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## **A Double Case Study of Latino College Presidents: What Younger Generations Can Learn From Them**

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A Double Case Study of Latino College Presidents:  
What Younger Generations Can Learn From Them

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A Thesis

Presented to

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

Teaching English as a Second Language Emphasis

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By

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Summer 2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

This double case study examines the academic journeys of a Latino university president and a Latina college president of Mexican descent. The aim of this study was to discover how they overcame barriers and become successful in a career where only 3.8% are Latino/a presidents. In order to come to learn about their lives and career paths, the researcher interviewed each president face-to-face, asking 26 open-ended questions related to their experiences growing up and being educated in bilingual families. The researcher is a bilingual Latina who teaches high school ESL, and as she taught for her first few years, she read the interviews again and again—a practice recommended in constructivist grounded theory (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). In this critical ethnography, the researcher presents both emic and etic perspectives while discovering and interpreting themes in the data. The researcher reflected on her languages, family, education, and migrations, including these in her literature review and data analysis. The research findings indicate that through resilience, optimism, parental support, and future planning, the presidents achieved their distinguished positions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my interviewees for being kind enough to share part of their stories with me. I thank them for their honesty and courage in answering all the questions I posed. Without their contribution, this project would not have been possible. Through their experiences, I learned so much about my own life and about being a good student and teacher.

I would also like to thank my family, including my friend Brenda, who encouraged me to start the master's program and complete this project; my mom and dad, Elsa and Jose, who have always given me their unconditional love and support; and my brothers and sisters, who inspired me every day to become a better person and to never give up.

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## Preface

### Language Learning Experience

As a young girl in Costa Rica, I spent my weekends with my grandmother, Chepita, who loved telling me stories and jokes about her younger days in Nicaragua. She immigrated to Costa Rica as a young woman because of the Sandinistas taking over her country, and even away from her family and friends, she never forgot her *tierra* (birthplace) and all the stories that came from there. My grandmother truly had that immigrant spirit. She worked from dawn to dusk to make sure we had stability and all the comforts we needed. In the afternoons, we sat on the sidewalk, and she'd reminisce about the old days. I carefully listened to her reciting poems from Ruben Dario, and I listened to her stories she had told me many times before, but each time she would add a different twist that would make it new and entertaining again. This is how I learned to love words and language in Spanish first and then in English second. The oral tradition laid a foundation for my literacy in both languages.

As a result, I was eager to start school, even though I was still too young. Unofficially, and thanks to the fact that the kindergarten teacher was my neighbor, I went to kindergarten two years before the system in Costa Rica would allow me to officially be in school. This allowed me to learn to read in Spanish earlier than most of the other kids. At eight years old, I remember reading many comic books and magazines in Spanish. I would even beg money from my grandma to buy copies of *Archie* comics. To my family, this was a complete waste of money. My grandma would get mad every time she found the latest copy of *Memín* under my mattress, and when I was not *gastando la plata en*



*papeles* (wasting money on papers) as my grandma always said, I was trading soap opera series with older ladies around the neighborhood, but I just loved stories and reading.

Golfito, the port town where I was born, welcomed tourists from all over the world. It used to be a vibrant town founded by the United Fruit Company in the 1930's until in 1985, the United Fruit Company moved out and returned the real estate to the Costa Rican government. Living in a place like this, allowed me to meet people who spoke different languages and had different cultures. However, my first official introduction to the English language occurred in seventh grade. I was sixteen years old then. We had one class period once per week. We spent most of the year learning the “to be” verb and basic pronunciation, but that was not sufficient for the challenge that was coming because soon after that my mother was re-married, and we moved to the United States.

### **High School in the United States**

In November of 1989, I moved to the United States, and although I knew how to write a little bit of English, my speaking ability was minimal. I lived in North Idaho with my American stepdad, my mom, and my three brothers and three sisters. At home, I spoke Spanish with my mom and broken English with my stepdad who also spoke a little Spanish. My parents enrolled me in school the day after I arrived in town. The school was very different from my school in Costa Rica because the smallest things made my days so difficult—opening my locker, understanding where to go when the school had special schedules, understanding teacher directions and lessons. With good intentions, the school placed me in a lot of non-academic classes like Art and Physical Education, imagining

those classes would be easier for a non-English speaker. However, I found those classes the most difficult because I had to be social and be able to understand directions—both of which I could not do. Physical Education was a challenge every day because we would play games I had never played before, such as dodge ball and football. I did not understand enough English to understand the directions, so I relied on my classmates telling me what to do or just sitting on the side, watching students play until class was over. Academic classes were better because I could just observe and figure out how things worked without feeling embarrassed or being expected to do anything. After a few days, teachers were supporting me more by writing the directions and the page numbers on the board to help me understand. Some people believe that immersing students into another language helps them learn another language faster, but in my experience the sink-or-swim method does not work. It only isolates and hurts students. Language needs to be comprehensible.

Two years later, I moved to a different high school in Eastern Washington. My experience there was more positive, even though I was never enrolled in any ESL classes; however, I felt students and teachers were more supportive, and most importantly, I did not feel so lonely and isolated. There were other minority students learning English too, and I met some friends by joining the International Club. Also, I met a French teacher that actually appreciated the fact that I spoke Spanish, and I met other students that loved learning other languages as I did. Two years later after coming to the United States, I had developed Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills (BICS) in English, so school life was much easier, although I still struggled in my core classes, but I graduated from North Central High School in 1992.

In retrospect, these first years of learning English were difficult and lonely, and in many ways, this shaped the kind of language teacher I am now. I would never recommend the sink-or-swim method to anyone because this method is damaging and degrading to students. Eventually, I learned English because I studied it, because I was observant, and because teachers and friends were caring and patient with me while I was learning English. Language needs to be comprehensible; otherwise, words have no meaning at all and just disappear.

### **Community College**

From high school, I continued studying English at the local community college. It was close to home, and I received financial aid. I am not sure why I was never enrolled in ESL classes. Perhaps my speaking skills and my writing skills were good enough not to be in ESL, but I still struggled writing academic papers and completing assignments, so I took several remedial writing classes to help me cope. For many years, I only went to school part-time while working full time as a bill collector. I was not sure if I was ever going to finish, but I knew I would not give up on learning. Along with accounting courses, I also took one year of Japanese language, which I loved. I knew that whatever I was going to be, it would involve foreign languages. All of those years, I continued to speak Spanish to my parents and my siblings, but I did not formally study Spanish after I left Costa Rica. However, my mom did not want any of us to forget our language, so she insisted in continuing speaking Spanish at home. My younger siblings spoke mostly English, but my mom would always answer them in Spanish. Looking back, I really appreciate that my mother insisted on preserving our culture and our language. This encouraged me to continue reading books in Spanish. My hope was that by reading more

in Spanish, I would learn more Spanish academic language. This somehow gave me a sense of cultural pride, and I felt that it was my responsibility as a Spanish speaker.

### **College Life**

After completing the Associate of Arts (AA) Degree, I transferred to Eastern Washington University where I started taking classes towards an English as a Second Language minor. In those classes, I understood the kind of student I was. I understood that I was not less intelligent, but that I was an English learner. Learning about the process of language learning gave me a sense of appreciation for who I was again, and I started to feel compassion for all those difficult years that I could not understand why I was always trying to catch up to other students.

Meanwhile, I found out I could use the knowledge I had in Spanish to complete a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. I took a simple test and tested out of all the lower level Spanish classes which gave me a sense of pride and appreciation for being a native Spanish speaker. I could have very easily completed a few classes and gotten a Spanish Bachelor's Degree and start teaching, but I felt that was too easy. I had taken a few English classes (Introduction to Fiction and Survey of American Literature) and I fell in love with English. For the first time, I *understood* the stories, and I could not see myself doing anything else other than teaching these stories to other students like me. These stories provided a deeper understanding of American culture and a bridge between what I knew and what Americans know. My teachers were tough, and deep philosophical discussions were always tough because I did not have the background knowledge I

needed to have, but I found my studies very rewarding. I wanted to be a real English teacher. I wanted to know as much about English as native speaker English teacher.

While completing the B.A. in English and Spanish, I had the opportunity to work at the adult education center as a reading tutor where I met students from different countries. This job reaffirmed my decision to become a language teacher. I wanted to make sure I was completely prepared because I knew I would be competing with native speakers for jobs as an English teacher, so I completed student teaching at a great high school in town, and in 2010, I got my BA in English and Spanish Education.

At this point, I knew exactly what I wanted to do--I wanted to be an English teacher, so I enrolled in the MA-TESL program at the same university. In this program, I learned the knowledge and strategies to be a language teacher. I worked with mentors and teachers who provided me with the guidance I needed to become not only a teacher but a professional-- which was something beyond I had ever dreamed of. After finishing with all my MA-TESL classes, I was offered a job in Pasco, Washington as a high school teacher, and I took the job because I was ready to put all my knowledge to use.

### **High School Teacher**

Being a high school teacher has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. Teaching teenagers is challenging but a lot of fun. In addition, the administration at my school has been very supportive providing me with many opportunities to learn and grow professionally, but most importantly, I enjoy working with the students at a school that offers plenty of opportunities to make a difference in students' lives. In 2012, Pasco High School enrolled about 1884 students of which about 77.4% are Hispanic or Latino.

Also, 73.8% of the students get in free or reduced meals, and 21.5% are in a Transitional or a Bilingual program. Our students come with many other needs beyond academics, so teachers have to do so much more than just teach, and this is an opportunity to make a difference and to become a better teacher.

My journey with the English language has been an uneven path. Thankfully, through the ups and downs, I have found an immense joy in where I am today. Along the way, I have been guided by people who cared about me and who had faith in my success. These mentors have taught me skills that, as a first generation college graduate, my parents were not able to teach me, and I am forever grateful for their kindness and patience. My grandmother, my parents, my siblings, my teachers, and my mentors have motivated me to never give up, to never forget *mi tierra*, and to have faith in my own story and my abilities.

### **Language Teaching**

While attending Eastern Washington University, I worked at the Institute for Extended Learning (IEL) in Spokane, Washington. The best part about this job was that I worked with students from all over the world. These students possessed the true immigrant spirit and optimism to better their lives for them and for their families. At the IEL, I worked as a ReadRight tutor for five years. Through this program, I learned about excellent reading and how to help students to understand the meaning of a story rather than focusing on individual words. We had high success with this program in helping students (native speakers and English learners) to improve their reading skills and help them transition into college.

In the spring of 2009, I completed student teaching at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, Washington. I worked with two master teachers. Half of the time, I worked with English learners and the other half I was teaching First-Year Spanish. I worked at this high school for six months, and for the last few months of the semester, the teachers allowed me to be in charge of the class which for me was a very challenging task. I had to learn to speak louder and in a more commanding way, so students would pay attention and listen to my directions. I felt extremely lucky to have worked with such experienced teachers who were truly masters at their craft. They taught me many strategies in managing and teaching teenagers, and I am thankful they shared their knowledge with me.

In August of 2010, I went to the Spokane's Educators Fair in Spokane, Washington. Although I met many people that day and had other promising interviews, I met the Pasco High School Principal, whom I had met two years before at the same job fair. He offered me a job as an ESL Teacher, and a few days later I accepted it. At first I was not sure if I wanted to move to a smaller town, but after speaking to friends and mentors, I realized this job was a great opportunity and a great fit for me and the kind of students I wanted to teach.

My first year teaching was more difficult than I expected it to be. It required long hours and a lot of preparation. I knew language learning theory, but I had to get familiar with other aspects of teaching in a high school. For example, I had to familiarize myself with the state standards, state testing procedures (MAP/WELPA), teaching units, differentiated instruction, and classroom management. Also, English as a Second Language is a complicated subject to teach because most schools do not have a set

curriculum to follow, so I had to create units and make many decisions to make sure my students improved their skills throughout the year.

### **Philosophy of Teaching**

When I started my first year as a teacher in high school, I had some unfounded fears: I was afraid students would not like me or that perhaps that I did not have enough knowledge to be their teacher. Soon, I learned that these fears were absurd. I realized that students needed me. They needed a guide and a role model to help them in their path to success. I realized that behind their teenage façade, they were counting on me to believe in them, to guide them, and to give them hope.

My philosophy of language teaching is to teach the whole student. At Pasco High School where I now work, students need so much more than someone who teaches content knowledge. They need a rigorous learning environment along with someone who cares and encourages them to take chances and to follow their dreams.

In my classroom, everyone gets a chance to participate and practice without being embarrassed. I emphasize that making mistakes is part of learning and that mastery comes with practice. I use many strategies where students can work in groups, in pairs, and as individual. I also address students' different learning styles and abilities. I am not afraid of being silly as long as I motivate students to work. In my class, students learn language by learning songs, novels, poems, and plays. Essentially, my classroom is a place where students can feel safe to make mistakes and free to practice English.

Additionally, my role as a teacher is to be a role model for students. I emphasize the importance of being in class everyday by also having perfect attendance myself. I



expect them to be respectful to other adults, to each other, and to school property. When students do something wrong, I talk to them respectfully, privately, and address the issue right away. I tell them that the words they use and the way they act are a representation of who they are. I let them know that, even when one disagrees with someone, you must still be respectful. At the beginning of the year, I had a long list of classroom rules, but later, I adopted simpler rules: “show respect, make good decisions, and solve problems.” Then, discipline became easier as I laid the responsibility on them instead of me. We do this by developing a social contract as suggested by Richard L. Curwin in *Discipline with Dignity: New Challenges, New Solutions*. Thus, the entire class decides on the responsibilities and consequences there need to be in place in order for them to achieve their academic goals. Since the students create the rules, they are more motivated to follow them.

Another one of my goals as a teacher is to get to know my students well. I want to know who they are and what experiences they have. I use this information to guide my teaching. For example, students wrote many journals about their families, their country, their childhood, and their future goals. They shared with me private information in their journals which shows me that they trust me.

Overall, I have gained a great amount of experience in this last four years of teaching. These experiences have enabled me to set new goals for the next school year. Some of my goals for next year is to implement more GLAD strategies, to adopt standard based grading, to bring more speakers to my class, and finally to take my students on more field trips to colleges and universities, so they can gain familiarity in their transition to college.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I came from Costa Rica to the United States when I was sixteen, and I promptly started as a sophomore in high school. The new surroundings shocked me to the core. Up until then, I had lived a safe and stable life with the love of my parents and my grandparents. My paternal grandmother, Josefa who was a prosperous business woman, taught me the value of hard work and encouraged me to get an education. She always advised me to choose my friends well and most importantly, not to get pregnant until I had a career. She always said, “*es mejor andar sola que mal acompañada* (it is better to be alone than in bad company), and I held on to that when I chose the people I hang out with. Moreover, my mother had a small grocery store where I learned to handle money and to deal skillfully with all types of customers’ personalities. I had many friends and I was a good student. My parents never doubted that I would be successful; most importantly, I never doubted I would reach my goals—whatever those were at this age.

But when I arrived at this high school in North Idaho, my whole world turned upside down. Back in those days, there were no English Language Development (ELD) programs and in fact, at that particular school, there were not any Spanish speakers in my school, so I was forced to “sink or swim.” To make matters worse, I had to go to a school with prejudiced teens that made me feel unwelcome. I quickly realized that this move was going to test my bravery and my faith. During my two years at that high school, I lost a part of me. I lost the sense of safety, pride, and valor. Suddenly, I did not have people believing in me and rooting for me as my grandmother had. I was just the girl who did not speak English--the girl who dressed in home-made clothes and had a funny

hairdo. I was an outcast. I was the one most teachers did not want to deal with in class because I required individual support in order to understand. I must say, the first two years after arriving in the United States were the worst years of my life; I had never felt so lonely and misunderstood.

When I think back on those years, only faith, courage, and the support of my family and a few friends kept me afloat. I finished high school, community college, and continued to a four-year university because no matter what was happening in my life, I always wanted to complete my education. Because of my persistence, courage, and because of the people who encouraged and helped me along the way, I reached my goals. Abandoning my goals was never an option for me. I couldn't leave with that little voice in the back of head reminding me not to let fear overpower me. I was not going to let down all the people who continued to help me, but most importantly, I was not going to let myself down. My main drive was always that I wanted to make my family proud and I wanted to be able to help them.

When I graduated from North Central High School in Spokane, Washington at age 19, my mother wrote in my yearbook, "Realiza tus sueños" (*Make your dreams come true*). As vague as that may seem, I knew what she meant. It meant that I should never give up on my future goals and that she had faith in my abilities. Since then, it has always been my motivation to make my family proud and to be a role model to my brothers and sisters. In the same way like my mother, most Latino parents value education and want their children to have a good life and fulfill their aspirations. However, studies indicate that even 50 years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Latino and other minority students experience a pattern of disappointment in American schools.

Over time, there have been many organizations that have organized resources and influence to push open doors to higher education so that Latinos/as and other members of minority groups could have the opportunity to obtain postsecondary education. This year, President Obama announced an initiative called My Brother's Keeper aimed to help boys and young men of color who are having a difficult time completing their education. The \$200 million initiative is aimed to "increase the number of boys of color who take gifted, honors or Advanced Placement courses and exams; work to reduce the number of minority boys who are suspended or expelled; and increase graduation rates among African-American and Hispanic boys" in 60 of the largest school districts in the United States (Rich, 2014). These types of efforts are made because frequently Latino/a students become discouraged and hopeless with the demands of school and the difficulties they face outside of school, such as discrimination, poverty, and a sense of disconnect and mistrust with the educational system. According to Axelrod (2012, web) "1 in 4 American high school students drop out before getting their diploma." He also adds that "there are 31 million high school dropouts in the U.S.—more than half are unemployed." When students abandon school, it becomes a tragic personal and financial loss for the individual and for the community.

### **Researcher's current teaching assignment**

Currently, I teach at Pasco High School in Pasco, Washington, and I have observed a great need to retain students in school, especially Latino boys. Our school is 77% Latino/a, 22% are Language Learners, and 75% of students are in free and reduced lunch. In the past few years, I had seen many improvements in our school. The administration has invested a lot of time in making sure we put students first and that we

create relationships with students. The hard work all have put into this effort really shows: In 2004-05 the graduation rate was 55%, in 2008-9 75% and in 2011-12 95%. What I notice is that students are in need of role models and people who would guide them without judgment. Girls are eager to meet adults they can trust and boys are scared of letting their guard down, so as a teacher, I spend a lot of time getting to know the students and learning what they are all about. This helps me to connect with them and also to create lessons they can relate to. I teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade English and Intermediate English as a Second Language. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade I teach books like *The House on Mango Street*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Students in this community are marginalized and isolated in many ways. Most of ELL students work in the fields during the summer and so the connections they have are not helping transition to where they want to be in the future, but most often these young adults get pushed aside.

### **High school students and graduation**

The National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that in school year 2011–12, 81% of high school students graduated on time with a regular diploma. Among all public high school students, Asians/Pacific Islanders had the highest graduation rate (93%), followed by Whites (85%), Hispanics (76%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives and Blacks (68%). In some states, the number is even lower. For example, according to the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), only 64.5% of Latinos/as graduated from high school in 2010-11. The low percentage of students not graduating is significant because Latinos/as represent the largest minority group in the United States, about 53 million people, and this number represents thousands of students not being ready for the demands of the real world.

Historically, statistics show that the efforts of the government and other organizations to help minority students have helped in decreasing Latinos/as dropout rates. As we can see in Table 1, in 1990 the national dropout rate for Latinos/as was 32.4% nationwide, compared to 12.7% in 2011. We may infer that the various prevention programs and efforts being made are not in vain. But even when the percentages look low, nationwide, these are many thousands of students not graduating.

**Table 1: Percentage of high school dropouts among young adults**

<b>Year</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
<b>1990</b>	9.0%	13.2%	32.4%
<b>1995</b>	8.6%	12.1%	30.0%
<b>2000</b>	6.9%	13.1%	27.8%
<b>2005</b>	6.0%	10.4%	22.4%
<b>2010</b>	5.1%	8.0%	15.1%
<b>2012</b>	4.3%	7.5%	12.7%

**Why students drop out**

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke Morison (2006) explain that “the decision to drop out is a dangerous one for the student. Dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves” (p. 2). In fact, students who do not complete high school earn “\$9,200 less per year” (p. 2). Even with all these personal and financial losses, students make the decision to leave school. Bridgeland adds that “our communities and nation also



suffer from the dropout epidemic due to the loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services (p. i)” In this particular study, the researchers conducted a survey of young people aged 16-25 who identified themselves as high school dropouts in 25 different locations throughout the United States. In this report, the authors found some of the main reasons why students of all races and ethnicities leave school:

- 1) Classes were not interesting
- 2) Not feeling motivated or inspired to work hard
- 3) Real life events got in the way:
  - 32% needed a job
  - 26% became parents
  - 22% had to care for a family member
- 4) Struggling in school and needing more help (p. iii)

According to this study, the main reason why students dropped out of school was because they felt high school was boring and not relevant to their lives. Knowing about the problems students face can help teachers to continue implementing prevention strategies as well as creating a supporting environment for students, so students stay in high school and achieve their academic goals.

### **College Degrees and Graduation**

As mentioned earlier, a 76% high school graduation rate for Latinos/as is far from ideal, but the numbers become worse when we look at college degrees attained by Latinos/as. Table 2 shows the number of bachelor’s degrees students obtained from 1990

to 2011. As the table demonstrates, in 1990-91, 3.41% of Latinos (as) completed their degree.

According to NCES, in the year 2011-12 only 9.47% of those bachelor’s degree recipients were Latino/a compared to 67% of white students. Of this 9.47%, 39% were Latino men and 60.4% were Latino women (NCES, Table 322.20) which shows the discrepancy is even greater between Latino men and women in attaining a Bachelor degree.

<b>Table 2: Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity.</b>				
<b>Year</b>	All Races	White	Black	Hispanic
<b>1990-91</b>	1,094,536	914,093	66,375	37,342 (3.41%)
<b>2000-01</b>	1,244,171	927,357	111,307	77,745 (6.24%)
<b>2010-11</b>	1,715,913	1,182,405	173,017	154,063 (8.97%)
<b>2011-12</b>	1,791,046	1,211,565	185,518	169,646 (9.47%)

On a positive note, it is significant to highlight that in 2011-12 school year, 56.4% of Latino/a high school completers were enrolled in a 2-and-4 year college compared to 42.7% in 1990 (NCES, Table 302.20). The fact that colleges and universities are making an effort in recruiting Latino students to their campus is a positive step for Latino/a students’ futures and educational attainment goals.

**Latino/a Academic Aspirations**

Thus, if the high aspirations exist among Latinos/as, why is there a discrepancy in wanting to attain the goal and actually reaching it? What can teachers and parents do to help Latino students reach their career goals? And what do students need to learn in order to get where they want to go? As a Latino student and now as a Latino high school

teacher, I ask myself the reasons why Latino students are not as successful in academic achievement. Is it that we do not value education as, for example, Asian students do? Is it that our parents do not encourage us enough? Or perhaps, as Allan Bloom says in *The Closing of the American Mind*, “students come to college without clear-cut values” (qtd. in Reeves, 2009). In another study by Martinez and Cervera (2012) it is stated that “although Latino/as have comparable educational aspirations with other racial/ethnic groups, in fulfilling these aspirations, Latino/as are less successful than their counterparts” (Schneider et al., 2006). So why does this happen? Why do Latino students do not come to college with “clear –cut values” or why are they not able to fulfill these aspirations?

Martinez and Cervera (2012) presented the Hossleer-Gallagher Model (1987) which explains the college-going process in three stages: “predisposition, search, and choice” (p. 389). Being predisposed for school means that physically and environmentally students are ready. Additionally, students need to know how to search. In other words, they need to know how to apply for college, select a college, and find someone who will guide them through this process. Last, students need to choose to go to college. Many valid reasons contribute to students choosing to dropout and/or work instead of going to college. In this double case study, I am going to present the journey of two Latino college presidents who pursued their academic goals and overcame their challenges through resilience, optimism, resourcefulness, and future planning.

### **Purpose**

First, throughout my life, I have met very few Latino professionals or someone I could look up to and learn from. For that reason, when I started this investigation, I was

curious to know how they had reached such high levels of success in their careers. Initially, my predictions were that they probably came from wealthy families or that somehow they got a lucky break. I assumed that they did not have many challenges. Even with all these assumptions, I was still curious to know how they got to where they are today. Here, I will investigate their journeys and try to understand what has helped these two presidents along their paths to success. The purpose is to find out if they share personal traits and environmental characteristics that have helped them to be successful.

Second, all teachers want their students to succeed and fulfill their aspirations. Gere (1992) explains that teachers teach to improve morality, to prepare good workers, to create elite scholars, to produce good citizens, to foster personal growth, and/or to offset inequality (p. 2-3); however, every year we still see Latino students struggling, falling behind, and dropping out of high school at higher rates than white and black students. Therefore, I want this research to help me be a better teacher to my Latino/a students and help them overcome any barriers in attaining higher education.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What is the impact of poverty and assimilation in Latino students' academic success?
- 2) How can schools and teachers support Latino students' completion of high school and attainment of higher education?
- 3) What can younger generations learn from reading about the journey of two successful university presidents who overcame economic and academic challenges?
- 4) How have these two presidents' families supported them on their way to success?

## **Researcher's Assumptions**

As a Latina, an ELL teacher, and the primary investigator, I made the following assumptions as I embarked on this research project. Moreover, my assumptions inform my research approaches, my data collection and analysis, discussion and conclusion. For this reason, I want to disclose my assumptions from the outset.

- 1) Becoming a successful Latino means that you have gotten a lucky break to accomplish your goals.
- 2) Successful people have not experienced discrimination or major financial challenges.
- 3) Not every person has the opportunity to become successful, so these individuals must have some extraordinary personal and academic abilities that have gotten them to where they are.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of literature focusing on Latinos/as educational achievement issues and an overview of Latino university and college presidents. It also includes my reflections on my own upbringing and education. Chapter 3 is the research methodology. Chapter 4 is the data collection, analysis and findings. Chapter 5 is the discussion of and reflections on the findings and the research process itself. Finally, Chapter 6 explains the conclusion, discloses limitations of the present study, presents recommendations for future research, and offers final reflections on the case double study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 is not a standard review of literature about academic success—the need for Latino/a role models, the impact of poverty, the rate of dropping out by ethnic group, the numbers of Latino/a presidents in higher education, the value of family support, the immigration status and cultural ties of the parents, the effects of mobility, or the self-efficacy of successful people. Rather, it is a creative weaving of the relevant literature as it relates to the case studies to be analyzed in depth in Chapter 4 with a glimpse at the presidents' lives (Dr. Baldwin and Dr. Sanchez) and a prelude to their voices that will dominate the remaining pages of this thesis. The names have been changed to comply with the Institutional Review board guidelines for research with human subjects (Appendix A). The decision to weave all of the voices—including my own voice as a Latina—follows a model adopted by TESOL and demonstrated here by my thesis chair:

I overlay childhood memories with scenes from Harvard [where I taught] and lines of Adrienne Rich's poem intertwined—hence the multi-vocality that TESOL asks of us in its guidelines for qualitative research, the weaving of voice upon voice. This story is what weavers call bayeta: cloth which was commonly raveled and reused as weft in nineteenth century Navajo textiles as defined by the University of Colorado archivists who preserve textiles. Like the Navajo, I have raveled and reused layer after layer of my experiences, memories, and stories to make a new blanket—I have taken the old to make the new. (Reeves, 2012, web)

This approach to research is consistent with constructivist grounded theory explained here by Bonner and associates et. Al.:

Grounded theory is a popular research methodology that is evolving to account for a range of ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Constructivist grounded theory has its foundations in relativism and an appreciation of the multiple truths and realities of subjectivism. Undertaking a constructivist enquiry requires the adoption of a position of mutuality between researcher and participant in the research process, which necessitates a rethinking of the grounded theorist's traditional role of objective observer. Key issues for constructivist grounded theorists to consider in designing their research studies are discussed in relation to developing a partnership with participants that enables a mutual construction of meaning during interviews and a meaningful reconstruction of their stories into a grounded theory model. (Bonner, Mills, and Francis, 2006, p. 8)

While this literature review does present key works, it incorporates the presidents' lived experience as relates to the research questions defined in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Chapter 2 builds on the lived experience of the researcher, whose voice serves as a bridge from the distant academic voices in this chapter and the presidents' voices to come here and later.

## **Background**

Understanding the tangible value of education is essential, but it is difficult to value something that neither you nor anyone you know has accomplished. From the beginning, my parents have fostered in me the value of education, but we knew very little about *how* to accomplish my "dream." I also knew very little about the challenges I would face as a minority student, as a second language learner, and as an economically

disadvantaged student. Another problem is that Latino culture somewhat romanticizes being poor. For example, when one watches *telenovelas* or soap operas, in Telemundo, all the good people are poor and all the rich people are villains. The poor girl waits for the rich prince to come and rescue her from poverty and brings her the happy forever after. These stories never show the rewards of hard work, effort, dedication, and resilience. People get out of bad situations simply by getting a lucky break, not by making good decisions, working hard, and overcoming challenges. Additionally, Latino culture promotes modesty and self-sacrifice failing to credit people who are self-made and who have accomplished their “fairytale” through education and hard work. In this sense, our culture promotes role models that reinforce faulty perceptions and expectations for younger generations.

### **The Importance of Role Models**

The Latino population is a large and growing diverse group of around 53 million people ([www.Hacu.net](http://www.Hacu.net)). However, Latinos/as do not have many positive role models, and this absence prompted me interview these two presidents. For example, the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that in American high schools only 6.8% are Latino school principals. In colleges and universities, only 3.8% are presidents of those institutions. So there is noticeably lack of diversity and inclusiveness in American schools. Méndez-Morse (2004) describes a role model “as someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate.” Dr. Baldwin mentions many times that she had “wonderful parents” and “a wonderful family life with parents who wanted the best for us.” Even though, her mom had only an elementary level education and her dad had an accounting degree, Dr. Baldwin demonstrated much admiration for her parents,



saying about her mother “She was very smart” and “I did want to make a difference for my family.” In addition to parents, Dr. Baldwin said she had a lot of good teachers. She said, “I had so many good ones.” For example, one English teacher gave her books to read. Another math teacher wanted her to be an engineer because she was good at math, and “he even took two or three kids to a college that he thought we would go to.” The teacher did this apparently on his own time and on a Saturday. Later in life when Dr. Baldwin was in college, she claims to be observant of people she admired. She said, “I had people that I looked up to. I think one of the things I had done, and it probably comes from the advice from my parents, I always paid attention to people that I thought were successful, and it was not necessarily people my age. So if there was a lady that I thought was really elegant or something, I kind of watch and learn. I was always astute in that way. [...] I kind of copy or imitated people who I thought were respectable.” Often times, students only have one parent at home or live in a poor neighborhood where there is no access to positive mentors that represent success.

It is important to mention that role models are not always as obvious as we think. When I asked Dr. Sanchez about his role models in college, he said, “I don’t really think I had role models, quite frankly.” However, he explains that he was surrounded by good classmates. He says, “I think my fellow students were very helpful and inspiring. There are a lot of smart kids in Michigan, so you saw what they did, and they encouraged you to join them at the library or some kind of academic situation.” We can infer that being around students who are focused on academics does make a difference in staying focused and in working as hard as everyone. He also said he had some mentors who were “very supportive because they saw potential in the things that he was doing.”

Moreover, Dasgupta (2004) acknowledges two important facts about role models. The author explains, “One key moderator for role model effects is the extent to which one identifies with a role model,” which means having “a sense of connectedness or identification with the role model” (as cited in Manke, 2011, p. 275). For example, “in one line of studies with Greg Walton (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2011), college students were presented with positive role models—for instance, a successful upperclassman who had majored in math at their school. The effect of this role model was dramatically affected by whether participants were led to have a sense of connectedness with the role model.” Manke adds that “another important moderator of the effects of role models is the message that they convey about the malleable nature of ability” (p. 275) which means that “they promote a belief that skill and success can be achieved through effort and practice” (see J. Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). We connect this idea with Dr. Sanchez’s experience. When he saw that his fellow classmates were working hard in school, it inspired him to do believe that effort and practice would bring him success.

Manke (2011) explains that “one way to convey this message is through describing a role model’s experiences with struggle. By learning that role models have struggled, students may glean from them evidence that obstacles can be overcome through hard work.” Therefore, it is important for students to see that a person has “persevered and achieved success and that their difficulties and doubts had faded with time” and that “one’s current worries are not diagnostic of one’s future prospects” (p. 276). Dr. Sanchez explains that “when my older brother got out of the military, he had a GI Bill, so he went to college. I saw that he went to college, so I thought, “I can do that

too.” In a way, by seeing someone he had a connection with—and admired—go to college, it confirms that success is possible, and it fades out any self-doubt the person may have. People do not want to fail, so having a role model or a person that somewhat confirms a higher chance of success, helps people have more courage to take that chance, especially when it is someone they are connected to.

Even when self-efficacy is high, if stereotyped individuals feel that a system or environment is unfair or unlikely to reward their efforts, they may disidentify with the domain and instead pursue a different path. For example, though marginalized group members may feel capable of success based on their abilities, they may believe that the system is unfair or biased against their group. Thus, they may believe that the unfairness of the system will not permit them the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their abilities. Consequently, they may be likely to choose another path that is less fraught with unfairness, one where they will be more likely to be given a fair chance to succeed (p. 277).

The issue of not having many positive and successful Latino/a role models at home, within the education system, or in the community makes minority students believe that their efforts will not be worth it, even if they complete an education. The feeling of not having power for their own future brings feelings of hopelessness and the desire to give up.

### **Poverty**

One of the main challenges minority students face is poverty. According to Malecki (2006), 29 percent of minority children live in conditions considered below poverty level compared to 9.5 percent of non-Hispanic White children (p. 376). I am

often amazed how some students are able to complete a bachelor’s degree before they are twenty-four years old. They have no problem getting through school and finding a good job, but for many of us, poverty makes it a constant struggle. We get stuck on the most seemingly “insignificant” things, such as completing assignments, passing tests, and getting to school every day. Living in poverty makes small problems bigger than they are—and it is even worse when these challenges take us further away from getting out of the dire state you are in. The daily struggles of going to the food banks, getting money for gas, going to work, getting all our brothers and sisters to school, dealing with bill collectors, or seeing a bright orange sign on our front door from the electricity company warning that “you have until 5: p.m. to pay the balance in full or your service will be disconnected” are not the most encouraging most days. And even though children are not supposed to worry about those things, they find a way to affect students’ mental and physical health.

In fact, statistics show that the lower income a family has, the higher the possibilities of dropping out of school. Table 3 shows how historically the amount of income is correlated to not completing high school.

<b>Table3: Percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16 through 24 years old, by income level. Status dropout rate, by family income quartile.</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>Dropout Rate</b>	<b>Lowest quartile</b>	<b>Middle low quartile</b>	<b>Middle high quartile</b>	<b>Highest quartile</b>
2000	10.9%	20.7%	12.8%	8.3%	3.5%
2010	7.4%	13.8%	8.9%	5.1%	2.5%
2012	6.6%	11.8%	8.7%	4.1%	1.9%

I recently read a quote from Mary Pipher's *Middle of Everywhere* that said that money does not buy you happiness, but neither does poverty. Up to this point, I have always rejected anything that represented wealth and money because money and wealth represented getting away from what I have always been—poor. Getting an education and abandoning the “culture of poverty” gave me a feeling of displacement. Again, that old religious belief that only poor people go to heaven seems to stay with me. Reeves (2009) found that “first-generation college students who "opt for complete deracination" (Rondinone in Reeves), do so knowing full well that "there is a price to be paid for such community-switching: the conflict and the pain" have "to be expected"(p. 7). As students go to college, they gain new knowledge, meet new people, and have to let go of or change certain behaviors and values in order to succeed.

Because of my own experiences with poverty, I assumed that the two presidents I interviewed either got a lucky break, or they had a lot of money. However, both presidents came from working-class families who also had financial challenges. Dr. Sanchez said his parents were farm workers, and they would travel across California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, following the crops. In college, he said, “My parents couldn't help me [financially], so I ended up getting a little scholarship for my first year of college,” and he also worked 30 hours a week. With a sense of humor, he explained their lack of financial resources. He said, “My mother, for some reason, got this idea in her head that I should be an accountant which is strange given the amount of money my family made per year. We did not use accountants. There's not much to count.” Due to the lack of money, Dr. Sanchez found different ways to be resourceful. For example,

while in college, he got involved with a program in school that allowed him to work and get a grant for his studies.

Likewise, Dr. Baldwin was very resourceful because they did not have a lot of money, but she was a good student, “I had no boyfriend. I was all about grades, grades, grades, so my teachers recommended me.” She says, “I had financial difficulties but not insurmountable.” Her mom wanted her to go to a university, and she always said, ‘*Pero tienes que sacar una beca*’ (but you have to get a scholarship) and because we did not have money, sure enough I got a scholarship.” Dr. Baldwin had a job at a law firm and she remembers that while in college her “parents would bring her groceries, but no money because we knew that money was tight.” Dr. Baldwin had difficulty paying for school but there were some things that made this challenge less “insurmountable.”

1. Her mom said always said, “*Pero tienes que sacar una beca* (but you have to get a scholarship).”
2. She was a good student, “I had no boyfriend, I was all about grades, grades, grades.”
3. “So my teachers recommended me.”
4. “I got a scholarship.”
5. Her “parents would bring her groceries, but no money because we knew that money was tight.”

We can infer that the expectation the mother had for her from the beginning made Dr. Baldwin take school and her grades very seriously. Her mother not only told her that they

did not have money, but also gave her a choice and a “solution.” Dr. Baldwin understood that if she wanted to go to college, she needed to focus on her studies.

### Teaching about poverty through literature

Some teachers have used a combination of community service and literary study to make reading and writing in an English classroom more authentic. Crassons (2009) incorporated the topic of poverty, “allowing students to see the complexity of poverty as an immediate reality that has bearing on their own lives and intellectual concerns” (p. 95). They read texts, such as *Piers Plowman*, Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed*, David Shipler’s *The Working Poor*, and George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Crassons’ goal was to turn to the community as a pedagogical resource, approaching our neighbors and fellow human beings as valuable sources of knowledge and understanding—“the poor are not typically the ones writing literary works we read. Literature, in many ways, provides only limited access to the experience of poverty” (p. 97). Moreover, “Because poverty denies people the means of representation, the experiences, desires, and beliefs of the poor go largely unarticulated” (p. 97). One of the major issues Crassons and the students found in doing the service work was the overwhelming sense of isolation associated with poverty. Their reading of “*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* encouraged them to see how economic inequality can lead to social isolation, limiting the capacity for intimacy and interaction among all sectors of the human population” (p. 100). Crassons’ pedagogy is a reflection of what Paulo Freire taught us about education. Education should not be a “banking system” where we deposit information. Students must be able to use their knowledge to better their own lives and create a better future for them. Education needs to be relevant.

## Case Study

Malecki (2006), investigated the effect of social support on academic performance for students living in poverty. Data was collected in one urban middle school from 164 primarily Hispanic students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The study focused on finding out if social support may act as a stabilizing or buffer factor for students, so that if a student has adequate social support in his or her life, his or her academic achievement will be less likely to be affected by poverty status or other risks factors (p. 378). The method used to classify socioeconomic status (SES) was using lower-SES if they received free or reduced lunches. Several studies have provided evidence of a link between low academic performance and low socioeconomic status (Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Hecht & Greenfield, 2001; Ma, 2000; Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 1995; Okpala, Smith Jones, & Ellis, 2000). In Malecki's study, social support is defined as one's perceptions of supportive behaviors from individuals in his or her social network, for example, parents, teachers, classmates, close friends, and school (p.376). Tardy (1985) described social support as being from multiple sources (e.g., parents, friends, teachers, etc) and of multiple types (e.g., emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational). Emotional support refers to caring behaviors from others. Appraisal support consists of feedback or evaluative information provided to someone. Resources, such as time or money provided to someone in need, are instrumental support. Finally, information support consists of providing needed information or advice (p. 377).

The results of Tardy's investigation showed social support played a significant role effect on each gender. It also showed a significant relationship between social support and GPA for lower SES students than students with higher SES (p.385). In conclusion, teachers "should consider assessing social support in students' lives and



consider social support, especially from parents and teachers, as a target for intervention, particularly for student of low SES” (p. 392). These findings support the importance of understanding poverty and the additional support students may need in order to succeed in school.

### **Immigration and Cultural Ties**

Immigration and cultural ties play important parts in some students’ lives. However, in this study, both of the presidents interviewed were born in the United States; therefore, they are considered second generation Mexican Americans. However, immigration did play a role in their parents’ lives. For example, Dr. Sanchez said his father eventually became a green card holder, and “my mother finally became a citizen [...] when she was in her 60’s. The expectation was that they would eventually go back to Mexico.” Thernstrom (2003) finds a strong parallel between Hispanics and Italian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century. The author believes that many of the problems affecting the school performance of Latino children are “rooted in the immigration background, in their movement back and forth across the border, and in the specific cultural characteristics of the families who chose to migrate” (p. 101). He explains that the main difference is that large-scale Italian immigration came to an end in the 1920’s. Therefore, “With fewer Italian immigrants, cultural ties to the old country became weaker and Italian Americans gradually assimilated to American society” (p. 101). He further states, “Hispanics have made far more educational progress than it is usually assumed” (p.102).

Although the children of earlier Mexican immigrants have made educational and economic progress, the huge and continuing influx of uneducated—legal and illegal—has

obscured those earlier intergenerational gains... and depress the overall position of the group (p. 104). The problem is that most statistics first mix all Hispanics in one group, and these figures underscore the recent magnitude of recent immigrants. The author states that the longer Latinos live in the United States, the better jobs and the higher their incomes (p.105). This information is important when looking at statistics that group all Hispanics together, not accounting for the amount of time they have lived in the United States.

In addition to the possible faults surrounding statistics, Thernstrom, states another problem in relation to Hispanics' poor achievement in school:

Hispanic immigrants in general and Mexicans in particular also stand out in another way. They may seem to be much more ambivalent than European or Asian immigrants about making a permanent commitment to living in the United States, and are thus more resistant to assimilation. They tend to be sojourners, not settlers—"birds of passage" like their Italian predecessors a century ago. A great many, of course, live a short distance from the Mexican border—in southern California, South Texas, Arizona, or New Mexico. Even those farther away geographically remain psychologically closer to their mother country than do most other immigrants (p. 105).

One example is that "they are far less likely to take out American citizenship. In 1997, 53 percent of all European-born immigrants had become naturalized citizens, and 44 percent of those born in Asia. But the overall figure for immigrants from Latin America was only 24 percent, and for those from Mexico it was a staggering low 15 percent (p. 105)."

These feelings of ambivalence carry over to the children, leaving them insecure of where exactly they belong and what they should work for.

### **The effect of mobility on adolescents**

It is significant to mention the topic of geographic stability and its effects on adolescents. Dr. Sanchez said his family traveled a lot due to his father's work in farm labor. He said, "We would travel probably beginning in April, so that means that we would leave school early before school was out. Then, we sometimes wouldn't come back until the middle of September." For migrant families, this is a tremendous problem. Calabrese (1989) cites from Marchant and Midway (1987) and states that "mobility enforces separation from significant others and generally occurs as a result of a parent's job transfer, financial problems, or marital problems" (p. 42). Moreover, "high mobility threatens the stability that many American adolescents feel when they gain admittance to various peer subgroups. For many adolescents, parental mobility leaves them feeling powerless and isolated as they travel from school to school in search of continual peer acceptance" (Calabrese, 1989, p. 42).

As cited in Teixeira (1992), Highton, (2000) Johnson, Stein, and Wrinkle (2003) explained that "residential tenure is also linked to psychological resources that facilitate individual turnout—community roots and social integration (Teixira, 1992; Highton, 2000). They also mention that "movers" may also have "fewer social contacts" which can impact the person's connection to the community. Dr. Sanchez explains that eventually his parents had to make a decision. He said, "My father had to stop doing the migrant crop business" because "he wanted to make sure that my oldest brother would graduate

from high school,” and they settled in a small town in Texas. Although Dr. Sanchez does not mention (and I did not ask) any problems of isolation, it seems that his parents opted to have more stability in a place when he was still young, so the mobility did not affect him as much. On the other hand, there may be some positive effects of mobility. For example, he said, “I think it [moving] helped me being able to accept and integrate myself into different communities. When I finished undergraduate school, I wanted to go to grad school and ended up going to [...] Michigan, from Texas. I didn’t see any problem getting in my car by myself and driving to Michigan not knowing anybody and starting school.” In many ways, moving around when he was young gave him a sense of adventure and confidence in starting something new or being in a new place.

### **Latinos/as Career Choice and Self-Efficacy**

Even though neither of the presidents I interviewed said that they aspired to be university and college presidents from since they were young, they did have a strong sense of self-efficacy. In other words, they believed they could do it. Some of those messages came from their parents giving them positive messages. For example, Dr. Baldwin’s mom always said she loved that she was a good student and “my father always thought I was so smart.” She said, “I had good teachers, and I took advantage, like hungry for learning, and that’s why teachers gave me books and recommended me for things.” They were “strict and they demanded a lot, and I was a good student, so I wanted to please them.” The messages she received from her parents and teachers (the people she had connections with) gave her messages that reaffirm her ability to be successful in school.

- 1) “I love you are a good student” and “my father always thought I was so smart.”
- 2) Teachers were “strict and they demanded a lot.”
- 3) “I was a good student, so I wanted to please them.”

Therefore, we can infer that students need the people around them to believe they are capable. The teachers not only believed in them, but also “demanded” the very best academic work from them. Once they have that confidence, students want to please the teachers and parents and live up to those high expectations.

Rivera (2007) showed that more than 60% of Hispanic women were employed in low-paying jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004) that offer little opportunity for advancement (e.g., sales and service). The study focused on understanding how Hispanic women’s concept of self-efficacy and perceived barriers affected their career decisions and the careers they were willing to consider (p. 47). Arbona’s (1990) argument that the presence of barriers in students’ lives may help explain the often-reported discrepancy between Hispanic’s high career aspirations and low expectations. Possible barriers anticipated by Hispanics in pursuing their career goals may include financial constraints and ethnic discrimination, and for Hispanic women in particular, gender discrimination and conflict between family and work demands.

In working with the Hispanic population, considering how barriers are perceived by Latinos/as is critical not only in understanding their career decision making but also in intervening effectively in order to assist them in achieving their goals (Rivera, 56). When

students' beliefs are due to lack of exposure to certain types of experiences (such as taking science courses), teachers should encourage students to gain this type of experience. Also, when "students' efficacy beliefs are based on faulty assumptions (e.g., "women don't go into these occupations"), providing them with appropriate information and exposing them to role models may be necessary" (p. 56). To me self-efficacy means that students believe they can do it, but it also means that they are equipped to do the work. Students need to know their strengths and talents, but they also need to have the skills.

Similarly, both presidents showed a great amount of confidence and a can-do attitude when they had a new opportunity. Whether it was applying for new job, moving to a new place, getting into a new academic program, both individuals felt they "knew what they needed to do."

### **University and College Presidents**

Being a Latino/a university or college president is far from typical. According to a study published by The American College President (ACP) (2012) most college presidents are primarily white (87%) and male (74%). Also, the typical president in 2011 is 61 years old and the highest earned degree was a Ph.D. (ACP, p. 5). The two presidents interviewed are quite extraordinary for becoming part of a very elite group of people who is not usually reserved for minorities.

In the survey, presidents indicated that "they spent most of their time on fund raising, budgeting, community relations, and planning" (p. xi). In fact, "They lead complex organizations in the midst of increasing pressure and diverse constituencies," (p.

1) and “while they don’t lead alone, presidents are central to the well-being of their institutions and higher education as a whole” (p. 1). Moreover, “their job requires intellectual rigor, administrative finesse, and social acumen in equal measure” (p. 1).

According to this study, minority men represent 12.8% of college presidents, and minority women represent 20.4% of college presidents in the United States. The study found that “the percentage of college presidents who are women increased 3%; however, “the proportion of presidents who are racial or ethnic minorities declined slightly, from 14% in 2006 to 13% in 2011” (p. ix). According to the author, these trends suggest that higher education institutions have slowly expanded senior leadership opportunities for women but regressed in creating these opportunities for minorities (p. 7). In fact, this study found is that among minority college presidents only 3.8% are Hispanic presidents (p. 9).

The study also adds that 77% of HSIs (Hispanic –serving institutions) were led by non-Hispanic presidents (p. 29). In summary, the study found that since 2006 there “continues to be little to no change in the diversity of top leadership positions in America’s colleges and universities” (p. 30). These findings show the uniqueness of the interviewees. These presidents have managed to attain positions that only a few people do hold. In my interview, I did not ask any questions about their current position as college presidents to respect their privacy about their current assignment, though just this month President Sanchez retired.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methods, Data Collection, and Analysis

#### Methodology

This chapter discusses the qualitative research methods for the project carried out starting in August 2010 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Eastern Washington University. From the very beginning, I had a general idea about what I wanted to investigate, and I knew that narrative inquiry would shed light on the topics I most wanted to explore. Even though my goal as a Latina was to be a language teacher, I knew that behind the knowledge and technical competence within a profession, there were emotional, cultural, and financial challenges Latino students have to overcome. I also knew that there is a lack of Latino/a role models, and therefore case studies of successful Latinos would help me learn more about this topic. In sharing my thesis topic with a coworker, I was told about these Latino college presidents in my local area, and so the subjects should be considered a convenience sample, not a random selection by any means. The first individual is the chancellor of a community college, and the second is a former university president. After consulting with my thesis advisor and in order to collect data for this project, I designed a questionnaire to guide my interview. The instrument (Appendix A) consisted of 26 open-ended questions that would allow me to understand their journeys in accomplishing their academic goals. Both presidents lived nearby and they were accessible for me to meet and speak with them. I first contacted them through email, explaining the thesis project to them and asking them if they would be willing to grant me an interview for about one hour. Soon thereafter, I went to each



office, met each one in person, and provided each with the IRB consent form (Appendix B), which they both signed that day. I also gave them both the interview questions, so they could get a general idea of what kinds of questions I would be asking (Appendix A). The questions were related to family, community, and self. They are categorized in the following way:

**Questions 1-4** related to family and growing up.

**Questions 5-7** related to language learning.

**Questions 8-11** related to academic, cultural, financial, and social experiences in middle and high school.

**Questions 12-18** related to their academic, social, financial experiences in college.

**Questions 19-23** related to motivation, accomplishments, and pride.

**Questions 24-25** participants expressed final advice to students.

I was the primary investigator. I wrote the questions with the curiosity of finding out how these individuals had achieved such a distinguished powerful role in our community. I wanted to know how it was that they had not let prejudice create a sense of self-doubt and hopelessness. In completing my higher education, especially in getting a BA in English, I felt a bit isolated. Sometimes, I even doubted if I would be able to find a job here in the United States. However, these anxieties are not unusual for non-native English speaker teachers (NNEST). In fact, Pipenko (2010) says that “the issues that concern them [NNESTs] most are the following: their language use (vocabulary and

grammar), discrimination because of appearance, being questioned about teaching abilities, students' attitudes, and making mistakes in front of the class" (p. 86). In my English classes in college, all of my teachers and most of my classmates were Caucasian. Of course, this gave me a chance to learn more about myself and about the people I was surrounded by, but at the same time, I was also wondering if I would be able to actually become an English teacher and whether or not schools would hire me based on my knowledge and professionalism instead of relying on other preconceived notions of Latinos/as.

#### Ethnographic and participant-observer research

Historically, ethnology can be defined as "comparative studies of human culture" which in turn "gave way to studies of the details of individual societies (ethnography)." This approach and more specifically critical ethnography, focuses on culture. As Risjord (2000) explains, the ethnographer goes out to find the information and "returns with a detailed picture of the society's inner workings." I chose these two participants because they are the role models Latino students need to know about. I interviewed them at the work office, each on a separate day, and their interviews took about one to two hours. I also recorded the interviews so I could later transcribe and analyze the information. The purpose was to learn how these two individuals have attained academic success in their careers, as well as, understand how they overcame the challenges along the way.

#### Action research

As a teacher, I wanted to use this information to guide my teaching and help my students be successful. I work in a high-poverty school where students face many

cultural, financial, and inequality challenges, and therefore, I could use the findings of this study to improve my teaching and the success of my students. As cited in Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes.... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 269). Moreover, a primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives (p. 270). In other words, by looking at two successful people, who have overcome obstacles, we can learn how to help our students and teach them the skills that will make the most difference in the lives.

In fact, Eric Jensen (2009, p. 18) in *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, tells us that all students come “hardwired” with six emotions, such as joy, anger, surprise, disgust, sadness, and fear. He argues that other behaviors need to be taught explicitly such as optimism, forgiveness, empathy, sympathy, shame, compassion, patience, cooperation, and gratitude. Jensen also adds that “some teachers may interpret students’ emotional and social deficits as a lack of respect or manners, but it is more accurate and helpful to understand that the students come to school with a narrower range of appropriate emotional responses than we expect” (p. 18). This demonstrates that teachers have not only a responsibility to teach students the curriculum, but also to continue learning about our students they serve and where they come from.

## Critical ethnography in TESOL

As cited in Buttaro (2004), ethnography is a data collection and analysis approach in anthropology; Moreover, “as in other forms of qualitative research, the data collected are rich in their descriptions of people, places, languages, and events” (Teresa, 1991, p.1). Many educational researchers recognize and apply ethnographic methods in the classroom setting in order to explore learners’ interests, teaching methods (Teresa, 1991), learners’ behaviors and classroom environments (Lohpasankrit, 2008. p. 30).

For the purposes of the present study, ethnography is defined as

a form of research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation of sociocultural phenomena. Typically, the ethnographer focuses on a community (not necessarily geographic, considering also work, leisure, and other communities), selecting informants who are known to have an overview of the activities of the community (Garson, 2008, para.1)

Ethnography involves human beings’ lives, especially the socio-cultural issues that make ethnography different from other kinds of research. LeCompte & Schensul, 1999 as cited in Purcell-Gates (2004) discussed the characteristics of ethnography:

- 1) It is carried out in a natural setting, not in a laboratory.
- 2) It involves intimate, face-to-face interaction with participants.
- 3) It presents an accurate reflection of participants’ perspectives and behaviors.

- 4) It uses inductive, interactive, and recursive data collection and analytic strategies to build local cultural theories.
- 5) It uses multiple data sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data.
- 6) It frames all human behavior and belief within a sociopolitical and historical context.
- 7) It uses the concept of culture as a lens through which to interpret results (p. 93).

There are several methods of ethnography which are being used in education. For instance, direct observation (Buttaro, 2004; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982 as cited in Teresa, 1991, p.1) or participant-observation (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p.101), interviews (Buttaro, 2004; Purcell-Gates, 2004; Teresa, 1991), field notes (Purcell-Gates, 2004), essay, questionnaire (Buttaro, 2004), video-taping (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982 as cited in Teresa, 1991). According to Teresa (1991), participant-observation is one of the most important methods in ethnographic methodology because the observers go to the community and spend time with people in the community, and soon they become part of the community. Buttaro (2004) argued that participant-observation is also “the most common form of data collection used in case studies” (p.26). In literacy studies, the ethnographic method is different from other research methods because there is no set hypothesis. The researchers will determine the results through the natural setting and socio-cultural contexts (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 94).

## Definition of participant-observer and his/her roles

As cited in Fogel (2007), a participant-observer is defined in the present study as a person who develops skills to observe and to write about his or her own and others' experiences while engaging in long-term and meaningful interpersonal relationship with others. Participant observation is a well-accepted scientific method in fields such as psychology, education, and anthropology. Instead of trying to be "objective," the participant observer calls on the depth of their personal connection and their ongoing relationship with the people being observed. Participant observation seeks to communicate the compassion, authenticity, and aliveness of the process so that readers feel as if they were actually present (p.2).

The relationship between the participant observer and the community usually becomes closer when the participant observer spends more time in the community.

Buttaro (2004) states that "an effective participant observer...

- (a) ...organizes the information he or she learns based on pertinent social science theory and methodology, whereas a pure participant organizes his or her information to achieve certain goals such as the group's tasks or his or her own personal satisfaction as a group member;
- (b) ...has been trained to record certain information that might be ignored by a pure participant; and
- (c) ...must be objective and look in the community because informants sometimes provide information that is biased (p.26).

Other researchers (Fogal, 2007; Lin, 2007), however, who identify as participant-

observers do not claim objectivity because their aim is to enter into the community, engage in the activities, form close relationships with the community members, and personalize the research process—changing by being part of the community (Mills, Bonner, Francis 2006). In ethnographic methods, the researcher does not form any hypotheses before the research. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) explain that the researcher should “build the research focus and theoretical models in conjunction with the local population with which the research is going to be conducted” (as cited in Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 95). In other words, the researcher must situate the project within a theoretical framework and disclose his/her assumptions about the subjects, the value of the activities and the research questions in order to focus and narrow the scope of the project. In the present study, the researcher and instructor discussed their assumptions about role models and academic success before the project began. These assumptions are disclosed in Chapter 1 and are addressed again in Chapter 5.

The steps of observation and data collection, according to Purcell-Gates, are summarized below:

- 1) Participant observer goes and spends time in the natural setting in order to study the setting and the subjects. Writing field notes, doing interviews, collecting and studying artifacts and archival data are required for the participant observer to consider because they would be useful information and helpful for conducting the study;

- 2) The observation begins where the participant observer starts collecting the data, as well as gaining some new perspectives from the environment and the subjects;
- 3) Then, the data is coded or categorized inductively and deductively (p. 109);
- 4) The findings are also interpreted and presented relating to the theories and research literature about the issues.

Interpretation is another coding process where the researcher has to present data in the written form, explain the findings and answer the questions (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 109). “Interpretation of ethnographic results requires going beyond the data in a principled way in order to ascribe meaning to them...Reviewing the theoretical and research literature around the issue at hand helps to place the results and the interpretation in the scientific field and clarify them for the readers” (p. 110). For other researchers (Lin & Reeves, 2008), however, reflection is ongoing and may continue after the project ends, especially when participant-observation is combined with action research.



## **President 1 Interview Questions**

### **Dr. Sanchez**

Dr. Sanchez gave me permission to tape record this interview which I later transcribed. These are the interview transcriptions.

**Sara:** Tell us about your parents? For example, place of birth, their home language, and/or level of education. What messages did you get from your parents or grandparents that helped you become a successful person? Feel free to tell us your story in English or Spanish. You may use the exact words they told you. Where were you born?

**President 1:** My parents are originally from Mexico. They both came from around the San Luis Portosi area in Mexico which is sort of the northern part of Mexico. Both my mother and father probably had not more than a third grade education from Mexico when they came here. They came here mostly to work in farm labor when they came to the United States. They ended up settling in south Texas which was basically about ten miles from the Mexican border, so they didn't come in very far. But, along with their family members, my mother's parents and my father's parents, they used to do migrant farm labor. So, they really would come as far as Washington, but they would come through California, Oregon, Washington, and then they would go back to Texas through Idaho and a couple of other states, and they would wind up back in south Texas in time to be involved in the picking of crops in south Texas.

**Sara:** So, you probably have memories of road trips going through those places.

**President 1:** A lot of road trips, yes. Interesting things that I remember, I mean I always remembered where it was driving down the highway, and all of a sudden there was a mountain right in front of you, and it seemed like a sheer cliff, but that is sort of where

my memory is in, and I have a feeling that it's the highway 90 as you cross the Columbia. The Columbia Gorge.

**Sara:** When you're a child you look at things differently.

**President 1:** Sure. It really looked bigger.

**Sara:** So, your parents came from Mexico ...

**President 1:** They spoke Spanish. I always wondered how my father got along coming as far north as he did in terms of negotiating contracts or what he would get paid for things because he didn't speak English especially at the beginning. I'm the youngest of seven children and there is a spread of maybe about 20 years in between, so I can imagine that my brothers and sisters, older brothers and sisters did a lot of interpreting because by then they were in school and could do some of the interpretation, but...

**Sara:** So, were you born in the states or Mexico?

**President 1:** All of the kids were born in the United States. My father eventually, and I don't know when, he eventually became a green card carrier where they were allowed to stay in this country, but you had to go to Immigration every year to renew your green card. My mother finally became a citizen, oh maybe when she was in her early 60s. The expectation was always that they would eventually go back to Mexico, so they had the green card and they just renewed it because they figured they would go back, but they never did.

**Sara:** Do you have siblings? Male/female? Are they also successful like you?

Tell us about your experience in elementary school?

Did you speak English or Spanish before you went to school?

At what age did you start learning English or Spanish?

Did you study your heritage language in school?

### Middle School & High School Experience

Tell us about your educational experience in middle school and high school?

**Sara:** How did your parents feel about your education at that point? Did you just travel during the summer or was that year around?

**President 1:** Well, we would travel probably beginning in April, so that means that we would leave school early before school was out. Then, we sometimes wouldn't come back until the middle of September. So most of the summer.

**Sara:** That makes sense. I just got a job in Pasco, and the teacher was telling me that throughout the year I'm going to have different students.

**President 1:** Sure. They come in and out. I didn't speak English, and I assume none of my brothers did, until I got to the first grade. I tell people that I was immediately a failure because I flunked the first grade because I didn't learn enough English to be promoted to second grade. It's my assumption that some of my brothers and sisters may have had the same difficulty, but I don't really remember talking to them as to why.

**Sara:** Or if you guys had to leave early and come back late, you kind of missed there.

**President 1:** Yes. In fact, one of the reasons my father stopped doing the migrant crop business during the summer was that he wanted to make sure that my oldest brother would graduate from a high school. I mean, you had to have enough credit somewhere for him to get a diploma. So, in 1958, he decided he would no longer come with the rest of the extended family. So, he settled in Edinburg, Texas and he's got a brother that settled here in Washington in. What's the name of that town? It's close to Sunnyside. In Grandview. So, I have a lot of family here. Cousins that I never met because they stayed

here, and we stayed in Texas. Everybody except one brother graduated from high school and he got his GED in the military. It's also interesting that my sister graduated from Walla Walla High School and she's the oldest of the family, so somehow... and my sense is that she was somehow able to attend more school than the boys were.

**Sara:** That's interesting. Sometimes maybe the parents had the girl... and she was the oldest. That's really important because one of the teachers was telling me that they really focus on the older brother or sister because that's going to be their role model and they were telling me that if we can get the older sister or brother then everyone else would come along.

**President 1:** I think my parents put a lot of emphasis on making sure we went to school. I mean, I remember in different little towns, you know, and definitely my brothers and sisters did that. Otherwise they would never have graduated from high school.

**Sara:** Do you think that moving around helped you in some ways to be able to adjust to new environments?

**President 1:** Yes. And to a great extent I think it has helped me being able to accept and integrate myself into different communities. When I finished undergraduate school, I wanted to go to grad school and ended up going to the University of Michigan, from Texas. I didn't see any problem getting in my car by myself and driving to Michigan not knowing anybody and starting school and here we go .....

**Sara:** Was there anything that your parents used to tell you? I remember my Grandma used to tell me things like "*Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres*" or things like that. Things they tell you when you're small.

**President 1:** Yes. There are very familiar sayings. Actually, that's one that my parents always used to use. Sort of the golden rule, you know. "*Trata personas como quieres que tartan a ti.*" Treat others as you would want to be treated. And I think, to a great extent, they also tried to instill avoiding judging people. You accept people for who they are and how they demonstrate what they do. I think my father also talked a great deal about you listening to what people tell you, but you look at what they do. And, if they don't match, they may not be people you want to hang around with. To some extent, that's what I do. I sit down with my leadership team and I say, "You tell me you're going to do this with the dollars we are giving you at the University, but let me see what you really do and, if you don't do that, you're not going to get the money." That's what I do.

**Sara:** So, you only have one sister or more?

**President 1:** I have one sister and five brothers. There are seven all total.

**Sara:** You said that they all graduated from high school.

**President 1:** They all graduated from high school. Out of the seven, four have college degrees, two of us have PhDs, well, and almost three had PhDs. My oldest brother was trying to finish his PhD and one day he was driving his little car and the car caught on fire. His dissertation was in the car, so it went up in smoke! He said, "Well, I'm not going to start all over again. I can't replicate what I've already done." So, just gave it up... He was the principal of an elementary school.

**Sara:** Were your parents able to see you graduate?

**President:** Yes. Like a lot of Latino families, although my parents were very supportive, when I graduated from high school my mother and father didn't go to the

graduation. I didn't go to my graduation when I got my bachelor's degree, so they didn't go. But, when I got my PhD, I flew them from Texas to Michigan and so they attended my doctoral graduation. My mother always used to ask me, "Why do you keep getting degrees? Didn't you get it right the first time?" They don't really understand the growth or the difference between degrees.

**Sara:** That's what my dad keeps asking, "You are still in school. When are you going to finish?" He doesn't understand. I try to explain, but it's hard.

Once you started first grade you learned English.

**President 1:** Yes, I learned English in the first grade, but it put me back a couple of years because I was older than most kids when I started school because of my birthday in April. You have to be a certain age to start school and so I wasn't that age when I started. So, anyway ...I was about a year late and I didn't get promoted one year, so I was about two years late. I graduated from high school when I was about 19.

**Sara:** Me, too. I graduated late. I think I was about 19 too. I was about 19, close to 20 maybe.

**President 1:** I caught up in terms of my studies because by the time I was in the fourth grade. I started taking fifth grade classes. For some reason, you just weren't advanced, but you were allowed to take more courses in your ability level. So, when I got to be a senior I was taking some advanced courses in English and math which were equal to college courses. But, back then, they didn't have this Running Start. I ended up going to college mainly because of that, because I was taking advanced courses already and was interested. By then, my oldest brother graduated from high school and went into the

military. But, when he got out of the military he had the GI Bill, so he went to college. I saw that he went to college, so I thought, “I can do that too.”

**Sara:** In a way, you followed your brother’s example. At least you knew that it was something you could do also.

**President 1:** I guess it helped that in the town that we lived in, that I was born in, there was a university there. In Texas. Edinburg. It wasn’t like I had to go off somewhere to do it. It was convenient. I did have a problem because my high school counselor didn’t want to help me. She didn’t think I needed to worry about going to college. If you were Hispanic or Mexican in that community, you just didn’t go to college. You just went to work. So, that was her general attitude, “ah, don’t worry about it.”

**Sara:** The same thing happened to my sister a couple years ago. She was going to high school and, you know teenagers have big dreams, so she started researching for this really good college... I think it was Stanford, or something. She was telling the counselor she wanted to go there and she said, “Well, why don’t you try the community college instead.” I don’t know, it should be her decision.

**President 1:** Sure, if she thinks she can do it. What I ended up doing, and I think it is part of my upbringing; I went to the college because it was in town. I found out, how do you get in? What do you have to fill out? I learned how to apply for financial aid.

**Sara:** You did this all by yourself probably.

**President 1:** Nobody wanted to help. My parents couldn’t help me, so I did that and ended up getting a little scholarship for my first year in college, so I thought, “I guess I can do it if they give me some money.” Of course, it didn’t cost that much back then. It was good. I worked pretty much while I went to college. Again, because I had that

stigma from my perspective of graduating late from high school, I ended up finishing my bachelor's degree in three years. I used to work 30 hours a week. I worked for a lawyer who ran a title company and I worked for the title company, so he let me come and go if I had a class in the middle of the day. I didn't have much of a college experience because I really didn't have time to mingle with the students; I had to go back to work or things like that.

**Sara:** So, you weren't in all the clubs and things like that?

**President 1:** No. In fact, my undergraduate degree is in accounting and my accounting professors were always after me, "Why aren't you a part of the accounting club?" I said, "Sorry, I gotta go to work. I don't have time for that."

**Sara:** At this point, were you very proficient in English?

**President 1:** Yes, by the time I got to college, I was. My writing wasn't very good because like in most high schools we didn't do a lot of writing. Actually, through my undergraduate work other than a general education I really didn't do much writing because I was in accounting and back then half of your credits were all in accounting. We didn't do a lot of writing.

**Sara:** You just did spread sheets, etc.

**President 1:** Yes, just spread sheets. Where I really learned to write was when I went to graduate school when I got into my master's program in Michigan. You almost have to produce a 15-page paper every two weeks or something like that, so you had to learn. I had a friend, a lady from California, a very bright lady and she would read my papers. She was a grad student too. We got to be friends and I finally had the fortitude to ask her to read my stuff. She helped me. She said, "Well, you have the right idea, but you need



to put it over here and not over there.” Just to organize it better. That’s really where I learned to write.

**Sara:** What mentors did you have?

**President 1:** Probably in junior high, I had two people; two teachers in a row who helped me get inspired a little bit more. They were math teachers. I was good at math and I think part of it was working in the field because you had to figure out how much is the family going to make, how much do we have to pick of this or of that... and one of the things my father used to do is motivate us to do hard work and to do it as efficient as possible. He would say, “The family has to earn so much today” and so that means that you have to pick, whatever, 100-200 pounds of whatever. He would say, “After you do that you can stop working and go sit underneath a tree or the trailer while everyone else finishes. Or, you can keep working, but whatever you make is yours.” So, I would figure out. Do I want to make \$10? I would do that all in my head, so when I went back to school it would help me because I could do numbers in my head, add three or four rows of numbers or multiply three or four rows of numbers without using a calculator. This 7<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher saw that, so he helped me develop that; that was Mr. Champion. About a year after that, I had Mr. Gordon who was a math teacher. He helped me too.

**Sara:** It seems like at that point, what you were doing at home matched what you were doing at school.

**President 1:** It’s like taking a skill that I developed at home and then somebody realizing you had a skill and having you develop it even more.

**Sara:** How did you cope with the other subjects that were not so easy, that you didn’t have that much experience with?

**President 1:** It was harder. I mean, English was still harder when I was in junior high. But again, I don't think I really understood my deficiencies then because they didn't do testing the way they do now. You get tests at a different level. And, I was getting promoted, so I figured I was doing okay. My grades were not Ds and Fs; they were basically Bs and Cs. I got involved in other things. I ended up getting into Band and I played a trumpet, so my parents had to rent the trumpet so I could participate. I think it is things like that they encouraged me to stay because there were things I liked, things that I had picked rather than someone else.

**Sara:** Probably when your brothers and sisters saw that it inspired them, in a way. So, did you think that your teachers had high expectations for you?

**President 1:** I really don't remember, other than those two teachers in junior high. In high school, I really don't remember anyone encouraging me to do something. I got into those advanced classes, but that was because my grades were good. It wasn't me sensing that someone was putting their arm around my shoulder and saying, "Hey, you're really good at this. You need to do such and such." I think I made a lot of decisions on my own about what to do, this or that. In high school I was in marching band and concert band, so that got you into another group of kids that maybe were a little bit more academically focused. So, I think that helped. I don't remember running around trying to skip school and stuff that I saw a lot of other kids doing.

**Sara:** So, it looks like your circle of friends kind of encouraged you to be a good student.

**President 1:** Yes, and I guess in high school I became sort of a little nerdy. Again, I guess because of the math.

**Sara:** So, you were a good student probably because you were in band and that encouraged you to be around the right people.

**President 1:** Once my family settled down and didn't move around as much I think there was more stability. And, I'm the youngest of seven, so my father was expecting the others... I think there was less expected of me in terms of bringing money into the house and going to work rather than going to school. I think it made it a little easier to be further down the chain of family members.

**Sara:** Moving on to college, who were your role models? You talked about finishing your accounting degree.

**President 1:** A lot of people talk about remembering so-and-so did this or that; I don't really think I had any role models, quite frankly. I was driven for some reason to want to achieve or get a degree. Actually, I started as a math major, but I finally got to a point where some of that math was really hard! I asked myself, Is this really what I want to do? My mother, for some reason, because I would talk to her about what I was trying to do, got this idea in her head that I should be an accountant which is strange because, given the amount of money my family made per year, we didn't use accountants. There's not much to count. So, I thought, "Eh, accounting... numbers..." So, I did that. There may have been some faculty because I did very well in my major that would occasionally talk to me, like I said, "Why don't you belong to the accounting club?" or whatever. I really didn't spend a lot of time with that.

**Sara:** What about when you were getting your masters?

**President 1:** I think fellow students were very helpful, very inspiring. There are a lot of smart kids at Michigan, so you saw what they did and they encouraged you to join them

at the library or some kind of academic situation. I had a couple of faculty members that were very supportive because they saw potential in the things that I was doing. In some ways it was very different because an undergraduate degree in accounting, but I went to get a masters in social work. Interestingly enough, at the University of Michigan in social work you could specialize in social work administration. So, in accounting you have to take some of the basic stuff in management and leadership and things like that. So, some of the things that were being discussed in social work management courses, I already had when I was an undergraduate. It was easier for me than for some of the students that came with degrees in psychology and sociology to do social work. They were trying to struggle with business concepts that for me were easy.

**Sara:** You said you were very driven and basically on your own were doing all of this. What was driving you?

**President 1:** I wanted to improve conditions for people. After I got my bachelors degree, I tried to get a job in accounting, but it was in the middle of the Vietnam War and accounting firms really didn't want to hire a young 24-year-old because they were going to get drafted. They didn't want to spend any money on you when they knew that you'd probably disappear in a year or so. So, I couldn't get a job or if I did it was a really low paying job in accounting. So I started working for the Texas Employment Commission as a youth counselor counseling kids that had dropped out of school or were potentially going to drop out of school, so I worked on how to get those jobs, how to get them training, or how to get them back into school. All of those were sort of counseling kinds of activities which I didn't have training for. This is why I wanted to go to social work, come back and then really know what I was doing, and to really understand how I could

help the students. So, that was basically my intent. When I was halfway through my master's degree I had a class with a faculty member that helped write the California Social Security Act. He worked in Washington, DC and did a lot of policy work around Social Security. Obviously, the guy knew his stuff in terms of social policy, but he was a lousy teacher. He couldn't explain concepts and things like that. So, one day I was sitting in class and I say, "This idiot can be in front of me teaching and I can do that too." A couple of weeks later, I marched over, because the school social work was separate from the graduate school. I went to the graduate school and said I'd like to see if I can get into the doctoral program for education because there was an educational policy. Again, I was connecting working with kids with education. I ended up getting in, so that's how I sort of got in my doctoral program.

**Sara:** I saw that you finished that pretty quickly.

**President 1:** I did my masters and PhD in four years. Again, it's part of that being driven. I knew what I wanted to do, I had a sense of how to do it, and I took advantage of things that were allowed. I started by doctoral program at the beginning of my second year because the master program was two years. At the beginning of the second year of my masters program I started the Ph.D. program. I was taking courses in social work to finish my masters and I was taking courses in the PhD program in education the first year. Then, through the process of talking to my advisors I learned that I could take the courses in social work and use them in my doctoral program in education. So, I double-counted the hours because at Michigan to do a PhD it required 60 units of graduate work. My Masters was 54 units. So, I took basically half of my Masters degree and I applied it

to the PhD because for the PhD you did courses in your major but then you also did courses in cognate or related areas, so I used social work as my cognate.

**Sara:** Like electives here.

**President 1:** Yes. I used them all as electives. For example, there were, I don't know, nine units of research courses that you had to take. Well, I had six units in social work so I said, Well, do those count for that? And they said Sure, why not?!

**Sara:** Then you got your PhD in educational administration, right? So, you knew that's what you wanted to do?

**President:** Yes.

**Sara:** Were you working while you were doing your masters and your PhD?

**President 1:** Yes. When I got to social work there were a couple of professors that had gotten a grant from the Ford Foundation and from the Department of Education to do crisis intervention in public schools because in the late 60s, early 70s there were all these high school and college disruptions, you know, kids walking out and protesting this, protesting that. So, a group of faculty from Michigan got this grant to go into these communities and help them resolve the problem between the parents, the students, and the public schools. So, I was hired by this group to go do that in some of the schools. I went to a number of schools in California and worked with parents. They taught us mediation skills and problem-solving skills and things like that. My first and second years of my masters, I used to travel all over the United States. We'd fly to California, the east coast, Alabama, and other places. Again, it was related both to my masters and my PhD because I was doing work in education and social work kinds of mediation, so it fit very nicely. For about a year and a half I worked with a black friend and I got started

during my second year of doctoral studies in doing recruitment for the School of Education recruiting minority students. He would go to the southern states. I would go to Texas, California and New Mexico and recruit students for the school. We got to be very successful, so the dean gave us an office and we became the minority affairs office in the School of Education at Michigan. Then, the graduate school heard about the work that we were doing so the graduate school said, “Hey, why don’t you help us recruit minority students?”

**Sara:** That was probably a new concept back then, right?

**President 1:** Oh yeah. That was in the early 70s.

**Sara:** I can’t imagine, because when I came here in the 80s, recruiting minorities still sounded kind of funny.

**President 1:** So, we did a lot of that and that’s actually how my friend and I funded ourselves going to school because we’d get paid for it and then I think I had a small grad school grant.

**Sara:** What would you say was the role that your heritage/language played during the years of high school, college, and masters? English was probably your dominant language because all your education was in English.

**President 1:** Sure. It was helpful because I was still coming to predominantly Hispanic communities and talking to students or their parents. So, the language ability always helped in terms of ability to communicate and get people to feel more comfortable with accepting that. They thought, “Well, you want me to move 2500 miles away.”

**Sara:** Do you think that was a positive feeling that you were Hispanic?

**President 1:** Oh yeah, I did. It helped to continue to better understand the culture, if you will. I had a problem once I finished my PhD because I spent 4-5 years in Michigan and even though we spoke some Spanish we didn't really speak that much. But, when I moved back to Texas, I transitioned from one language to the other without much thinking. Well, I started stuttering because mind couldn't adjust... I couldn't go easily from one language to the other, so I spent about a year having problems with it.

**Sara:** Yeah. That happens to me too. I'm from Costa Rica, so every time I go to Costa Rica it takes me a few days to adjust. It seems like the more I live here, the longer it takes me to adjust when I go back! So, I understand what you're saying.

**Sara:** So, take some time to reflect on your successes. How do you think you got from there to here? What do you think is the most important thing that helped you become the successful person that you are?

**President 1:** Quite frankly, being self-motivated. I assume that some of that self-motivation had to do with my parents instilling in me that we have to grow... that we have to be better than we were. The family needed to improve, so you had to be willing to do new things, learn new things. I tell people that I've never been afraid to try something new whether it's moving to a community that I don't know anybody to, quite frankly, applying for a job where I maybe don't have all the experience, but I think I could do it. So, I think some of that self-motivation, some of the future planning... I don't do it as much now, but certainly when I was in my 30s and 40s, I pretty much defined my future in five-year increments. I would get to a new job and I'd say In five years where do I want to be? What do I want to be doing? So, that helped me define what I needed to get involved with to move my level of expertise from here to here.



**Sara:** That's very important, just having those goals. How did you keep from deviating from those goals?

**President 1:** I just don't. I'm self-directed. That doesn't mean that you don't do other things. That's why I tell some of the younger folks that we hire, "If you say you want to be a vice president. What you need to ask yourself is, what do vice presidents do? What kinds of skills do they need to have? And then ask yourself what skills do I have right now? What skills do I have to learn to get there?" Even if I do my job real well, it's limited and so the skills that this person may need may not be part of what I'm doing. Ask yourself, "Do I have to volunteer to do things outside my job focus or responsibility in order to pick up these skills? And, if that's the question, you have to say to yourself, I know I only have to do my job better than anyone else so I don't lose it, but I have to do extra things to get my future job. So, you motivate yourself to do other things and you have a reason to do it.

**Sara:** So, self-motivation, having future planning and that's really important.

**President 1:** And sometimes a lot of luck, being at the right place at the right time and being able to gauge that. Because, to some extent, that's happened to me. I mean, I've just been at the right place at the right time.

**Sara:** I don't know.. My teacher says that it's not luck if you work hard to get there. You never know which one it is. Of all your accomplishments, what are you the most proud of in your career or personal life?

**President 1:** Probably things that relate to giving back to the community and not necessarily just the Hispanic community, although I focused a lot of things I do outside the universities that I worked at towards that. For example, when I was in California, I

helped restart an agency that served the developmentally disabled. It had gone bankrupt because it was very poorly managed in Santa Clara County just outside San Jose. It used to serve a very large population of disabled adults and children. There were about six of us that got together because we were in social work and were interested in that. We got buy-in from a local bank to give us a \$50 million line of credit. The agency was basically funded by the state, but it was done by reimbursement, so you had to have start-up money. We restarted the agency and it still exists today. From my perspective, that is really big. Then, when I was in LA, I had a concern that, for some reason, kids in the east side of L.A. which was predominantly Hispanic and Asian, didn't have access to gifted programs and the district used to just say There aren't any gifted kids. Now, that's just dumb. If you look at the percentage of gifted kids, our community is not any different than any other community... I mean, there have got to be some. So, we did a study and we found that there were a lot of gifted students in that region of the district. So, we called a meeting of parents and students. We had a huge overflow crowd. So, then we ended up designing a gifted program for the school district. Well, that program still exists!

So, it's little things like that, and they seem little at the time, but I think there are things that you look at things that are going to last rather than getting involved in things that are just good for today. Then, you can get other people to buy in because if you can't, then it's only your idea and once you leave, the idea goes down the drain because there is no one there to pick it up. There are a number of other examples like that.

**Sara:** Basically, mostly the things that you've done for the community, for other people?

What would you say to Hispanic students or any other students who are going to college, but are not sure if it's worth it or not sure how to overcome their challenges.

**President 1:** I think what I would tell them is that if you're interested in promoting your ideas or improving the quality of life for yourself and your family that education is the best and more sure way of doing it. I do talks to elementary kids, high school kids, and middle school kids, and I always tell them that one of the things you have to think about is, and I mentioned this before, we all have strengths. I don't care if it's being a great soccer player. Think about what got you to be good at. What do you think is your strength? How can you use that same effort of how you got there to improve the things that maybe you're not as good at? I basically say the same thing to teachers. How do you look at students? Do you just see that they can't write or they can't do math? There's got to be something they're good at. Identify that, promote that, and use that to improve the other parts of the individual that aren't as strong.

**Sara:** That's a good idea. Now, one last question that I kind of forgot.... When you were in high school and college, were you among a very racially diverse community or ...

**President 1:** I don't think it was very diverse. The community that I was raised in was probably 80% Hispanic. So, you had Hispanics and whites. That same community now is probably 95% Hispanic. The difference was is that back then when I was growing up, the 20% had about 95% of the resources, and that has changed. When I was going to college especially in Michigan, the percentage was real small, maybe 3-5% in terms of the Hispanic population.

**Sara:** How did you feel about that? Did that motivate you more or less?

**President 1:** It didn't bother me. I knew what I needed to do. I mean, I hung around with a small cadre of Hispanic students that were going to school.

**Sara:** Again, that ability to adjust kind of went with you throughout.

**President 1:** Sure. Quite frankly, I've been the first to do something... the first Hispanic administrator they hired at the University of Texas, which got you into circles that sometimes when you walked in, you were the only brown face in the room.

**Sara:** But, it seems that you had enough confidence to not ....

**President 1:** Sure. You know, my wife is not Hispanic nor was my first wife Hispanic. She came from a very small rural community probably 99.9% white and because her family was sort of known we would go to the country club and I was the only Hispanic there. Sometimes people would ask, "Didn't you feel uncomfortable?" I said, "No." I belong there, had the most education of anybody that was in the room because this was after I got my PhD. If they had a problem it was their problem, not my problem.

**Sara:** Would you say that your wife was what they call a "cultural broker"? What role did she play with her being white?

**President 1:** I think it made people feel a little more comfortable with me being there. You asked about what I would tell students and sometimes they are young, well I guess depending on the age group, but education gives you an entry into places that you normally wouldn't get, like my country club experience. Nobody was going to complain. I was probably the one with the highest degree in there. I've been in a lot of situations like that.

**Sara:** Well, I think I've asked you all of my questions in one way or another. So, I really appreciate your taking the time to meet with me.

## **President 2 Interview Questions**

### **Dr. Baldwin**

Dr. Baldwin gave me permission to record the interview which I later transcribed. The interview was on completed on August 2010.

1. Tell us about your parents? For example, place of birth, their home language, and/or level of education.

**President 2:** ok. On my mother's side she was an immigrant from Mexico and came to United States when she was a young woman, a teenager, so her native language was Spanish. She spoke English but spoke it with a heavy accent and never became a U.S. citizen, She had a green card, but on the day she died, she died at 87, she was still a green card holder, never took a citizenship test or anything.

**Sara:** Sounds like my mom.

**President 2:** On my dad's side his family had.uhm actually his roots interestingly are Canadian, but the family moved to Maine, and then, you know, somehow they got to New Mexico, so on my dad's side is Anglo, and so I grew up in a home that was bilingual, and I spoke Spanish and English at home. My mom had an elementary level of education, a very smart woman, but elementary level. And you know, she tells me that girls of her generation did not go to secondary. They basically married. My dad had gone to high school and had an accounting degree, so he had had some post secondary education. It wasn't like a 4 year degree but he was an accountant.

**Sara:** Did he speak Spanish?

**President 2:** Yes, he spoke Spanish.

**Sara:** But his first language was English?

**President 2:** So it's interesting that some things I learned from my mom like our faith being catholic was a big part of our culture, but I learned all the prayers in Spanish because she was the one that taught us the prayers. First I thought, isn't that interesting, I mean, I learned all those prayers. I know them but I learned them in Spanish first.

**Sara:** Did you speak Spanish to your mom and English to your dad?

**President 2:** Yeah, we kind of did that. My dad spoke Spanish too. They would speak it back and forth, and my mom spoke English but she preferred Spanish.

**Sara:** What messages did you get from your parents or grandparents that helped you become a successful person? Feel free to tell us your story in English or Spanish. You may use the exact words they told you.

**President 2:** I actually had a wonderful family life of parents who wanted the best for us the children and they expected us to be successful and to go to school. My mom always said she was happy that I had educational options she had not had them and she said she loved that I was a good student and so going to school was an important part of the message I grew up with.

**Sara:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**President 2:** I had five brothers and myself. And so it was a family of six children.

**Sara:** were you the youngest?

**President 2:** No. I have two younger brothers, but I was the only girl.

**Sara:** Are your brothers as successful as you are?

**President 2:** Yeah, aha. I am the only one with a doctorate, but they have college degrees. One brother actually has...he didn't finish college but he has a business, so he has his own business and then the rest have bachelor degrees and one has worked toward a masters but never finished the masters. I am the only one with the most advanced degree.

**Sara:** Do you think because you were the girl your parents maybe expected you to...?

**President 2:** Yeah. And I think that I was always...you know...everyone always told me that I was so much like my dad and he was a very driven man and like my mom in other ways but like my dad too and he always thought I was so smart and I always heard from him how smart I was. And so my mom too. They both...and I still remember growing up and you know, we had a house and we sit up at the table and we would do our homework every night all together. And when you think of wow...six kids around the table doing homework and because she did not know English or like Algebra, some of the older kids, you know, would help the younger kids but they would make sure after we had dinner and played a while. They would say, "ok time to do your homework." And we all sit at the table and do homework. And we kind of help each other. So, [it was] a very supportive environment for education even though, they themselves had not gotten that.

2. **Sara:** Where were you born?

**President 2:** I was born in New Mexico.

3. **Sara:** Do you have siblings? Male/female? Are they also successful like you?

4. How was your experience in elementary school?

**President 2:** I went to a rural, you know, a little bitty school in Mexico, and had wonderful teachers, really good. And they were strict. I mean, this was back in when I was in elementary like in the 60's and teachers were strict and they demanded a lot and I was a good student, so you know, I wanted to please them so I loved the teachers and they loved me because I was a serious student and I love it, but they were very friendly. I had a wonderful experience and I don't know if it was the times because I know there are kids that talk about having a hard time or kids picking on them and I always felt like the teachers liked me and the other kids liked me and maybe because it was a little bitty school and all the kids were like ranchers.

**Sara:** Did you stay in one school the whole time?

**President 2:** Aha. From first through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then they closed the little school because it was so small and then they bussed us to another school to another town. And then I had a really good experience too, so I was student body president, member of national honors society, and all of those things that are part of a good high school experience. And I think a lot was because we were such good students.

**Sara:** So you were kind of a leader from the beginning?

**President 2:** Yeah. I still remember that I was like the most likely to succeed or something like that. So oh gosh, this is a long time ago.

**Sara:** Do you have any teachers that helped you along the way?

**President 2:** I had so many good ones, but honestly in elementary. But when I think about one teacher in particular, it was in my elementary years in this little bitty school. There was a Mrs. Hinke, and she was an English teacher. A very tough teacher, very demanding, but she really rewarded the good students. Everyone thought she was mean



because she was so hard, but because I was a good student, we had a really good relationship and she encouraged me so much because she kept telling me how much potential I had and she did special things like she gave me books and we didn't have a lot of money so we had some books because my dad loved reading and you know, he would even read encyclopedias, but this teacher would give me books. You know, as gifts. And so I was like "Oh my gosh what a treasure," when she gave me a book. So I think she was one of those teachers that had a huge impact on my life because she, ah, believed in me and she expected so much. She would say, "you are really talented" and also little privileges in little bitty high school rather, we had a library, but we didn't have a librarian so it was full of books but the school didn't have enough money to have a librarian so in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while other kids went out to play or recess, I would get to go to the library and I would play the library, but she trusted me enough and the principal to check out the bookstore for students and what a privilege, to have this library, and I was in it all by myself. And I had this library all to myself and I could check out the books and she was the one that had me assigned for that. She talked to the principal and said, we can have **President** help in the library and I was like "oh my gosh." So of all the teachers. I was especially fond of Mrs. Hinke and I kind of wish she know how much she made a difference.

**Sara:** Yeah, that's tough with teachers because you want to go back and let them know.

When you were in high school was this a racially mixed school?

**President 2:** Yeah. There was lots of Latinos and you know, kids were called cowboys, but I kind of fit in both sides. You know, my brothers were all athletes and they were in the sports teams and I was just the good student. So I fit in, but there were no African

American students and I didn't even meet African Americans until I was in college.

Yeah, but New Mexico is very heavily Latino and then white.

**Sara:** and maybe Native Americans?

**President 2:** Yeah. Some Native Americans too.

**Sara:** So, did you have any kind of challenges in high school because you said you were a good student.

**President 2:** You know, I didn't have many of the challenges that many Latinos have and certainly have worked in schools all my life, so I have seen students that struggle because parents don't want them to go to school or the teachers or the other students push them out. I honestly feel like I had a really strong sense of family and our family is very tight, you know, with each other. We were very supportive. I truly don't feel like I had any obstacles in school.

**Sara:** It seems like you guys helped each other at home.

**President 2:** Yeah at home and we were all good students and my family was very respectful and everyone thought they were so nice and good people, and good Catholics, and so my family has holding high standing and they were generous. They would go help out other people. If something happen in another ranch, they take food, clothes, you know, just like you are supposed to do, help each other out. So I think my parents were really well like, and my mom, women loved her because she was such a good cook and she would help anyone and she was so wise. Like if someone was having a baby, she knew what to do or give it this kind of a tea. You know, she was just generous and everyone wanted mom's blessings so she just had so many friends, and dad too. So I think we grew up with a lot of support from home. You know, everyone thinking that our

family was so nice that we had a very easy, you know, because we had a good environment and we felt very good culturally because we were Latino, we speak Spanish, and were very proud of our culture. We never felt like we were pushed out or excluded and it could be part of that it is New Mexico where Latinos are very dominant part, and it was a different time, you know, now I am seeing all this stuff in Arizona, and it is crazy. It was never that way.

**Sara:** So people didn't look at you funny because you were speaking Spanish?

**President 2:** No. Not because we spoke Spanish or we had black hair. It was not like that because there were other kids like us who were successful too. Maybe just the times were different. I don't know what was different, but the family structure was solid and so after school and college I found no obstacles. You found more obstacles later professionally than you do like along the way, but then you are matured, but I never felt discriminated against. I always thought I was smart. And I knew, and I think a part of our family and our parents had always encourages us that, you know, you are Catholic, we are good to other people, and so religion was a good part of our lives, and also that you treat others with respect, then you expect to be respected. My mom had a phrase, "*darse a respetar.*" So it was like you are as good as anyone else. We are just like anyone else. We are human beings and so there was a confidence that came with that. A sense of self.

**Sara:** Yeah. My grandma always told me "Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres"

**President 2:** yeah. I always heard that from my mom. She wanted us to hang out with good people. Follow the rules. Do good things. And my mom was very proud that way of saying that sometimes people give room to be disrespectful and then that you don't allow anyone to disrespect you and we always grew up with that "*darse a respetar.*" So ok that

means that you expect others and if someone mistreat you call them on it, so we kind of grew up with that.

My really good friends were mixed. I do remember that at the high school, I don't remember in elementary, but in high school, that there were like little groups of out kids, you know, there were kids that were considered like some of the tough girls or some of the boys that were "*cholos*." But they were kids I did not associate with because these girls were always like fighting. I don't know what they did, but the group I kind of hang around was good kids and good kids in school.

**Sara:** Yeah. My grandma always warned me like when a girl got pregnant that was a bad bad thing.

**President 2:** And that for my family is like a big deal. That was in my head engrained forever.

**Sara:** Note the reader: During the interview, I felt Dr. Baldwin had already answered in one way or another some of the following questions, so I skipped asking her directly some of the questions 5-16.

5. Did you speak English or Spanish before you went to school?
6. At what age did you start learning English or Spanish?
7. Did you study your heritage language in school?
8. Tell us about your educational experience in high school?
9. Many students have a difficult time completing high school due to financial, social, cultural, emotional, and academic difficulties. Did you experience any of these types of challenges? What or who provided you with support in these areas?

10. Financial: Did you have difficulties getting money for lunch, buying books, attending school events, buying nice clothes or transportation to school, etc?
11. Social: Who were your best friends and what did you have in common with them? Did you grow up in a community where there was linguistic, ethnic, and/or racial diversity? What kind of activities did you do with your friends? Are you still friends with them and did they also become successful.
12. Cultural: Tell us about some of your values and beliefs and were those reinforced in the school. Did they come mainly from your family, school, church, and/or friends?
13. Academic: What kind of student were you in high school?
14. Did you have difficulty with teachers, homework, completing classes, attending school, understanding assignments?
15. Who helped you if you had trouble completing assignments?
16. What were your expectations for yourself? It seems like you were a good student in school. Did you seek these roles?

**President 2:** I was a good student so teachers always recommended me. We had perfect attendance. In our whole family, all of us, actually one of my brothers went 12 years with perfect attendance. Even I didn't have that because I liked taking my birthday off with my parents. We lived in a little bitty town and we would go to another little bitty town and take me to lunch just like a day with my parents. A day with my parents by myself, and so I did not have perfect attendance and they let me take my birthday off , but my brother did have perfect attendance for 12 years. I always ask him, "How did you do it?" I was nice to other kids, so I got elected to a lot of things because I was nice and I had a lot of friends.

**Sara:** On a scale 1-10 what were your parents' expectations for you academically? And your teachers?

**President 2:** 10

17. **Sara:** At this age, did you know what career you wanted to pursue after high school?

**President 2:** I knew, and again, going back to good teachers, in my high school teachers. I had no boyfriend. I was all about grades, grades, grades, so my teachers always recommend me like I had my math teacher, Mr. Goodman, who wanted me to be an engineer because I was good in math. He even took two or three kids to a college that he thought we would go to. And now that I think back, he took us on a weekend to go to a college, and how many teachers do that? He didn't even get money and he took us because there were only three kids in honors, and so he took the three of us. We toured. So I always had people wanting us to get me to go to college. It was a teacher not a counselor. I don't ever remember a counselor talking to us about college. I ended up getting scholarships. And my parents wanted me to go to the university, but my mom always said, "*pero tienes que sacar una beca*" (but you have to get a scholarship) because we didn't have money to go, and sure enough, I got a scholarship. And the rest was I had to maintain the grade for the scholarship and I like it, so that was easy. Then I got a job, so I had a little income. I worked at a law firm. I had a great college experience.

**Sara:** You mean, you were working while you were going to college?

**President 2:** Yes, because I didn't have a car. I had a bicycle, and I had the scholarship that paid for my tuition and my dorm, but I needed a little spending money. My parents would come to visit and bring me groceries, but not money, because we knew that money

was tight, so I worked at a law firm and then for a little while, I worked at a military base, but I was taking a bus to the base, and then I worked for N.A.S.A. just a little while.

**Sara:** What did you do there?

**President 2:** I had taken short hand, in those days we didn't have computers, so I did like clerical, and you know I was smart, I could write well, I could spell, so I did short hand and typing and I work at a law firm, that just gave me spending money and enough to buy a little car later on.

**Sara:** What was your major in college?

**President 2:** I started as a computer science major because again all of my teachers said I was good in math and science. I didn't like it and after a year, I switched to education and then I found my love. And when I think back, and my brothers reminded me that anytime I wanted to play, because my brothers usually wanted to play sports, but what wasn't a part of it, and my mom would tell them, "*tienen que jugar con su hermanita*" (you have to play with your little sister), and so, what I always wanted to play was "school." And I was always the teacher. Oh that should have told me. I loved it. And so I got into the school of education and major in Spanish and English. I taught Spanish and English in high school and I loved it.

**Sara:** That was my major too, Spanish and English.

**President 2:** Good major.

18. To whom or what do you attribute your success in completing high school?

19. Why did you decided to attend college?

20. What college did you attend?

21. What obstacles did you encounter in college?

22. Financial: How did you pay for college?
23. Social: what kind of relationships helped you get through college?
24. Cultural: How did you adjust to life in college? What values seem to be emphasized in the university and were they consistent with your own values and your upbringing? Academic: Did you feel high school prepared well for college? Who helped you when you were having difficulty with homework, tests, assignments, etc? What did you do to overcome difficulties? Did your teachers treat you with respect? Did you feel teachers had high expectations for you?
25. Emotional: Did you have someone who helped you when you experienced any failure in college? What motivated you to keep going instead of quitting? What or who helped you overcome the challenges in college? Did you have any mentors?
26. Who were your role models while going to college? Did you have any special teachers?

**President 2:** No, what happened is so funny because so many of the high school kids didn't go on to college. Well, that was a small school. But most of the kids came and left. They dropped out, so they came, not that many, but a few came to New Mexico State and I was one of the few that graduated. They came and after a while, they left. It was either money or something that they went back home. And I remember of a whole group of kids. I mean one got pregnant, I mean, it was just like..., so it was one out of six girls the only one that finished. And I thought wow, but I was always like "I am getting a degree" and I was very driven.

**Sara:** Was that an intrinsic motivation? Like you wanted to get a good job?



**President 2:** Well, yeah, I wanted a degree. And then once you get into, you know how it is, once you get into something, then I wanted the next degree, but I definitely wanted a degree. And my mom, she was so good about the advice and [telling me] not letting anything distract you. Now in college, that was a very different experience. Not in terms of challenges or fitting in, I always fit in, but it opened my eyes to more cultural diversity, because for the first time I saw African Americans, and you know, people of other backgrounds because I was from such a little town, and I had only seen a little part of the world. But I was not like a party girl like, you know, a lot of kids in college. I did not have any boyfriends. I was so focused because my mom always said, you know she gave me such a good advice, she said, “don’t let them distract you.” And she was so right. It really paid off.

**Sara:** So you were very driven to complete your degree. Was it because you wanted to have a good job? I mean, what was it that was driving you?

**President 2:** I wanted to make a difference. You know, I really wanted to do something big. I did not know what it was, but I wanted to make a difference.

**Sara:** for yourself, for your parents?

**President 2:** For everyone. I kept thinking, I mean, started everything from thinking, someday I am going to have money to help my parents because they were such a good parents. They worked so hard, and everything they did was for their kids. You know, they didn’t go on vacations, you know, and so I thought someday I am going to do something for them, and then it was also because kind of helping the world. I wasn’t really fixed on what that was, but it was like, help, do something. And it seems like I always had people who would step up and, like, give me a recommendation and help me take that next step

because, you know, mom and dad gave us all the love and the principals, you know, to be hard working, to be dedicated, but they didn't give us advice about college, Or tell us study this or study that. And then in college, what I found so different, but I still had the college experience, but you know, you don't know anyone, the advisors, I mean, and I was a good student, so it was a good place and it was a good thing that I was driven because no one gave me any advice; my friends were all, like, dropping like flies for various reasons, so I was the one that said, I am going to do this. And some of my friends said they would get an associate degree, and I thought, well that's good, but no I am going to stay, so they were finishing that and then going back [to a university.] But even there, all through college, I didn't really have obstacles that you would expect, or academic [obstacles].

**Sara:** You were very well prepared.

**President 2:** Yeah, I had such good teachers, and I took advantage. Like hungry for more learning. And that's why teachers would give me books, recommended me for something rather, but I did want to make a difference for my family. And then the other part of that was almost like you meet someone or you get an award and met someone else, and it was like the better I did the more people wanted to help me. But I was never distracted in school. I was never at risk and truly I think it was the grace of God, because there were a lot of other kids like me, who did get distracted or had obstacles, but I think it was my family upbringing, my faith, that kept me focused.

**Sara:** were you part of different groups or clubs in college?

**President 2:** No. Now as a college president, I think about how to start groups for second generation students, peer counseling (which I think kids need), but also networks of

students, you know, people like peer tutors. I did didn't have any of that or if it was there, I didn't know about it. I navigated it by myself. And I think mmm, considering I was a first generation student, and considering...but I was well prepared and motivated but in college I certainly did not feel like I had the support I had in high school; teachers saying do this or do that, go here go there, there was like figure it out on your own.

**Sara:** Did you have any mentors in college?

**President 2:** I had people that I looked up to. I think one of the things I had done, and it probably comes from the advice from parents, like your grandmother telling you, I always paid attention to people that I thought were successful, and you know, and it wasn't necessarily people my age, so if there was a lady that I thought was really elegant or something, I was kind of watch and learn, you know, I was always astute that way. I was always picking good examples. They might have not known

**Sara:** I had a teacher like that. She is always well prepared.

**President 2:** Right. That's what I did and say wow look at that lady and she was like so together, but they didn't know I was doing that. But it came from...it's probably from the advice from your mom or your grandmother and stays in you. And I watched because I was a country kid. I didn't know about manners and so I watch and say "ok, this is what they do" so I kind of copy or imitated people who I thought were respectable. But it was all in here (pointing to her head) I wasn't discussing it with friends. And then when I was going to college, a lot of kids got into marijuana, and that was like way out of life. I did not know about, I didn't want to know about it, or hang around with people [like that] so it kind of narrowed my friends, so it kind of narrows your world in a good way. So I

rather watch someone that I looked up to. So I think that's what I got in the habit of doing: picking my examples [role models].

**Sara:** Did you have any Hispanic role models?

**President 2:** No. Not many. I can't say that. That's the sad thing when you think back on the teachers, most of my teachers weren't [Hispanic] because it seems that everyone with a college degree, you know, there were very few Latinos with ...

**Sara:** But then it really doesn't matter after a while.

**President 2:** Exactly. If it's someone who cares about you as a student and is a good person...like I still think of that Mrs. Hinke, and I think, you know, she was a German teacher, her background was German, and everyone said, "she is so tough," but she was the best teacher, and she was so supportive of the students. And she wanted you to be motivated, she did not understand students who were lazy, or you know, and that's why people thought she was tough.

**Sara:** so probably English was your dominant language. What was the role of your heritage language during your college years?

**President 2:** Well, socially I did a lot of things with Latino students like when I go out to a restaurant, you know, whatever we did. Because people would call me, they knew I was always studying, so they would say, "come on, it's Friday, we can go," so they people I hang out with were Latino, in college, and they were nice and fun. I was just a little more serious because I felt like, you may have a parent writing a check, [but] I don't have a parent writing a check and I got to get these grades...and I was kind of always a serious student, and to be honest, even my parents would say, I was always matured. I knew the kind of decisions I should make to get where I wanted to go. And I pretty much did what

my parents expected me to do because I wasn't like rebellious and they were such a good parents.

27. Did you get married in college?

28. Are you married? What role did your spouse play in terms of your success?

29. In language acquisition we speak of language dominance. What was your dominant academic language?

### Higher Education

30. After getting your BA, MA, why did you decide to continue your education?

President 2: I went right into my Masters and I got that like in a year and half, and I was working full time, then I really got into a fast track. I wanted a Masters and I wanted a Doctorate. And I married later, like a lot of people marry in their 20's, but I wanted my masters and my doctorate. So I had my Masters when I was 24 [years old] and my doctorates by age 30, and that had been my goal that I had my doctorate by age 30.

**Sara:** That's really young. So was it all at the same university?

**President 2:** My bachelors was, and then I moved to teach, and just to show you what wonderful parents I had, I think they'd thought I would stay in one of the little towns, there are a whole bunch of little towns in New Mexico, they are all like 5000 or 10,000 people, but I had dreams of, "I am going to go somewhere big," and when I was recruited at a teacher's fair, career fair, and there are all kinds of districts, and they were looking for Latinos, and I had so many job offers, I remember, like Tucson, Arizona, Phoenix and districts in Texas, and then Denver, and I had never been to Denver, and I didn't know anyone there, so I thought it sounds like an exciting thing, and I signed a contract right on the spot. And I had never been there, had no family, and then my parents were so

amazing because I told them “I signed a contract and it is in Denver.” They said, “Denver?” You know how Latino parents want everyone close. But they were so wise, and they said, “Well, that’s where you got your job. God bless you.” And I was like “wow.”

**Sara:** They didn’t start thinking about moving with you?

**President 2:** No because, you know, they were so established. And now that I think back, it was a big decision because when I left, they cried, I cried. It was like this big deal. But they did not hold me back. And I think wow, it was amazing.

**Sara:** So you became a teacher. What was your master’s in?

**President 2:** Educational administration. So I got into the administration side right away.

**Sara:** and what about your PhD?

**President 2:** I am sorry my master is in curriculum and development. And my doctorate is in educational administration.

31. Did you have a family while pursuing your graduate education?

**President 2:** I was single all those years. So while everyone was on vacation and they tell me about this wonderful trip, every summer I was a CU, [while] everyone was going here and there. So I would take a class or two during the fall and spring, and then go full time in the summer and I did that for...ever.

**Sara:** Is that what you knew you wanted to do?

**President 2:** I wanted to get into the management side.

32. Did you work? What kinds of jobs have you done?

33. Take some time to reflect on your successes, and tell us how you think you got from there to here? Is there a secret to your success that you want to share with young people today here in Washington where we have such a high dropout rate?

**President 2:** It's a very good question. I think that the observations or reflections I would have to say to find that passion you have and pursue it and stay with it and not anyone or anything in the way of that passion. My obstacles were more, like, financial, but not insurmountable. And I guess to know yourself, so you know what you have to do to. What are you willing to do to get to where you say you want to get? In a way, there is peer pressure to go out and do something else, or to go travel instead of pursue a degree. I mean, friends my age were doing a lot of other things, so it was more like setting that goal, and for me, it was that timeline. Saying, "I am going to do this and this and this," and that meant that something got in the way of that, you know, a trip would have been wonderful, but I would have not been able to finish my degree, or maybe I would have spread it out so long, but I kept thinking, "I got to finish, I got to finish."

**Sara:** Kind of like future planning.

**President 2:** Yes, and I did a lot of that, and then kind of that discipline to stay with it because success doesn't come immediately. You know you have to get all those degrees, like you are doing now, and probably the same thing could be said for you, a lot of other students are doing other things, spending money, going here going there, you are in school...

**Sara:** You have to make certain sacrifices.

**President 2:** Right. So it's more like saying ok this is really what I want, and so I would say, set that goal. Don't let distractions get in the way. Stay with it, and follow your

dream. Don't let people discourage you or even tease you because I had plenty of friends say, "come on" and I just laughed and said, "I know" but they were always nice. I think they just actually couldn't believe that I was studying all the time, but then it paid off. What that degree did, and I encourage everyone to continue, it opens doors. You are going to make decisions about those doors, but it opens the doors wide. I mean, I've had a wonderful career, lots of opportunity, lots of good people, and I have always felt prepared to take those positions.

34. Describe what kind of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) helped you come to this point in such a successful career? Did you feel you had to give anything up to arrive at this point? If so, what?

**President 2:** I gave up along the way when I was younger, some of the interruptions that young people take, you know, boyfriends, a trip, but I kind of felt like "I don't have to have it right now," I am going to have it at the right time, so I was willing to sacrifice on the short run. And one of my hopes was to be able to help my parents financially, and I was able to do that.

**Sara:** Did they see you graduate?

**President 2:** Yeah.

35. **Sara:** Of all your accomplishments, of what do you feel the most proud of in your career or personal life?

**President 2:** Probably one of my proudest accomplishments which is probably where you are is getting your doctorate because there so few Latinos that have that, it is so miniscule, and it opens so many doors, and I don't think I would be at this position if I had not had that credential so being able to be an assistant superintendant, college



president or now a chancellor, it would have been out of my reach. That was the big thing. Personally, What I think I like most is that it has freed me to help others which is what I always wanted to do.

36. **Sara:** What would you say to Hispanic students or any students who are going to college but are not sure if it is worth it and are not sure how to overcome the challenges?

**President 2:** I had financial [difficulties] but not insurmountable. For me, if my parents [would've said] no you shouldn't go to college, we need you here to stay home and take care of something, that would have been huge, but they [my parents] encouraged me so I felt that all I needed was for them to say it was ok and then the rest I would figure out somehow. So I think the financial part for me was not so hard because with the scholarships I had, and it was enough, that I just needed spending money. I think it's harder when students have to pay the tuition, pay board and they have enough to pay, well, I had that though a scholarship. So just having spending money and you know I didn't have a car. I didn't get a car until I was a sophomore, and it was a used car, but I feel that I didn't have...because I was well prepared academically, so I think my advice to student is to ...Latinos are intelligent, smart, hard working people, show it, you know, don't let peer pressure get distracted to not do well in school. We are intellectual too. We can do a lot and there is pride in it. I don't care if someone is a carpenter or...but for people who choose to be intellectuals, we are capable of that too, so don't let someone else define what you should be. Don't let someone else tell where you belong. You decide where you belong. So that's why I tell students, if you want to be a carpenter, fine, and be the best carpenter. Don't let a teacher or society tell you, don't do that college prep. And for me it comes from my religious background and I feel like God gives us

gifts, so to me, we get blessed with gifts, so use them, develop them, if he gives you all this and you do nothing with it then shame on us, and so be focused don't get distracted and have the discipline, especially when I see all this nonsense across the country on immigrants, so don't let anyone define you. We define ourselves. And that means any individual. I think that's true of any group. So that to me is a really important message.

37. **Sara:** What more can we in our state do to help these students stay to finish high school and finish college? I think we kind of skipped. So after getting your bachelors, you started you masters?

**President 2:** I went right into it. Of course you had to apply. I had good scores. I had developed relationships with the faculty at the university and so I got my recommendations. I was admitted. In fact, I was one of the youngest students in my doctoral program. All my other colleagues were already principals and they were administrators working on their doctorate. I was on my 20's working on my doctorate.

**Sara:** on a scale 1-10 what were your teacher's expectations?

**President 2:** 9-10 very demanding

**Sara:** What about your parents?

**President 2:** Same. My parents were very hard working and very disciplined. And that was for all. I think I told you, my brothers too, And at home in every way. They had a big thing about that we would honor our family. You know, that we would never bring shame to our family, like, by getting pregnant, or by not doing well, they didn't want to hear someone in the community say, "oh those Baldwin's kids." They expected us to be really good kids. Really good Catholics. You know all these things.

### **Addendum to the interview**

**Sara:** Well, I think that's it. Did you have any questions?

**President 2:** Well, now I want you to tell me about yourself.

**Sara:** About me? Well, I am from Costa Rica.

**President 2:** Oh my goodness. Wonderful. It's a beautiful country. I have been there many times.

**President 2:** What part of Costa Rica are you from?

**Sara:** From a little town called Golfito. It's maybe one hour from Panama.

**President 2:** Oh ok. It's in the Caribbean side.

**Sara:** It is in the pacific but way south.

**President 2:** We have been to the Caribbean side but I can't even remember the [town.]

We stayed at this wonderful resort. Really beautiful and then the rest of the time we stayed in the pacific side: Limon, Tortuguero.

**Sara:** Ok, so you were in the Atlantic.

**President 2:** Yeah so Tortuguero is on the Atlantic. And then on the Pacific side, we have been to Tamarindo, the Flamingo Beach area, and all of that. Our friends, we usually go there because they have a condo, so we go there every year. When it's cold in Denver, we go there. It's a beautiful country.

**Sara:** Yeah. It is very nice. Well, my entire family lives there. But I came here when I was about sixteen or seventeen. I was a sophomore in high school.

**President 2:** Did you come with family or just yourself?

**Sara:** My mom married an American, so my sister and I came with my step dad and my mom and we moved to Rathdrum, Idaho. We lived there for a while. That's where I went

to high school, and then we moved to Spokane because my dad was a construction worker. He was making bridges around Spokane.

**President 2:** Yeah, your dad or your stepdad?

**Sara:** My stepdad.

**President 2:** Yeah but he is your dad. Sure.

**Sara:** And so, I have lived here in Spokane, I would say half of my life.

**President 2:** So how has it been? I have only been here a month.

**Sara:** oh really? I thought you had been here longer.

**President 2:** No. I have been in Colorado thirty years, but I am new to Spokane.

**Sara:** oh I did not know you were that new.

**President 2:** No

**Sara:** Yeah, so, I graduated from North Central High School here, and then I went to community college. I went to SFCC and I got my AA degree.

**President 2:** Good for you.

**Sara:** It took me a long time.

**President 2:** That's ok. You got it.

**Sara:** Yeah, I got it. And from there, I transferred to Eastern and I got my BA in English and Spanish. Now I am working on my Teaching English as a Second Language degree.

**President 2:** Excellent.

**Sara:** And I just got a job.

**President 2:** where in the school district?

**Sara:** No. I got a job in Pasco for the high school.

**President 2:** Good for you. And you are going to teach ESL?

**Sara:** Yes. So I am starting my new job in about two weeks.

**President 2:** Teaching is wonderful. You can influence so many young people.

**Sara:** I am excited, but at the same time nervous. It's a new job and I am a new teacher.

**President 2:** But, you know what? You will do well if you care for the students and you prepare. You know. I did too. I know it's a long time ago, but as a beginning teacher you really have to prepare because the expectations of making sure the students know that you expect a lot. You support them and encourage them, but making sure that...because I think students perform well when they know you expect a lot and support them. You have to be good to them, but expect a lot.

**Sara:** So that's my plan right now. I am moving and finishing my thesis. But I can write my thesis, but I just wanted to do my interviews before I left.

**President 2:** That's a good idea and stay with it because you can move professionally and, you know, and it's wonderful. You know, I thought five years and I loved it and I loved the students. I taught and became a college president all in the same town. I would see students everywhere that I knew. And it is so wonderful.

**Sara:** Did you teach in a high school or...?

**President 2:** I taught at a high school, and then I was a principal of a different high school later on like five years later. So I taught five years and on the seventh year I was a vice principal, and then the following year principal, but I loved the students and I was very supportive and very demanding. You know, expecting and treating them well. I always called them "young lady" or "gentleman" so they see themselves as such. The school where I taught had a big Latino population. And that's why I would get mad when they would cut classes, you know. No, you are wasting yourself.

**Sara:** Yeah, so that's my plan now.

**President 2:** Good for you. Now, do you feel like in your school here, did you have any obstacles by groups or racial?

**Sara:** I did. I kind of had a bad experience in Idaho.

**President 2:** That was probably... there was a time in Idaho when they had all the crazy Arian.

**Sara:** and I went to the same school that they did.

**President 2:** Oh my God.

**Sara:** So It was hard. But...

**President 2:** Did they make comments?

**Sara:** yeah. They were mean.

**President 2:** Oh my God, I can see it. It's painful and it's horrible and it is not right. It's amazing what human beings can do to each other or say to each other. It's cruel, but don't let that define you. Like, umm, I actually experienced something similar professionally. You see, it's later on that, from the competition, you know, the higher you go, people want to bring you down, and when people say something, you know, don't give them power. It hurts, I mean, we all hurt when people say unkind things, but I always prayed a lot like "God, don't let me focus on that because I don't want them to," because, you know, we hurt, and then they have power over you. But I can't even imagine what that must have been like.

**Sara:** But ...

**President 2:** But you survived and look where you are. I bet they are not there.

**Sara:** Yeah. I just try not to focus on that like you said, but focus on the good things because there were a lot of good people too [who helped me].

**President 2:** Right. See that's what...because we hurt we think of that. We all do it at any age. We get so mad and upset. You have to think about all the people who were on your side, you know, whether were teachers or counselors, the principal, or the community sometimes where they don't like what they see, and what I have heard about Idaho is that all those white supremacists were there, but then kind of the community has run them out. I am sure there some there, hiding, but at least it's not visible and they don't get away like they were for a while.

**Sara:** yeah. So I just think about lots of good teachers that helped me and classmates that would stand up for me. And they would give me a ride and try to be friendly with me.

**President 2:** Well, I am sorry for that experience. It must be so painful and when I think about and when you are young it's hard to go through something like that. When you are older, you know, you kinda life weathers you a little bit, and you, but wow, I am not sure how I would have done if I had had that in high school or elementary. Because, you know, you are a kid then, and you expect people to love you.

**Sara:** Yeah and not only that, but I just came from Costa Rica and I had never heard of [racism]. I know it sounds silly, but I had never heard of this racial, like, oh you are Hispanic, I never knew that I was a minority, you know, until I got there.

**President 2:** And what's so interesting about that is that a little bit how New Mexico was because there was a lot of Latinos, so I never thought, I am no different than anyone else. I did not even know. I think it's because the state of New Mexico has always had a big concentration of Latinos. We are in everything, you know, in every job, in every class, so

I felt that way too. I am no different than you are. But now what I see happening in Arizona. I can't believe it. They are treating people like they are not human beings. We are all human. And then I think about, of course, Costa Rica and Latinos in general, we are gentle people. We are friendly, we like people, we are outgoing. And I think, wow, when you squash that...

**Sara:** Yeah sometimes I think Latinos have certain gifts that maybe...are not as much appreciated.

**President 2:** Right. But I always say, stay proud of your heritage because I am always felt so proud of who I am and being Latino is a big part of me. So during interviews, they say, are you bilingual? And I say, "absolutely!" Can you speak Spanish? I say, "*Perfectamente!*" because I do. I always say, I am so glad that my mom...and she had always made sure that we could speak it well, that we could speak to my grandparents, and *tíos* and *tías* (uncles and aunts), and I am so glad that was a part of me from my birth on. And it is a gift to speak two languages. It's wonderful.

**Sara:** Yes, it is.

**President 2:** It had to be hard for your mom and your step dad, you know, to see how you were treated. It must have hurt them.

**Sara:** I don't think I told them. I don't think I even understood [entirely] what was happening really, until later. I mean, It was painful at the time, but I did not...

**President 2:** See, you got to write about that sometime. You really should. And independent of a thesis, you could do a little booklet or something that captures your reflections how it happened and how you overcame it. You really should because that would show students...and now you are a teacher and students will learn from you. And



sometimes sharing that experience...and it's ok if they know it hurt you, but they can see that sometimes they are going to hurt, sometimes life has hurtful things in our lives, but if you just remember to stay grounded in who you are and on the gifts you have. It hurts at the moment, but you know, you have to say they do that because they are ignorant and you try to detach it, but I know it hurts, and especially when you are younger because you don't understand. So, you will have to do that and write about it.

**Sara:** Yeah, I probably should.

**President 2:** Because you may not about this for five years, three years, or who knows when, but you got to make some notes, and you know, so that you have, not a whole book, but some notes about how you felt, you know, things or dates that will help you put it together when you are ready. Because your experience gives people time to share and understand.

**Sara:** And see that those things do happen.

**President 2:** Then acknowledging they good people who helped you and then maybe even questions that you would ask the people who mistreated you, like why or what did they get out of it. Because who know what their life is like and they may end up in prison or whatever, and they were willing to hurt people and it's, like, disgusting.

**Sara:** Well, it was the 80's or 90's and things have changed a lot.

**President 2:** Yeah, I used to hear about it and who would go to Idaho because it sounded awful. And then now I think now I am 20 minutes away, because I asked, but they said, oh no, we ran them out of town. And I thought oh good.

**Sara:** I think the new generation of people, because they have that background, they have tried to make it better and make a change.

**President 2:** That is a good thing. But you should chronicle for yourself because now that you are a teacher students can learn from you. Because, you know, one of the beautiful things about the profession is, and I have to tell you is that I have love it, and I felt like I made a difference every day of my 30 years. It's a wonderful feeling, is that they learn from you, from your success, and they also learn from the hurtful, or the failures because we have them along the way. They say, "wow, you went through that and you are a teacher!" you went through it and you are ok, and so it's really important to share that with them and then you become the example. Like you were thinking or I am telling you about the people and say, wow that lady is so neat or whatever. And I wasn't at the time trying to be the example, I was just trying to learn, but other students will be looking at you.

**Sara:** That's part of it. Being a good observer of people and learn from them.

**President 2:** Young people, they are going to find good and bad examples, so we got to give them, I have always felt a responsibility to show them good examples, and Latino students, they got to see people who are just like them, just as poor, just as whatever, or just as blue collar, you know, we were not poor of not having food or a house, we just did not have money to do big things, but we were happy. We thought we had everything. And we did. And it's important for students to see that. To see that you are someone just like them, that you succeed and you get wherever you want to get so that's why they have to define it, and if someone tries to push you down, you just come right back up because I always say, "you don't define me, I define myself."

## **Analysis of themes in the interview**

In analyzing the responses from both presidents, there were many themes prominent in their answers. Sometimes they directly mention the word, such as faith or future planning, but other times the themes were intertwined in their stories, I had to infer the idea from what they were saying. Another challenge was that some the themes were closely connected such as hope and optimism, or self-efficacy and confidence.

Below is a list of the initial themes in the order they appeared in the interview:

### **Dr. Sanchez**

- Migrant Families-Stability—or lack of-
  - Children living with relatives instead of parents
- A sense of adventure/mobility/not growing roots in one place/flexibility/
- Finding people you can trust
- There may be a need for Hispanic families to celebrate the rites of passage
- The importance of familiarity and role models in deciding to attend college
  - Convenience, housing, money
- The importance of high expectations from school personnel
- Poverty. Money. Paying for college
- Classmate support
- Teacher mentors
- Extracurricular activities / Having “good” friends
- Oldest siblings have more responsibilities
- Future planning / The importance of having definite goals / Setting goals
- The desire to help others and leaving a legacy/ doing things that are going to last.
- positive attitude/confidence/can-do attitude/Self motivation
- Courage
- Education gives you a sense of pride

### **Dr. Baldwin**

- Parents’ citizenship
- Stability/mobility
- Parent’s old ideologies and how those affect their sons and daughters
- Religion/ A need to be kind and to be good to others/having values, faith, and focus.

- Family support/high expectations/positive messages/protective parents
- Supportive teachers/teachers who care /Teachers who trust the students/having mentors/supportive classmates
- Family stability
- Poverty/money/working while going to college/scholarships
- Self-Control / being driven / making sacrifices / making good choices
- Being likable / Developing relationships with the university faculty
- Familiarity affected the decision of attending college / parental approval (11)
- Resourcefulness /Taking advantage of opportunities/Being observant of successful people
- Making a difference / help others
- Having good college preparation in high school
- You don't need to be Latino to make a positive impact on Latino students
- Taking risks/ sense of adventure / making sacrifices
- Future planning
- Resilience to stay with it / Education opens doors to opportunity
- A need to help her parents / honor the family

Due to the variety of themes prominent in the interview, I proceeded to organize them so that I could find related themes in some way. For example, the theme of optimism, drive, and motivation appeared many times, so I proceeded to link them together as I thought they are closely related. Then, I further organized the themes in three main categories: Self, Family, and Community because these were key areas in which my correspondents were able to navigate and to understand to help them reach their goals. Some of the themes, such as poverty, were difficult to categorize as they related to all three categories.

### **Dr Sanchez**

#### **Family**

- Migrant Families-Stability—or lack of-
  - Language Barriers
  - Children living with relatives instead of parents
    - Family is more broadly defined/Large family

- Aunts may take in a child to be able to finish
- Deeply bonded Families
  - Parent's high expectations
  - Multi-generational family ties
  - Commitment to all generations

## Self

- A sense of adventure/mobility/not growing roots in one place
- Resourceful / Flexibility
- Self-reliant
- Resilience
- Self-Efficacy
- Delayed gratification / Self-Control
- Self- Directed
- Luck
- Pride
- Solid home base which not geographically specific or consistent
- Desire to stay put but life would not allow it
  - Had to keep moving to follow the harvests/crops
  - But could still provide emotional stability and grounded home life for children

## Community

- Finding people you can trust and who could help
  - genuine support from teachers
  - school folks
  - neighborhood
- The importance of familiarity and role models in deciding to attend college
  - Convenience, housing, money
- The importance of high expectations from school personnel
- Poverty. Money. Paying for college
- Teacher mentors / Teacher high expectations
- Extracurricular activities / Having "good" friends/Classmate support
- Oldest siblings have more responsibilities / Older siblings as mentors
- Future planning / The importance of having definite goals / Setting goals
- The desire to help others and leaving a legacy/ doing things that are going to last.
- positive attitude/confidence/can-do attitude/Self motivation
- Courage
- Education gives you a sense of pride

## **Dr. Baldwin**

### **Family**

- Parents' citizenship
- Family Stability/mobility
- Parents' educational level
- Growing up bilingual was a sense of pride
- Parent's old ideologies and how those affect their sons and daughters
- Religion and good values
  - A need to be kind and to be good to others
  - Having values, faith, and focus/ Being kind and generous
- Family support
  - high expectations/positive messages/protective parents

### **Self**

- Poverty/money/working while going to college/scholarships
- Good students
  - Extracurricular Activities
  - Perfect attendance
  - Focused and not letting anything distract you
- Resourcefulness /Taking advantage of opportunities/Being observant of successful people
- Self-Control / making sacrifices / making good choices/ Focused
- Taking risks/ sense of adventure / making sacrifices
- Resilience to stay with it / Education opens doors to opportunity
- Self-Motivated / Goal Oriented / Being Driven/ Discipline
  - Self-confidence /Self-directed

### **Community**

- Supportive teachers/teachers who care /Teachers who trust the students/Strict teachers / Having mentors/supportive classmates
- Being likable / Developing relationships with the university faculty
- Making a difference / help others
- A need to help her parents / honor the family
- You don't need to be Latino to make a positive impact on Latino students
- Future planning
- Familiarity affected the decision of attending college / parental approval (11)
- Having good college preparation in high school

Dr. Sanchez recurring themes

Below are listed the top five recurring themes in my interview with President 1. These themes are listed in the order in which they appeared the most. It is important to note that there was a tie between the importance of teacher mentors and teachers having high expectations of students and the importance of future planning and setting goals. Those were:

1. Self-motivation, confidence, self-efficacy, and a can-do attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When his brother got out of the military, he went to college, and Dr. Sanchez explains that when he saw his brother go to college, he thought, “I can do that too.”</li> <li>• “I was driven for some reason to want to achieve or get a degree.”</li> <li>• “I tell people that I have never been afraid to try to do new things.”</li> </ul>	12
2. Resourcefulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I did my Master’s and Ph.D. in four years.”</li> </ul>	10
3. Courage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[I was] the first Hispanic administrator hired at the University of Texas, which got you into circles that sometimes when you walked in, you were the only brown face in the room.”</li> </ul>	9
4. Family support and high expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “One of the reasons my father stopped doing the migrant crop business during summer was that he wanted to make sure my oldest brother would graduate from high school.”</li> </ul>	7
5. Future planning / setting goals / having definite goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I define my future in five-year increments. I would get a job and I’d say in five years, what do I want to be doing?”</li> <li>• “I am self-directed.”</li> </ul>	5
6. Teacher mentors / teacher having high expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In junior high, I had two math teachers who helped me get inspired. I was good at math and I think part of it was working in the field I had to figure out how much the family was going to make.”</li> <li>• In college, “I think fellow students were very helpful, very inspiring. There were a lot of smart kids in Michigan.”</li> </ul>	5

<b>Table 5: Dr. Baldwin recurring Themes and the number of times they appeared in the interview</b>	
<p>1. Family support and high expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I honestly feel like I had a really strong sense of family. Our family is very tight, you know, with each other. We were very supportive. I truly don’t feel like I had any obstacles in school.”</li> <li>• “She said she loved that I was a good student.”</li> <li>• “My family was very respectful and everyone thought they were so nice and good people, and good Catholics, [...] and they were very generous.”</li> <li>• “I felt that all I needed was for them [her parents] to say it was ok, [to go to college] and then the rest I would figure out somehow.”</li> </ul>	14
<p>2. Supportive teachers/ teachers who care and who students trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I was a student body president, member of the honors society, and all of those things that are part of a good high school experience.”</li> <li>• She had a special English teacher, “a very tough teacher, very demanding, but she really rewarded her students.”</li> </ul>	9
<p>3. Self-motivation and being goal oriented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think it was my family upbringing and my faith that kept me focused.”</li> <li>• “I don’t let someone else define what you should be. Don’t let someone else tell where you belong. You decide where you belong.”</li> </ul>	8
<p>4. Self-efficacy (always felt prepared)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I didn’t really have obstacles that you would expect, or academic [obstacles].”</li> </ul>	7
<p>5. Religious faith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being kind and generous</li> <li>• “We are good to people, and so religion was a good part of our lives.”</li> <li>• “I was never at risk, and truly I think it was the grace of God.”</li> </ul>	6



### **Similar Backgrounds**

- Both presidents come from big families. President 1 is the youngest of seven and President 2 was the only girl in a family of six.
- Both presidents grew up in small towns. President 1 grew up in a small town in Texas (and many other small towns in Oregon, Washington, and California as his parents were migrant workers) and President 2 in a small town in New Mexico.
- Both presidents grew up with both parents at home.
- Both presidents are second-generation Mexican-American.

### **Similar character traits**

Even though they were different in many ways (gender, place of birth, education, experiences, etc.), they had many similar character traits. It seems to me those are the characteristics that help them to overcome challenges. Dr. Baldwin said, “I didn’t really have obstacles that you would expect, or academic [obstacles].” This president was so well prepared academically that maintain a good GPA in college was not a big problem. On the other hand, Dr. Sanchez said he paid for graduate school by working for the minority affairs office at his university and he also received a small grant. In this instance, Dr. Sanchez always found a way and made connections with the right people to help them get through school. Both participants demonstrated a great level of:

- Resourcefulness in overcoming poverty through scholarships and jobs
- Optimism and hope
- Resilience in “staying with it”

- Family support and a solid home base (not necessarily geographic stability as this did not seem to affect the level of success of one participant).
- Cultural Identity and a desire to make their family proud.
- Having good preparation in high school and high expectations from teachers
- Networking and finding mentors
- Future planning and taking advantage of opportunities
- A sense of Adventure and unafraid of taking risks
- Purpose and a desire to make a difference

## Chapter 4

### Discussion, Reflections, and Future Research

#### Discussion

Because of the abundance of themes that emerged in the interview, I decided to focus on four major themes which will be discussed further in Chapter 4. I chose these themes because more often they are not necessarily taught in school. The objective is to learn more about these themes because I thought they would be important for me and my teaching.

1. Resilience
2. Optimism, drive and motivation
3. Parental support
4. Future Planning

Individuals are supposed to magically “have” these traits in them, but often times, students who have experienced discrimination, loss, and hopelessness forget that these basic traits will help them get passed obstacles. Somehow, students need to understand that poverty and discrimination is not something we can really control, at least in most cases, but we can control ourselves and who we become.

The two presidents I interviewed are very extraordinary, not only because they have achieved very prestigious positions few Latinos/as attain, but also because they are good persons who have devoted their lives to making a difference in their communities. Even though, they had different upbringings and experiences, these presidents share some

salient characteristics and family traits that I believe made a difference in helping them achieve success. Some of the themes I found in these two presidents interviews were resilience, drive and motivation, stability, and, future planning.

## **Resilience**

The dictionary defines resilience as the “power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched” ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)); Also it is described as “the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.” In other words, it requires for the person to be flexible, tough, and even resistant. Dr. Sanchez stated that from the start, he felt a step behind other students in elementary school. He said, he “flunked the first grade because [he] didn’t speak English to be promoted to second grade,” but in spite of being behind other students, he graduated at the age of 19 “or maybe close to 20.” Then, when he started college, he encountered other difficulties. He said, “Nobody wanted to help. My parents couldn’t help me, so I did that [filling out applications and applying for financial aid] and ended up getting a little scholarship for my first year of college.” He worked while going to college, and ended up finishing his bachelor’s degree in just three years. Dr. Sanchez said that he really didn’t think he had role models while in college, but he said, “I was driven for some reason to want to achieve or get a degree.” However, he mentions he had a good support system of family, friends, and faculty members that were very supportive and “saw potential” in the things he was doing. Moreover, when his brother got out of the military, he went to college, and Dr. Sanchez explains that when he saw his brother go to college, he thought, “I can do that too.” So, after completing his bachelor’s degree, he started working as a youth counselor helping kids who were potentially going to drop out

of school, and then he realized that one of the desires that motivated him was to “improve conditions for people.” Throughout his education, Dr. Sanchez experienced challenges such as learning how to navigate the educational system and finding the financial resources to accomplish his goals. However, he was always ready and one step ahead of what he needed to do next. He took advanced courses in high school, he was good at math, he was involved in band and played the trumpet, and he worked and made connections with people (fellow students, faculty, and employers) who could guide and teach him valuable skills.

Dr. Baldwin was born in New Mexico, and she had “a really good experience” growing up and in school; she had stability and good parents. She said, “I was a student body president, member of the honors society, and all of those things that are part of a good high school experience.” She had a special English teacher, “a very tough teacher, very demanding, but she really rewarded her students. Everyone thought she was mean because she was so hard, but because I was a good student, we had a really good relationship and she encouraged me so much because she kept telling me how much potential I had.” Also, Dr. Baldwin explains that the teacher gave her books as gifts because that her family “didn’t have a lot of money,” so she was so grateful for those books that she considered them “a treasure.” Culturally, Dr. Baldwin was a type of chameleon, and said, “I kind of fit in both sides,” and “I didn’t have many of the challenges that many Latinos have and certainly have worked in schools all my life, so I have seen students struggle because parents don’t want them to go to school or the teachers or the other students push them out. I honestly feel like I had a really strong sense of family and our family is very tight, you know, with each other. We were very

supportive. I truly don't feel like I had any obstacles in school." Moreover, she said, "We felt good culturally because we were Latino; we speak Spanish and were very proud of our culture," and "the family structure was solid and so after school and college, I found no obstacles. You found more obstacles later professionally than you do along the way." She was confident in her abilities, and so she never felt discriminated. Her faith and family encouraged her to "follow the rules" and "do the right thing." In fact she said, "We are just like anyone else. We are human beings and so there was a confidence that came with that. A sense of self."

However, even though "we always had people wanting us to go to college," her mom always said, "*pero tienes que sacar una beca*" (but you have to get a scholarship) because we didn't have money to go, and sure enough I got a scholarship." She worked at a law firm for a little spending money, and rode a bicycle until she saved enough to buy a car, and her parents brought her groceries when they visited. This way she got by and eventually "found her love" studying education. Then she became an English and Spanish high school teacher; she completed her Master's degree when she was 24 years old and her doctorate by the age of 30. Overall, Dr. Baldwin did not have the challenges I expected her to have, such as money, discrimination, and academic challenges. Instead, she had to make a lot of difficult choices and sacrifices and she always found a way to make it work. Her journey seemed smooth and easy because she always kept focused on what she wanted to accomplish. She had self-control, made good choices, and sacrifices, and she believed in her abilities. She said, "I wanted to get a degree," "I wanted to make a difference," and she believed that "someday [she was] going to have money to help [her] parents because they were such good parents. They worked so hard, and everything

they did was for their kids.” On her academic achievement, Dr. Baldwin did not get distracted from reaching her goals.

In her book, *The Middle of Every Where*, Mary Pipher (2002) explained about certain qualities in resilient people from all over the world, and she labeled them the attributes of resilience (p. 285). She explains that all of us can benefit from these attributes. She tells us, “we cope with loss and adjust to new situations, we will do better if we have a sense of humor, if we are hardworking and honest, and if we know how to stay calm” (p.285). Below are listed the twelve attributes she addresses:

**1. Future Orientation**

Future Orientation is about letting go and moving on. It is about the newcomer zest. They do not live only in the past; they can envision a better future (p. 286).

**2. Energy and Good Health**

Adjusting to America and recovering from loss requires an enormous amount of energy. Just facing each day, with difficult jobs and coworkers who are hard to understand, is exhausting (p. 286).

**3. The Ability to Pay Attention**

Paying attention means being aware of subtle cues, knowing whom to trust, and accurately sensing danger. It means catching on to patterns and rules, picking up on how things work, and not repeating mistakes (p. 287)

**4. Ambition and Initiative**

Being a hard worker requires motivation and stamina. It requires time-management skills, the ability to work with others, and the ability to do what one is told and more (p. 287).

**5. Verbal Expressiveness**

One of the most important attributes is simply being able to express one’s needs clearly and appropriately. Being able to communicate thoughts and feelings, to ask good questions, and to articulate problems are aspects of this attribute (p. 288).

**6. Positive Mental Health**

Positive mental health requires an optimistic nature, a sense of humor, and the ability to appreciate and enjoy what one can in the midst of sorrow (p. 288).

**7. The ability to calm Down**

These skills, which include deep breathing, putting things into perspective, and optimistic thinking, allow people to stay calm and positive, to forgive themselves and others, to sleep nights, to avoid additions or impulsive behaviors, and to control feelings in the face of great sadness and trauma (p. 288).

**8. Flexibility**

Flexibility means simply that one can behave differently in new situations. One can assess the situation and act accordingly. It's being adept to cultural switching.

**9. Intentionally, or Being Thoughtful About Choices**

In the United States, where there are so many choices, it's imperative to make careful decisions, to choose wisely what to do and not to do.

**10. Lovability**

Lovability is a complex attribute that include many other attributes. Certainly energy, verbal expressiveness, empathy, and good character are all part of being lovable. Lovable people make us feel good. [...]We want to be with them and we want to make them happy (p. 291).

**11. The Ability to Love New People**

People who are loved are granted favors, given advice and privileges. They are invited to events and awarded scholarships. [But] caring for others is what motivates humans to get out of bed in the morning. It gives life a purpose and a meaning (p. 291).

**12. Good Moral Character**

Good character is vital to success. Honesty, responsibility, and loyalty all help newcomers to succeed (p. 292).

**Optimism, drive, and motivation**

One of the prevalent themes in both of my interviews was optimism and self-motivation. Both presidents always demonstrated a sense of positive possibility and an excitement for what would come next. According to Lopez (2010), "Hopeful students see the future as better than the present and believe they have the power to make it so. Hope, the ideas and energy for the future, is one of the most potent predictors of the success of our youth" (p. 41) Moreover, he explains that "hopeful students are energetic, full of life. They're able to develop many strategies to reach goals and plan contingencies in the event that they face problems along the way. As such, obstacles are viewed as challenges to overcome and are bypassed by garnering support and implementing alternative



pathways. Similarly, the two presidents focused on finding ways to overcome the challenge instead letting that stop them from where they wanted to go. Dr. Sanchez said, “I really understood my deficiencies,” and because of that he made sure he his grades were good and that he was getting promoted to the next grade. Soon, he was taking advanced classes in English and math and involved in many curricular activities and playing the trumpet in band. Dr. Baldwin knew from the beginning, she would not be able to attend college unless she received a scholarship as her mom told her. Therefore, she was a “good student” throughout high school and college. She had good attendance and good grades, became student body president, member of the honor society to make sure she was on track to receive scholarships, and she did. Her motivation was that she “wanted to make a difference” and that “someday I am going to have the money to help my parents.” These presidents had a lot of optimism and hope for the future.

Eric Jensen in his book *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* reminds us that optimism is a learned skill. Many times, “children don’t have the repertoire of necessary responses. It is as though their brains’ “emotional keyboards” play only a few notes” (p. 18). As we can see in table 7, children’s’ brains are hardwired with some basic responses such as sadness, joy, disgust, anger, surprise, and fear, but skills like optimism needs to be taught.

**Table 7 Children’s emotional keyboard.**



The emotional brain can be represented by a keyboard on which children from poverty use fewer keys than well-off children. The six responses represented by the darker shading on the keyboard and in the center box are hardwired in our DNA. The responses represented by the lighter shading must be taught.

Additionally, Gillham and Reivich (2004) tell us that “hope is often defined as a wish for something with some expectation that will happen, while optimism is typically defined as a tendency or disposition to expect the best” (p. 147). Moreover, “dispositional optimism refers to a general tendency to expect positive outcomes. In part, these positive expectations may result from the individual’s belief that he or she can control good outcomes. But positive expectations may also result from a general belief that good things will befall us” (p. 147).

Hope and optimism were traits of both presidents, but I think that what made all the difference was their optimism. They always believed in themselves and believed they would get where they wanted to go. They may have been scared or unsure at times, but they seemed to always work through the challenges and not let those obstacles get in the way, because they always found a way. As challenges came their way, they seemed to simply work harder to compensate and make it though. Dr. Sanchez was able to “catch up” to his classmates in elementary school, even though he had to learn English and be held back one year. In high school, Dr. Sanchez said, “I think I made a lot of decisions on

my own about what to do,” [...] I was in marching band and concert band, so that got you into another group of kids that maybe were a little bit more academically focused. So I think that helped.” Years after in college, he said, “when I finished undergraduate school, I wanted to go to grad school and ended up going to the University of Michigan from Texas. I didn’t see any problem getting in my car by myself and driving to Michigan, not knowing anybody and starting school and here we go,” and he adds, “I tell people that I’ve never been afraid to try something new.”

### **Parental support**

According to Martinez and Cervera (2012) parents play an important role in students’ college search processes (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989), and so “it is concerning that research indicates that Latino/a parents frequently lack sufficient knowledge about the college-going process” and they are only able to support students “through indirect channels, such as by supplying encouragement” (p. 390). However, parents can offer more than just encouragement. For example, Dr. Baldwin remembers that her parents gave her “a good family life.” She said, “We sit around the table and we would do our homework every night together” and if “[her mother] did not know English or like Algebra, some of the older kids would help the younger kids.” Her parents would say, “Ok, time to do your homework,” so it was “a very supportive environment for education, even though they themselves had not gotten that [an education].” Dr. Baldwin adds, “At home, my family was very respectful, and everyone thought we were so nice and good people, and good Catholics, and so the family held a high standing; They were very generous,” and “she [her mother] wanted us to hang out with good people, follow rules, and do good things.” Last, she said, “My parents were very hard working and

disciplined.” As simple as they may seem, the values and academic expectations parents set at home do have a great effect on students.

It is important to note that both of the presidents lived with both parents at home. Dr. Sanchez’ father worked as a farm laborer and although he mentions his mother, I did not ask if she was a homemaker mom or if she worked outside the home. On the other hand, Dr. Baldwin’s father was an accountant, but I did not ask if her mom worked outside the home. She did mention many times that she had a “wonderful family life” and that her family was very “solid” and united. The table below shows that in Latino homes 42% of kids under 18 years old live with a single parent, so it is possible that having both parents and having a “solid” family can help children be more successful.

**Table 6: Children living in single-parent families by race (Kidscount.org)**

**Children In Single-Parent Families By Race**

Year(s): 5 selected | Race: All | Data Type: Percent

Data Provided by: National KIDS COUNT

Location	Race	Data Type	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
United States	American Indian	Percent	50%	53%	52%	53%	53%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	Percent	16%	16%	16%	17%	17%
	Black or African American	Percent	65%	67%	66%	67%	67%
	Hispanic or Latino	Percent	38%	40%	41%	42%	42%
	Non-Hispanic White	Percent	23%	24%	24%	25%	25%
	Total	Percent	32%	34%	34%	35%	35%
	Two or More Races	Percent	41%	41%	42%	42%	43%

**Case Study**

In a case study by Ceballo (2004), she investigated the role of parents and home characteristics in the academic success of Latino/a students from impoverished, immigrant families. The researcher’s goal was to identify parenting practices that contributed to the academic achievement of poor Latino students. In this study, “ten first-

generation, U.S.-born, Latino students attending Yale University were interviewed [...]. All of the students were the first in their families to receive a college degree” (p. 171). The findings identified four family background characteristics that contributed to their scholarly achievement. The four themes were:

**1) a strong parental commitment to the importance of education**

In the case of both presidents, parents show “a strong parent commitment to the importance of education” by creating an environment at home conducive to education. Dr. Baldwin’s said her parents would tell them, “Ok, it is time to do homework” and they would all gather around the kitchen table to do homework; Her brother had perfect attendance for 12 years! And although her attendance was also very good, she liked to take her birthday off and spend the day with her parents. Similarly, Dr. Sanchez said, “my parents put a lot of emphasis on making sure we went to school;” however, I did not ask about his home environment.

**2) parental facilitation of their child’s autonomy**

It is not certain to me if parents facilitated “their child’s autonomy.” For example, I don’t know if the presidents’ parents were involved in extracurricular activities; however, Dr. Baldwin’s parents helped with school projects and supervised homework every evening.

**3) an array of nonverbal, parental expressions of support for educational goals and tasks**

I found that with Dr. Baldwin’s parents, there was always “an array of nonverbal, parental expressions of support for educational goals and tasks.” As I mentioned

earlier in this chapter, her parents always told her that she was smart and how much they appreciated that she was a good student. Dr. Sanchez did not specifically talk about the messages his parents gave him about school, but through the interview, I could infer that his parents made a lot of sacrifices (negotiating contracts without knowing English and finally settling in one place in order for the oldest brother to graduate) for him and his brothers to get an education. Dr. Sanchez said, “They also tried to instill in me avoiding judging people. You accept people for who they are and how they conduct themselves.” He adds, “My father also talked a great deal about you listening to what people tell you, but you look at what they do [their actions], and if they don’t match, they may not be people you want to hang around with.” Overall, parents have a responsibility to teach their children good values to live by. Parents can teach this with positive messages and by being good examples for them.

#### **4) the presence of supportive faculty mentors and role models in the students’ lives**

As I have mentioned throughout the thesis, role models are important for children, and even when parents do not have a “successful career,” they can still be examples of good values, such as generosity, kindness, discipline, dedication, and hard work.

#### **Future planning**

One of the characteristics in both of my interviewees was the idea of future planning. Dr. Baldwin mentioned that when she was in high school, one of her teachers

took her and two other classmates to visit a college. Although still young, this opportunity informed them about college and what it would take to go there. Martinez and Cervera (2012) said, “Post (1990) found that Latino/a students indeed lacked knowledge about postsecondary education, especially in the case of finances, concluding that many held “unfounded beliefs about the costs of college,” particularly those with Spanish-speaking parents (p. 185).” Moreover, they affirm that “lower socioeconomic status (SES) students lack social networks that provide information about college because they are not as likely to have parents or other friends and family who have attended college (as cited in Schneider et al., 2006) (p.390).” What I found about these presidents is that they were continually looking to the future and thinking about what they would need to do to move to the next step.

Additionally, they always seem to “be in the right place, at the right time,” so what it may seem like just good luck, I believe was their excellent future planning skills. For example, in high school, both took advanced courses and were involved in many school activities. Dr. Sanchez said that by the time he was a senior, he was taking advanced courses in English and math. He said, “I ended up finishing my bachelor’s degree in three years.” Then, when he finished college, he couldn’t get a job as an accountant because of the Vietnam War, so he became a youth counselor while getting a Master’s in Social Work. I can see that he was always thinking ahead and thinking about how his present position could help him get to the next point. He said, “I pretty much defined my future in five-year increments. I would get to the new job and I’d say, “In five years where do I want to be?” So that helped me define what I needed to get involved with to move to my level of expertise from here to there.”

In a similar way, Dr. Baldwin said, “I knew the kind of decisions I should make to get where I wanted to go.” So she “had her Master’s when she was 24 [years old]” and her doctorate by age 30. She described it as a “timeline” and she knew what sacrifices she was willing to make in order to get there.

### **Limitations of the study**

As with any study, there are limitations to this thesis. Some of the limitations in this study are that the interview was only about an hour long and so there was not enough time to ask any follow-up questions or to clarify on some of the answers. Also, both of these presidents were presently working for an institution so they may have had reservations as to what information they could disclose to me. Also, it is possible that I could have conducted the interview in Spanish and maybe gotten different answers from a different perspective.

### **Research questions answered**

1. What is the impact of poverty and assimilation in Latino students’ academic success?

This research question is actually two questions, as I discovered in my final weeks of reflecting on the project, and so I will discuss each one separately.

It is noteworthy that neither president overtly discussed assimilation, and none of the questions in the interview used the term assimilation. For this reason, my thesis advisor and I discussed the silences at length. In feminist theory Nancy Miller, introduced the term muted voices to explain that some things, some words are hard to talk about, and assimilation is one of those. For some, like Richard Rodriguez who wrote *Aria: Memories of Bilingual Childhood*, assimilation meant that a personal loss



of language and culture led to a public gain of inclusion and education. In both cases, the presidents retained the heritage language with pride and facility.

At the same time, President Sanchez shows empathy for his parents who spoke little English stating, “I always wondered how my father got along coming as far north as he did in terms of negotiating contracts and what he would get paid for things because he didn’t speak English.” President Baldwin on the other hand, marveled at how her mother “spoke it with a heavy accent and never became a US citizen. She had a green card, but on the day she died, she died at 87, she was still a green card holder.” It seems to me that there is a muted story that President Baldwin chose not to tell me: why her mother never became a U.S. citizen. The fact is important enough for her to tell us three times but in different words:

- 1) She... never became a U.S. citizen.
- 2) She had a green card.
- 3) ...but on the day she died, she died at 87, she was still a green card holder.

This is called triple coding—saying the same thing in three different ways because it is so important. We do not infer from this that her English was not good enough to pass the citizenship test because President Baldwin stated only that she “spoke with a heavy accent.”

It seemed that in their home the Baldwins created an ideal environment to ensure bilingualism and biculturalism: diglossia in which the children spoke to the father in English and to the mother in Spanish, even though both parents spoke both languages. It is not clear however, if this decision was conscious or just a natural way to communicate at home.

While President Baldwin talks about gender identity in overt ways, she does not talk about ethnic identity overly, and for that reason the term assimilation never comes up. Out of respect for President Baldwin's privacy, I did not ask why her mother chose not to become a U.S. citizen. While Dr. Sanchez does not discuss assimilation, he does disclose his parents' status. He said "he [his father] eventually became a green card carrier where they were allowed to stay in this country, but you had to go to immigration every year to renew your green card. My mother finally became a citizen, maybe when she was in her early 60's. The expectation was always that they would eventually go back to Mexico." It seems that both of his parents decided to make the U.S. their permanent home when they were older, but out of respect for his privacy, I did not ask why they chose not to get their citizenship earlier in life and why they made the various decisions they did.

- 4) How can schools and teachers support Latino students' completion of high school and attainment of higher education?

Richard Sagor (2008) explains that

Students are motivated to put forth their best effort when they have faith in the future and themselves. He adds that students elect to do well in school out of a firm belief that getting good grades will lead to admission to a selective college, which will lead to a happy adult life. We might wonder why this calculation isn't convincing for all students. Why aren't they buying in? The reason is simple:

Investing today for a payoff tomorrow requires believing in your future" (p. 27).

In other words, motivation requires optimism. But for some students of color having optimism (and faith) is not easy because when we look around, we are not necessarily

surrounded by success—at least not academic success. In fact, “if children see despair around them, it’s likely that they will fear that this represents their destiny. Many children simply have no good reason to expect tomorrow to be any better than today” (p. 28). However, Sagor explains that “two key variables are the building blocks of optimism: faith and efficacy.” Faith is something teachers can foster by helping students to look outside of their current situations by exposing them to educational experiences and role models who give them “proof” of what could be.

Moreover, Sagor adds that “it takes more than faith to commit to a difficult pursuit. Optimistic people have the fortitude to persevere with complex tasks because they are confident that if they work long and hard enough and apply enough creativity, they will, in fact, succeed” (p.28). This is why it is important to provide students from all backgrounds and language abilities with a rigorous education that prepares them for college. In fact, giving students an education where they can clearly see will help them in their future career will help them feel more optimistic of their abilities and their future. He recommends that “every day as students leave our classrooms we need to ask ourselves two questions: As a result of today's experience, will these students be more or less confident that their futures are bright? Will students walk out of the classroom feeling more capable than when they walked in?” (p. 31). This will allow for teachers to be reflective in the purpose of their lessons.

- 5) What can younger generations learn from reading about the journey of two successful university presidents who overcame economic and academic challenges?

Interviewing these Latino presidents gave me hope, and made me optimistic about the future, and it gave me proof that it is possible to achieve one's goals. It also taught me some necessary skills a person needs to get to where he or she wants to be. I learned that these presidents are regular people, and that they achieved their goals with discipline, practice, effort, and dedication. I also learned that they have a sense of self, and they stay true to their values and their beliefs with a sense of pride and honor. As I mention earlier in this chapter, students need to know stories like this, stories from people who share the same struggles, and yet they have succeeded.

- 6) In what ways have these two presidents' families supported them on their way to success?

The president's families made a significant contribution to their success as it was explained earlier in this chapter under parental support.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Both of my participants were bilingual, yet the interview was done in English. The recommendation is to give participants a language choice. I forgot to give them the option to switch to Spanish if they wished.

Future researchers might also interview other successful Latinos across a variety of professions to help children know that they have many options for careers, such as the following:

- 1) Psychology
- 2) Social Work

- 3) Educational Administration, K-12
- 4) Health Care
- 5) Government
- 6) Business
- 7) Sciences

Additionally, students need to know that it is possible to reach the goal you want and be successful in a career. They need to know that they will have proof there is a chance to succeed. Also, we need to teach minority students to have faith and be optimistic because even though they may not know anyone who has done that before, they need have faith and confidence in their abilities and commit to their goals.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this project, I started researching with the assumption that Latino/a students were not doing what they needed to do to get ahead. I was assuming that they were not putting enough effort into realizing their dreams. I was puzzled as to why only 76% of Latinos/as graduate and why others decide to drop out of high school and not to go to college. In retrospect, I realize I should not have been “puzzled” because I am the only one in my family who has graduated college. Latinos/as do want to go to college and have the aspirations, but many are not prepared and do not have the family support they need to be successful. Additionally, the lack of role models within the educational system has made them lose hope and lose the optimism and drive needed to succeed.

As I learned about the many challenges Latino students face and the prejudice that it still exists (especially against students of Mexican descent), I understood part of the problem lies on each individual. Often we do not have control over poverty or discrimination, but we do have control over the values we hold, the sacrifice we make, the friends we have, and the dedication we put into a particular goal. Often, students come with a great number of educational gaps as Mr. Sanchez did when he was in school, but he knew himself. He said, “I knew my deficiencies,” so he planned accordingly to get ahead. Most often, people in need focus on the negative, when in reality what they need is to focus on the positive. These presidents saw obstacles as challenges, as one more thing they needed to do to get to the next level. They asked themselves, “What do I

need to do to get to where I want to be?” To succeed, you need to be resilient, to have optimism, to have supportive people around, and to plan ahead. Most importantly, you need to believe in your own abilities and know that as Dr. Baldwin said, “nobody defines you, you define yourself.”

## **Final reflections**

### **What I learned through the writing process**

As I embarked on my teaching career in ESL at Pasco High School, I put all of my energy and focus on my students and my daily teaching, trying to teach the mainstream curriculum to intermediate ESL high school students while insuring they were acquiring English. For three years, I have been differentiating instruction to provide scaffolding while introducing *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. During these early years of my career, I set the thesis aside except for summers, though I had already collected and transcribed the interviews while searching the literature for studies about successful Latino role models. This was a three-year germination period where the presidents’ words and lived experiences were always on my mind as I read books such as Supreme Court Judge, Sonia Sotomayor’s memoir, *My Beloved World*, from which I learned about her community of origin, Puerto Rico, and her path to success. I also read *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love and Life* by Henry Cloud. One of the most important lessons I learned was that in order to complete a big task, such as learning a language or writing a thesis, we must work a little bit every day. Otherwise, the task becomes overwhelming, and we just want to give up. The presidents’ lives reminded me that if they were able to find a way to

achieve their goals, I could too. Quite unexpectedly, they actually became my role models and gave me hope during times of self doubt, which many first-generation college students like me experience.

Finally, I am thankful I spoke with these individuals because beyond their successful careers, they are wonderful people, and they represent our Latino culture. This is why it is important students learn about people like them. We, as a culture, don't need anyone to come rescue us. There is no need to feel like victims of anyone, but rather celebrate who we are, take responsibility for ourselves, be optimistic, plan where we want to be, and work hard for what we deserve because as one of my interviewees said, "You don't define me. I define myself."

### **What I learned about myself as a Latina**

From the two individuals I interviewed, I learned that they did not focus on obstacles. They focused on their goals. One of my research questions in Chapter 1 was about the impact of poverty on Latino students, and although finding resources is a problem for many students, I learned that these individuals always found a way. They prepared and worked hard for what they wanted to accomplish. Both of these presidents knew their families would not be able to give them the money they needed to complete school, so they maintained good grades, made connections with key individuals, and found the resources needed to get where they wanted to be. Furthermore, they constantly set new goals and stayed open to opportunities coming their way. Neither president said from the beginning, he or she wanted to be a president of a university or college, but when the opportunity came to both of them, they were prepared and they were not afraid to take the chance.



At the same time, both presidents emphasized that their parents were hard workers and disciplined. Their parents' had a firm belief in their abilities to succeed. Both came from intact families that, I believe, contributed to their sense of well being and security at home. Conversely, when I started this research, I resented my family for not giving me the guidance I needed to succeed. In some ways, I felt disappointed with my parents for putting me and my brothers and sisters through experiences, such as poverty, chaos, and instability that I would rather have not experienced. I resented being uprooted from my safe place of birth—Costa Rica—and brought to a place where I was discriminated against and devalued, North Idaho—well known as a region where white supremacy is taught openly.

As I explained in Chapter 1, the isolation I experienced the first years in the United States was not easy for a sixteen-year-old, but I did not know myself well enough to understand that the hate or prejudice some people felt towards me was out of my control. I did not need to take it to heart, and most importantly, I should never have accepted their views that I was inferior to them somehow and let it affect me the way it did. Although it is true that my life could have been easier if my parents had been educated and stable, I would not be the person I am today without those experiences. To her credit, my mother did everything she could to provide for me and my six siblings, and she left her homeland, so we would have more opportunities in the United States than in Costa Rica. Through this journey to a new land, I learned that both my mother and I were resilient in many ways (Pipher, 2002), and her hard work inspired me to always make my dreams come true. In fact, I fondly recall the words she wrote in my yearbook, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, "*Realiza tus sueños.*"

Finally and perhaps most importantly, I learned from the two presidents I interviewed that Latino families, even without a lot of education, can provide students with an abundance of support. For that, I cannot be anything but thankful for the good fortune of having good parents who believed in me. Additionally, I learned that, contrary to the *telenovelas* or soap operas in Telemundo, success is the result of dedication, effort, and faith in your own abilities. Dr. Baldwin said that [you have to have] “discipline to stay with it because success doesn’t come immediately.” (Dasgupta (2004) described role models as individual actors who, through their high achievement, inspire and buffer the efficacy and belonging of people under threat (as cited in Manke, 2011, p. 277). I feel that stories from successful people, like these two presidents, helped to inspire me, and they will inspire my own students when I share their stories with them.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Academic Achievement and Challenges Among Hispanics:  
A Double Case Study at the University Level

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by:

<b>Principal Investigator</b> Sara Aymerich Leiva, M.A. Candidate in English 8825 West Campus Drive, Spokane, WA 99224 509-953-1472 sara.aymerich@gmail.com	<b>Responsible Project Investigator</b> Dr. LaVona Reeves, Director of MA-TESL Program at EWU Reid School 158A Tel: (509) 359-7060 E-mail: <a href="mailto:lreeves@mail.ewu.edu">lreeves@mail.ewu.edu</a>
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**Purpose and Benefits** : The purpose of this study is to investigate your academic achievement as a person of Hispanic heritage in order to provide role models for younger Hispanics and other ethnic minorities in the United States. The project is being done to complete Leiva’s master’s thesis in the Department of English at Eastern Washington University.

**Procedures**: You are being asked to participate in a tape-recorded interview related to your home life, school life, languages, culture, and academic achievement. It will take about one hour.

**Risk, Stress or Discomfort** : The risks of participating in this study are not expected to exceed those encountered in daily life. There is a copy of the questions attached here (Appendix A). If you decide to participate, you may choose to skip or not answer some of the questions listed here and/or follow-up questions not listed here.

**Other Information** : Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The interviews will not be anonymous, but the data collected will be kept confidential if you choose not to give Leiva permission to use your name in the thesis. If, at any time, you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Ruth Galm, EWU’s Human Protections Administrator, at (509) 359-7971 or [rgalm@mail.ewu.edu](mailto:rgalm@mail.ewu.edu).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sara Aymerich Leiva

Primary Investigator’s Name                              Signature                              Date

The study described above has been explained to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this from. I understand I will receive a copy of this signed consent form. I also understand that (1) Sara Leiva will provide me with a draft of the written transcript for my approval and that (2) I can request changes and/or omissions prior to the submission of the final draft.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s signature                              Participant’s name printed in English                              Date

**I give Sara Leiva permission to use my name in her thesis. Circle and initial one.**

**Yes**                              **No**



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

1. Tell us about your parents? For example, place of birth, their home language, and/or level of education. What messages did you get from your parents or grandparents that helped you become a successful person? Feel free to tell us your story in English or Spanish. You may use the exact words they told you.
2. Where were you born?
3. Do you have siblings? Male/female? Are they also successful like you?
4. Tell us about your experience in elementary school?
5. Did you speak English or Spanish before you went to school?
6. At what age did you start learning English or Spanish?
7. Did you study your heritage language in school?

#### Middle School and High School Experience

8. Tell us about your educational experience in high school?
9. Many students have a difficult time completing high school due to financial, social, cultural, emotional, and academic difficulties. Did you experience any of these types of challenges? What or who provided you with support in these areas?
  - a. Financial: Did you have difficulties getting money for lunch, buying books, attending school events, buying nice clothes or transportation to school, etc?
  - b. Social: Who were your best friends and what did you have in common with them? Did you grow up in a community where there was linguistic, ethnic, and/or racial diversity? What kind of activities did you do with your friends? Are you still friends with them and did they also become successful.
  - c. Cultural: Tell us about some of your values and beliefs and were those reinforced in the school. Did they come mainly from your family, school, church, and/or friends?
  - d. Academic: What kind of student were you in high school?
    - i. Did you have difficulty with teachers, homework, completing classes, attending school, understanding assignments?
    - ii. Who helped you if you had trouble completing assignments?
    - iii. On a scale 1-10 what were your expectations for yourself?
    - iv. On a scale 1-10 what were your parents' expectations for you academically?
    - v. And your teachers?
10. At this age, did you know what career you wanted to pursue after high school?
11. To whom or what do you attribute your success in completing high school?

#### College/University Experience

12. Why did you decided to attend college?
13. What college did you attend?
14. What obstacles did you encounter in college?
  - a. Financial: How did you pay for college?
  - b. Social: what kind of relationships helped you get through college?
  - c. Cultural: How did you adjust to life in college? What values seem to be emphasized in the university and were they consistent with your own values and your upbringing? Academic: Did you feel high school prepared well for college? Who helped you when you were having difficulty with homework, tests, assignments, etc? What did you do to overcome difficulties? Did your teachers treat you with respect? Did you feel teachers had high expectations for you?
  - d. Emotional: Did you have someone who helped you when you experienced any failure in college? What motivated you to keep going instead of quitting? What or who helped you overcome the challenges in college? Did you have any mentors?
15. Who were your role models while going to college?
16. Did you get married in college?
17. Are you married? What role did your spouse play in terms of your success?
18. In language acquisition we speak of language dominance. What was your dominant academic language?

#### Higher Education

19. After getting your BA, MA, why did you decide to continue your education?
20. Did you have a family while pursuing your graduate education?
21. Did you work? What kinds of jobs have you done?
22. Take some time to reflect on your successes, and tell us how you think you got from there to here? Is there a secret to your success that you want to share with young people today here in Washington where we have such a high dropout rate?
23. Describe what kind of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) helped you come to this point in such a successful career? Did you feel you had to give anything up to arrive at this point? If so, what?
24. Of all your accomplishments, of what do you feel the most proud of in your career or personal life?
25. What would you say to Hispanic students or any students who are going to college but are not sure if it is worth it and are not sure how to overcome the challenges?
26. What more can we in our state do to help these students stay to finish high school and finish college?

## Appendix H

Sara Aymerich Leiva

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✉ Sara.Aymerich@gmail.com

### Education & Certificates

**MA-English with an emphasis in TESOL:** anticipated August 2014

Thesis: A Double Case Study of Latino College Presidents: What Younger Generations Can Learn From Them

Chair: Dr. LaVona Reeves

Committee: Dr. Tracy McHenry & Chiu-Hsin Lin

**BA-English Education:** June 2008

**BA- Spanish:** June 2008

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Teaching English to as a Second Language minor

**Washington State Teaching Certificate K-12:** English as a Second Language, Spanish, and English Language Arts.

### Summary

- Four years of experience teaching high school students grades 9-12
- Collection of Evidence Teacher for Reading and Writing
- Bilingual in Spanish and English
- Knowledge of a wide variety of learning models and teaching strategies
  - GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design)
  - Differentiated Instruction
  - Understanding by Design
- Excellent interpersonal communication skills

### Teaching Experience

**English Language Development:** August 2010-present

*Pasco Senior High School, Pasco, WA*

#### **Beginning and Intermediate English Language Development**

- Teach integrated English skills to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders centered on themes of coming of age, drama, poetry, and current events.
- Planned and implemented lessons for language learners according to curriculum and ELL State Standards.
- Established classroom procedures conducive to a positive learning environment to the needs of students.

- Emphasized collaboration through small group activities and peer review.

**Collection of Evidence (Reading and Writing)**

- Teach exposition, narrative, and argument, including a variety of writing forms such as informal daily journaling, friendly letters, and business letters.
- Conferenced one-on-one with students on how to improve writing.
- Students submitted their electronic binders with a 100% success rate.

**Reading Teacher- Read Right™ Program: June 2005-August 2010**

*Community Colleges of Spokane, Spokane, WA*

**Institute for Extended Learning**

- Administered entrance interviews and exit reading assessments.
- Focused on developing students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills.

**Student Teacher: January-June 2008**

*Lewis and Clark High School, Spokane, WA*

- Developed and implemented lesson plans for first-year Spanish learners using the textbook *Juntos*
- Developed and taught unit plans for Advanced Language Learners using the novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

**Activities**

Soccer, mountain biking, swimming, reading, foreign films, and traveling

Additional Experience Available Upon Request