capital because he placed the framework within the context of education, social structures (i.e., the schools and school community) and social relationships that facilitate actions of individuals (the Latino parents).

Additionally, research in family-based explanations has examined the relevant social support system of social capital as an element found to positively affect academic achievement (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu (1992) identified the value of social capital. Robert Putnam (2000) took the concept beyond academics and to the community. James Coleman (1988) gave social capital a clear theoretical framework and applied it to the context of education for research purposes. This research is centered on the work of these three social science theorists. However, social capital in this study is anchored within a large social context in the community, from the elementary school to the neighborhood (*barrios*) where parents reside, and to local colleges and universities, to country of origin (Mexico) where social capital was first developed through connections and interactions with family members.

The social capital theory was used to understand what the Latino parents in the study knew about postsecondary education and how they access its content. Data from parents' responses revealed social factors such as critical cognizance held by the parents contributed to their indifference and refraining from accessing higher education information during the time their children attend elementary school. Misconceptions about the timing to get access also led to the delayed actions and misguided intentionality to pursue information beyond what they already know. Any

postsecondary education they learn at the elementary level may be by either chance or by default. These factors resulted in lack of investing in social relationships, community networks, and providers that may have postsecondary education embedded in its infrastructure.

This study also intended to identify not only the resources parents held but also the content of information they knew, and any existing networks they employ. As indicated in social capital theory, knowledge and information are considered as resources. Individuals who provide college information, advice, and support are significant social resources for parents who do not have information about postsecondary education. Access to a college preparation information is a critical variable. Additional resources necessary are knowledge of academic preparation and prerequisites needed at the high school level (i.e., course work, GPAs, (Grade Point Equivalency) qualifying at the top 5%, SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT (American College Test) exams, college applications, deadlines for registration to tests, names and locations of college information providers, and college information internet websites.

The social capital theoretical framework premised by the work of Bourdieu (1992) was employed to understand the idea that cultural disadvantages or inequalities exist and are passed down from one generation to the next. This according to Bourdieu (1992) extends to the educational system. For this case study, social capital was also framed within Pierre Bourdieu's social theory conceptualized as social class (dis)advantages leading to education inequity. Bourdieu (1992) also proposed that social networks and access to resources are incumbent on the volume of social capital and

network size. He placed greater emphasis on access to resources and issues of power in society. Ream and Palardy (2008) noted that social class position are centrally responsible for the production and reproduction of education inequities (Bourdieu, 1986; Ream & Palardy, 2008).

Robert Putnam (2000) added to the social capital theory noting that social networks matter. Putnam conceptualized the critical role that networks and relationships have in sharing information. According to Putnam (2000), social capital consists of both individual and collective value. Putnam postulated that one can *invest* in social capital by networking, specifically in civic organizations. For Putnam (2000), social capital maintains that certain kinds of social networks and relationships also possess economic value. It was evident the parents lack of networks limits them from investing in the information embedded in networks. Putnam (2000) also noted value in networks when there is reciprocity of sharing information within those networks and also relationships. The fact that the parents were attending the ESL class indicated the conceptualization of social capital as an adaptation of “civic participation” in the school community setting, social capital as indicated by Robert Putnam (Putnam, 2000).

### **Summary of Findings**

Throughout the data analysis there were commonalities between the participant comments and the research questions. These commonalities indicated how the parents rationalize their role and their thoughts about their access and support towards postsecondary education commencing at the elementary school. Their responses were situated in the critical cognizance the parents held and their misguided intentionality

measures taken to access to higher education information. This permeated the greater part of the findings in the study and was within the framework of relational investiture in social networks and relationships. Various insights parents had were due to their prior educational experiences. These include inaccurate beliefs and preconceived notions that college is only for those who are intelligent and have necessary economic, financial resources needed to pay for college tuition. The findings are reported by data analysis based on the 3 research questions that guided the study

Beliefs that parents held influenced their actions. Critical cognizance ensues in their misconceptions and disbelief. Their intentions become misguided and their actions delayed. Alexander and Collier (2002) have noted that competing family and work demands on time attribute to the hesitancy to act. As one parent shared, “Many students drop out of school at high school because they don’t think they can get a good job. They leave because they do not see any hope.” (*Se salen porque no ven esa esperanza.*)

Findings in the study indicated there was uncertainty and disbelief on the part of the parents for the attainability of college for their children at the time they are enrolled at the elementary school. Their misaligned beliefs about the possibility of their children to attend college and their expectations deter efforts to access postsecondary education information early at the elementary school. They had a mitigated uncertainty in higher education possibilities for their children because of the current low socioeconomic financial situation they face. While they have high aspirations for their children to attend higher education, their actual expectation for them to attend are low.

Concerning the first research question which investigated what Latino parents know regarding postsecondary education, the parents interviewed could only share postsecondary education knowledge they have learned from family and relatives. They know that they don't know and are unclear about what they need to know. When asked about what they knew about college, one parent responded, "Information about college. That is what I don't know. That is what I need to know" (*Información sobre el colegio. Yo no se información. Eso es lo que yo necesito saber*) without sharing any specific information about what she needs to know. Some parents expressed self-blame for not being informed. They want their children to get a good education. All of the parents indicated that they want for their children to attend college and obtain a degree. They also want to be able to support their children more in their journey to continue to higher education.

Data analysis from the first question indicated the beliefs that parents held influenced their actions. Their misaligned beliefs about the possibility of their children to attend college and their expectations deter any efforts to access postsecondary education information early at the elementary school. Critical cognizance befalls in their misconceptions and disbelief. Their intentions become misguided and their actions delayed. However simultaneously, they aspire for their children to succeed academically and hope they will continue to higher education. There is a mitigated uncertainty in higher education possibilities for their children because of the current low socioeconomic situation they face. Also, researchers Alexander and Collier (2002) noted that competing family and work demands on time attribute to the hesitancy to act.

Other challenges include immigration status, fear, and culture experiences and doubtful expectations. As one parent shared, “Many students drop out of school at high school because they don’t think they can get a good job. They leave because they do not see any hope.” (*Se salen porque no ven esa esperanza.*)

Financial planning would be a skill parents need to learn to be able to access financial support through loans, grants, and scholarships. One parent notes that “college is too expensive and difficult to pursue for people who have few resources.” They inquired about college tuition and financial aid. This informational resource is critical for matriculation in colleges and universities. One of the parents indicated that she was going to start saving money for her children’s future in case they do not obtain scholarships. (*Yo pienso que voy a empezar a ahorrar por tal razón que más adelante los niños no puedan obtener vecas*).

Parents focus from an affective perspective (emotional capital) by encouraging their children through *consejos* (advice) to do well in school. The data analysis indicated that they provide emotional support. As one parent stated, “I tell them, work hard with much effort. You have to be something.” (*Échale ganas. Tienes que ser algo*). They do not know of any specific information that they can share with their children. Their primacy of action is deferred to “being there” to guide their children and support them through (*consejos*) the rhetoric of making effective academic efforts and working hard in their school work. They lacked specific information that they can share with their children at this time. Their primacy of action was deferred to supporting their children through (*consejos*) the rhetoric of effective efforts and working hard at school.

In addressing the second research question, which investigated how Latino parents are involved at the elementary school to access postsecondary education information. It was evident and inferred that most parents do not know how to get information. One parent said, “We need to know *how* to get information” (*Necesitamos como saber esa información*). The data revealed parents do not intentionally seek out venues to access information. They do not attend college related events because they think it is too early in their children’s education to seek out the information. They also do not use public media such as television, newspapers, or technology, however, at times they hear information about college careers over the radio and television. Only one parent spoke of using the internet to look up colleges. None indicated the use of social media. All noted that the elementary schools do not provide parents engaging activities in postsecondary education specifically. They also said that teachers do not share any higher education information.

It was evident and inferred that most parents did not know how to get information. One parent said, “We need to know *how* to get information” (*Necesitamos saber cómo adquirir esa información*). The data revealed parents do not intentionally seek out venues to access information. They do not attend college related events because they think it is too early in their children’s education to seek out the information. They also do not use public media such as television, newspapers, or technology, however, at times they hear information about college careers over the radio and television. Only one parent spoke of using the internet to look up colleges. None indicated the use of social media. All noted that the elementary schools do not provide

parents engaging activities in postsecondary education specifically. They also said that teachers do not share any higher education information. Therefore, it can be inferred that the parents have restrictive capital.

The parents interviewed shared scant postsecondary education knowledge they have learned from family and relatives. They “knew that they don’t know” and are unclear about what they need to know. When asked about what they knew about college, one parent responded, “Information about college. That is what I don’t know. That is what I need to know” (*Información sobre el colegio. Eso es lo que yo no sé. Eso es lo que yo necesito saber.*) She did not indicate specific information about postsecondary education that she needs to know. Some parents expressed self-blame for not being informed. They want their children to get a good education. All of the parents indicated they want for their children to attend college and obtain a college degree. They also want to be able to support their children more in their journey to continue to higher education.

A few parents commented that their children are too young at the elementary school to think about college (*Está muy chiquito todavía*). It was also noted that in the process of growing up, children change their minds about what career they want to pursue. They noted that not only do they not know what career they want to pursue but also they many not want to continue on to higher education at all. One parent noted her child is tough (*duro*) and does not want to listen to advise (*consejos*) about attending college. The parent wants for her child to go to college. However, her son is emphatic about not wanting to attend.



For James Coleman (1990) social capital is about its functionality. Knowledge is considered within the social capital theory as a resource. One basic concern was whether or not they possess resources such as social relationship, networks, and connections available to them to be able to retrieve higher education information. As premised by Coleman (1990) access to knowledge (i.e., college information) can help parents in guiding their children around academic continuity and higher education. Social capital is also inherently about whatever allows individuals or institutions to act by providing essential resources within a social structure. The setting, the school campus where the parents were interviewed, constituted a social structure. This study also intended to explore what Latino parents knew about postsecondary education and resources they employ at the elementary school where their child is enrolled.

The third research question investigated the resources Latino parents used to access postsecondary education information and what actions they take to get access. From a resource perspective, action is important. Most of the Latino parents in this study had not taken any strategic action to access information about college. Thus, their primacy of action was unintentional and delayed. Findings in the study indicate there is to some extent an uncertainty and disbelief on the part of the parents for the attainability of college for their children at the time they are enrolled at the elementary school. The data revealed that while Latino parent aspirations were high, realistic expectations of achievement were uncertain. Even the parent who has used the internet to access information shared, “The university is no guarantee” (*La universidad no es garantía*).

This parent discussed at length the importance of financial resources to pursuing a college education.

The analysis of the data did not indicate a deployment of networks to access specifically postsecondary education information. It was also evident there were no active networks that were currently in place for parents to take action in accessing resources in college related information. With the exception of transitional family networks, dimensions of social capital were weak in nature evidenced by the minimal interaction between the parents and their relationships outside of the school and in the community itself. In the data analysis, the researcher did not identify any social networks outside the school, in the community where parents reside. When asked if they socialize outside the school context, they noted the school is the only community structure where they socialize and inter act with each other. The parents did not socialize with each other beyond the school setting, into the local community (*colonia* or *barrio*) where they reside.

Sadly, the data analysis revealed that the parents did not take action when confronted with college related resources, relationships, and/or networks provided in the school community. With the sole exception of verbal support, the parents interviewed in this study were encouraging and supportive of their children's education. They indicated their support by advising their children [*consejos*] and motivating them to work harder and do well in school [*Échale más ganas. Adelante*]. Because these Latino parents generally do not have specific social capital to guide their children in the area of higher education, they are left holding a lessened role than that of middle class parents.

Imperatively, strong social support networks seem vital for helping these Latino families to maintain, sustain, and motivate their children to go to college.

In addition, while parents were optimistic about the possibility of their children going to college, there was an uncertainty due to extenuating issues such as academic achievement and immigration status. Other challenges include immigration status, fear, culture experiences and doubtful expectations (Rong & Brown, 2002). One parent asked, “Do you need papers to study?” Uncertainty to access higher education prevails due to undocumented status.

Immigrants that do not have a social security card. Let’s say like my son. He does not have a permit or papers [The parent is noting son is non-documented and illegally residing in the United States.] to be able to keep going forward. Are children without papers able to attend college? They say that if you do not have social security you can’t get a job. Can you enter the university without social security?

However, they still desire possibilities and opportunities for their children to continue their education.

### **Additional Findings**

Latino parents have scarce knowledge of the K-12 and higher education system (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Their limited knowledge about the educational system and higher education is a critical access attribute. It can be ascertained that Latino parents have limited, restrictive access to postsecondary education information. This can deter future possibilities to seek out information early during the elementary school

experience of their children, the elementary school level. They are not looking that far into their children's educational future during this educational schooling time frame.

All of the parent participants have aspirations for their children to attend college and express determination to do what they can in supporting them. They realize that higher education may be able to help them improve the current economic and family situation. They see a postsecondary education for their children as bringing about a better life than they, (the parents and their family) presently live. They want to know more college information as indicated when responding, "We also need more information about the university (*Pués también necesitamos más información sobre la universidad*). However, simultaneously, they aspire for their children to succeed academically and hope they will continue to higher education.

Mexican immigrant parents come from a country in education beyond elementary school. Is not enforced. In Mexico, compulsory education only extends to the *secundaria*, the equivalent of middle school in the United States which is an average formal education attainment for most students. Thus, in Mexico, completion of high school is not compulsory and many children leave earlier out of economic necessity or lack of access to schooling (Day & Newburger, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Parents in this study saw higher education as a possibility but not a reality. This might be concluded from the fact that most of the parents in the study did not complete high school. They noted that they "need to be able to get more information" (*Necesitamos saber adquirir más información*).

School personnel talk to parents about higher education and pathway to college indirectly through college related activities they provide to students. Parents are for the most part the unintended other in college information events at schools. For parents to make a difference in college education as early as possible in their children's education, they must be intentionally included in all college activities, events, and information sharing. The data indicated the schools must start talking to parents about college early, in elementary school, so they can start thinking about the realities and possibilities of their children's college choices early in their educational path. When there is a purposeful intent to include parents in the dialogue about college at the elementary schools, then the parents will not fall into the significant "unintended other" context of the college bound culture. The acquisition of this information will become the content of social capital newly acquired.

Another insight found was that while language may be an inhibiting factor, it is also promising and essential. Alexander and Collier (2002) noted that fear of not being able to communicate with the school personnel keeps Hispanic parents from getting information.

The parents interviewed had just finished their ESL class. They attend class weekly to learn to speak and write English. Resources, social networks, relationships, connections, social ties, and information may not be readily available in Latino families where parents have less education and low socio economic, limited financial resources. Additionally, Gándara (1995) noted researchers familiar with the Hispanic culture

attribute differences in academic achievement to Mexican parents' lack of familiarity with the American school system.

Furthermore, what the data from field observations and conferences attendance revealed was that there is inconsistency in the participation of parents in college related activities. *In Transit*, a component of the *Path to Scholarships* program, is conducted at a church in the community. It is an academic college information curriculum for students at middle school and high school. The program was developed with a parent component. However, students and parents participate separately in program information sessions. Students complete information that is required for applying to any college or university. These include essays, applications, and letters of recommendation. Students also required to participate in community service activities. College visits is another component of the program. Interestingly, the parents are not required to participate in any of these events. The information they receive is not the same as the information for the students. Also, parents who have children at elementary school only are not invited to participate. In another college career preparation program for girls, *Girls First*, held annually for students from grades third – eighth, parents are also excluded from attending the sessions with their daughters.

The *Houston Hispanic Forum* is a college related conference held annually in downtown Houston for grades sixth-twelfth. This event highly encourages parents to attend with their children. Unfortunately, many of the schools do not invite and include the students' parents' attendance. Parents that do attend the conference often attend selected sessions without their children. The event is inclusive of surrounding public

school districts as well as charter schools. It offers an exhibit area where college and university providers provide career, enrollment, and tuition related information. In addition, informational workshops and sessions are offered in a variety of postsecondary education information including discussion panels and forums. A highly attended discussion forum is presented by *El Grupo de Jovenes Immigrantes* (Immigrant Youth Group) and it goes over college access and matriculation for undocumented students.

It is possible for Latino parents without college experiences to learn the process required to the pathway to higher education. As noted by Tierney (2005) more information is needed on how diverse families interact with schools and precisely what type and degree of parent engagement is most efficacious. Schools rarely place heavy emphasis on programs that reach out to parents in substantive ways. Their effectiveness may be difficult to assess given the long-term, cumulative nature of investing in the development of social capital. When the PreKindergarten-12 school community unites common efforts in this endeavor, the capital investment in these resources can result in significant gains for Latino students accessing higher education (Tierney, 2005).

### **Recommendations**

The single most effective way to get individuals to change the way they act is to change the way they think and what they believe. Their actions are the result of what they think and believe to be possibilities. Their actions have to speak louder than words. Changing the way parents think and believe, may be a determining factor in the way they act and seek out information about college. Changing their beliefs may also change their behaviors thus, they will seek out information. I attended a college related

conference at the University of Houston provided by the Annenberg+ organization. When asked, participating parents shared they attended because they knew that they have to become more informed about access to postsecondary education because their daughter was now in high school. The parents in attendance were not Latinos.

Parent support and encouragement are important in making children feel successful and competent. However, these constitute as minimal and rationed resources. Latino parents provide emotional and rhetorical advice (*consejos*), but because they generally do not have the social capital needed to guide their children in the postsecondary education process, they often cannot play the role that middle-class parents do for their children. Consequently, for Mexican immigrant parents, beating the odds requires that an individual who does have social capital take over that role (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Rotberg, 2001).

### **Scaffolding *Consejos***

A consistent pattern from participant responses, the concept of *consejos* (advice) was prevalent throughout the data analysis. While the Latino parents did not have specific information about postsecondary education to share with their children, they provided support in terms of encouragement and advice. This affective, emotional, narrative advice, and rhetorical support begins as early as elementary school. Parent participants in the *In Transit* program share the same support during their children's middle and high school educational experience. Therefore, a plan of action with a postsecondary education curriculum is recommended for PreKindergarten-twelfth grade. This recommendation supports the concept of “scaffolding *consejos*.” This concept can



provide parents a building structure for the academic pipeline. It can consist of aggregate, college specific information (i.e. admission process, matriculation requirements, financial aid, etc.) that begins at the elementary school level, builds, and continues to high school. The “scaffolding *consejos*” concept can empower parents given the content and substance is specific to the process and requirements needed for matriculation in higher education.

### **The School Community**

The community is another resource where parents can interact with others and build relationships. However, for the parents in this study, there is little to no interaction within the school community. For this study, the school community consists of social structures, groups, and/or organizations (elementary, middle, high schools, colleges, or universities) within the parents’ grasp in the community where they live. Parks, community center and social agencies do not exist within the community geographic area of the schools. Without access to community resource providers, schools are left encapsulated trying to meet all children’s needs, academic, social, and emotional. School communities have the potential of becoming resourceful avenues that reach out to Latino parents in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways that narrow the college information gap and level the playing field for college access (Auerbach, 2004).

Individuals in the school community can improve the PreK-16 pathways through strengthening the relationships and partnerships with families and schools. Collatos, Morrel, Nuno, and Lara (2004) cited Valenzuela (1994) indicating that by focusing on the strengths students bring to school, a classroom can serve as a space to create a

college-going identity which adds to *cultural* and *social* capital rather than it being a site that subtracts cultural resources (Collatos et al., 2004; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Thus, the school community can coordinate efforts with college providers as early at elementary school, where the educational pipeline begins for children and their parents.

Schools need sustained interactive connections with parents. The task must go wider and deeper, mobilizing available resources, exploring and finding funding resources, and going beyond existing boundaries to reach out to parents and bring them to the schools. Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) have suggested there is a positive correlation with parent involvement and academic success for most students (Ingram et al., 2007). Annette Lareau believes that unequal levels of parent engagement in schools go back to the schools themselves (Lareau, 1987).

In addressing parent involvement programs, schools must take into consideration that family structures have changed. There has been a dramatic change in either single-parent households or homes in which both parents work. The consequences have seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of close adult attention available to children. Social change has seen a dramatic reduction of the amount of time parents spend with their children on a weekly basis and possibly also at school parent involvement activities.

Vincent Tinto (1982) pointed out effective parent programs are those that are able to integrate individuals into the mainstream of the academic and social life of the educational institution in which programs are housed (Tinto, 1982). The unavoidable fact is that the schools do not reach all parents. No research was found indicating the percentage of parents that actually respond and attend such activities compared to the

number of students enrolled whose parents are invited, encouraged, or informed. However, some high schools have implemented college preparation programs as enhanced programs that extend the school's regular day and are aimed at low-income youth who might otherwise not be poised to attend college (Tierney et al., 2004).

What can elementary schools do to begin the process of instilling and developing in students a college going identity? The elementary school is the first elementary experience where educators can begin to build bridges and pathways for Latino parents toward the college experience. Early intervention programs are needed for parents that have no post-secondary experience, opportunities to learn about college, and realize that college is a possibility for their children (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2005). Latino parents are often kept out of the academic loop.

Oftentimes, parents are more involved in the elementary schools and less involved in their children's middle school and high school. While schools open the doors of parent involvement activities, these often do not include information about the successful academic preparation of students beginning at the elementary level and as they move on to middle school which could reinforce social capital that can benefit parents early in the education of their children, thus equip them with the social capital they need in to guide them toward a higher education path. Parent involvement programs elementary, middle, and high schools have a distinct nature. School districts have not created infrastructures or networks to keep parents engaged in a vertical alignment pipeline as their children' and the movement passing through PreKindergarten to twelfth grade in schools.

## **Implications for Educational Leaders**

Educational leaders play an important role in this process by initiating parent programs that promote academic guidance and support for their children. They do so by planning and providing time and coordinating strategic and effective efforts that support the social, cultural, and critical capital resources to the families in their school community. Furthermore, partnership grants and organizations enhance the parent and student programs implemented in the schools. Business and university partners in the community can also be resourceful in the human and economic capital they provide to schools.

A well-constructed plan of action to involve parents beginning at the elementary level in the college access pathways depends of the commitment the school leader is willing to make. A process program by which parents receive ongoing information about college throughout their children's elementary school experience can take the form of a college "awareness" level for parents. Parents can begin to learn and reflect on college education possibilities for their children. A college awareness program can offer information about different types of colleges and universities, exploration of career choices, academic coursework and requirements for colleges and universities, financial aid, and variables that contribute to successful completion of college. This all constitutes valuable social capital for Latino parents.

Educational leaders in schools have the capacity to engage parents in dialogue about unforeseen future possibilities for their children to be able to attend college. The types of initiatives and parent involvement activities schools provide have the potential

of closing the college access information gap for Latino parents and their children. College specific parent education learning initiatives can make Latino parents more aware of the information they provide their children. When parents build on their existing knowledge of postsecondary education, the resources they provide can support their children's aspirations and preparation efforts as early as their elementary school experience. This social capital can definitely effect the support and guidance the parents provide to their children.

Personnel in high schools are more apt to strategically provide information in the development of college pathways and college awareness. College awareness parent involvement activities can begin as early as the elementary school level and continue to be supported at the middle and high schools. School districts have yet to design parent involvement programs in the same vertical alignment as the educational pipeline for school children from elementary, to middle, and on to high school. Successful college information programs that commence at the elementary level have the potential to be sustained at all levels. The academic and informational pathway to college for students (elementary, middle, high school) can model a parallel framework for parents.

Families provide resources in the form of knowledge. The human capital they possess in the form of intellectual capital. By expanding their family-school-community networks and relationships, parents can also enhance the social capital and intellectual (human) capital they possess. When the parents build on their social and human capital, they also build advocacy capacity to support their children during their educational path (Sanders & Nee, 1996). Parents in this study have family and/or friends who attend or

have attended a college or university. They have social networks within their families. The parents have knowledge and a sense about higher education in terms of financial capital needed for tuition from family that has attended higher education. Parent family networks provide information about college and careers to the parents in this study. They have the opportunity to contact their family members to access valuable resources, higher education information. Interrelationship capital is the amount of capital parents give their children. The greater the parents' personal social structures, and networks, the greater their children's resources and opportunities will be for pursuing a postsecondary education.

Thus, it is imperative to harness the resources offered by family-school-community partnerships to positively impact the academic progress of Latino students (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). School-family-community partnerships have been shown to meet the diverse needs of students, enhancing student success by fostering connections among the people who play central roles in children's lives. School personnel and researchers must examine the multiple contexts influencing the students in order to address the myriad of issues impeding students' ability to function successfully academically (Epstein, 1995).

Nurturing the development of families' postsecondary educational culture is incumbent on the leadership at the district and local school level. Mexican immigrant parents and community members must be valued as dynamic collaborative partners and not as passive participants (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). To effectively develop a culture of collaboration and support, partnership efforts must involve parents in the

planning process, and the school system must promote and include parental participation in school decisions. By organizing a system of utilizing family members as volunteers in the school and encouraging educators to volunteer in the community, schools can enhance parent involvement and engagement.

The findings further indicate that higher education providers need to reformulate, reconfigure, or reconstruct existing networks or pathways for parents at the elementary level to access information. Local elementary schools can coordinate efforts with high schools and provide postsecondary education information at the elementary school at events such as Career Day and College Day. The United Way Agency, Communities in Schools, Neighborhood Centers Inc., and local colleges and universities are a sampling of providers that local schools and districts can access as resources for higher education information.

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. When families are involved in their children's education, they send a message about the importance of an academic education and graduating from high school. Families can network with other families, develop parent cohorts, connections and relationships with individuals that might become "friends of benefit" who provide needed information about academic achievement and successful navigation of the educational pipeline that leads to matriculation and completion of postsecondary education. This can add to the social capital they have and increase their level of support for their children in the goal of pursuing a postsecondary education.

A college path specific curriculum comprised of tools and skills for parents at all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) is needed. It needs to also include information for college enrollment such as coursework, SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT (American College Testing) tests, resumes, essays, letters of recommendation, college applications, timelines, and entrance requirements such as GPAs (Grade Point Average) can be beneficial for parents and their children as they take the path to higher education together. Parents need to be aware of the drawbacks that can hamper access efforts such as critical cognizance, primacy of action, misguided intentionality, and relational investiture. They need an awareness that these factors can influence their attempts to act on resources available to them in the schools and in the community. The aspirations they have for their children must continue until college matriculation.

The curriculum must also include components such as different career paths, colleges and universities they can research and possibly visit, and financial assistance available through federal and university scholarships, grants and loans. This is probably the most critical because poverty weighs heavily on speculative cognizance as to whether or not affordability for college is a possibility. Parents along with their children need to maintain a portfolio with college relevant information. Parents also need to know their children should participate in extracurricular events and volunteer to do community service. All of this information can sustain their efforts to guide their children and continue to build on the social capital they have in process and requirements to access higher education.



An effective social structure is one where school community and parents together initiate changes because they see how such changes will benefit the children's education. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) agreed the relationship between those in the school and those outside must be fundamentally "reframed." Reframing can involve changing or modifying existing norms, values, skills, and relationships in the school to support the social school and community to work differently together. It requires a strong investment from everyone connected with the school. Reframing the existing programs in the school system can transform the existing culture and relationships between the school and parents in the community (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). These structures can only be as strong as the positive and collaborative relationships developed by families and individuals in the school community.

Are beliefs about college attainability hindering parents from moving toward the vision of college possibilities for their children especially when they don't have the vision or expectation while their children are attending elementary school? It was noted by one of the parents interviewed that "when they say elementary school we need to be more informed so we can program the future. Visualize and dream is what we need to realistically do" (*Pero cuando dicen primaria debemos estar más informados para programar el futuro. Visualizar y soñar. Creo que eso es lo que realmente debemos hacer.*). Throughout the interview the parents were in a state of re-learning what they previously knew about higher education. They asked questions about careers and requirements to access scholarships. They began to see possibilities and acknowledged they previously resisted getting informed because they thought it was too early in their

children's educational experience. Thus, they unpacked their previous beliefs and thoughts about higher education accessibility.

Where does the responsibility fall in creating the dialogue that helps students and parents to access needed information about college thus advance their social capital? Who has ownership of accountability as far as parents gaining access to college information? Is it the school, teachers, school district, or community? Alignment and mutual ownership on the school district's decision to provide the information and parents interest and determined actions to access the information results in shared commitment to achieve results, students' college attendance and college career goals. In their parent involvement activities, schools can train parents regarding information needed to pursue a postsecondary education.

Educational leaders in school districts must understand that school personnel need to be actively engaged in the inclusion of parents at every pivotal opportunity when college information is shared and include this access beginning at the elementary level. In reciprocity, parents must be actively engaged in accessing the information from their children's schools and from the community. Furthermore, effective and positive relationships, collaborative efforts, and clear communication must exist between parents and schools. This is critical and also necessary for the flow and exchange of information. It is evident the college relevant information dispersed to parents is minimal to nonexistent at the elementary level is altogether minimal and/or nonexistent.

It is incumbent that school personnel provide activities, strategies that are meaningful to families in the area of college access and pathways to college since this

seems as the only social context and structure where parents participate within the community where they reside. If schools develop a plan of action and collaborative with parents for sharing postsecondary education, the parents should be included in the planning. The action plan can be a timeline with strategies and activities to involve parents and their children throughout the educational pipeline, elementary, middle, and high school. Before the development of an action plan, there should be a needs assessment to identify the awareness, readiness, and degree of accessibility at all educational levels including the development of a partnership that leads to greater awareness of college related information and process and increase in resources, such as networks, relationships, and connections to higher education providers.

### **Significance of the Research**

Parents' uncertainty exists due to factors related to low socioeconomic and immigration status. Thus, they are critical in their expectations, knowledge, and perspectives about accessing higher education information beginning at the elementary school. James Coleman (1990) notes that public schools need to work closer with parents to help them develop more social capital. However, there are still many parents that feel alienated and disenfranchised from the educational system. Sadly, schools do not reach all parents. It is the elementary schools that have the greatest parent involvement participation. Parent involvement diminishes as children move to middle and high school. Also, many schools do not communicate with parents in Spanish, leaving non-English speaking parents uninformed and disengaged. Yet strategic interventions can be put in place to reach the majority of parents via informational

letters, announcements, school pamphlets, school parent handbooks, school news bulletins, and parent involvement activities. Additional information is needed to gauge the effectiveness of parent involvement activities for the purpose of providing college information. The question remains “How important is this to the schools?”

Schools and higher education institutions continue efforts to reach out to Latino students and parents in order to increase college going students. However, Latino parents are often limited to access postsecondary education information early on their children’s school experience due to their decreased parental involvement at middle and high school level. If Latino parents would have access to this information early on, their children may have an advantage in choices and higher education aspirations for their future. Thus, providing early intervention informational pathways to college (e.g., K-5 grades) are critical for navigating the school system and assisting parents in becoming gatekeepers to economic and social capital empowerment. C. Adelman (2007) suggests that perhaps access needs to be re-conceptualized and take into account the recognition of when and how preparation for a postsecondary education actually begins (Adelman, 2007).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Differential access to postsecondary education information should begin as early as Pre-kinder-fifth grade. This study focused only on female Latino parents of Mexican descent, mothers who have children at the elementary level only. All parents interviewed are involved in their children’s school by attending parent involvement activities. They either volunteer or attend scheduled meetings, school events, or

information related sessions. Most of their interaction with other parents takes place in the schools. Outside the elementary school structure, parents indicated there is little to no interaction between them.

Recommendations for future research would be to interview parents who also have children enrolled at middle and high schools. Inference regarding access leads to the possibility of whether the findings would have been different if inclusion of a more diverse Latino population would have been interviewed. Further studies can be done from the perspectives of community and college providers as to how they engage parents at the elementary level as far as access to postsecondary education information.

Additional questions remain: What is school's engagement to and commitment to engage parents in meaningful ways to enhance social capital and thus, learning more about the higher education process? How does the school demonstrate its commitment to engage parents in meaningful ways that address the social capital and college access? How pro-active are school staff members in creating effective pathways to communicate college information and aspirations with parents? Are mechanisms in place in school organizations to facilitate a shared accountability and collaborative to communicate mutual resources? What are the existing strategies in place that work to effectively engage parents in the collaborative process? What needs to be improved or enhanced in order for Latino families to obtain equitable access to educational opportunities in the area of access to postsecondary education information?

Latino families require assistance. This was evident in their request to get more information so they can better support their children in their educational pipeline leading

them to higher education. The parents did not have the knowledge and resources to adequately support their children in making decisions and goals to acquire a postsecondary education. The continuing social structures, networks, contexts, and weak ties are void of higher education information. A mechanism to activate the flow of networks, relationships, and knowledge is needed for parents to process dissemination. The school social structure exists but does not share information needed by parents.

Many questions remain unanswered indicating that more research is needed to unravel its existing complexities and challenges. What are the next steps or actions to be taken? Who needs to take the next steps? How will a plan of action be communicated and implemented? How can higher education individuals be more engaged in the process beginning at the elementary school level? How do we convey the dynamic nature of relationship between the home, parents, school, and school staff? Can we clearly identify the pipeline, road to college? Who will do it? When?

The finding clearly indicated that the Latino parents in the study were not familiar with the requirements for college in particular the postsecondary education system in general. Making parents knowledgeable about the process and facilitative information to access a postsecondary education has the potential to be emancipatory in as far as increasing the number of Latino students that pursue a college degree. The parents request to have more information in this subject bears witness to their beliefs about the importance and value of a higher education for their children.

Additionally, findings revealed parents think critically about their own experiences and educational possibilities. It was noted when parents interviewed

inquired about the possibility of college for themselves. This was a critical moment for the parents because they began to see a postsecondary education as being significantly important not just for their children but also for themselves. This was apparent when one parent asked, “What about us? Can we go to the university if we want? Can we get scholarships?”

Furthermore, participants also asked about the process to obtain a GED (General Educational Diploma) and enroll in a community college. Thus, they see the value of a college education not just for their children but also for themselves which is indicative of the human, intellectual capital they possess. One parent shared the process to get a GED in Spanish. She pursued it for herself and eventually enrolled in a community college but did not continue due economic and financial challenges, “When I came to Houston I went to a Houston Community College but I had to leave because it was too expensive”.

Reaching out to parents and community beyond the school is more difficult than easy even though we live in a connective world. Being a parent is hardest of all when poverty prevails. Nourishing children properly, helping them to remain hopeful, keeping their spirits up, finding more time to care for them while having to work night shift or put two or three jobs together just to make ends meet is a monumental task for most adults (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). However, parents must develop their own value about a postsecondary education before they can foster the value for the pursuit of higher education attainment for their children. The question remains how many parents will actually reach out to access postsecondary education information, when and where available. Their social capital remains elusive.

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