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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Empathic Empowerment: Supporting Latina/o First-Generation College-Bound Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Beverly Prange

Committee in charge:

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2013

The Dissertation of Beverly Prange is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University San Marcos

2013

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, Norman Prange, who was a beloved teacher to many. My dad died on October 3, 2009, the same day I learned of my acceptance to the Joint Doctoral Program. He inspired me by his example of empathic understanding for his students, in his 37 years as Professor of English as Second Language at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio. He loved and learned from his students, whose stories, struggles, and successes touched him and guided his teaching.

I have experienced great sadness at times during the past three years not being able to share this dissertation journey with my father.

The way of being with another person which is termed empathic has several facets. It means entering into the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensings of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. You are a confident companion to the person in his/her inner world. By pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of his/her experiencing you help the person to focus on this useful type of referent, to experience the meanings more fully, and to move forward in the experiencing.

To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice. In some sense it means that you lay aside yourself and this can only be done by a person who is secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and can comfortably return to his own world when he wishes.

Perhaps this description makes clear that being empathic is a complex, demanding, strong, yet subtle and gentle way of being.

Carl Rogers, 1975

One week before my twenty-second birthday, I arrived in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas to begin work as a bilingual prekindergarten teacher. The rural border town of Donna was as unfamiliar to me as a foreign country. On my first day in the classroom, I encountered 36 four-year-old faces: some sad, some excited, some terrified. I alone was responsible for their first schooling experience. I quickly realized that in order to teach my tiny students, I needed to understand where they were coming from. Driving down dirt roads through unincorporated *colonias*, I set out to meet the parents who faithfully put their babies on school buses every morning. From this rocky start through the past twenty years working in education, the students and families I work with have taught me that asking questions, listening, and perceptive taking are the foundation for all teaching and learning.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would never have made it through this journey without the support of my wonderful Joint Doctoral Program colleagues, Joel Garcia and Domenica Pearl. From reading drafts of literature reviews, APA and formatting help, keeping each other awake in class, meals together, to all those phone calls, their support and friendship helped sustain me mentally and emotionally through a challenging process.

My dissertation committee members guided me every step of the way. Dr. Mark Baldwin, the chair of my committee, has been the "cooler head" throughout this process, helping keep me focused on the goal, and reminding me to breathe. Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter's warm encouragement and careful eye have been invaluable. Dr. Alan Daly always pushes me to go one step further, and reminds me to ask, "what does it mean?"

I also wish to thank the many dedicated educators at California State University San Marcos who were so welcoming, supportive, and instrumental in helping me complete my research. I am grateful to Dr. Lorena Meza, Associate Vice President of Student Academic Support Services, Andres Favela, Director of Undergraduate Advising Services and Equal Opportunity Program, Norma Larios, EOP Coordinator, Guillermo Castillo, Mini-Corps Coordinator, Minerva Gonzalez, CAMP Director, and Marylou Gonzalez, CAMP Academic Advisor.

This research would not have been possible without the participation of the bright and inspiring students who graciously completed the survey and answered my interview questions and emails. Their stories of perseverance helped keep me focused on the ultimate objective of my research and career: improving educational equity and access for Latina/o students.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Empathic Empowerment: Supporting Latina/o First-Generation College-Bound Students

by

Beverly Prange

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2013
California State University San Marcos, 2013

Mark Baldwin, Chair

There is a significant achievement gap for Latina/o students, evidenced by low rates of high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary education. This dissertation summarizes literature on factors that promote academic success for Latina/o student's success employing two theoretical perspectives: resiliency and social capital. Research in these areas points to the significance of supportive relationships with educators to fostering academic success for students from underserved populations. Nevertheless, many students from Latino backgrounds report a lack of caring relationships with adults at school. Empathy has been identified as a foundational element of human relationships and essential for caring and cultural sensitivity. This study defines empathy, and suggests that educator empathy is essential to creating supportive relationships between Latina/o students and teachers, administrators, and other school personnel. A mixed-method study explored the attitudes and behaviors of educators who demonstrate empathic understanding for students in order to learn what is

needed to replicate and spread empathic attitudes and behaviors in the school

environment. Findings from this study suggest that Latina/o first-generation college-

bound students perceive supportive high school educators as empathic and non-

judgmental. Analysis of student and educator descriptions of supportive relationships

reveals six thematic clusters: relationship building, perspective taking, cultural empathy,

high expectations, undocumented students, and organizational context. These findings

suggest a conceptual model showing how educator competencies and organizational

context can support or constrain empathic relationship building in schools.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Latino students are a large and fast-growing segment of students in United States public schools, and now comprise the majority of students attending public school in California (Kane, 2010). These students are less likely to graduate high school and matriculate at colleges and universities at lower rates compared to their non-Latino peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For example, in 2009, 31% of 25 to 29-year-old Hispanic[1] adults in the United States had not earned a high school diploma or GED, compared to 11% of all 25 to 29 year-olds and 5% of white adults in the same age range. In 2008, 26% of 18 to 24-year-old Hispanic youth were enrolled in degree-granting schools, compared to 40% of all students and 44% of white students. For students who had completed high school, 37% of Hispanic students compared to 47% of all students and 49% of white students were enrolled in post-secondary programs.

The achievement gap for Latina/o students has many causes. Factors contributing to the difference in outcomes include poverty, low parental educational levels, language barriers, discrimination, and an educational system that perpetuates vast disparities in resources between communities of color and white communities. Research focusing on factors promoting academic success for Latina/o students suggests several elements that are essential for helping improve educational attainment for this historically underserved group. These include increasing participation in preschool programs; improving teachers' cultural competence; providing college access programs; and effectively engaging parents (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). A common theme of

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[1] Although the term "Hispanic" is not optimal, it is used here because this is the descriptor used by the U.S. Department of Education.

literature on Latina/o student success is the importance of supportive relationships with educators in the lives of Latina/o students (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006; Alva, 1991; Gándara, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Further exploration may assist practitioners in better understanding the characteristics of educators who are skilled at providing support to Latina/o students who will be the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. This study serves to bridge the goal of fostering academic resiliency in students with the abilities and attitudes educators must develop in order to achieve that objective. The research guiding this study looks at academic success for Latina/o students through the theoretical frameworks of resiliency and social capital. The literature provides evidence of the need for school personnel who are skilled at offering supportive interpersonal relationships to students. Both resiliency research and social capital literature point to the utility of relationships for increasing student motivation, engagement, achievement, and graduation rates (Alva, 1991; Cooper, 2002; Gándara, 2002; Wentzel, 1997). In addition, studies and theoretical literature in psychology and education point to the need for *empathy* in schools (Noddings, 2005; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). This study explored the possibility that educator empathy may help improve the educational achievement of Latina/o students by building the conditions for resilience and promoting access to resources through social capital.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the supportive relationships between would-be first-generation college students and adults in the high school setting. These supportive educators included counselors, teachers, and classified staff. This research looked closely

at supportive relationships to identify the characteristics, dispositions, and behaviors of school adults who successfully offer empathic understanding and support to Latina/o students who are striving to be the first in their families to graduate from high school and attend college.

This mixed methods study explored the types of relational support educators provide to Latina/o high school students who will be the first in their families to achieve high school graduation and college matriculation. A transformative methodological design (Mertens, 2008) was used in which resilience, social capital, and empathy provided an overarching conceptual framework for the study. Research based on resiliency theory and social capital theory offers evidence that relationships with supportive adults are important to the academic success of underserved demographic groups (Benard, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Meanwhile, literature on empathy suggests this disposition is essential to educators' ability to relate to students (Cooper, 2002; Rogers, 1969). The study included both quantitative and qualitative data gathered sequentially. The quantitative data was used to test the theory that successful Latina/o students often received relational support from at least one educator at their high school, and that educator empathy is an essential component of such relationships. The qualitative phase of the study explored the behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions of high school educators who offer support to Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

Research Question

The following research question and sub-questions were addressed:

1. In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

Quantitative Sub-Questions

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o students rate them on empathy?

Qualitative Sub-Questions

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

Sub-questions a-d were addressed in the quantitative phase of the study, while the second, qualitative phase addressed sub-questions e and f. Data from both phases were used to answer the final sub-question:

g) What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o students?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to help determine effective methods for gathering data regarding Latina/o first-generation college students' experiences of supportive school adults in high school. The researcher conducted focus groups and elicited written

responses from Latina/o, first-generation college students. In addition, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with students and educators. Analysis of data suggested the following emergent themes: cultural empathy, high expectations, empathic understanding, as well as the constraining effects of accountability pressure.

Research Methodology

This research followed a transformative mixed-method research design (Creswell, 2011). First, an online survey was administered. Subsequently, a phenomenological multi-method qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) was conducted to gather data regarding Latina/o first-generation college students' experiences of supportive school adults during high school. The researcher conducted an online survey of 184 first-generation college students to provide data regarding their experiences of supportive educators in high school, as well as their perceptions of these adults' level of empathy. The qualitative portion of the study included written responses to prompts, document analysis, and one-on-one interviews to elicit descriptions of supportive relationships between students and educators. This methodology was selected because first-hand reports of experience offer optimal data for learning studying human experience (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Quantitative methods. An online survey was administered to approximately 689 students participating in an Equal Opportunity Program at a public university in California. One hundred eighty-four students responded to the survey; of these, 141(76.6%) identified themselves as Latina/o. The survey provided data from a large sample regarding educators who support first-generation college-bound Latina/o students. In addition to demographic data, the survey addressed these sub-questions:

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship with a high school educator, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive supportive high school educators to be empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the high school educator matter in providing support to Latina/o first-generation college going students?

Question *c* was answered by asking questions based on the Jefferson Scale of Patients' Perceptions of Physician Empathy (Kane, Gotto, Mangione, West, & Hojat, 2007). This portion of the survey included 15 statements answered on a 5-point Likert scale intended to ascertain the patient's experience of a medical provider's empathy. The survey included statements such as: "This person can view things from my perspective (see things as I see them)" and "This person asks about what is happening in my daily life".

Survey data regarding students' perceptions of educator empathy helped to determine the degree to which empathic understanding is prevalent among educators who offer supportive relationships to students.

Qualitative methods.

Interviews. The researcher interviewed 22 undergraduate college students who are Latina/o and are the first in their families to graduate from high school and attend college. A criterion sample of students was identified from survey respondents who

indicated interest in being interviewed for the study. The researcher conducted interviews with twenty-two first- and second-year college students. Snowball sampling was used, as student participants referred the researcher to supportive educators from their high schools. Student participants identified adults at their high schools who provided crucial support. The researcher then sought out these supportive adults to learn more about how they work with students. Seven educators from five school districts were interviewed.

Written responses. College student participants received emails containing writing prompts asking them to recall and describe relationships with supportive educators during high school. Results from a pilot study as well as literature on phenomenological research design suggest this method of data collection may help participants remember past experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Definition of Terms

At-risk: Describes students who face risk factors such as low socioeconomic status, belonging to a historically underserved racial or ethnic group, or low parental educational levels.

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID): This program supports first-generation college-bound students through an elective course taken in middle and/or high school, tutoring, advising, college application assistance, and other supports.

Caring: A relationship between two people in which the person offering care is receptive to the other's experience and thinks about what the person needs.

Emotional Intelligence: Understanding and capacity related to self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill.

Empathy: Although empathy and caring are closely related, empathy is more active. A synthesis of definitions offered by Rogers (1975) and Cooper (2004) is used in this study:

> Empathy is the process of understanding others that in turn helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude; listening; working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.

Cultural Empathy: Caring about and working to understand another's perspective, with a focus on cultural factors.

Empathic/empathetic: Demonstrating empathy.

Empathic Understanding: Using perspective taking and putting oneself in another's shoes to understand that person. When empathic understanding occurs, the recipient feels acknowledged and understood.

First-generation College-bound: A student whose parents did not attend college.

First-generation High School Graduate: A student whose parents did not graduate from high school.

High-stakes Accountability: Describes the current climate in public education generated by legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, whereby schools face sanctions if student achievement on standardized tests does not reach required levels.

High School Educators: Teachers, counselors, administrators, classified staff, and para-professional staff who work at a high school.

Latina/o Student: A student of Latin American descent.

Historically Marginalized: Describes how Latina/o students and other underserved students have been treated as less important than their white peers by the educational system and other public institutions.

Mulitplex: Relationships in which educators provide multiple forms of support to students, acting variously as teachers, counselors, mentors, and caring friends.

Resiliency: The capacity of individuals to overcome difficult circumstances and thrive in spite of barriers such as marginalization, poverty, under-resourced schools, or high-crime neighborhoods. Resiliency is comprised of internal and external protective factors. Internal protective factors are defined as personal attributes, while external protective come from *outside* the resilient individual. External protective factors are grouped into three categories: caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for participation and contribution.

Academic Resiliency: Achieving academically in spite of risk factors such as poverty, under-resourced schools, unsafe communities, and discrimination.

Social Capital: Non-monetary benefits people obtain through relationships, providing them with resources they can use to accomplish their goals.

Underserved: Describes student populations in the United States who have not received the level of educational services afforded to white, middle- and upper-class students. This phenomenon has led to an achievement gap, whereby Latina/o, African-American, and Native American students experience significantly lower levels of academic achievement than their white peers.

Limitations

This work has certain limitations. For the quantitative portion of the study, the sample selected for the online survey was not representative of all Latina/o first-generation college students.

For the qualitative phase of the study, generalizability is limited, as is typically the case in phenomenological research. Although every attempt was made to choose a representative sample of participants, the sample size was limited to 22 college students and 7 high school educators; the stories of those individuals interviewed cannot encompass the breadth of experience of such a vast and heterogeneous population as Latina/o first-generation college students. Additionally, qualitative research is by nature subjective and influenced by researcher bias. The researcher's position in the community may entail bias, as she works directly with the population through her work in the Migrant Education Program.

To counteract these potential limitations, the researcher ensured that no students she currently works with participate in the study. Furthermore, the researcher used member validation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to ensure participants' perspectives were represented accurately.

Significance of the Study

Literature on successful Latina/o students suggests the primacy of supportive relationships with school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. A review of research from the areas of resiliency, social capital, and empathy supports this claim, yet fails to offer a detailed picture of school agents who offer such relationships to students from historically disadvantaged populations. Those who work in education know these adults; they seem to have a special gift for connecting with

students, as well as providing needed motivation, a listening ear, and a belief in students' ability to rise above difficulty and fulfill their potentials. An in-depth exploration into the relationships supportive school personnel build with students may help identify the specific skills, attitudes, and dispositions they possess. This work helps illuminate how empathy plays a role in offering needed support to students. Educator empathy merits further exploration as a critical component for closing the achievement gap, and preparing all students to realize their dreams, accomplish their goals, and contribute to society.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the problem of the achievement gap for Latina/o students, as well a rationale for and an overview of the proposed study. Chapter 2 will delve deeper into the literature on Latina/o academic success from the theoretical frameworks of resilience and social capital, as well as literature related to the construct of empathy. The three frameworks of resilience, social capital, and empathy will be tied together and presented as a proposed conceptual model at the beginning of Chapter 3. Chapter 3 will describe the proposed study design and methodology. In Chapter 4, results from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are presented. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the study, offering a discussion of findings. Research findings are used to expand the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 3. The new model is presented, along with suggestions for policy, practice, theory, and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

You know, there's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit - the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us...When you think like this - when you choose to broaden your ambit of concern and empathize with the plight of others, whether they are close friends or distant strangers - it becomes harder not to act; harder not to help.
(Barack Obama, Xavier University Commencement, August 11, 2006)

Introduction

There is a clear achievement gap for students from Latino backgrounds (Lopez, 2009). The literature offers several causes for this gap. Many students of Latina/o origin face risk factors such as poverty, limited English proficiency, low parental education levels, discrimination, and high mobility (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) which can negatively affect academic performance. Furthermore, schools themselves often reproduce an oppressive social structure, which impedes advancement (Bartolome, 1994; Campa, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In addition, many Latina/o students confront issues of poor teacher quality and low expectations (Contreras, 2011).

Often, research focuses on failure and its causes (Morales & Trotman, 2004), which is an important line of inquiry. However, in order to improve educational outcomes for Latina/o students, it is also useful to examine skills, experiences, and attributes of successful students. By focusing on elements that promote success, resiliency literature identifies and describes three clusters of protective environmental factors that help promote student academic success in spite of such difficulties. These factors are caring relationships with at least one adult, high expectations from adults, and opportunities to participate and contribute (Benard, 2003, Wang, Haertel, & Walberg,

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1998). All three of these clusters involve students' social interactions; hence, the primacy of relationships is one of the key elements of resilience theory.

This focus on relationships suggest the importance of "capital" in the form of social ties with significant adults that can help improve academic outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). This work has been conceptualized as *social capital*. In addition to resilience literature, studies in education which employ a social capital framework highlight the significance of supportive relationships with adults in schools to positively impacting school success among "at risk" youth (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Klem & Connell, 2004; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Although research has consistently shown supportive relationships with teachers, counselors and administrators to promote resilience (Alfaro, et al., 2006; Alva, 1991; Gándara, 2002), studies have not focused on describing in detail what attitudes and competencies school personnel must have in order to offer this essential experience to students. Some theoretical works propose how to set up schools based on caring (Noddings, 2005) and empathic understanding (Rogers, 1969), but there is a dearth of empirical research describing in detail supportive relationships between school personnel and resilient students. Rather, it is often assumed that once educators realize students who are at risk require a connection with and high expectations from an understanding, caring adult, they will automatically provide such a connection. Recent research in neuroscience shows our brains are designed for empathy, the basis for interpersonal relationships (Carr, L., Iacoboni, M., Dubeau, M. C., Mazziotta, J. C., & Lenzi, G. L., 2003; Gallese, 2001). Nevertheless, at present, rigid accountability measures focus educators' attention primarily on academic skills, rules and procedures. Meanwhile, a

growing community of scholars and practitioners are working to resuscitate the "heart" of education—and asserting that a *caring culture* must be the foundation for real growth and learning (Goleman, 2006; Noddings, 2005; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Stone, et al., 2005).

In an effort to close the gap between the aim of supportive school environments and the abilities needed to create such environments, this dissertation will bridge the goal of fostering academic resiliency in students with the skills and awareness educators must develop in order to achieve that objective. This literature review summarizes research on academic success for Latina/o students employing two principal theoretical frameworks: resiliency and social capital. Both bodies of literature point to the utility of relationships for increasing student motivation, engagement, achievement, and graduation rates (Alva, 1991; Cooper, 2002; Gándara, 2002; Wentzel, 1997). It is worth noting that researchers who approach the problem of improving educational outcomes for Latina/o students from different angles come to a similar conclusion: strong supportive relationships are fundamental to improving achievement for this and other historically disadvantaged populations. Knowing that relationships are key is the first step; understanding what skills, attitudes, and behaviors help create those relationships is a logical subsequent step. After laying out evidence of the need for school personnel who are skilled at offering supportive interpersonal relationships to students, a synthesis of studies and theoretical literature in psychology and education that point to the need for empathy in schools, is presented. Subsequently, empathy is defined and a case is made for the need to increase educator empathy in order to improve educational achievement of Latina/o students by building the conditions for resilience and promoting access to resources through social capital.

The Impact of Supportive Relationships with Educators

> *"…relations between adult and student, when they become genuinely*
> *supportive, carry the potential to transform a student's life chances in very*
> *positive and lasting ways."*
> (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p.162)

Resilience.

Supportive relationships. Resilience theory provides a strengths-based lens

through which to examine issues of inequity and underachievement of Latina/o students.

Researchers in the field of resilience have explored protective factors that promote

students' healthy development and success in the face of obstacles such as poverty,

minority status, discrimination, language barriers, and low levels of parental education

(Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993). Students considered *academically*

resilient are those who reach high levels of educational achievement and attainment in

spite of difficult and stressful circumstances (Alva, 1991; Morales & Trotman, 2004).

Evidence from research on academic resilience demonstrates that supportive relationships

between students and educators positively affect student achievement (Alfaro, et al.,

2006). Nevertheless, investigators acknowledge there is a dearth of detailed

understanding about the specific qualities, attitudes and behaviors of educators who are

able to offer such crucial relationships to students (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Over the course of the past three decades, resiliency researchers have sought to

identify and describe the processes by which young people overcome potential barriers to

healthy development and academic success. Studies indicate the presence of several

types of external protective factors that support children and adolescents, enabling them

to thrive in spite of risk factors such as discrimination, poverty, single parent families,

under-resourced schools, or high-crime neighborhoods. External protective factors can

be grouped into three main categories of experiences: caring relationships, high

expectations, and opportunities for participation and contribution (Benard, 2003; Wang,

et al., 1998).

Resiliency consists of the processes that enable individuals to overcome

significant difficulty in life and persevere despite obstacles. Resiliency scholars stress

that in order to be considered resilient a child must face significant risk factors (Bernard,

2003). In a landmark longitudinal study of all children born on the island of Kauai in

1955, researchers followed hundreds of children to learn about the developmental paths

of those exposed to various risk factors including poverty. Through this seminal research

spanning several decades, clusters of protective factors were identified, one of which is

supportive adult relationships: "Most of all, self-esteem and self-efficacy were promoted

through supportive relationships. The resilient youngsters in our study all had at least

one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally…" (Werner, 1993, p. 512).

Works of other prominent resiliency researchers corroborate the findings of the

Kauai study related to supportive adult relationships (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Masten,

2001; Rutter, 1987). Supportive personal relationships with caring adults at home and in

the community enhance self-efficacy (Rutter, 1987) and motivation (Masten, 2001).

Despite the risk factors of poverty, low parental educational level, and societal inequities,

some Latina/o students *do* achieve academic success. A closer look at the factors

influencing their resilience is warranted.

Resilience and Latina/o students. Researchers investigating factors impacting

academic success for students of Latina/o origin have been drawn to the strengths-based

focus of resiliency theory (Alva, 1991; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Gándara, 2002; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). A review of literature related to resiliency in Latina/o students shows supportive adult relationships to be a significant protective factor. Both qualitative and quantitative studies of successful Latina/o students demonstrate the importance of relationships with school personnel. These relationships are a significant factor in high school motivation (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009), high school grades (Alva, 1991), college matriculation (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004), and college retention (Zalaquett, 2006) of Latina/o students, as well as academic success of undocumented Latina/o students (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). A closer look at two studies offers insight regarding the importance of relationships with school adults to student success.

In a four-year comparative study of high school students enrolled in the Puente college-access program, Patricia Gándara and her colleagues (2002) found that many students not enrolled in Puente lacked relationships with supportive adults at school from whom they could obtain information and guidance regarding future goals. For this evaluation, researchers compared 1000 students participating in the Puente program to 1000 students not in Puente from 18 high schools throughout California. The study involved collecting baseline data for the two groups of students, and then following both cohorts throughout their high school careers in order to compare outcomes in terms of academic success, college application, and attitudes. Puente students' connections with program teachers and counselors proved invaluable in helping them persevere in high school, graduate, complete college entrance requirements, and obtain college admission (Gándara, 2002). While the Puente study focused on Latina/o high school students,

another study of resilience explored the experiences of African-American and Latina/o college students, and emphasized the interplay of protective factors that contributed to their academic success.

A recent qualitative study consisted of interviews with 20 Hispanic and 30 African-American college students from low-income backgrounds (Morales, 2010). Evidence from qualitative research focusing on students from at risk backgrounds who have achieved an academic milestone such as college enrollment is useful for increasing our understanding of protective factors. Using a resiliency framework, Morales sought to determine the protective factors these resilient students had in common, and to better understand how those factors work together to promote student success. He identified several protective factors the respondents shared. One cluster of factors speaks to the importance of academic mentoring relationships and includes: a desire to move up in social class; caring school personnel; a sense of responsibility to one's racial/ethnic group; and a motivation to create a better future. Morales highlighted the interplay among these four protective factors, noting that 67% of students in the study reported experiencing a combination of all 4 factors. These findings are especially significant because several participants in Morales' investigation pinpointed adults at school as crucial sources of support and motivation. During interviews, respondents used the terms "empathetic" and "encouraging" to describe these significant teachers, counselors and administrators. Furthermore, Morales noted the importance of school agents' perspective taking when mentoring students of color from low-socioeconomic status backgrounds.

In addition to resiliency theory, the field of educational sociology provides another useful perspective for understanding the importance of these connections

between school personnel and historically marginalized youth. Whereas resilience research has its roots in psychology, the field of social capital emerged from sociology, and focuses on how each individual's experience takes place within a network of relational ties. Similar to resiliency research, social capital researchers also highlight the importance of relationships. Contributions from social capital literature provide further information about academic success for Latina/o students.

Social capital.

Social capital in education. Social capital is defined as the non-monetary benefits people obtain through relationships, providing participants in those relationships with resources they can use to accomplish their goals (Coleman, 1988). In the educational context, students' experience of social capital can either support or constrain their access to assets such as information, resources, and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986). Among the significant interpersonal ties studied by social capital researchers are the supportive adult relationships—including those with school personnel—that can help a student succeed (Muller, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). At the same time, employing a social capital lens can illuminate how school structure and culture tends to reproduce societal inequities in access to resources, disenfranchising students of color (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). On the other hand, schools have the potential to enhance students' access to social capital by acknowledging the inequity inherent in our educational system and by recognizing and valuing the "funds of knowledge" present in historically marginalized communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). Taking into account these funds of knowledge—the rich expertise and skill students acquire from their home

environments—requires that educators develop an understanding of students'
perspectives, including their values and experiences. Developing this understanding
requires that educators adopt an empathic attitude (Trumbull, 2001).

One example of educators adopting such an empathic disposition comes from a
qualitative study of students in a Migrant Education Program (MEP), where researchers
found the "holistic" nature of Migrant students' relationships with their MEP advisors
and teachers was important to their success in high school and pursuit of post-secondary
education (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). In addition to acting variously as teachers,
counselors, social workers, mentors and friends to students, these school advisors or
"institutional agents" provided access to essential social networks for students from a
historically marginalized population.

Social capital derived from relationships with school agents helps prevent
students from dropping out of high school, and the more risk factors students have, the
more benefit they derive from supportive relationships with teachers (Croninger & Lee,
2001). Data from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study show that
supportive relationships with adults at school facilitated higher engagement and
achievement in school among recent immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin,
2009). Similarly, recent research linked teacher support to engagement in school
(Woolley & Bowen, 2007), academic motivation (Alfaro et al., 2006) and to student
achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Furthermore, social support from families as well
as school agents is a protective factor against the negative effects of discrimination
(DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). Due to their ability to increase students' access to
networks, information, and resources, school agents have a unique capacity to offer

significant, empowering relationships to students from historically oppressed groups. This type of educator was recently conceptualized as an "empowerment agent", describing a school adult who goes beyond helping increase students' social capital to supporting students to effect real, positive change in the world (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Researchers have used quantitative methods to explore the impact of school-based social capital on students considered at risk (Klem & Connell, 2004; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). In one such study, Woolley and Bowen (2007) administered the School Success Profile, a self-report 220-question survey measuring risk and protective factors, to investigate the connection between adult support and school engagement of middle school students. Their study included over 9000 at-risk middle school students in 51 schools in five states. The researchers found that supportive adult relationships helped to mitigate risk factors, especially for males and minority students. Based on their findings, Woolley and Bowen prescribed policy and practice changes to increase supportive adult relationships in the lives of students, particularly at school (Woolley & Bowen, 2007). The results of this study echo those of other investigations, such as one study of 4276 elementary and middle school students, which showed a link between teacher support and student engagement and achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). While this research focused on at-risk students generally, other studies have investigated social capital of Latina/o students specifically.

Social capital and Latina/o students. The social capital lens is especially applicable to exploring protective factors for Latina/o youth due to the nature of Latina/o culture (Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). For example, Latino culture tends to be more collectivistic than European-American culture, emphasizing the importance of

interpersonal and group relations (Trumbull, 2001). Furthermore, the Latino value of *educación* "refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). Finally, the construct of *confianza en confianza,* "trust in trust", describes relationships characterized by a high degree of intimacy and mutual trust often valued in Latino families (Ream, 2005).

A mixed methods study sought to describe and understand the social networks of Mexican-American youth in poor neighborhoods in California (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Using interviews, social network analysis, and survey data, Stanton-Salazar developed a nuanced picture of these students' social landscape described in his book, *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth* (2001). Stanton-Salazar described students' need for multiplex relationships with school personnel, but noted these relationships are the exception not the norm. *Multiplex* describes relationships that impart multiple forms of support to students—similar to the way Migrant Education Program advisors described the multiple hats they wear with students. Such relationships are key, yet rare, in part because they require a high degree of trust, and because schools are not structured to nurture such supportive ties (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

These types of supportive connections with educators are clearly a foundational necessity for students to rise above difficult circumstances, fulfill their potentials, and prosper in today's complex world. Nevertheless, many students, especially students from historically underserved demographic groups, report they do not encounter supportive adults at school (Noddings, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). For example, results from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), show that fewer Hispanic/Latina/o students

experienced high levels of caring from adults at school compared to students from other racial and ethnic groups (WestEd, 2010). This disparity between the proven need for caring relationships and the lack thereof prompts an exploration of the skills educators must have in order to create these connections. Scholarship in the field of psychology points to *empathy* as an essential building block for interpersonal relationships, and a promising direction for educational research (Hoffman, 2000; Rogers, 1975). In the next section, empathy will be explored as an essential starting place for ensuring historically underserved students gain access to strong ties with supportive administrators, teachers and counselors.

Empathy for Building Supportive Relationships at School

> *"Empathy is an essential skill for effective teaching and relationships with*
> *students as well as parents and colleagues."*
> (Brooks & Goldstein, 2008, p.121)

Defining empathy. The fundamental building block for connecting with another human being is empathy, described by Martin Hoffman (2000) in his seminal work as "the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible" (p.3) and as the root of both caring and justice. Empathy, "the sine qua non of all social effectiveness in working life" (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p.50), the ability and disposition to understand and care about others' perspectives, may be a critical element for achieving educational equity. A recent essay quoted a high school student who perhaps best articulated the relationship between empathy and equity: "If you want to get rid of the achievement gap…then you first have to get rid of the empathy gap" (Carter, 2009, p. 294).

The history of the concept empathy traces back to late 19th century Germany when Robert Vischer coined the term *einfühlung*, "feeling into", to describe his feeling when experiencing a work of art (Verducci, 2000). Psychologists later adopted the term to describe how we feel others' emotions as our own (Rifkin, 2009). Since the mid-20th century, researchers and theorists have explored empathy as a trait needed in order for those in the helping professions to build essential relationships with clients, patients, and students (Reynolds & Scott, 1999; Rogers, 1969). In the mid-1990's, using newly available imaging technology, neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons, leading to the assertion we are biologically hard-wired to be empathic (Carr et al., 2003; Gallese, 2001). Because mirror neurons enable us to connect with other human beings by understanding their emotions and experiences, these remarkable cells have been dubbed "Gandhi neurons" (Ramachandran, 2010). Even though our brains have evolved for empathy (Ramachandran, 2010) and children show empathic tendencies from an early age, each individual's capacity for empathic understanding is not fixed and can be developed (Hoffman, 2000; Rogers, 1975).

 Carl Rogers (1975) defined empathy as a process of understanding other people that in turn helps people understand themselves. Rogers, a psychotherapist who developed "person-centered" therapy, compared the therapist-patient relationship to the student-teacher relationship, asserting that both require empathic understanding. According to Rogers, empathy involves extended periods of listening; being non-judgmental; valuing and caring about the person as a human being; and "entering another's world without prejudice" (1975, p.3). Further, he asserts the importance of the client's perception of the therapist's empathy and acceptance. In his book *Freedom to*

Learn, Rogers (1969) applied his person-centered approach to education, introducing the term "learner-centered". With an exuberant and hopeful tone, Rogers described a humanized future of education where teachers are facilitators and students thrive because of caring, trusting, empathic relationships. Rogers based his prescriptions on empirical evidence from a large quantitative study of a teacher-training program designed to increase educator empathy, genuineness, and positive regard towards students. Results from this research linked these gains in teachers' interpersonal skills to improved academic outcomes (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977).

A meta-analysis of 119 studies of learner-centered approaches to education (Cornelius-White, 2007) sought to determine whether there is a correlation between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement as well as non-cognitive outcomes. The synthesis included studies of teacher variables characteristic of Roger's (1969) learner-centered approach; some included teacher empathy. The meta-analysis showed a strong correlation between empathic educators and positive behavioral and academic outcomes for students. These findings are especially significant, since this comprehensive review synthesized studies spanning five decades of research employing a variety of methods in different contexts.

As we have seen, empathy is a complex construct. For the present study, the following operational definition of empathy will be used, a synthesis of definitions offered by Rogers (1975), and Cooper (2004):

> Empathy is the process of understanding others that in turn helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude; listening; working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.

Measuring empathy. Empathy is a central component of the mindset teachers need in order to promote resilience in students (Brooks & Goldstein, 2008). Even though empathy is an individual attribute, it is most observable in social interactions. Interpersonal interactions are primary in the "helping professions" such as health care, education, and counseling. While not a frequent focus of educational research, empathy is considered by the medical profession to be a necessary trait for nurses, counselors, and doctors (Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 1998). Several scales have been developed for evaluating therapists', nurses' and doctors' empathy (Hojat, Gonnella, Nasca, Mangione, Vergare, & Magee (2002); Kane, et al., 2007; Mercer, Maxwell, Heaney, & Watt, 2004), and nursing and medical schools have long included empathy in training for medical professionals (AAMC, 1998).

Lessons learned from the field of medical education provide useful insights and guidance for examining empathy in the K-12 educational context. There is an ongoing conversation in the medical education literature about how to best measure and teach empathy to medical professionals. In a quantitative study of medical student empathy, researchers identified a troubling decrease in students' empathy during the course of medical school (Chen, Lew, Hershman, & Orlander, 2007); first year medical students tested higher on empathy than their fourth year counterparts. In light of the need for medical practitioners to understand and care about their patients' perspectives, research has focused on how to best train doctors to be empathic towards patients, finding that interventions such as workshops on interpersonal and communication skills can increase empathy in aspiring physicians (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006). In addition, medical educators developed tools for assessing doctors' levels of empathy towards patients, both

through self-report and from the patient's perspective (Kane et al., 2007; Mercer et al., 2004). This suggests empathy can be measured and increased in order to improve teachers', counselors' and administrators' relationship-building skills, a focus that could enhance educational outcomes for historically underserved students.

Initial measures of empathy developed by psychologists during the twentieth century tended to assess either the cognitive or the affective aspects of empathy. Those researchers whose definition of empathy emphasized the intellectual process of seeing another's point of view created assessments measuring this ability, while those defining empathy more as an emotional phenomenon developed tests of an individual's ability to experience vicariously another's feelings (Chlopan, McCain, Carbonell, & Hagen, 1985). More recently, empathy has come to be considered a process comprised of both thinking and feeling. This re-definition of empathy gave way to Davis's (1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which is now the most commonly accepted empathy measure. The IRI consists of 28 items covering four sub-scales of empathy: perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress (Davis, 1996).

Later, researchers developed the 20-item Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (Hojat, et al, 2001) based on Davis's IRI. This self-report measure was then modified to create the 5-item Jefferson Scale of Patient's Perceptions of Physician Empathy, which assesses patients' experience of doctors' empathy (Kane, et al., 2007).

Whereas medical research has focused on practitioner empathy specifically, education research related to Emotional Intelligence (EI) has focused on global measures of EI. In these global measures, empathy is one of several components comprising the construct of EI.

Decades of research in Emotional Intelligence provide guidance for assessing and improving empathy in educators and educational leaders. Numerous self-report assessments have been developed to measure EI in leaders; each assessment includes questions specifically related to empathy (Bar-On, Elias, & Maree, 2007). Furthermore, the California Health Kids Survey includes six items designed to measure whether students feel cared about at school (WestEd, 2010). Assessments measuring doctors' empathy from the patient's perspective (Kane, et al., 2007) could be modified to measure educator empathy. Training programs developed to increase social and emotional competence among adults in organizations and medical professionals can be applied to the educational leadership context. EI researchers stress that effective professional development for increasing EI consists primarily of experiential methods such as role-play, modeling, coaching, and discussion. Since improving emotional competence involves strengthening under-used neural pathways to change long ingrained habits, experts suggest training in EI should be on going over time (Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan, & Adler, 1998).

Empathy for improving equity. Daniel Goleman, one of the foremost authorities on emotional intelligence (EI), summarized EI using five categories: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (1998). Because it is the basis for human beings connecting with and understanding one another (Hoffman, 2000), empathy may be the most crucial of these elements for improving teaching and learning outcomes for historically underserved students in our schools. Martin Hoffman (2000), Professor of Psychology at New York University, has studied empathy and moral development for over four decades. In his book *Empathy and Moral Development:*

Implications for Caring and Justice, the culmination of his research, Hoffman concluded that the development of empathy is essential for a caring and just society. By recognizing the similarities in painful life experiences among all people, such as death and loss, we can increase our empathy for those from cultures and backgrounds other than our own, what Hoffman termed "universal empathy" (2000, p. 295). Hence, empathy can be used to combat oppression; relationships among different cultural groups can be built upon a desire to understand each other's perspectives (Davis, 1996; DeTurk, 2001; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Empathy, therefore, is a necessary part of cultural awareness and sensitivity (Goleman, 1998) and "in the growing global economy, empathy is a critical skill for…getting along with diverse workmates" (Goleman, et al., 2002, p. 50). Research on academic under-achievement of Latina/o students suggests the lack of cultural sensitivity towards and authentic caring for students negatively impacts school success (Valenzuela, 1999). It follows that in order to effectively serve the needs of students from diverse cultural, racial, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds, educators must have both the desire and capacity to understand and care about those they serve.

Caring and empathy. Existing literature related to students' experiences of educator empathy is scant, out of date, and largely theoretical, not empirical in nature. This dearth highlights a need to study and describe in detail the elements of supportive, empathic relationships educators form with at-risk students that promote academic resilience. Since a person's degree of empathy is best assessed by the recipient (Rogers, 1975; 1989), there is a need for further research on students' experiences of empathic relationships with school personnel. Although a review of the literature did not reveal studies of student perceptions of educator empathy, some empirical investigations have

been done in the area of students' perceptions of teacher *caring.* Although caring and empathy are not synonymous, these two constructs have much in common, particularly in their application to relationships between educators and students. Nel Noddings (2005), Professor Emerita of Education at Stanford University, elaborated the Care Theory of Education where she defined caring as a relationship between two people, in which the person offering care is receptive to the other's experience and thinks about what that person needs. Carl Rogers (1975) noted that both caring and empathy are essential for effective growth-enhancing relationships, whether between parent and child, client and therapist, or educator and student. Literature on both caring and empathy in education affirm the assertion that cognition and affect are both crucial to learning (Cooper, 2004; Vygotzky, 1986).

Empirical studies of caring in schools demonstrated increased motivation and achievement among middle school, high school, and college students' when they perceived their teachers as caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1996; Muller, 2001; Wentzel, 1997). In one study of students' perceptions of teacher caring, middle school students were asked to describe what caring teachers do (Wentzel, 1997). Students identified educator behaviors such as listening, paying attention, and talking about problems students may be experiencing, as well as the attributes of trust, honesty, and high expectations for their students.

Expectations. It is worth emphasizing that when educators truly *care* about students and their achievement, they also hold high expectations for all students (Contreras, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). This fact contradicts the common notion that an empathic, caring school environment is one where educators make excuses for or expect

less from certain students than from others based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. In the context of research about Latina/o students, this phenomenon of low teacher expectations has been referred to as *pobrecito ("*poor little thing") *syndrome* (Garcia, 1997). Far from originating from empathic understanding, low expectations for marginalized groups result from and perpetuate institutionalized racism and classism (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Rather, the genuinely empathic educator recognizes that caring *along with* academic rigor will best prepare students to succeed in life and work.

Empathy vs. sympathy. It is important to distinguish between empathy and sympathy. Although the concepts are related, empathy researchers are careful to define empathy as distinct from sympathy; the construct of empathy involves taking action, while sympathy is passive (Davis, 1994). As in the case of the *pobrecito* syndrome, sympathy alone can be detrimental to marginalized groups. Meanwhile, empathy may be a powerful tool for educational change.

Empathy for improving educational leadership.

> *"If a principal wants to create an emotional climate that 'lifts all boats',*
> *he or she must lead the group toward positive,*
> *empathetic social interactions."*
> (Goleman, 2006, p. 78)

The material covered here presents a critical issue for educational leaders, as they need to focus on ways to improve empathic relationships with—and thus, academic outcomes for—students of Latino descent. Among educators, the development of empathy may be *particularly* important for principals, assistant principals, and district administrators, as their attitudes and behaviors set the tone for the institutions they lead

(Goleman, 2006). Because empathy is a major component of emotional intelligence, the literature on emotionally intelligent leadership offers evidence for the importance of social and emotional competence among school leaders, as well as suggestions for professional development to build empathy.

Emotional intelligence is highly correlated with strong school leadership (Hackett & Hortman, 2008; Stone, Parker, & Wood, 2005; Wong, Wong & Peng, 2010), and empathy specifically is critical to building a positive organizational climate in schools (Yoder, 2005). Many studies have confirmed that students' EI correlates positively with academic performance (Bar-On et al., 2007; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, &Walberg, 2004), and teachers scoring high on EI report higher degrees of job satisfaction (Wong, et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the current policy focus on conformity and accountability may constrain empathic understanding in schools as these factors limit flexibility in the curriculum, learner-centered teaching, and reduce the amount of time educators have to concentrate on relationships with students (Cooper, 2004). Research suggests school leaders participate in professional development activities around improving such skills as self-awareness, flexibility, empathy and relationship building (Stone, et al., 2005).

Summary

> *"Nothing appears to be more important for helping underrepresented*
> *students navigate successfully through high school and into college than*
> *the formation of a strong relationship with a caring adult who truly knows*
> *the student"*
> (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.292).

Public educators have, perhaps unwittingly, cultivated a myth: a false dichotomy between high academic standards and an empathic school culture. This stance does a great disservice to young people—those from historically underserved groups in

particular—and ensures the persistence of egregious inequities in our educational system. As we have seen, research shows supportive, multiplex relationships with school personnel correlate with increases in both resilience and social capital for students, leading to improved academic outcomes (Bernard, 2003; Morales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 2011). Applying the frameworks of resiliency and social capital, studies suggest the importance of educators offering relationships to students based on empathic understanding. Because empathy means working to put ourselves "in another's shoes" and understand students' perspectives (Rogers, 1975), developing empathy in schools can help bridge cultural and social-status divides between school personnel and those they serve. Likewise, building empathic relationships between adults and students of Latino origin may give students access to needed social capital in the form of information, access to resources, and motivational support, while helping change structural inequities which persist in limiting educational access and social mobility for this large and growing group of students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Increasing empathy among teachers, counselors, and administrators in public schools holds promise for supporting Latina/o student success. Results from the California Healthy Kids Survey indicate that "supportive and caring connections to adults" at school are necessary for student success (Hanson & Austin, 2003). Such connections are especially important for students of Latino origin, due to cultural factors as well as patterns of inequity in schools, which have historically oppressed low-status groups (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The California Healthy Kids Survey, with its resiliency-focused research base, is a step towards gaining a better understanding of whether or not students experience school personnel as caring and

empathic. However, a deeper look is needed to gain a more detailed understanding of what adults in schools must do in order to cultivate such vital relationships with their students.

Literature on successful Latina/o students suggests the primacy of supportive relationships with school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. A review of research from the areas of resiliency, social capital, and empathy supports this claim, yet fails to offer a detailed picture of school agents who offer such relationships to students from historically disadvantaged populations. This study provides an in-depth exploration into the relationships supportive school personnel build with students to help identify the specific skills, attitudes, and awareness they possess. The present synthesis suggests empathic understanding among adults in schools may allow Latina/o students to benefit from supportive connections to school personnel. Educator empathy merits further exploration as a critical component for closing the achievement gap, and preparing all students to realize their dreams, accomplish their goals, and contribute to society

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

"The research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being…"
(Van Manen, 1990, p.6)

"The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience."
(Van Manen, 1990, p.62)

Introduction

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides evidence that supportive relationships with high school educators can be a significant protective factor and source of social capital for Latina/o students aspiring to be the first in their families to attend college. However, there is limited information about the nature of these supportive relationships, and the qualities, behaviors, and attitudes needed by educators in order to offer such relationships to Latina/o students. Meanwhile, literature on empathy suggests this quality may be a necessary foundation for administrators, teachers, counselors, and other school personnel to offer relational support to these students. The present chapter describes how the proposed study will explore the possibility that educator empathy can help improve the educational achievement of Latina/o students by building the conditions for resilience and promoting access to resources through social capital.

Research question. The overarching research question guiding this study is: In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

The quantitative phase of the study was designed to answer the following sub-questions:

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o students rate them on empathy?

These sub-questions were addressed in the qualitative phase of the research:

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

Finally, data from both phases of research were analyzed to answer this question:

g) What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o students?

A Proposed Integrated Model

Figure 3.1 ties together the research reviewed in chapter two. This conceptual model shows how the complimentary bodies of literature from resilience theory and social capital converge in pointing to the importance of supportive relationships with adults to the academic achievement of Latina/o students. This integrated model also shows how empathy, an essential element for building such relationships, is central to promoting students' resiliency and social capital—and, in kind, their success in school.
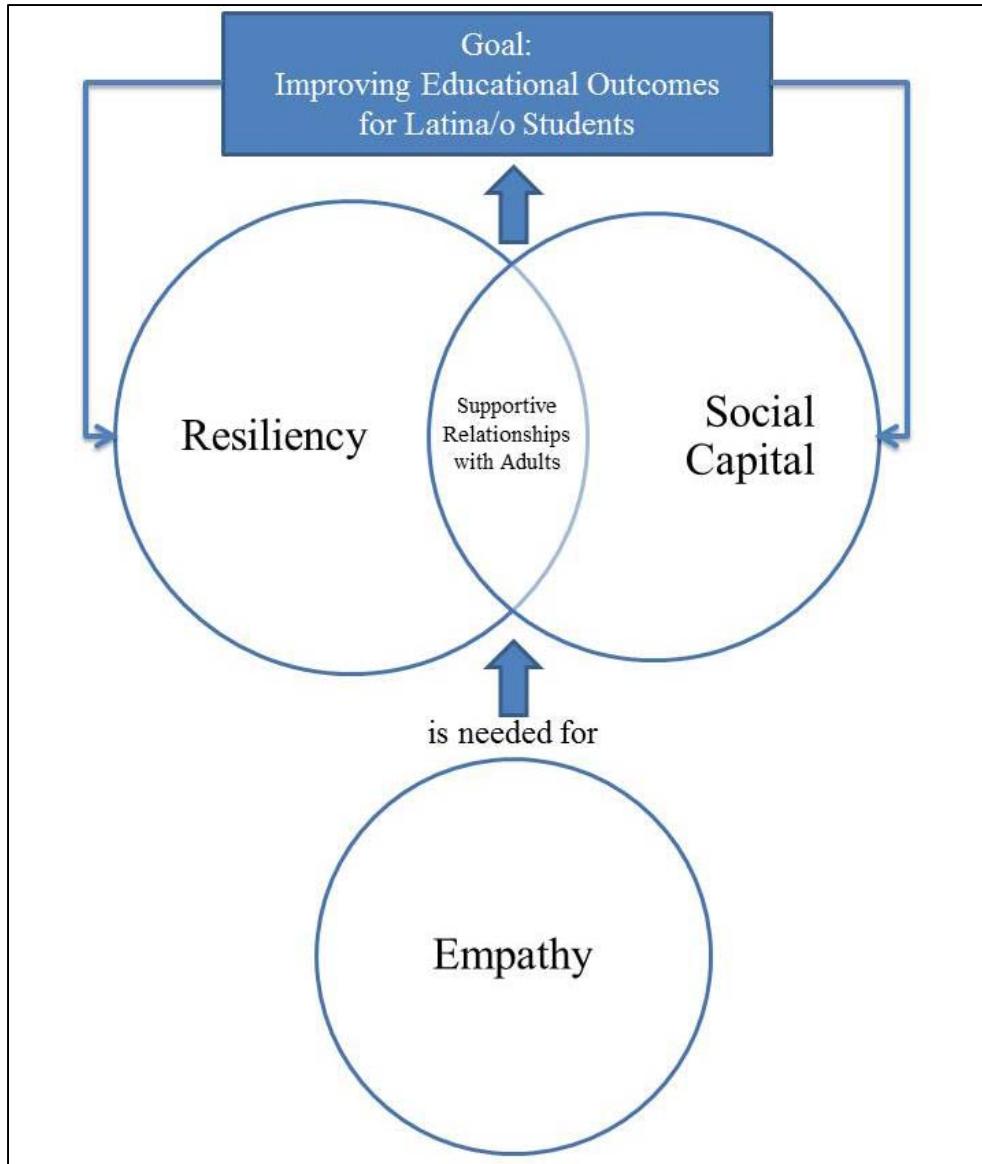
Figure 3.1: Empathic Education for School Success. This proposed integrated model shows how increasing educator empathy may help enhance supportive relationships between Latina/o students and adults at school.

Research Design

This study employed a transformative mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) following the transformative-emancipatory paradigm (Mertens, 2008). This framework rejects a deficit approach to the struggles of marginalized populations, emphasizing instead the resiliency and strengths of historically oppressed groups. The

transformative paradigm "focuses on culturally appropriate strategies to facilitate understandings that will create sustainable social change" (Mertens, 2008, p.10) and is congruent with an emancipatory theoretical lens. This work intends to illuminate the types of relational support first-generation college-bound Latina/o students experience that may assist them in becoming the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. Specifically, this study sought to explore ways in which educator empathy helps support Latina/o students in reaching their academic goals. The research question and sub-questions this study addressed are:

In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o students rate them on empathy?

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

g) What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o students?

The sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) involved a survey of Latina/o first-generation college students followed by a qualitative study. Using both quantitative and qualitative and methods allows for triangulation and increases the validity of the study. Data from the survey serves to augment findings from the larger, qualitative portion of the investigation (Bryman, 2006). The rationale for research design decisions is summarized in figure 3.2.

Rationale for Transformative Mixed-Methods Research Design

Paradigm:
Transformative emancipatory
(Mertens)

Theoretical Lens:
Emancipatory theory
(Mertens)

Methodological Approach:
Transformative Mixed-Methods Design
(Creswell & Clark, 2011)

Methods:
Interviews, journal entries, document analysis, survey

Figure 3.2: Rationale for Transformative Mixed Methods Research Design. The researcher's transformative emancipatory paradigm suggests research that will help solve problems related to inequity. This paradigm calls for an emancipatory theoretical lens, stressing the importance of stakeholders' participation in research aimed at effecting social change. Finally, the emancipatory theoretical lens leads to the choice of a transformative mixed methods research design.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to help determine effective methods for gathering data regarding Latina/o first-generation college students' experiences of supportive school adults in high school. Preliminary analysis of data suggests the following emergent themes: cultural empathy, high expectations, empathic understanding, as well as the constraining effects of accountability pressure.

Cultural empathy. In the pilot study, both students and adults interviewed suggested educators with similar cultural backgrounds were better able to see students' perspectives. During focus groups, interviews, and in written responses, several students mentioned that the supportive adult or adults who helped them during middle and high school were from the same ethnic group. Many students indicated that school personnel who came from a similar cultural background were often better able to see and understand students' experiences, struggles, and perspectives.

> They [Migrant Education staff] were Latino so they understood us.
> (Isabel, first-year college student)

Data from interviews with educators suggest empathic perspective taking plays a significant role in educators' ability to support first-generation college-bound students. Preliminary analysis also points to the importance of educators who understand students' home language and culture.

> Whenever you have a professional, especially in education, someone that
> is able to understand, and know the culture, not someone that's just
> bilingual, but bicultural, and is able to understand the background of our
> Latino families, it makes a huge impact; it's a big difference. (Manuel,
> high school counselor)

High expectations. Another theme that emerged was teachers and other school adults holding high expectations for students. These adults identified students' potentials, and found a way to push them in a caring and supportive way.

> Before I met Mr. Brown I used to be more insecure, after I met him I started to believe in myself. He talked to many administrators and teachers so I could jump all the way to English 2. He said that he was sure that I had the potential to do well in higher-level English classes. (Written response, Ricardo, second-year college student)

Empathic understanding. For many students, knowing that school adults cared enough to learn about the details of their personal lives and struggles was significant. Participants stated the supportive educator was a "friend" or even a "like a brother".

> She knew my life inside and out. (Juana, second-year college student)

> And if you create that environment that no matter what's going on that you'll take the time to listen to them, that creates a **safe place** for them to come and talk, because they know that you'll listen. And I think that's a big deal. (Glenda, Migrant Education Advisor).

Effects of accountability pressure. Analysis of interviews with educators as well as students indicates the importance of attending to issues of networking and social capital when examining the educator-student relationship. Meanwhile, due to large caseloads and pressures from accountability structures, educators often feel constrained in their ability to invest sufficient time in talking with students.

> Taking the time to listen to the kids is very, very important…but I wouldn't say, from the administration, that we're given the resources—in terms of time and support—to do that. (Rebecca, high school counselor).

Research Design Flowchart

Because this study explored deeply individuals' experiences, the sequential mixed methods design emphasized qualitative over quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed as they were collected, to enable the findings to inform subsequent interviews,

as well as document analysis and design of the online survey. Figure 3.3 shows the

sequence of data collection.
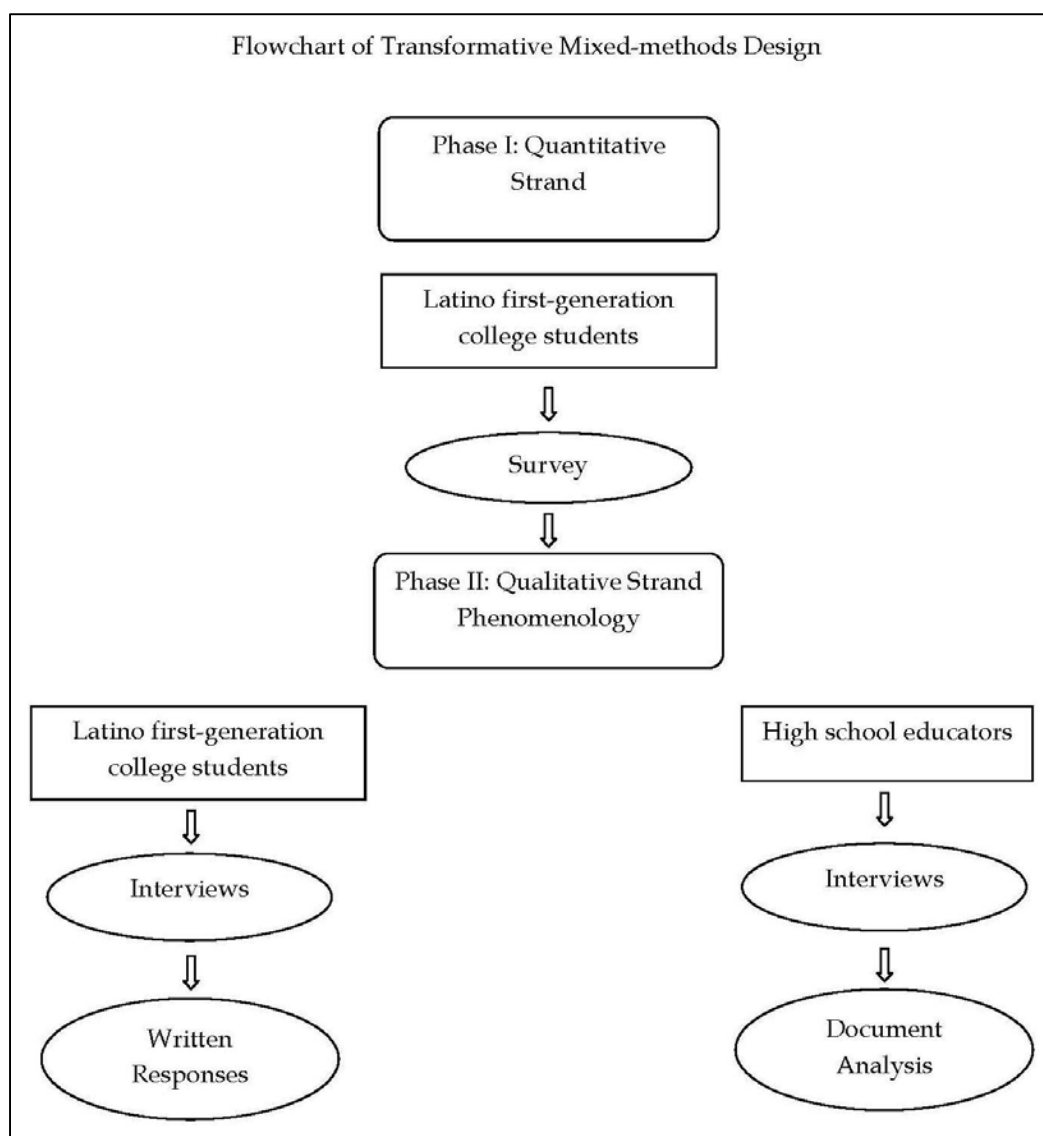
Figure 3.3: Flowchart of Transformative Mixed Methods Design. The flowchart shows the sequence of data to be gathered, and how survey data will be used to inform the qualitative phase.

Phase One: Quantitative

Following a sequential design with an emphasis on qualitative methods (Creswell

& Clark, 2011), survey data from the quantitative portion of the study helps to paint a

picture of the impact of supportive relationships with educators on first-generation

Latina/o college students, including their perceptions of educator empathy. Survey data regarding students' perceptions of educator empathy help to show the degree to which empathic understanding is prevalent among educators identified by students as supportive. In addition, the survey responses provided a pool from which some of the interview participants were selected. Finally, answers from two open-ended survey questions were analyzed with other qualitative data collected in phase two.

Participants. An online survey was administered to 689 undergraduate college students in the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) at a public university in Southern California. This population was chosen because the researcher has access, and because the majority of EOP students at this university are Latina/o first-generation college students.

Instrumentation. The first ten questions of the survey collected demographic information including participants' race/ethnicity, university attended, year in college, and gender. In addition, the survey included background questions such as whether the student is the first in his/her family to graduate from high school and attend college. Next, participants were asked whether there was an educator in high school who supported them in their academic and life goals. Participants who responded affirmatively to this question were prompted to complete the portion of the survey regarding educator empathy. If they responded "no", participants were prompted to further describe their experiences with educators in high school, and their views about how high schools can improve support to Latina/o, first-generation college students.

For those students who *did* report receiving support in high school, data about the prevalence of educator empathy was obtained through survey items based on the

Jefferson Scale of Patients' Perceptions of Physician Empathy (JSPPPE) (Kane, et al., 2007). This portion of the survey included 15 statements answered on a 5-point Likert scale intended to ascertain the patient's experience of a doctor's empathy. These 15 questions were modified to measure educator empathy instead of physician empathy. The survey included statements such as "This person can view things from my perspective (see things as I see them)" and "This person asks about what is happening in my daily life". These statements represent a modified version of the JSPPPE; the researcher replaced the word "doctor" with "this person" in each survey item.

Finally, the survey included two open-ended questions. Survey respondents who indicated they did *not* receive support in high school were asked: *Please describe your experiences seeking support in high school.*

All survey participants were asked: *What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latina/o high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?*

Data collection. The researcher coordinated with the Equal Opportunity Program office at a public university to distribute the link to the online survey via email. Potential participants received an email invitation to complete a brief online survey (see Appendix G). The invitation to participate stressed the opportunity to contribute to improving equity for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

Data Analysis

Analysis of survey data included descriptive statistics, showing the demographics of respondents; the number of respondents who experienced a supportive relationship with an educator at their high school; and the types of positions these supportive

educators hold. In addition, the researcher ran frequencies to determine the characteristics of educators students perceive as supportive. For those respondents who reported they received support from an educator at their high school, survey data showed the degree to which the students experienced these educators as empathic. Finally, written responses to the open-ended questions were added to qualitative data collected during phase two.

Phase Two: Qualitative

A phenomenological multiple method qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) was conducted to gather data regarding Latina/o first-generation college students' experiences of supportive educators during high school, and the role educator empathy plays in these relationships. The qualitative phase of this study was a phenomenology, which focuses on the meaning of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990) and seeks to describe the essence of a group of individuals' experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This methodology was chosen because first-hand reports of experience offer optimal data for studying human experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). From the phenomenological perspective, "the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Kvale & Brinkmann, p. 26). In this case, the phenomenon described is the relationship between Latina/o high school students and educators.

The qualitative phase of the study included writing prompts and one-on-one interviews to explore supportive relationships between students and educators. In addition, the researcher reviewed and analyzed school and school district documents relating to educator-student relationships.

Participants. The researcher solicited written responses from and interviewed twenty-two Latina/o undergraduate college students (9 male and 13 female) who were the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. This specific population was selected because of the achievement gap for Latina/o students as evidenced by low rates of high school graduation and post-secondary matriculation.

In addition, the researcher interviewed seven high school educators who work with students in the above-mentioned population, in order to describe ways in which these adults provide support to students. Interviewing both educators and students enabled a more thorough exploration of the experience of the relationship.

Confidentiality was maintained for all research participants. Participants' responses were reported anonymously, and all names used here are pseudonyms.

Sampling. A criterion sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of potential college student participants was identified through a variety of channels. Seven student interviewees were selected from survey respondents who indicated interest in participating in an interview. In addition, five participants were participants in the Summer Bridge Program run by EOP during the summer before their first year of college. An additional five students were referred by the coordinator of the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), and the remaining five were referred by colleagues working in education in the area. The researcher contacted potential participants via email (Appendix A), describing the study and inviting them to participate.

Five of the seven high school educator participants were selected from those identified by college participants as an adult at their high school who supported them. In

addition, two educator participants were referred to the researcher by colleagues during the pilot study. The researcher sent an email invitation to the potential participants describing the study and inviting them to participate (Appendix B). The final seven participants were selected based on interest and availability for interviews. The researcher also attempted to select educators from a variety of schools and districts in the county.

Immigration status. Although not a requirement for participation in the study, four of the college student participants were undocumented, also known as AB 540 or DREAM Act students, due to pending federal legislation that would create pathway to citizenship for students who go to college or serve in the military (DREAM Act, 2011). California is home to 553,000 potential beneficiaries of the federal DREAM Act, or 26% of the nationwide total (Batlova & McHugh, 2010). Presently, in California, undocumented college students are eligible for AB 540 status, which means they are considered California residents for purposes of enrollment in public colleges and universities (AB 540, 2001). Recently, California passed a second portion of this legislation, AB 131, also known as the California DREAM Act, which beginning in January 2013 enables AB 540 students to receive state financial aid (AB 131, 2011).

Undocumented students' experiences with educators are important to consider (Contreras, 2011), as these experiences are influenced by the added component of immigration status.

Instrumentation

The researcher conducted semi-structured life world interviews using an interview protocol (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are "neither an open

every day conversation nor a closed questionnaire" (Kvale & Brinkmann, p. 27). Therefore, the protocol merely provided suggested questions, and the actual questions asked differed somewhat from interview to interview. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, this type of dynamic and open-ended interviewing provides the richest data. Questions for the interview protocol were informed by the literature on the impact of relationships with supportive adults in the lives of marginalized youth. In addition, results from the pilot study were used to modify the initial interview protocol. Finally, researcher used emergent themes from the quantitative data to inform interview protocol modifications (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

Data Collection

Written responses. Prior to conducting interviews with college student participants, the researcher solicited written responses from prospective interviewees. Van Manen (1990) suggests this form of data collection is useful in exploring participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon. College student participants were emailed writing prompts asking them to describe the type of support they experienced in high school.

Individuals differ in their preferred form of expression. Evidence from the pilot study suggests some students may be more comfortable writing about their high school experiences than discussing them with the interviewer. In addition, when a writing prompt preceded the interview, participants had been given the opportunity to reflect on interview questions ahead of time. This is especially significant in the present study, as participants were asked to recall past experiences.

Data from the college students' written responses were used to inform the interviews. For example, the researcher was able to refer to specific details from a participant's written response during the interview. In addition, as themes emerged from written responses and interviews, the researcher incorporated these themes into the interview protocol.

Interviews. College student and educator participants were identified and selected as described above. The researcher arranged a meeting time and place with each participant according to his or her availability. Participants chose the location most convenient and comfortable for them, on or off campus. The researcher conducted the interviews in the language most comfortable for the participant. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol both for college students and educators (appendices E and F). The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Questions for student participants. College student participants were asked the following questions:

1. Tell me a about your background and your education. What was your high school experience like?

2. Think back to when you were in high school. Was there an adult at your school who you felt understood and supported you?

3. Who was this person?

4. How would you describe this person?

5. When you say that person understood and supported you, what does that mean?

6. How did you know this person understood you and supported you?

7. Did this adult support and motivate you in terms of your academic achievement?

8. Describe your interactions with this adult.

9. What did this adult say to you that you experienced as supportive?

10. What else did this adult do that helped you?

11. Tell me about a specific obstacle or barrier you experienced during high school and how this person helped you.

12. Is this person able to put his/herself in others' shoes in order to better understand their issues or problems?

13. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latina/o high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

14. Is there anything I did not ask you that you think I should have?

15. May I contact you with further questions?

Questions for educator participants. Educator participants were asked the following questions:

1. Tell me a about yourself. What is your position at this school? What are your responsibilities?

2. Think about a student you are currently working with or worked with in the recent past who was or will be the first in his/her family to graduate from high school and attend college. Tell me about this student.

3. What types of support did you provide to this student?

4. What challenges, if any, did the student face as he/she worked towards graduation? How did you learn about these challenges?

5. Describe your interactions with this student.

6. Does your ability to understand a student's perspective—put yourself it their shoes—play a role in your relationships with students?

7. Do the culture and policies at your school/in your district help you offer this type of support to students?

8. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latina/o high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences working with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

10. Are there any documents related to policies at your school that address support for first-generation college students?

11. May I contact you in the future with follow-up questions?

Documents. During interviews with educators, the researcher asked about school and district policies related to mentoring and the importance of student-educator relationships. This was done in the context of exploring the extent to which school policies support or constrain educators' efforts form supportive relationships with Latina/o students. Educators were asked for any applicable documents such as handbooks, policy guides, websites, etc. describing the school or district's policies related to mentoring, coaching, and counseling of Latina/o and/or first-generation college going students. Document content was summarized using a document analysis form (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis

Written responses, documents, and interview transcripts were analyzed as data were collected. Ongoing analysis enabled data sources to inform each other. Themes were identified through coding of written responses, interview transcripts, documents, and researcher field notes. Initially, the researcher will use hypothesis coding (Saldaña, 2009) applying concepts from the frameworks of resiliency (Bernard, 2003), social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and empathy (Rogers, 1969). In order to accurately represent students' and educators' voices, in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009) was also be used. As unanticipated patterns and themes emerge from the qualitative data, these were incorporated into the coding scheme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A mixture of analytic methods (Kvale & Brinkmann) allowed data sources to both inform and be informed by one another.

Validity

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), in qualitative research, "the critical question is whether the meanings you find in qualitative data are valid, repeatable, and right" (p.245). Validity, then, in qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness and accuracy of findings (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In this study, the researcher validated collected data through various means. The researcher used member-checking (Creswell & Clark, 2011); participants reviewed summarized findings. In addition, triangulation of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used, as evidence was gathered from interviews with college students, interviews with high school educators, written responses from college students, and documents.

Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Data

In keeping with the objectives of a transformative mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), the analysis procedures focused on looking for data that can be leveraged to advocate for improving educational practices and outcomes for Latina/o students. Data from this study will highlight injustices as well as provide a window into promising practices for supporting Latina/o students through empathic relationships.

Significance

Students of Latina/o origin now comprise a majority of students in California public schools and over one-fifth of public school students nationwide (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010), yet there is a wide gap between Latina/o and white students in terms of academic achievement. Support offered through relationships with high school educators is one significant factor affecting educational attainment for Latina/o students (Contreras, 2011). The present study may hold promise for helping improve educational outcomes for Latina/o students by bringing awareness to the key components of support educators can provide.

To be considered transformative, research should include dissemination of findings to the community (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The transformative emancipatory paradigm requires the researcher to make a positive contribution to the participant population and to furthering a social justice agenda (Mertens, 2009). To this end, the researcher will publish articles based on this research, not only in scholarly journals, but also in publications read by teachers, counselors, and school administrators. The researcher plans to share findings at professional conferences, with a particular focus on reaching audiences comprised of educators who work with Latina/o students.

Summary

This chapter stated the research problem and questions, and described in detail the research steps for this mixed-method study of supportive relationships between high school educators and Latina/o first-generation college-bound students using a transformative design. Survey data, written responses, and data from one-on-one interviews of students and educators were gathered to offer full and nuanced information about the behaviors, attitudes, and qualities of high school educators who provide relational support to Latina/o high school students aspiring to be the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. In addition to instrumentation, this chapter discussed sampling, data collection, data analysis, validity, and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

"…it really makes a difference in the student. It really encourages them to also, not just try in life, but also try in school and in class because …they have that personal connection with the teacher and if you have that personal connection with the teacher, you want to go to class, you want to learn, and you want to just get a higher education."
(Mireya, first-year college student)

The first three chapters provide an overview of the study, review the research, and describe the methodology used. Chapter 1 introduces the study, providing a rationale for conducting research to explore the role of empathy in relationships between high school educators and Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. Chapter 2 offers a review of related research on Latina/o student success through the theoretical lenses of resiliency and social capital, and offers a review of research on empathy. In Chapter 3, the themes of resiliency, social capital, and empathy are combined in a proposed theoretical model suggesting empathy may be a key for effectively offering supportive relationships to Latina/o high school students. Subsequently, Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this mixed methods study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. The first section of this chapter presents results from a survey of undergraduate college students to provide an overview of student experiences of supportive relationships and educator empathy. Next, the results of one-on-one interviews with students and educators, written responses from students, document analysis, and responses from open-ended survey questions are presented. Finally, results from the quantitative and qualitative phases are tied together and the findings are summarized.

Review of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to look closely at supportive relationships to identify the characteristics, dispositions, and behaviors of school adults who successfully offer empathic understanding and support to Latino students who are striving to be the first in their families to graduate from high school and attend college. This study was guided by the following operational definition of empathy:

> *Empathy is the process of understanding others that in turn helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude; listening; working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.*

The following research question and sub-questions guided this mixed methods inquiry:

Overall Research Questions:

In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latino first-generation college-bound students?

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o students rate them on empathy?

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

g) What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o students?

Quantitative Findings

An online survey of undergraduate students in an Equal Opportunity Program was conducted at a state university in southern California. The survey sought to answer the following research sub-questions:

Sub-Questions:

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o students rate them on empathy?

Description of sample.

Table 4.1: Demographics of Study Sample Compared with Demographics of EOP Student Population

Factor	Study Sample	Latina/o Students Only	EOP Student Population
Gender			
n	184	141	689
% Female	81	83	73
% Male	19	17	27
Race			
n	184	141	689
% White			14.2
% Latino/a	76.6	100	71.4
% Asian/Pacific Islander			5.1
% African American/Black			5.8
% Other			3.5
Age			
n	184	141	
% 22 or younger	70	75.2	
% 23 or older	30	24.8	
Year in School			
n	184	141	689
% First Year	14.7	16.3	33.7
% Sophomore	17.4	19.1	19.8
% Junior	31	30.5	22.5
% Senior	37	34	20.9
Mother's Education			
n	171	132	
% Mother some college	44.4	36.4	
% Mother no college	55.6	63.6	
Father's Education			
n	159	124	
% Father some college	44	35.5	
% Father no college	56	64.5	
Number of Siblings			
n	184	141	
% 0	3.3	2.1	
% 1	19	14.9	
% 2	33.2	32.6	
% 3	17.9	21.3	
% 4	11.4	14.2	
%5	6	7.8	
% More than 5	9.2	7.1	
Birth Order			
n	184	141	
% Oldest	34.2	34.8	
% Youngest	23.4	18.4	
% Middle Child	39.1	44.7	
% Only Child	3.3	2.1	
Older Siblings Attended College			
n	183	140	
% Older sibling attended college	39.3	41.4	
%Older sibling no college	28.4	27.1	
% No older siblings	32.2	31.4	

An invitation to participate in an online survey was emailed to 689 students in the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) at a state university in Southern California. Approximately 27 percent (184 students) responded to the online survey. Of these, 14.7% of respondents were in their first year of college; 17.4% were sophomores; 31% juniors, and 37% seniors. The sample included 149 (81%) females and 35 males (19%). 76.6% of respondents identified themselves as Latina/o, Hispanic, Chicano/a, or Mexican, and 23.4% identified as other races/ethnicities.

Of the 184 survey respondents, 141 (76.6%) identified themselves as Latina/o, Hispanic, Chicano/a, or Mexican, Mexican American. This sample of 141 Latina/o undergraduates included 117 (83%) female and 24 (17%) males. For those students who had at least one older sibling (n=96), 58 students (41%) reported an older sibling had attended college.

One hundred forty-seven students (79.9%) answered yes to the question "Were there any adults at your high school who supported you in achieving high school graduation and college admission?" For those who reported receiving support in high school, survey instructions asked respondents to think about "the one adult in high school who made the most difference for you in helping you achieve your academic goals." When asked to identify the supportive educator's main role at the high school, 73.9% of students reported the educator was a teacher. Over 47% of respondents identified the supportive educator as an AVID teacher. Fifteen percent of respondents chose a counselor, and the remaining respondents selected a tutor, Migrant Education advisor, secretary, or other mentor.

Sub-question a. *Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?*

Of Latina/o survey respondents, 87.9% reported receiving support in high school, 8 percentage points higher than the EOP sample as a whole.

Sub-question b. *For those Latina/o students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?*

When asked to identify supportive educators' roles at their schools, results for Latina/o participants were similar to those for the entire sample. For example, 73.9% identified a teacher, 48.5% identified an AVID teacher, and 15.4% chose a counselor.

Table 4.2: Descriptives of Educators Identified by Students as Supportive

Factor	All Participants	Latina/a Participants
Received Support at School		
n	184	141
% yes	79.9	87.9
% no	20.1	12.1
Educator Role at School		
n	133	111
% English teacher	11.3	10.8
% Math teacher	2.3	1.5
% Science teacher	.8	.8
% History teacher	2.3	2.3
% Other teacher	9.8	10.0
% Counselor	15.0	15.4
% AVID teacher	47.4	48.5
% AVID tutor	.8	.8
% Migrant Ed advisor	5.3	5.4
% Secretary	1.5	1.5
% Coach	1.5	.8
% Other mentor	2.3	2.3
Educator Gender		
n	133	112
% Male	27.1	26.8
% Female	72.9	73.2
Educator Race		
n	126	105
% African-American	4.8	4.8
% Latino	30.2	33.3
% Asian	2.4	0
% White	61.1	60
% Pacific Islander	.8	1
% Not sure	.8	1
Educator Race Perceived as Same		
n	132	111
% Yes	31.1	27.0
% No	62.1	64.9
% Somewhat	4.5	5.4
% I don't know	2.3	2.7

Factor analysis of empathy survey. The educator empathy scale included in the

online survey contains 15 items. From the 15 items, two constructs were extracted by

using principal component analysis with eigenvalues over one explaining 73% of the total

variance. The first construct, educator empathy, includes 12 items, such as "This person

understands my feelings" and "this person can view things from my perspective (see

things as I see them)". The second construct, educator non-judgmental attitude, consists

of three reverse-scored items: "this person makes assumptions about me without asking

for my input", "this person is always in a hurry", and "this person is judgmental".

Table 4.3: Rotated Component Matrix[a] on Fifteen Item Educator Empathy Survey

Survey Item	Component	
	1	2
This person can view things from my perspective (see things as I see them).	.800	
This person asks about what is happening in my daily life.	.792	
This person shows concern for my well-being, not just how I am doing in school.	.781	
This person understands my feelings.	.780	
This person seems concerned about me.	.780	
This person understands my concerns.	.773	
This person is a caring person.	.752	
This person asks me how I feel about my problems.	.740	
This person seems concerned about my family.	.674	
This person takes my perspective into account when making decisions.	.648	
This person arranges for adequate privacy when talking with me.	.629	
This person understands my cultural background.	.606	
This person is judgmental.*		.866
This person is always in a hurry.*		.829
This person makes assumptions about me without asking for my input.*		.791

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.
*Reverse-scored item

Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .87, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Principal components analysis revealed the presence of two components with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 43.9% and 13.8% of the variance. The screeplot showed a clear break after the second component. Using Catell's scree test, it was decided to retain two components for further investigation. This was further supported by the results of Parallel Analysis, which showed only two components with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (15 variables x 132 respondents).

The two-component solution explained a total of 57.7% of the variance, with Component 1 contributing 43.9% and Component 2 contributing 13.8%. To aid in

interpretation of these two components, varimax rotation was performed. Both

components showed a number of strong loadings.

Table 4.4: Descriptives of Two Components of Empathy Survey (for All Respondents)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Educator Non-Judgmental Attitude	132	3.7449	.93817
Educator Empathy	132	4.2005	.59270
Valid N (listwise)	132		

Table 4.5: Descriptives of Two Components of Empathy Survey (for Latina/o Respondents Only)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Educator Non-Judgmental Attitude	112	3.7173	.97743
Educator Empathy	112	4.2119	.58961
Valid N (listwise)	112		

Reliability. This survey included modified items from the Jefferson Scale of

Patient Perception of Physician Empathy (Kane, et al., 2007). In the current study, there

were two components: 1) educator empathy (α=.92), and 2) educator non-judgmental

attitude (α=.79).

Table 4.6: Reliability Scores of Two Components of Empathy Survey

Component	N	Alpha Reliability Score
Educator Empathy	12	.92
Educator Non-Judgmental Attitude	3	.79

Sub-question c. *To what degree do Latina/o students perceive these educators as*

empathic?

The mean empathy score for educators was 4.2 on a 5 point scale, and the mean

non-judgmental attitude score was 3.7, indicating students saw these educators as being

extremely empathic and non-judgmental.

Sub-question d. *Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o*

students rate them on empathy?

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare how students rated

supportive educators on empathy, depending on whether or not students perceived the

educator to be of the same race. There was no significant difference between the two

groups of students: those who identified their supportive educator as being of the same

race, or somewhat same race (*M*=4.15, *SD*=.566, *t*=(129)=-.624, *p*=.53), and those who

stated their mentor was either not the same race or replied "I'm not sure." (*M*=4.22,

SD=.606; *t* (129)=-.624, *p*=.53). Of Latina/o students in this sample, whether or not a

supportive educator was also Latina/o did not affect their rating on educator empathy and

educator non-judgmental attitude.

Table 4.7: T-test Comparing Ratings of Educator Empathy Based on Student Perception of Educator's Racial Similarity

Does student perceive supportive educator to be the same race/ethnicity?		N	M	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Educator Empathy	Yes	47	4.1512	.56573	-.624	.534
	No	84	4.2185	.60635		
Educator Non-Judgmental Attitude	Yes	47	3.6241	.81239	-1.06	.291
	No	84	3.8056	1.00362		

Survey respondents rated their identified supportive educators high on empathy

and non-judgmental attitude overall. There was not a statistically significant difference

in the mean empathy and non-judgmental attitude scores for male and female educators,

or for educators who were the same race/ethnicity as the student and those who were not.

Data from the survey help broadly describe the high school experiences of

supportive relationships of Latina/o first-generation college-students at one state

university in California. Findings from the survey show students rated these supportive

educators high on empathy and non-judgmental attitude. In order to look more closely at

supportive relationships between high school educators and Latina/o first-generation

college-bound students, the qualitative phase of the study asked students and educators to

describe these relationships in detail.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents findings from the qualitative phase of the study, which addressed the following sub-questions:

e) *What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?*

f) *How do educators offer supportive relationships to Latina/o first-generation college-bound students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?*

First, the participant demographics for the qualitative phase are described. Next, an overview of barriers faced by the students in the study is presented, as well as some of the benefits students received through their relationships with educators. Then, four clusters of themes identified during qualitative data analysis are presented. For each of the four clusters, an analysis of student responses is presented, followed by an analysis of educator responses.

This section also describes two unexpected themes from the data in answer to research sub-question *g*: What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o students? These themes are undocumented students and organizational context. At the end of the chapter, findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are summarized and tied back to the overall research question:

In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

Student interview participant demographics.

Table 4.8: Student Interview Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Year in College	First Gen HS	First Gen College	AVID	DREAMer	Educator Role	Ed Race Same	Ed Gen Same
Andrea	F	1	N	Y	N		Health Academy Instructor	N	Y
Carlos	M	1	Y	Y	N	Y	Counselor	N	N
Diana	F	1	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	Y
David	M	2	N	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	Y
Hugo	M	2	N	Y	Y		Counselor	N	N
Ivan	M	2	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	Y
Joel	M	1	N	Y	N		Counselor	Y	N
Joaquin	M	1	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	N
Jesus	M	1	N	Y	N		Counselor	N	Y
Jenny	F	1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Club Advisor	N	N
Liliana	F	2	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	N
Lalo	M	1	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	N
Lorenzo	M	2	Y	Y	Y	Y	AVID Teacher	N	Y
Monica	F	1	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	Y
Mireya	F	1	Y	Y	N		English Teacher	N	Y
Maria	F	1	Y	Y	N		Counselor	Y	Y
Ruth	F	2	Y	Y	N	Y	ELD Specialist	Y	Y
Silvia	F	2	Y	Y	Y		Math Teacher	Y	Y
Susana	F	1	N	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	Y	Y
Yasmin	F	1	Y	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	Y	N
Yolanda	F	2	N	Y	Y		AVID Teacher	N	Y
Yvette	F	1	N	Y	N		GEAR-Up Counselor	Y	N

The 22 college student participants interviewed for this study are all Mexican or Mexican-American. All of the participants come from low-income families, and are the first-generation to attend college. Of the 22 interviewees, 14 were in their first year at the university, and 8 were college sophomores. The group consisted of 13 (59%) females and 9 (41%) males. In addition to being the first-generation to attend college, 14 (63.6%) of the undergraduate participants were also first-generation high school graduates. Student participants attended 16 high schools in 13 school districts in Southern California. Immigration status was not a focus of the interviews; however, four student participants mentioned their undocumented status during interviews.

Survey participant demographics. The online survey conducted for the quantitative portion of this study included two open-ended questions. Responses to these questions from 123 participants were imported into InVivo data analysis software, and coded along with the other qualitative data sources. Survey participants were students in the Equal Opportunity Program at a state university in southern California.

Educator participant demographics. The high school educators interviewed for this study included two high school counselors, one Migrant Education advisor, two AVID teachers, one English teacher, and one Math teacher. With the exception of one counselor and the Migrant Education advisor, educator participants were selected from school adults identified by participants during student interviews. Educator participants work at seven different high schools in five school districts in one southern California county. The table below identifies the educator participants, as well as the student participants and others who nominated them for the study.

Table 4.9: Educator Participant Pseudonyms, Roles, and Student Nominators

Pseudonym	Role	Nominated By
Mr. Clark	English and AVID Teacher	Lalo
Ms. Michaels	English Teacher	Mireya
Ms. Santana	Counselor	Maria
Mr. Martinez	Counselor	Colleagues
Ms. Nuñez	Former Math Teacher, now Assistant Principal	Silvia
Ms. Lopez	Migrant Education Advisor	Maria & Colleagues
Mr. Marez	History and AVID Teacher	Yesenia

The following sections describe some of the barriers faced by Latina/o first-generation college bound students, and how relationships with supportive educators play a role in helping students achieve their goals.

Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

He wants to go to college. His mom has a sixth-grade education, and his dad has a minimal amount of high school education. He wants to be the first in his family, not only to graduate high school but to go on to college. The problem with him though is that he knows how to do the high school thing, he's just still lacking the knowledge and the navigation of the college world, and so what I've been focusing on a lot, is just kind of building a personal relationship with him, because for him is that he doesn't have any role models. He has no other family members that have gone on to college. (Mr. Marez, teacher)

Qualitative data indicate Latina/o first-generation college-bound students face a special set of circumstances that can affect their schooling. The undergraduate interview participants selected for this study were not a monolithic group in terms of their backgrounds, family situations, and academic trajectories. However, a common theme among participants was that Latina/o high school students who are working to become first-generation college students may encounter barriers other students do not face. Interview data and written responses show the challenges faced by this group of participants included factors such as students' parents being unfamiliar with the college application process. In addition, students reported receiving little help at home with schoolwork, while often having many responsibilities at home for chores and childcare.

Furthermore, since their families struggle financially, several students had to work during

high school to contribute to the family income. Students in this study reported their

parents assumed they could not afford college and were unfamiliar with financial aid. A

response to the open-ended survey question *"What do you think teachers, counselors,*

principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latino first-

generation college-bound high school students so they can graduate from high school

and go to college"   illustrates this point:

> They [educators] need to know that some of us don't have the privileges
> that others have. Our parents didn't have the privilege to go to school so
> we pretty much fight to reach our own goals with their support because
> they don't have the background knowledge about the SAT ACT test or
> how to fill out FAFSA and all that goes into furthering our education.
> Some of our parents don't even know English which only makes it a bit
> more difficult to get through the hardships we encounter. (EOP student,
> online survey response)

Other barriers encountered by participants included negative stereotypes of

Latina/o students, and a culture of low expectations in some schools for Latina/o students

from low-income families. Many students reported a lack of belief in their own potential

to go to the university. In spite of such barriers, many Latina/o students do graduate and

attend college. The findings from this study support the notion that relationships with

supportive adults in high school can help mitigate the effects of such obstacles.

When high school educators are sensitive to the issues confronting students, and

can make connections with students on a personal level, students feel supported and do

better academically (Gándara, 2002).

Empathic educators provide access to social capital. Student participants

described how supportive educators assisted them with their academic and life goals.

Support provided by educators included access to internships; assistance in communicating with personnel at colleges; connecting them with former students who faced similar challenges; networking with other teachers at their high schools to coordinate support services; letters of recommendation for college and scholarships; referral to appropriate outreach and student support programs at universities; information about financial aid and scholarships; encouraging students to become involved in extra-curricular activities; providing information to parents about college and financial aid; and facilitating supportive peer networks among Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. Interview data indicate that access to these concrete benefits was a direct result of the strong supportive relationships between students and high school educators.

Qualitative data sources. Qualitative data sources consisted of interview transcripts from one-on-one interviews with 22 Latina/o first-generation undergraduate college students and 7 high school educators; 123 responses to open-ended questions from the survey of EOP students at a state university; and written responses to prompts from 12 undergraduate interview participants. In addition, during educator interviews, the researcher asked for documents from the school or district addressing student-educator relationships and supports for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. Documents collected and analyzed included one teacher-made questionnaire, one school profile brochure, and one philosophy of teaching statement. In most cases, educators indicated that no documents existed that specifically addressed the importance of relationship building.

Data analysis procedures. Interviews were transcribed. Interview transcripts, student participants' written responses to prompts, documents, and responses to open-

ended questions from the survey were imported into InVivo qualitative data analysis

software. Initially, the researcher coded data sources using hypothesis coding (Saldana,

2009) applying concepts from the frameworks of resiliency (Bernard, 2003), social

capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and empathy (Rogers, 1969). Additional codes emerged during

data analysis. The researcher used text searches to explore the frequency of some

themes, such as "family", "listening", and "judgment".

     Themes from qualitative data. An analysis of qualitative data sources revealed

four clusters of themes related to empathic relationships. These four clusters are the

Relationship Building Process, Perspective Taking, Cultural Empathy, and High

Expectations. These thematic clusters build on preliminary findings from the pilot study.

This section describes these four clusters and how empathy plays a role in each element

of the educator-student relationship. Table 4.10 shows the frequency of these themes and

sub-themes in the data sources.

Table 4.10: Themes from Qualitative Data Sources

Theme	Sub-Theme	# of Student Interviews (out of 22)	# of Educator Interviews (out of 7)	# of Survey Responses	# of Written Responses	Total Sources	Total References
Building Relationships		18	6	15	5	44	151
	Safe Space	8	3	0	1	12	19
	Open to Hearing Issues	12	4	2	1	19	31
	Trust	8	3	1	0	12	37
	Humor	11	3	0	0	14	37
	Offering a Personal Relationship	6	3	8	1	18	24
Perspective Taking		19	6	22	4	51	132
	Asking Questions and Listening	15	6	11	2	34	72
	Understanding Student Emotion	9	4	4	1	18	28
	Non-judgmental Attitude	5	3	5	1	14	18
	Educator Using Personal Experience	10	5	1	2	18	32
Cultural Empathy		7	15	52	2	76	143
	Educator Ethnicity	5	5	0	1	11	15
	Importance of Family	14	7	30	1	52	74
High Expectations		16	7	7	4	34	84
	Student Belief in Potential	12	6	1	4	22	32

Under each cluster, the two main sub-questions that guided the qualitative phase of this study will be addressed by first reporting on students' responses and then educator responses:

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

Thematic cluster 1: Building relationships. Analysis of student responses. Each of the 22 student interviewees described how a teacher, counselor, or advisor initiated and nurtured a supportive relationship. Elements of relationship building that emerged from student responses include providing a safe space for students, being open to hearing personal issues, trustworthiness, and using humor.

Safe space. Educators providing a safe space for students to share personal issues was a theme in responses from eight of the student participants. Students reported these adults were open to students coming in at any time during breaks, before and after school, or during a teacher's prep period, either to just say hello and check in or to discuss a larger issue. These educators' classrooms and offices were often an inviting hangout space for students. For example, Carlos, a first-year college student, described his counselor's office this way: "Any time I step into her office it's like a sanctuary in there, a place where I can get away from my struggles and I can just like confide in her everything and talk to her."

In addition to creating a safe environment for students to drop in spontaneously, some teachers provided structured opportunities for students to talk about their

experiences and feelings with adults and other students. For example, Diana, a first-year college student, described the Friday circle in her AVID class: "Mrs. Barker, she would like get into like our hearts. She would have the Friday circle and we would share stuff— like difficult situations we were going through—and everyone would cry—I don't know…it was just nice. We all got along." Throughout data sources, participants described the safe environments supportive educators provided as places where they could talk about struggles they were facing in their personal and academic lives.

Open to hearing personal issues. In written responses and interviews, student participants shared that supportive adults explicitly let students know are open to hearing about difficult and painful issues. Some participants emphasized how empathic educators differ from other teachers, acting more like friends or parents. For example, in his description of his AVID teacher, Mr. Sewell, Ivan acknowledged it is rare for teachers to be so open to listening:

> Coming from a minority group, sometimes some teachers don't really understand you and they're great teachers and it's fine, but he was more than a teacher. He was more like a friend kind of thing. You could go and tell him your problems, anything, home problems or anything you're going through, like not just school. You can't do that with most teachers…It was nice to have an adult to go in and talk to. (Ivan)

Students reported sharing issues with their teachers, counselors, and advisors that ranged from family problems to conflicts with friends to an eating disorder:

> Yeah, when I was struggling with my eating disorder I went and talked to her…she knew all about the situation, and she just told me to take deep breaths, and just sit in her office and talk to her…I would just talk to her about anything. (Diana, first-year college student)

As Diana's quote describes, participants reported that supportive educators continually remind students that they are there to listen. Furthermore, supportive educators view

changes in academic achievement as a possible indicator of personal problems that might

need to be addressed. David explained how his AVID teacher approached struggling

students:

> Say they're struggling at home, he's going to understand. He's going to
> be there because he considers AVID as a family, so it's a structure that
> you should never feel uncomfortable being able to talk to anybody in the
> class or him personally. He's there to care… If he noticed [our grades
> dropping] because he knew all our grades in classes, but if he noticed
> something was off track he would pull us to the side. He'd talk to us, "Is
> anything going on at home? How are you doing? Anything you want to
> talk about, just feel free to talk about." You know? Whereas other
> teachers were kind of like, "All right." I never had anything like that with
> other teachers. (David, sophomore)

Data indicate certain educator characteristics are needed for students to risk

disclosing personal information with educators. One essential element described by

students is trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness. Student participants emphasized that in order for students to feel

comfortable opening up about the issues affecting their schoolwork, it was important for

educators to gain their trust. Nine of the 22 student participants mentioned

trustworthiness when describing supportive educators. For example, Hugo explained this

aspect of the educator-student relationship this way: "he goes past the student-teacher

relationship and actually becomes your friend. You can really talk to him about

anything—anything that's going on at home or anything. And so that connection, I

guess, you get a lot of trust in him."

The educators students identified as supportive of their academic goals had earned

a reputation among students at their schools for being reliable confidants that students

could trust. Through peer networks, these educators became known for as safe people to

talk to about personal issues. For example, the interviewer asked Diana how she knew

her AVID teacher was someone who would be open to listening confidentially to her

struggles with her eating disorder:

> Interviewer: How did you know, in the first place, that you could go to her
> with a problem?

> Diana: Just because everybody went to her. I kinda figured she was—like
> a good person. Like friends—it's hard to trust some friends. So I
> wouldn't go to friends. I would go to her.

> In addition to trust, another educator attribute named by students was a sense of

humor.

Humor. Eleven student participants reported that supportive educators often used

humor to connect with their students. When asked to describe a teacher or counselor,

these students noted a good sense of humor as an essential quality. Students said that

when teachers and counselors joke around with students, it helps students feel

comfortable, and makes the classroom environment more welcoming. Yolanda described

how her teacher used humor in her interactions with students:

> … a lot of her students, they would always be in there, always be in her
> classroom, always talking to her, they would joke around with each other.
> And also, she has a really good sense of humor to where, if you would
> kinda be like a smarty-pants in there, she would give it back to you. And
> that's how it was. I think that's why she connected so well with
> people…it seems like it made her relationships stronger with people too.
> (Yolanda)

Thematic cluster 1: Building relationships: Analysis of educator responses.

Educators offer a personal relationship. Educator participants described how

they intentionally lay a foundation for building supportive interpersonal relationships

with students. As students enter their classrooms or caseloads for the first time, educators

find ways to let the students know they care, and that they want to get to know students

personally. Teachers and counselors communicate to students that they care about them

as people by using questionnaires, and by explicitly telling students, "You can come to

me with your issues". Ms. Nuñez, a high school math teacher, spoke about her process

for becoming acquainted with her students on a personal level:

> I started the year with a small questionnaire for as many classes as I could
> just to find out where they were coming from and what was going on
> through their heads. I never shared anything. I never commented about
> what those questionnaires said. The questionnaires were just for my eyes.
> I didn't want to embarrass any student. It was just for me to find out their
> interests to see how I could somehow make math relevant to them…The
> questions that were always the same were: What's your name? Tell me
> one thing you are proud of? Tell me one thing that scares you, hobbies?
> How you see yourself in your future? (Ms. Nuñez, Math Teacher)

Educators interviewed for this study acknowledged the need to reach out to some

Latina/o first-generation college-bound students individually. Students were often not

aware they had the opportunity to attend college. Ms. Santana, a high school counselor,

talked about how she reaches out to students who otherwise might go unnoticed:

> What I've noticed is the kids who are super-duper super stars get my
> attention, the ones who are not doing well get my attention. But—and
> that's where Maria was at—kind of in the middle, under the radar, doing
> well…but I don't know anything about them. They're the ones who
> typically won't come in, so that was me making the effort to reach out. I
> will periodically call in students who—I recognize the name, but cannot
> put the name to a face. And just start, really, easy going –how are things
> going at school? I'll pull up their transcript, talk about classes, and then
> start talking about goals and aspirations after high school. So that
> provides me with the opening. (Ms. Santana)

Similar to Ms. Santana, the educators in this study described the special effort they make

to reach out to students and let students know they are available to them. Mr. Marez, a

history teacher, talked about his decision to give students his phone number:

> I give students my cell phone number. I know that sometimes they say
> they shouldn't be crossing that line, but I've never had a single student ever

in the last five years I've been teaching this course, ever abuse the cell phone use. Everybody knows and understands that they only use it in case of an emergency and mostly, it's via text now – I've got this question, can you look it up or can you check your email. So, when we're on break, the student would call me - hey Mr. Marez – I just got this message, what does this mean? And so I would text them back –okay this is what you need to do, or I would get on the computer and email them. So, the form of communication through email and through the telephone was very important, and it established our relationship with him because now he knew that – he can get that support when he couldn't have it at home. (Mr. Marez)

Educators provide a safe space. Educators interviewed for the study consciously provide a safe space for students at school, where students can gather to study, socialize, or discuss issues. Ms. Nuñez, a former math teacher, now an assistant principal, described the inviting environment in her classroom:

I had an open door policy during lunchtime. I had an open door policy during my prep period. I told all of the kids when my prep period was. Sometimes they asked their teacher to go to the bathroom and they ended up in my classroom because they wanted to talk to me about XY or Z. Kids talked to me just about everything. "I think I got this girl pregnant." I go, "Oh my God, really? Do you want to go to the counselor?" "No. I want to talk to you." (Ms. Nuñez)

Educator interviewees reported that some schools provide structured opportunities designed specifically for students to have a safe place to share and receive guidance regarding personal issues. For example, several teachers regularly conduct group sharing circles, where students can share successes, and talk about difficulties. In one high school, the counseling department selects students for participation in support groups, according to issues they are experiencing, such as domestic violence, or parental alcohol abuse. One student's counselor described the effects of the support group for a student:

It was so powerful, they [other students] could see the transformation with her—being so quiet in the beginning, and then she turned into a leader her senior year. And she was sharing her own—she was honing in, asking

them questions and sharing her own experiences, and sharing her mistakes, sharing her successes. So she really turned into a leader, and the girls really listened to her. Anytime she said something, the girls were like—you know—listening to everything she'd say. (Ms. Santana, high school counselor)

In addition to school staff members offering structured time for students to meet, some schools leverage community resources to provide mentoring and support to students. For example, at Ms. Nuñez's school, an outside agency brings in AmeriCorps volunteers to work with students:

We have the PASS program, which is for at risk students with low grades, students who have been arrested, students who have been suspended. In that program, there is a mentor and the kids are able to just. They are open at lunch. The kids are able to walk in because I am not always available. They are able to establish that relationship. It is just support from us that allows students to feel that there is a place where they belong and somebody that will listen to them and somebody to care about them and somebody to give grey hairs to. They need that. (Ms. Nuñez)

Educators are open to hearing personal issues. Educator participants stated they recognize this openness to hearing personal issues as a necessary part of their work, and a natural outgrowth of teaching process. In addition to explicitly telling students they are open to hearing personal issues, educators described how they look for signals that students may need to talk. For example, Mr. Clark talked about how he becomes aware students are experiencing problems:

They tell you. They come in and you can tell—whether or not—how things are going. What's going on? "Nothing." "something's going on." And then they just tell you…But I've found out horrible things—just because…in AVID, we run tutorial groups. And you're trying to tutor a kid in something and you tell whether that's what they're focusing on or not. And the kid's distracted, and I'll ask them—what's going on? You don't seem yourself today. And eventually, things come out. (Mr. Clark, AVID teacher)

Like Mr. Clark, Ms. Lopez, a Migrant Education advisor, is attentive to changes in

students' demeanor and body language:

> And sometimes the kids just send out signals. Wanting to see if
> someone's—you know—they're casting, a fishing line, and they're just
> waiting for someone to actually just pick it up and take the time and before
> you know it, you know, you end up learning about their whole life
> story…(Ms. Lopez, Migrant Education advisor)

This ability to connect with students and see their perspectives was a common theme in

the data sources.

Thematic cluster 2: Perspective taking: Analysis of student responses. The

ability to "enter into another's world", to see his or her perspective, is at the heart of

empathic understanding (Rogers, 1975). Data analysis of student responses indicates

students consider this an important skill for educators offering support to students.

Perspective taking, according to the students in this study, includes asking questions and

listening, understanding student emotion, having a non-judgmental attitude, and using

personal experience to connect with students. Andrea expressed the need for educators to

see students' perspectives this way:

> I think that they just need to try to step into a student's shoes, no matter
> what race or anything. They need to remember when they were in high
> school and what their fears were. Because although many of our high
> schoolers nowadays, we act tough, they act tough like they know what's
> going to happen, but it comes to a point when you're like, "What's going to
> happen next?" (Andrea)

Asking questions and listening. Throughout student interviews, participants

described educators as skilled and non-judgmental listeners.

> Listening…she would give me her dog—Beans—and she'd say "pet my
> dog" … She would just be like "it's okay, why are you feeling this?" Not
> really giving me advice, just kinda like—giving me the opportunity to
> like, let go, just say what I'm thinking about… (Diana)

Students noted it is important for educators to ask questions and listen, but that there is a skill to easing into discussing difficult or personal topics with young adults. Ivan, a college sophomore, described how his teacher develops a rapport with his students:

> When you talk to a student and you tell him, "Make an appointment," or do something like that, it makes you feel like you're in trouble. It's just too much. What he did was he would be like, "Hey, you want to come in and have lunch with me on this day?" He was really easygoing, not making it awkward or not a big deal out of it. Just come in and have lunch, sit down and talk, you know. That sounds good. Instead of having a "let's make and appointment" talk. That's just more like, "What's going on? What does he want to talk to me about?" You kind of separate yourself from that. He would just be like, "Yeah, you come in. Let's have lunch." I went in, sit down and talk. He would just say, "How are classes? How are you doing?" You know I played sports so he would be like, "How's sports, how's your team doing?" Easing into whatever he wanted to cover. I mean we would go off topic, come back and talk about what we were talking about, just really easygoing conversation… (Ivan)

> *Understanding student emotion.* Frequently, student participants described how

supportive educators would notice changes in their mood or demeanor, and bring it up. This provided an opening for discussing the underlying issue, as in the case with Ivan, whose family was experiencing financial problems:

> I remember we were having some money issues at home and I went and talked to him and told him what was going on. Things were tough and stuff. He had told me that I hadn't been fully there in class and my other teachers had said the same thing. I went in and we talked and we sat there during lunch and just sat there for an hour and talked. He was just—he was very supportive and just talked to me. He was like, "You know, things get better and you can do this. What's going on?" We just talked about everything that was going on, where your parents worked, what's going on with their work and putting everything together, I guess, putting the whole picture together and how to make it better. It was helpful just to have someone there to tell how you feel, not keep it inside yourself. (Ivan)

Students felt connected to these educators in part because they knew the educators were working to understand them as people. Having a teacher or a counselor make an

effort to notice and care about their inner lives was significant for the students. In the

case of Jesus, for example, his high school counselor was the first adult who broke

through his tough demeanor:

> What he said to me was that it's hard for me to trust someone to let them into my life, basically. When he told me that, I thought about it for a couple of days and then I realized that it was true. I don't really let somebody into my life that easily; it takes a lot. As soon as he told me that and then I thought about it, I'm like, "Wow, this guy really does understand who I am." He knew me right off the bat. (Jesus)

Non-judgmental attitude. A non-judgmental attitude was one attribute

participants named that contributes to educators gaining students' trust and encouraging

them to open up. Supportive educators were often described by student participants as

non-judgmental. This was a central finding from survey data as well, where students

consistently rated supportive educators high on non-judgmental attitude. This

characteristic helped students feel comfortable opening up about personal issues, barriers,

struggles. A common theme in interviews and written responses was the need for

educators to be open to understanding *why* a student is not achieving, instead of making

assumptions based on pre-judgments. For example, Yasmin compared her teacher's non-

judgmental attitude to the way some teachers might jump to conclusions about possible

motivations for students having trouble academically:

> I think—well I think all teachers care about their students—but Mr. Marez, he would really relate to us, and I think some teachers don't really think about the obstacles students go through and kind of don't put themselves in their situation and just think that they're bad students or they're lazy or something. (Yasmin)

The non-judgmental attitude was also a theme in open-ended survey responses to

the question: *What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at*

schools need to know to better support Latino first-generation college-bound high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college? For example, one student wrote, "they should not pre-judge the student, even if the student is not doing well in class for they may have potential to be something great, but they need something that will help them know that they should just try their best for it is benefiting their future."

   Using personal experience to connect with students. Student participants noted that supportive educators often shared personal experiences in order to connect with students. This theme was present in 13 of the student data sources. Students reported this is one way they knew educators could understand their perspectives. In many cases, educators shared with their classes the struggles they faced in high school and college, such as family issues, financial problems, or academic difficulties. For example, Yolanda's father was in prison throughout her high school years, and she found out her teacher, Ms. Robinson, had a similar experience.

> Ms. Robinson definitely knew about it, and I feel like the reason we connected was because her dad was in a similar situation [incarcerated]. And I would sit there and tell her how I felt and she'd "you know, honey I totally understand you, because when I was growing up that was the exact same thing I went through." And she finished school. And she told me she had a waitressing job to help her pay for school and her books, and she graduated, and she's a teacher. (Yolanda)

Similarly, Yasmin's teacher shared details about his background with the class.

> When he was in college he would tell us that he would have up to three jobs to make ends meet financially and everything. I thought about that. He worked really hard and he had really good grades and he graduated and he's a teacher now. It made me think about that money sometimes really isn't a problem because you can always find ways to work it out. (Yasmin)

Students reported experiencing relief knowing their teachers had faced and overcome similar obstacles.

Thematic cluster 2: Perspective taking: Analysis of educator responses.

Educators reported working to see students' perspectives and to understand them as people. Elements of perspective taking that emerged from educators' responses were asking questions and listening, understanding student emotion, and using personal experience to connect with students.

Asking questions and listening.

> Sometimes they just want somebody to listen. I learned that. At first I felt like I always have to provide some kind of advice or some kind of an answer. You don't always have to have the answers. They just need a set of ears. You just listen. It's more about listening than speaking. They knew they could show up. As soon as I was there, I had a line of kids outside my classroom just waiting to go in. Those kids, even though they moved on to other teachers, they continued coming to my room. That was nice. That was always nice, to keep following up on them. (Ms. Nuñez)

Rogers (1975) describes empathy as "a process rather than a state" (p. 3). Asking questions and listening attentively to the answers is a critical part of this process. Supportive educators in this study take the time to ask students about their worlds. Educators demonstrate skill at knowing how to approach students in a way that makes them feel comfortable sharing. These adults also admitted that "listening is the hardest part" and that it is a skill that takes time to develop. Ms. Lopez, a Migrant Education Advisor, talked about the process of learning to listen:

> I think that's what's benefitted me with [working with a support group], you know, it's taught me to take the time to listen to the kids. You know, there's a lot of surface stuff. But then something, you know they say that just catches your ear and you're like-whoa whoa whoa—wait, what do you mean about—y'know? Tell me about that. And if you create that environment that no matter what's going on that you'll take the time to

listen to them, that creates a safe place for them to come and talk cuz they know that you'll listen. And I think that's a big deal. (Ms. Lopez)

Understanding student emotion. When asked about their ability to connect with students, educators emphasized that paying attention to and working to understand students' emotions is an important element of the process. Teachers and counselors interviewed for this study talked about watching students' faces and being alert to changes in mood as indicators of students' needs. Ms. Santana described this skill:

> As much as there's the art of teaching there's the art of counseling and being able to listen. And watching certain behaviors, when I ask a certain question. Noticing the tear in a corner of an eye when I ask about family stuff. Being very—honing in on those observation skills and listening skills. (Ms. Santana)

Ms. Nuñez described how she used these observation skills in her math class to support Silvia, who often struggled with the material:

> I had to read her facial expressions and I used a lot of walking around the classroom and checking her answers. A lot of things she didn't notice that I did. There were just things that I learned how to know each of my students. When she looked like Mona Lisa, like a lot other of my kids, if I saw that Mona Lisa expression then I wanted to check. I wanted to make sure that she understood. (Ms. Nuñez)

Mr. Marez, an AVID and History teacher, talked about a student's feelings at the end of senior year. This student was experiencing anxiety around the college matriculation process, and because Mr. Marez recognized and empathized with these emotions, he was better able to assist the student.

> Mr. Marez: I know there's certain things still he kind of gets concerned about, because for him, I think that he really wants to be successful, so he really wants to make sure that everything he does is correct, so there is that fear in him that – not fear – I would put it more of a – I'm trying to figure the word I could best use to describe that. He wants to make sure that he's doing it right.
>
> Interviewer: So maybe doubt?

Mr. Marez: Yeah. He wants to make sure he doesn't have that doubt – if I do, is that correct. You know, he needs to have that self-confidence knowing that what he's doing is correct. So, that's where we're at with him, like for example today, I just emailed him because he was concerned about…his entrance exam scores were very low. Does that mean that he's not going to [the state university] now, and that's not the case. It just means he has to take remedial classes, but he's still accepted into [the state university]. Those are the things I'm talking about as far as self-confidence. And, it's okay, I had to remind him that it's okay, everybody goes through this. You just have to kind of relearn some of the things. (Mr. Marez)

Using personal experience to connect with students. Five of the educator participants reported using their own personal experience to connect with students. Supportive educators share their own struggles with students. Educators do this intentionally, to help normalize situations for students, help them feel understood, and to provide models of adults who have faced similar challenging circumstances and achieved their goals.

I just put myself out there for kids to know that there is a way. There's always a way. Silvia really connected with that because she saw herself as, "There's nobody in my family I can talk to about college. There's this pathway that I know I am supposed to follow but I don't know what to expect." I told her "it's OK not to know what to expect"...She saw herself reflected in me. There was somebody like her that had already done the walk. (Ms. Nuñez)

This quote shows how Ms. Nuñez considered Silvia's college aspirations in the context of her background. This cultural perspective taking can be termed cultural empathy.

Thematic cluster 3: Cultural empathy: Analysis of student responses. Findings around the theme of cultural empathy revealed two main themes: educator ethnicity and the importance of family. A common theme that emerged from student responses was the importance of educators seeing students' perspectives in the context of their cultural background. Study participants emphasized the importance of their families in their

lives. Family expectations of students are often influenced by traditional gender roles.

As first-generation college students, the participants' parents do not have experience with

higher education. The majority of participants' families struggle financially, and in many

cases students work to contribute to the family income during high school and college. In

some cases, students' families were facing immigration issues.

Educator ethnicity. Five of 22 student interview participants stated that having

educators who are also Latina/o is significant. For the students, these educators provided

a daily reminder they could make it to college. Yasmin articulated this phenomenon:

> Mostly the students in my class were Latino as well and he was too. I
> believe he was first-generation [to go] to college as well. We could kind
> of relate to him that he was a first-generation [student] and we would be
> too so it kind of motivated us to go to college. (Yasmin)

Silvia expressed how having her math teacher acknowledge their shared culture through

using Spanish and joking made her feel more comfortable and connected in class.

> Because her parents were also like my parents, you know, they have no
> education, they're …Spanish is their first language, but just knowing that
> she made it through and she's made a difference in her family, but Algebra
> was difficult for me. She would explain it in Spanish…and she made it
> fun, she made interactive, and she would make jokes or she would talk in
> Spanish, so that made me feel confident and understand her better, you
> know, and just knowing that if she made it, I can do it too, we're from
> similar backgrounds, and just getting her to help me with…contacting
> people here at the university, that was a big help, and she just finished her
> master's here too. (Silvia)

However, even in cases where supportive educators did not share students'

culture, participants reported that these educators found ways to let students know they

cared and understood. Of 22 student interviewees, seven described a supportive educator

who was Latina/o and 15 described an educator from another group. Similarly, in the

survey sample, 27.2% of Latina/o student respondents described their supportive educator

as being "the same race/ethnicity as me". This number is higher than the proportion of

Latina/o educators in the county, which was 16.4% in 2010-11 (Education Data

Partnership, 2012).

Although Latina/o educators have an enhanced ability to connect with students

through shared culture, educator empathy transcended cultural similarity. This confirms

survey results showing no significant difference in empathy scores between Latina/o

educators and non-Latina/o educators. For example, although Ivan's teacher is not

Latino, Ivan sensed that Mr. Sewell understood and valued his cultural background based

on observing his interactions with students and other staff members:

> He was really understanding of minority groups. Like I said, it's hard to explain, but you can sense that you can feel comfortable with him no matter who you are. He had friends from different backgrounds. Our Spanish teacher, which is Mr. Gomez; him and Mr. Sewell, were great friends. They would always joke around. I don't know, it just felt like he was really easy to get along with and he really understood your background. Most of all, he wouldn't judge you based on your background. (Ivan)

Similarly, Lalo described how his teacher used her understanding of student culture to

help her female students whose parents were reluctant to allow them to attend college

away from home:

> …especially with the girls…it was, if they had difficulty convincing their parents and some of them would come to school crying, like, oh, I got into, a good school, like let's say you get into a good school, but your parents are like, "No, you're not going there. Like, it's too far." Things like that, you know? Because there's certain cultural expectations and other roles, and Ms. Brown is…she's…she's a white lady, but she would…she understood what, like say another race would go through. You know? Like, she wasn't close minded or anything like that. And, yeah, she put herself in other peoples shoes and she would talk to the student and tell them things that are, like strategies that they could take, or things like that. And she would talk to the parents, also. (Lalo)

The importance of family. Students expressed some ambivalence about their families' role in their academic lives. While family was very important to them, and they were dedicated and loyal to helping their families, students also sometimes felt family obligations might impede their academic progress, especially in terms of responsibilities at home for chores, childcare, and for contributing financially by working. Meanwhile, even though the fact that families struggled financially could be a barrier, it was also a motivating factor for some students. Lorenzo expressed this:

> I feel like that's why a lot of my motivation came because I knew that through school I could have a job—I wouldn't have to be working an hourly wage. Because I saw my parents—or at least my mom—cuz I grew up—my mom just raised me—my dad eventually left to Mexico when I was nine years old and my mom raised me since. So I realized, if you don't go to school, you're going to be working every day and you're going to be working paycheck to paycheck—you're not going to have any extra money. That's kinda what made me realize that going to school was important so eventually in the future I could have a good job and a stable job and not have to worry about paying the bills.

He went on to suggest that educators who understand students' culture use this desire for socio-economic mobility as a motivational tool:

> So I feel like a lot of it is teachers and counselors telling them the importance of this—and make them realize what their parents are going through so they don't have to go through that. (Lorenzo)

Student participants reported that a significant barrier to attending college was their parents' misunderstanding and lack of information about the cost of college. Educators were instrumental in helping families as well as students understand financial aid. In Yvette's case, a college-access program offered workshops in Spanish for parents. Her counselor, Mr. Luna, was able to work with Yvette's father to help him better understand college and how financial aid works.

Yes, he really talked to my dad and like more from man to man than counselor to parent. It was more like, "This is what you need to do." So I'm really grateful that he did and my dad was able to understand this is what you need to do, like we don't have to take out loans to go to school. I mean we can make it through like that. So I thought it was useful that they do a lot of financial aid workshops, because a lot of the parents don't understand…They don't want to listen, so I know my dad was like that. My mom was more understanding because she was born here, but my dad was more worried about the cost of school and my choice of major or more like he didn't understand, but because they did all those workshops, he understood what my major was going to do and why I was going to school and how I was going to get to my goal. So it was very easy for him to understand in Spanish. (Yvette)

While students were motivated to go to college to improve their families' economic conditions, they were also reluctant to leave the family home to get an education. Yvette expressed this ambivalence. Her counselor, Mr. Luna, understood her mixed feelings about leaving home and helped her choose a university where she could live on campus, but that was a short drive from her family's home.

He was [understanding] because he grew up around where we did. He grew up in a Hispanic family and knows how we are as a family. It has a lot to do with our culture. Our dad is supposed to approve of everything which is still important, but right now it's more like I'm doing things on my own. Being a girl made it harder for me to be able to leave my home. Mostly because I'm daddy's little girl, always will be, but it was harder on him than on my mom which is kind of weird but Mr. Luna kind of understood because his sisters went through that. So he understood where I was coming from that I don't want to leave my family, but I do want to go to school. So it made it easier for me to be like, "It's okay to want to leave, but it's okay to want to come back." (Yvette)

At the time of the interview, Yvette was attending a summer bridge program for incoming first year students. She reported that she continued to communicate with her counselor about her doubts and fears around the issue of leaving her family to attend college.

Thematic cluster 3: Cultural empathy: Analysis of educator responses. Whether or not they were themselves Latina/o, educator participants all viewed cultural understanding as a key component of their interactions with students.

Educator ethnicity. Of seven educator participants interviewed for this study, five are Latina/o. For these educators, they felt their ethnicity helped them connect with students. For Mr. Martinez, a high school counselor, the fact that his background is similar to many of his students is an asset, as he describes here:

> I come from that background—low socioeconomic background. My father was not very involved in my education. And my mother had very limited education herself, but she made it a point to send me to school every day and to be involved in my schooling. And then of course, the whole gang affiliation. And so it gives you a better understanding. I think it makes you far more capable to service the needs of this particular population of students. I think that families are also more trusting. When they see someone that they can relate to. Someone not only that understands their background, but also speaks their language…And so I think that's a huge icebreaker. It paves the way for us to be able to serve the students in very similar backgrounds as ours. (Mr. Martinez)

At the same time, Ms. Michaels and Mr. Clark, who were not Latina/o, had worked to learn about their students' cultures and considered this an important part of the teacher's role. Ms. Michaels chose to focus on the commonality of human struggles and experiences, by choosing literature for her English classes dealing with existential themes of meaning and purpose. Mr. Clark had spent time learning about his students' cultures to help understand where students are coming from. As a teacher leader responsible for providing professional development to other teachers, he focuses on increasing cultural empathy among his colleagues. He suggested educators do home visits in order to develop empathy for the Latina/o students at his school who were predominantly low-income:

I think one of the main things: do a home visit. Get a look at where your students are coming from. Because I think a lot of my colleagues— poverty is just this abstract thing. And when you visit, it's just shocking. This has always happened. Kid doesn't do their homework over a period of time—and they're "lazy". Then you visit their home, and—where would you do homework in this house? Then you talk to the kid. Where do you do homework? "In the bathroom." How long can you be in there before…? "About 20 minutes at a time. That's the only quiet place." More information. Understand the students. Then they'll be more empathetic. Then, when they believe the kid can do it, then convincing [a teacher] to scaffold and use appropriate instructional strategies—is a lot easier. As opposed to, telling him "you need to do this". (Mr. Clark)

The importance of family. Understanding the family's perspective was a key theme in interviews with educators. In addition, educators see how student perspectives and goals are affected by their relationship with and role in their families.

But family is SO important for our students—which is not a bad thing— but, they do so much more than my colleagues did when they were young. In terms of responsibility, work, chores, raising kids, feeding kids, translating for parents, going to—you know, it's like a full time job being a kid in that type of environment. And I don't think—a lot of our colleagues don't realize that. (Mr. Clark)

Overall, the educators interviewed for this study see family as an asset not as a barrier, but understood that for first-generation college-bound students, families are not familiar with the college process. There may be information gaps, misconceptions, and fears that need to be addressed. Interview data show supportive educators acknowledge the importance of involving parents in the college process. Ms. Michaels talked about the need for educators to reach out to families:

I think there needs to be open dialogue with parents about that. If your son or daughter wants to apply to college, and helping them understand that that is a part of our world and our reality today and in all my experiences last year and this year and years past…every family that has a first-generation college goer wants that more than anything for their child, but they want to feel like they're a part of the process. Every parent that I have encountered as a first-generation college goer wants that for their

student. They just want to be a part of the conversation. They don't want to be left behind and I think that you know in like the more of an abstract context it's already hard to let your child go to college I would imagine… and it's probably even harder to feel like you're not a part of that process and that decision …(Ms. Michaels)

A frequent theme in educator interviews was understanding what a big step it is for families to have a first-generation college student. Educators could see not only the student's perspective, but also the family's point of view:

Although I just said it's the next natural step… like socially speaking, culturally speaking that doesn't mean it's not a huge deal. I think celebrating that and honoring that not in like a condescending way or a patronizing way… is huge. I think that's so important to get them excited about that and to remind them that just because they're doing this, it doesn't mean they're leaving their family behind or they're going to be on a different level than their family and like you know that's not what happens and it might, but that's okay because that just means that they're growing and evolving as people and …(Ms. Michaels)

The issue of whether or not to encourage students to apply to and attend college out of town is significant, according to educator participants. When it comes to assisting students with college applications, educators noted that students and parents are often not comfortable with students going to a university away from home. Mr. Clark has a lot of experience with this phenomenon, and described his interactions with parents:

The struggle is to convince the parents to allow their star to move on and go away and become an adult and live her own life. And I say "her" because it's mostly girls that get the pressure to stay home. And I get kids who get their acceptance letters and mom's like "huh" cuz to mom that means—family's breaking up—(Mr. Clark)

Educators acknowledged the need to adjust the guidance they offer students depending on the family's situation, and that staying at home does not mean college is not an option for students:

It's really difficult to get them outside of [this area]. To get them to look at schools outside of [this county]. I want them to expand and look on—

but the reality is, they can have responsibilities at home—whether it's
financial—babysitting—you know, all of these responsibilities and being
respectful of that—of the cultural aspects of their role in the family. (Ms.
Santana)

Thematic cluster 4: High expectations: Analysis of student responses. A

common theme throughout the data sources was educators holding high expectations for

Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. For students, the fact that their teachers

and counselors believed they could handle challenging college-preparatory classes was a

motivating factor. The theme of high expectations emerged in 16 student interviews.

Participants frequently described teachers and counselors "pushing" them to stay in a

challenging class, take an AP class, and consider college when that might not have been

part of their plans. Students described educators as believing in their potential, and

expecting them to succeed.

For example, Joel described his interactions with his counselor, Ms. Colon, and

how she communicated her high expectations for him:

> … she wouldn't say *"if* you get into college", she would say, "*when*
> you're in college." I was like "okay". She would say "when you're in
> college you need to be more social. You'll get more social." She would
> say *when* you're there already. It kind of told me like—dang—she already
> thinks I'm there. That's kind of another thing that motivated me was that
> people would say *when* you're there, not *if* you make it or anything. They
> wouldn't question.

Joel also described how Ms. Colon monitored his grades and pushed him when needed,

refusing to let him drop a course when it was difficult for him.

> Occasionally I would go in her office and just stop by. Because they told
> me just to stop by just to see how you're doing, and I would. She would
> just explain, "oh you're doing fine", or she would tell me, "no you need to
> do better". Actually, she's the one who, when I failed my Trig class, I
> didn't want to take Trigonometry again, and she said "no you have to take
> it again because that's what colleges look at". That was my third year of

school so I was like "I don't want to". She's like "I'm not going to take you out", she didn't let me get out of it...That's pretty much it, when you have people who have faith in you and believe in you then it motivates you, like, "oh, well maybe they're right." (Joel)

High expectations lead to student belief potential. Like Joel, many participants did not believe they could attend college prior to their relationships with these supportive educators in high school. In many cases, supportive educators were instrumental in showing students a path in life they might not have thought was possible. The theme of students "believing in themselves" was present in 22 data sources. For example, in her written response, Maria described how her counselor and Migrant Education advisor helped her see her potential:

> Little did I know that these two special people were able to convince me that I was a strong young woman that could accomplish anything if I believed I could. Towards the end of my junior year, I now believed in myself that I could be the first in my family to attend a 4 yr college. Now look at me! I am working full-time and also a full-time student at [the university]. I am very proud of myself and without them, I would probably not be where I am today. (Maria, written response)

Student participants frequently reported that supportive educators helped them change their beliefs about their own potential by showing them their grades and progress. Educators showed students their transcripts and explained what their grades meant for their post-secondary options. Even students who had done well throughout high school were sometimes surprised that their counselors and teachers believed they could attend college. Carlos described this moment of realization with his counselor:

> She was the first person to tell me that I *can* go to college, and that brought a smile to my face. I almost kind of like did not believe her because of my [immigration] status, but she told me, "Carlos, look at your grades." She printed out my transcript, and she was like, "Look at these amazing grades. Look at your GPA. Colleges are going to fight for you. They want you. They want you to go to their campus." So, after what she

told me I recorded that in my head, and I did well through high school, and that's why I received honors. I graduated with honors. (Carlos)

Likewise, David talked about how his AVID teacher, Mr. Simons, was the first person to talk to him about college. This conversation opened up a new possible future for him:

> I didn't really give it much thought until I had an interview with Mr. Simons and that was eighth grade, but he just told me, "You have the potential. Don't waste it. Go to school." After that it got me to thinking because of my parents, where like my dad, he didn't finish. He was educated up to sixth grade, so it's like okay, I see how he's doing. My mom, high school, and then she didn't go to college, so it's like I realized maybe things would be better if I just do school… (David)

As supportive educators monitor students' progress, they are instrumental in helping students complete college entrance requirements. Many times, this involves convincing students they are capable of succeeding in more challenging courses. Omar explained how his English teacher helped him transition out of English Language Development classes in order to complete the English requirements to attend a four-year university:

> Before I met Mr. Katz I used to be more insecure, after I met him I started to believe in myself. I took a reading language class with him and he told me that I was supposed to be in a higher-level class. And because of that I decided to get into English 2. I was not supposed to skip that many classes; I skipped many reading classes, English transition, and English 1. He talked to many administrators and teachers so I could jump all the way to English 2. He said that he was sure that I had the potential to do well in higher-level English classes. (Omar, written response)

Because Omar arrived in the United States during middle school as an English Learner, had it not been for Mr. Katz's intervention, he would not have been able to complete the college entrance requirements.

Educators communicate confidence in student abilities when students themselves do not have the confidence. Contrary to *pobrecito syndrome,* where educators feel sorry for students and hold low expectations (Garcia, 1997), the supportive educators described by participants in this study see the importance of building students' sense of self-confidence. During these conversations, educators' perspective taking was evident. For example, Hugo's counselor acknowledged his anxiety and worked to build his belief in himself:

> I remember one thing Ms. F. told me, college is a big thing and it's sort of worrying, but she said I was a really smart kid with a lot of potential, that I wouldn't be worried about what college I got into, my problem would be which college to pick. And that just told me—just took a lot of pressure off me, and that's a lot less worrying on my part. She showed that she believed in me so I should—there's no reason I couldn't believe in myself. (Hugo)

Thematic cluster 4: High expectations: Analysis of educator responses.

Educator participants in this study all reported a need to hold high expectations for students. In addition, teachers and counselors noted that high expectations for Latina/o, first-generation college students are not always the norm in schools. Sometimes educators feel pity for students instead of high expectations. Mr. Marez articulated this problem:

> I think there needs to be a set of expectations for the students. I think sometimes we pigeonhole them, and what I mean by that is …We feel sorry for them, because look at their background. But, because of their background, I think that's also a good way to show them that they can achieve better. I think sometimes just because they may be a Latino student or first-generation college-going student, they don't see them as, oh you know – there's always [community college] – you know, that kind of thing.

Supportive educators see students' potential and take responsibility for communicating to students that college is possible for them. These educators understand that first-generation college-bound students are unfamiliar with the university pathway, and make an effort to show students where they are academically and where they can go. Ms. Santana, a high school counselor, avoids the pitfalls of labeling students by beginning with the assumption that college is possible for every student.

> My mindset is that everybody's college. And so, when I meet with students, it's—that's my expectation: that they're going to a 4-year university. So really it's *them* kind of opting themselves out of that pathway. But when I communicate with them, it's always about preparing for 4-year university…And what I notice is a lot of times, if they're not in AVID, it's a huge surprise [that college is an option for them]. Like what? Really? And I sit down with them and review their transcript and show them you're on there—you're on that path. (Ms. Santana)

At the high school where Ms. Santana works as a counselor, the majority of students go on to college and university, and this is a stated goal of the school. Whereas Ms. Santana works at a school with an explicit school-wide college going culture, all of the educators in this study, even those who do not work at such high-achieving schools, reported holding high expectations for their students.

Student belief in potential. Six of the seven educator participants talked about changes in students' beliefs about their own academic potential during the course of high school. For example, Ms. Michaels sat down with Mireya to discuss her grades and her future at the beginning of senior year:

> I think it was almost as if it was some sort of epiphany for Mireya that she was smart. I almost would get this sense that she was surprised by the fact that she was smart and initially that made me sad for her, but then I was so excited for her because she finally figured it out and she believed it…
> (Ms. Michaels)

Like Mireya's epiphany, the imagery of "opening doors", "pathways" and "diamonds in

the rough" frequently emerged during interviews. Educators knew that seeing themselves

as college-bound could be both exciting and scary for students and recognized the

significance of having an adult at school that knows the pathway to college and believes

in students' capabilities.

> The counselor felt that she had…the potential to go to school. But the
> student Alma herself, she didn't think that she had that potential. Her
> grades showed it, but emotionally …she didn't feel that she'd be capable
> of it. It didn't even cross her mind that that was an option for her…And
> obviously this kid, she had heard about the dream—the American
> dream— but didn't think that it applied to her…Pretty much it was like
> she was …what do they call it? A diamond-in-the-rough kinda thing.
> And it was pretty cool because as we started talking to her throughout the
> year—and she got SO excited—like, she couldn't believe that that was
> possible. (Ms. Lopez, Migrant Education Advisor)

> Their belief in students' potential led to teachers, counselors, and advisors

pushing and motivating students when needed. Understanding students' perspectives

helped them effectively respond to students' uncertainty or lack of confidence.

> There's times when they don't really want to take another year of math—
> or, "I don't really want to take chemistry"—so I have to work through
> those psychological barriers, that maybe they're feeling not real
> confident, and can't see for themselves that they're very well prepared to
> move onto the next class. So it's that too—providing the confidence, and
> telling them that "look—yes!" and sitting down with the transcript and
> showing them why they are prepared. And what resources are available
> at our school, too. (Ms. Santana)

As evidenced by Ms. Santana's remarks, supportive educators work to understand their

students and can see when students' are not seeing their own potential accurately. In

these circumstances, an educator's empathic attitude enables them to provide students

needed guidance.

The special case of undocumented students. Although this study did not specifically focus on undocumented students, four student participants are undocumented, and immigration status came up in three of the educator interviews, as well as two survey responses. The data indicate that in the case of students who do not have legal status in the United States, supportive educators are particularly important, as these students have a great need for information regarding higher education, yet are often afraid to disclose their status. Undocumented students need access to information about their options, which are changing rapidly due to new legislation pending and the memo issued by President Obama in June, 2012 authorizing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012). In addition to federal policy, state policy is also in flux in California. Since 2002 in California, AB540 has allowed undocumented students to matriculate at public colleges and universities, and the California DREAM Act (Assembly Bill 130), passed in 2011, permits undocumented students to receive state financial aid beginning in January 2013. Nevertheless, educators may not have current information, and students may not ask, for fear of exposing themselves and their families to legal problems.

Educators who build trusting relationships with students create the necessary conditions for students to feel comfortable disclosing such a difficult issue as immigration status. Carlos described the process of opening up about his immigration status to his high school counselor, thus enabling her to better assist him with his college application process and financial aid.

> I eventually confessed to her, "Ms. Bennett, I don't think I can go to
> college," and she said, "Why not?" I had a hard time telling her why
> because I thought she was going to not believe in me no more. I thought

she was going to just say, "Oh, okay," but I eventually just let it out. I told her that I wasn't born here. I wasn't born in this country. I was born in Mexico and I don't have a social [security number] to go to college, to receive financial aid, and she didn't move me aside. She looked at me with confidence. She was like, "Carlos, I believe in you. I believe that you'll do great things in the future. Don't worry about that. You're a smart kid. You can go to college and have a successful life. That doesn't matter." I was like, "Okay." So she's been a great influence in my life.

In Carlos's case, his counselor was initially unfamiliar with issues faced by undocumented students. However, once she became aware of his immigration status, Ms. Bennett made an effort to research ways to support him. Her empathy for his situation inspired her to seek out information to help him achieve college admission.

Such access to social capital provided through relationships with empathic educators can truly change lives when it comes to undocumented students. For example, Mr. Clark told the story of Horacio, a former student:

So, Horacio was undocumented. He was one of those kids who had a 2.0 his freshman year and his teachers didn't know who he was. And I got him in my sophomore class, and he was one of my superstars. And he went on to AP and he did very well from then on out, but he had to deal with a lot of—you know—home—mom, their story, it was horrible. His father was killed in a land dispute in Mexico when he was 7. They hiked through the desert. Little brother almost died. Definite survivors… Horacio got into [a state university in another city]. He—we kind of had him apply strategically, because of his situation. It was amazing. He ended up meeting a contact up there, where they hosted fund raisers for him. And sort of passed the hat around. And he ended up able to complete a year at [the state university]. During that time, he ran for ASB president and won, but it was a paid position and he couldn't accept it, because he's undocumented. In the meantime, my wife had been contacting [a prestigious private college out of state]. Because Horacio got into [the private college] at that time wasn't sure what they could do—in terms of, they'd never had an undocumented student. But—long story short—they figured it out, and Horacio transferred after one year to [the private college]. Graduated from there and is at [an Ivy League] University now, getting a Master's in History and Social Justice, I think. (Mr. Clark)

Horacio's story highlights the importance of not only interpersonal relationships between students and educators, but also the usefulness of social networks and institutional support. Carlos suggested schools offer structured programs for undocumented students:

> What I think high school teachers should do is gather up AB 540 students or students that are going through financial issues and who are thinking about not going to college because it's too expensive or because they can't. Just gathering them up or having maybe an organization or somebody in charge of them, like be a mentor to them, like keep in touch with them. Let them know that they're not alone, that they have a support system. (Carlos)

Carlos's comment about a "support system" suggests that educators offer support to students in the context of the entire school organization. Institutional support was another unexpected theme that emerged from the data.

Unexpected theme: Organizational context – Institutional structures that promote relationship building. Quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of schools providing structures that promote relationship building. For example, the predominance of AVID teachers in the survey data as well as qualitative sources speaks to the importance of schools implementing structures to provide assist first-generation college bound students. In the AVID program, schools and districts implement structures to ensure teachers are monitoring student progress in all their classes. Furthermore, AVID teachers have more time with their classes than other teachers do, helping them get to know students personally, and to work through issues when they arise. Lorenzo talked about how being in the AVID program helped him:

> AVID was probably one of the big key things that helped me out because they guided me through the process for college and everything. If it wasn't for AVID it would have probably been harder for me to figure out

the things I had to do. So I started freshman year and kept through senior year, so that helped a lot.

While 14 of the 22 interviewees participated in AVID in high school, AVID is not the only program designed to ensure students are informed and supported in their college aspirations. Of the eight interviewees not in AVID, five were part of other organized activities at school such as clubs and college-access programs like GEAR-Up, which provided a greater context of support. For example, at the school where Ms. Michaels teaches English, each student has an advisor who is also their homeroom teacher. These teachers stay with the same students throughout their high school careers, acting as a second counselor. At Ms. Nuñez's school, students can take the "College Applications" course their senior year, which assists them with their applications for college as well as financial aid. Some students qualify for the Migrant Education Program, a federally funded program that assigns each student an advisor like Ms. Lopez, who reviews and monitors student progress, meets with students, and collaborates with school personnel to ensure high school graduation and access to post-secondary education. Three of the male interview participants belonged to a club for male Latino students that focused on developing leadership. For Yuliana, a first-year college student, she credited her counselor from the GEAR-Up program at her high school with providing the guidance she needed to achieve her goals. Evidence suggests that interpersonal relationships are situated within broader institutional contexts that can either support or constrain educators' efforts to offer support to students. Climate is an important feature of a school's organizational context.

School climate. Interview participants discussed ways that school and district

climate can support or constrain relationship building with students. For educators

working at schools with a collaborative culture, the willingness of teachers, counselors,

and administrators to communicate about specific students' needs was identified as an

asset to relationship building. Four of the seven educators interviewed highlighted

networking and collaboration among their colleagues as a key feature of their school's

organizational culture. For these educators, school structures supported them in their

efforts to offer empathic understanding to students.

Ms. Santana was one educator who noted the collaborative culture at her school.

She highlighted the school's homeroom structure, which helps students develop a sense

of belonging. Her school's brochure emphasizes a focus on "personal attention to

students". At the same time, Ms. Santana recognizes that budgetary constraints and

higher pupil to teacher and counselor ratios can negatively affect relationship building:

> And then, the reality is that we have, we're in a time right now where
> everybody has big classes—lots of kids—and so maybe are not getting
> that—connection from teachers, you know, elementary on up. There's
> just so many students in a class. And so making those connections can be
> really challenging.

In spite of time constraints, the educators interviewed for this study are dedicated

to providing relational support to students. Mr. Clark, an English and AVID teacher,

noted the changes over time in the demographics at his school, and the increasing needs

of students for personal support. He noted that some veteran educators at his school were

resistant to the changes:

> Some of them haven't made the transition from when the school used to
> be—80 % white middle class—you can lecture and test, and the kids do
> fine. And you can't do that anymore. If you do that, the kids are going to

fail. And it's not that you're not a good lecturer, but there are a lot of other things you need to do…

Mr. Clark acknowledged the demands of being an empathic educator, stating, "it does take a certain type of person—you can't do this job as just a job from 7:30 to 3:00. We have plenty of people who do that, but you can't do that effectively." Ms. Michaels also noted the challenge of building personal relationships with students, suggesting educators receive professional development around empathic understanding:

> I think that people are fearful of doing that, people are fearful of opening themselves up to that. It is emotionally taxing. I think that there has to be a structure to how you roll out and a culture of that sort. You can't just tell people to be empathetic and love kids. That's not going to happen, because that seems to contradictory to the way our education system has developed over the past 150 years, so I think that there has to be professional development around being a reflective practitioner.

Summary

The over-arching research question guiding this study is: *In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latino first-generation college-bound students?*

Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that educators who provide relational support to Latina/o first-generation college-bound high school students are perceived by students to be empathic and non-judgmental. These data also suggest that students rate Latina/o and non-Latina/o educators equally high on empathy and non-judgmental attitude. While the survey data provide a general profile of supportive high school, the qualitative phase of inquiry provides a more nuanced description of the student-educator relationship to unpack specific attitudes, behaviors, and skills of empathic teachers and counselors.

Data from the qualitative phase of the study were organized into four thematic clusters. Each of the thematic clusters explored in this chapter illuminates an important aspect of educator empathy. The operational definition of empathy used in this study is:

Empathy is the process of understanding others that in turn helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude; listening; working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.

The first thematic cluster described how educators build relationships with students by creating safe spaces, being open to hearing personal issues, building trust and using humor, and offering a personal connection that goes beyond the traditional student-teacher dynamic.

The second thematic cluster, perspective taking, is the heart of empathic understanding. The themes in this cluster are asking questions and listening, understanding student emotion, a non-judgmental attitude, and educators drawing from their own personal experiences to connect with students.

The third cluster is cultural empathy, which describes how educators work to see students' perspectives in the context of their cultural backgrounds. Educators whose cultural backgrounds are similar to their students' may use those similarities to connect with young people. Meanwhile, educators interviewed for and described in this study who were not Latina/o made a conscious effort to understand their students' cultures. For students in this study, a significant aspect of cultural empathy involved the importance of family; supportive educators demonstrated an understanding of the role of families in students' lives.

The fourth major theme in the data is high expectations. Data show that the educators identified by students most supporting them in their academic pursuits were those who held high expectations. Results suggest that educators who see and understand students' perspectives are able to push and challenge students, and often are instrumental in helping change students' beliefs about their own potential.

Data show that educator empathy is particularly important for undocumented students, as these young adults needed the context of a caring relationship to feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status and requesting information and help. For these students, their status was an important aspect of their reality, and the school adults supporting them needed to acknowledge this element of the student perspective.

An unexpected theme that emerged from the data was the number of AVID teachers that showed up in the data. Nearly 43 percent of college students surveyed named an AVID teacher as the adult at their high school who supported them in their academic and life goals. Of 22 student interview participants, 14 were in the AVID program. All 14 of the AVID students in the sample named their AVID teacher as their supportive educator. During interviews, students and educators reported this program and other institutional supports facilitated the relationship-building process.

This chapter presented data from the quantitative and qualitative phases of a mixed methods investigation of the role of educator empathy in relationships between high school educators and Latina/o first-generation high school students. Chapter 5 summarizes the purpose, methodology, and findings. Chapter 5 also revisits the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 3, and presents an expanded conceptual model

based on the present findings. Chapter 5 then describes implications for practice, policy,

theory, and future research in the context of the conceptual model.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"I think that my affection and empathy for my students comes before my

curriculum and my instruction."

(Ms. Michaels, high school English teacher)

"Honestly, if you're a teacher, you got to care about your students. Who

can honestly say they go into teaching for the money? You go in there

because you care about the students."

(Joaquin, first year college student)

This chapter provides a summary of the study and of findings presented in chapter four. Based on these findings, the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 3 is expanded to include critical conditions for empathy in schools. In the context of this expanded conceptual model, this chapter offers a discussion of finding and suggestions for practice, policy, theory, and future research.

Summary of the Dissertation

Statement of the problem. Latina/o students are the fastest growing demographic group in public K-12 schools, yet lag behind their non-Latino peers in graduation and college matriculation rates. Students of Latino origin are more likely than are their white peers to face risk factors such as poverty, limited English proficiency, lack of access to early childhood programs, parents unfamiliar with the educational system, as well as inequity in access to high-quality instruction. Research focusing on factors promoting academic success for Latina/o students suggests several elements that are essential for helping improve educational attainment for this historically underserved

group. These include increasing participation in preschool programs; improving teachers' cultural competence; providing college access programs; and effectively engaging parents (Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Purpose statement and research question. Literature on Latina/o student success using the theoretical lenses of resiliency and social capital suggests that relationships with caring adults may contribute to better educational outcomes (Benard, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Empathy, the process of seeing and understanding another person's perspective, is a foundational element of human relationships (Hoffman, 2000). Therefore, this study proposed a conceptual model (Figure 3.1) showing the importance of educator empathy for building social capital and resiliency in Latina/o students. The present study explored the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

In what ways does empathy play a role in the relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

Quantitative sub-questions.

a) Do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience supportive relationships with educators in high school?

b) For those Latina/o first-generation college-bound students who experience a supportive relationship, is this adult more likely to be a teacher, counselor, or other educator?

c) To what degree do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students perceive these educators as empathic?

d) Does the race/ethnicity of the educator affect how Latina/o first-generation college-bound students rate them on empathy?

Qualitative sub-questions.

e) What attitudes/attributes/behaviors do Latina/o first-generation college-bound students experience as supportive of their academic and life goals?

f) How do educators offer supportive relationships to Latina/o first-generation college-bound students who, without that support, might not graduate from high school and attend college?

Data from both quantitative and qualitative phases were used to answer the final sub-question:

g) What unexpected themes emerged that played a role in the effects of empathy for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students?

In exploring these questions, the following operational definition of empathy was used:

Empathy is the process of understanding others that in turn helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude; listening; working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.

Review of the Methodology. This research followed a transformative mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011), consisting of a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. First, the researcher conducted a survey of Latina/o first-generation college students at a public university in California in order to learn about their experiences of educator support in high school and their perceptions of educator empathy.

The survey data provided a broad overview of Latina/o students' experiences of educator support, as well as a pool of potential interview participants for the second phase of research. Survey respondents who indicated interest in being interviewed were contacted for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Other student interview participants were recruited from referrals from the researcher's colleagues, as well as from a summer bridge program at the university where the survey was conducted. A total of 22 student interviewees met with the researcher, and were asked to describe their relationships with supportive educators in high school. Student participants also responded to writing prompts about the support they received in high school. In order to learn about the educator-student relationship from the adult's perspective, seven high school educators were interviewed. Educator participants included four teachers, two counselors, and one Migrant Education advisor. During interviews, the researcher inquired about any school or district documents related to relationship building with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

Summary of Findings. Quantitative results show that Latina/o college students rate supportive high school educators high on empathy and non-judgmental attitude. Students' perceptions of educator empathy did not vary whether the educator was also Latina/o or not. The majority of supportive educators identified by students were teachers (approximately 75%) and many of those were AVID teachers.

Qualitative data analysis revealed four thematic clusters around educator empathy: relationship building, perspective taking, cultural empathy, and high expectations. In addition, the unique needs of undocumented students, as well as the importance of organizational context were unexpected themes uncovered in the data.
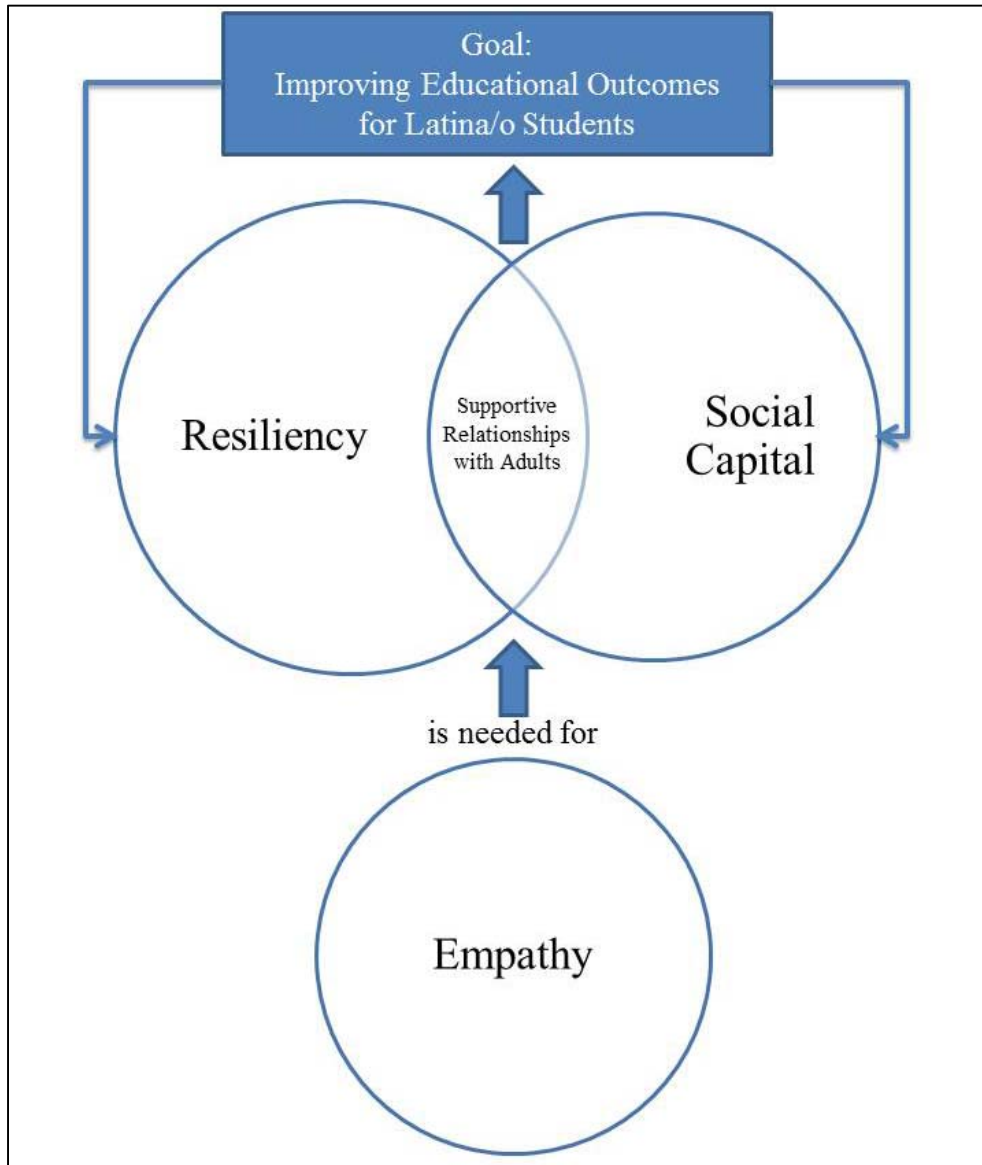
Proposed Integrated Model.

Figure 3.1: Empathic Education for School Success. This proposed integrated model shows how increasing educator empathy may help enhance supportive relationships between Latina/o students and adults at school.

This conceptual model, proposed in Chapter 3, shows how literature on Latina/o

student success from both resiliency and social capital frameworks suggests the

importance of supportive relationships with school adults to academic success for

underserved populations. The proposed model asserts that since empathy is the

foundational element of human relationships, educator empathy could enhance these supportive ties between students and educators and, in turn, positively affect outcomes for students.

Structure of Chapter 5

Results from the present study confirm the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 3, while prompting some additions. Empathic understanding played a significant role in the relationships described by student and educator participants. Findings from this work indicate a need to expand the theoretical model to include two essential conditions for enhancing educator empathy. These essential conditions are 1) educator attitudes, skills, and behaviors, and 2) an organizational context that supports relationship building and empathic understanding.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on these two essential conditions for ensuring access to supportive relationships based on empathic understanding, in order to improve academic outcomes for Latina/o students. The first section, Essential Condition I, offers a discussion of findings describing the necessary attitudes and behaviors individual educators need in order to offer empathic understanding to students. This section will also provide recommendations for practice based on Essential Condition I.

The second section of this chapter defines Essential Condition II, the organizational context necessary for an empathic school climate and culture. This section includes implications for practice suggested by this condition.

After presenting these two essential conditions, an expanded conceptual model is introduced which incorporates the two essential conditions of educator attitudes, skills, and behaviors, and organizational context. This expanded conceptual model has

implications for policy, practice, and research. This chapter concludes by presenting limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Essential Condition I: Educator Attitudes, Skills, and Behaviors

While clearly demonstrating that supportive relationships with educators influence academic success for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students, the literature revealed a dearth of specific descriptions of the attitudes, skills, and behaviors of supportive educators. The present research elucidates some important qualities and skills high school educators may use to connect with students on a personal level, and offer needed support. The four thematic clusters of relationship building, perspective taking, cultural empathy, and high expectations define these attitudes, skills, and behaviors.

Building relationships. Empathic educators see building relationships with students as integral to their work. For Latina/o participants in this study, personal connections with adults at school were integral to their academic success. Empathic educators demonstrate they value and care about students by creating safe places for students to talk, and letting students know they want to know them personally. In addition, supportive educators build trusting relationships with students and often use humor to help students feel comfortable. When students know that teachers and counselors genuinely care about them as people, these adults' classrooms and offices become havens where students can seek help, complete homework, or socialize. Having an "open door" policy, using questionnaires to get to know students personally, and structuring time for students to share in groups are all ways empathic educators initiate

and sustain relationships with students. The second thematic cluster, perspective taking, is the key foundational element of empathy.

Perspective taking. Empathic educators work to understand students' perspectives. The first step in perspective taking is listening to students without judgment. As empathic educators listen to students, they attend to students' emotions, and they use what they learn to offer needed support. Oftentimes, what students need from adults most is attentive and accepting listening. In addition, empathic educators share their own personal experiences as a means of connecting with students and helping students feel understood. The process of empathy as expressed by participants in this study means educators work to put themselves in students' shoes, instead of making assumptions. For Latina/o students who will be the first in their families to attend college, this often means working to understand students' cultural backgrounds and home environments.

Cultural empathy. Empathic educators demonstrate cultural empathy. Educators who share students' cultural background are sometimes able to connect with students based on similar experiences. Nevertheless, the present research suggests educators who do *not* share students' cultural backgrounds, yet make an effort to understand students' cultural perspectives, can effectively offer relational support to students. One example of educator cultural empathy affecting student success is seen when cultural understanding influences the ways educators involve students' families in the college process. When educators understand the importance of families in students' lives, they make an effort to communicate with parents who are unfamiliar with the

college application process, and they are better able to assist students whose parents may be fearful about the expense of college, or about their children leaving home.

Educator participants in this study who work with Latina/o first-generation college students noted the impact of students' family responsibilities on their schooling. Overall, these educators view students' family and culture as an asset. In terms of parents, the counselors and teachers described in this research extended their perspective taking to the students' families. Empathic and culturally responsive educators see close family ties as part of the "funds of knowledge" students bring with them to school (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Trumbull, 2001; Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992).

When students' parents have not attended college, young people may not envision futures that include post-secondary education. Participants talked about not considering college as an option, or not seeing themselves as capable of attending. Furthermore, stereotypes of Latina/o students as low achieving sometimes contributed to students' doubts about their abilities. Educators who understand this aspect of a student's perspective are well situated to help affect the student's vision for the future, and belief in her own potential.

High expectations. An empathic attitude and high expectations may affect students' belief in their own potential. Empathy researchers note the main difference between empathy and sympathy is that empathy is an *active* process (Davis, 1994). This aspect of empathy was evident in the data, as those educators identified by Latina/o first-generation college students as most supportive held high expectations for students and pushed them to achieve their goals. In many cases, empathic educators were the ones who introduced students to possible educational pathways of which they were previously

unaware. The data show that high expectations from a caring, empathic adult at school might be pivotal for students by helping to transform their belief in their own potential.

Researchers note that both supportive relationships with adults and high expectations contribute to improved academic outcomes for underserved students (Benard, 2003; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin, 2009). Findings from the present study suggest interplay between educator empathy and high expectations for students. In this study, educators' high expectations led to students believing in their potential to pursue a post-secondary education. In addition, it appears that educators who demonstrate empathy by working to see students' perspectives are better able to understand the importance of building students' confidence in their own abilities. Although findings from this study do not prove a causal relationship between empathic understanding and high expectations, they do suggest these elements are linked. This may be because, as Rogers stated, receiving empathy can alter an individual's self-concept and promote change. Empathic understanding leads to "greater understanding of, and prizing of himself" (1975, p. 9).

Implications of Essential Condition I

Educator empathy combined with high expectations is essential for supporting Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. Educators who are skilled at building relationships with Latina/o students know that first-generation college-bound students require extra support in order to fulfill graduation requirements and achieve college admission. The educators profiled in this study all held high expectations for their students. For these teachers and counselors, illuminating a pathway to higher education is a priority. The ability and disposition to see students' perspectives is a

critical element of supporting students in their academic goals. If, as the present finding suggest, empathic understanding is indeed an important qualification for teachers and counselors, what are the steps to fostering educator empathy?

Developing educator empathy is a critical task. The adults interviewed for and described by students in this study are not trained psychologists. Most of the survey and interview participants chose a teacher, not a counselor, as the adult that provided them the most support during high school. Indeed, the behaviors noted by students as supportive—building relationships, perspective taking, high expectations, and cultural empathy—are competencies that can be developed. Any adult can cultivate these skills, attitudes, and behaviors in order to offer meaningful support to young people.

Research suggests that access to social capital through relationships with caring adults may be enhanced by providing professional development around relationship building (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Cornelius-White, 2007; Wooley & Bowen, 2007). The present study adds to this body of knowledge, suggesting that educational programs for teachers focusing explicitly on empathic understanding may help educators develop necessary skills for offering needed support to students.

In order to help develop educator empathy, it may be useful to apply lessons from medical education in teacher preparation programs. Recent research at Massachusetts General Hospital found resident doctors' empathic awareness increased with empathy training (Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, and Phillips, 2012). The Jefferson Scale of Patient Empathy is now used by 30 medical schools in their physician training programs (Burling, 2012). Empathy research indicates people can learn to be empathic, especially if those in leadership positions model empathy (Rogers, 1975, p. 6).

Educator empathy may contribute to cultural understanding and increased equity. While Latina/o students comprise the majority of public school students in California (Kane, 2010), these demographics are not mirrored in the teaching force. In the southern California county where this study took place, only 16% of educators are Latina/o, while the K-12 student population is nearly 47% Latina/o (California Department of Education, 2012). In a recent national survey of Latina/o youths, 44% said they believed that cultural differences between students and their teachers was a major reason why Latina/o have lower academic achievement than other students (Lopez, 2009). Increasing the number of educators of color is an important goal; however, it will take years for school personnel to reflect the demographics of the student population. In the meantime, it is important to note the findings of the present study related to educator ethnicity. The majority of student respondents in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study had a supportive educator whose was *not* Latina/o, yet students experienced these educators as caring about them, and able to understand their perspectives. These results suggest that educators can work to understand students' cultural perspectives, regardless of their cultural similarity to students.

Students can benefit greatly from having mentors and role models from similar backgrounds (Santos & Reigadas, 2005). Indeed, for five of the 22 students interviewed for this study, the fact that their teacher or counselor shared their cultural heritage was an important aspect of their feelings of being understood. Over one-fourth (27%) of Latina/o survey respondents named high school educators who were also Latina/o to be the most supportive. At the same time, results from the present study suggest educators need not feel limited if they do not share students' ethnicity, home language, or culture.

Perspective taking is a skill that can be developed (Hoffman, 2000). According to Rogers, "the highest expression of empathy is accepting and nonjudgmental" (1975, p. 7). Furthermore, research shows cultural understanding and valuing students' cultures are essential to effectively engaging students from underserved populations (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Trumbull, 2001).

If educators are to become true "empowerment agents", providing students access to the necessary social networks for not just their own academic success, but effecting lasting change on inequitable institutional structures (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), then a necessary step is understanding and valuing where students are coming from. Empathy provides the basis for strong multiplex relationships between educators and students. Through these connections, first-generation college-bound students gain access to resources such as programs, information, and powerful individuals within institutions. Therefore, structuring schools around empathic understanding may help promote educational equity.

Essential Condition II: Organizational Context

Although this research focused on closely examining the interpersonal relationships educators form with Latina/o first-generation college-bound students, these ties exist within a broader organizational context. The culture and climate of a school can either support or constrain educators' efforts to build empathic relationships with students. This section discusses the impact of the organizational context on relational support available to students.

Organizational structures. Organizational structures can support empathic understanding. Frequently during interviews, students and educators referred to formal

and informal structures that support students, in part by ensuring access to relationships with educators. These structures included support groups, college access programs, homerooms, volunteer organizations, and clubs. Important aspects of many programs mentioned by participants are monitoring student progress, providing role models and mentoring, creating a sense of belonging, and offering guidance with college and financial aid application processes.

Even in the absence of organizational structures that support educator-student relationships, an empathic educator can make a significant difference in a student's life. For two student interviewees, Carlos and Yvette, the empathic educators they chose to describe lost their jobs during the students' high school careers. In both cases, the educators stayed in touch with the students and continued to support them, even though it was no longer "their job". Nevertheless, these outliers are exceptional cases, and findings suggest the importance of institutional structures that provide support to first-generation college-bound students, along with an organizational climate built on empathic understanding.

School climate and culture. Findings from this study suggest that a school's culture and climate can either promote or inhibit relationship building between educators and Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. Student and educator participants noted the detrimental effects of a culture of low expectations for students from underserved populations. By contrast, when schools are built on a goal of college access for all students, educators feel more supported in their efforts to assist students. In addition, educator respondents noted that teaching and counseling are collaborative processes and that when educators communicate with each other about student needs they

are better able to respond effectively. Strong, supportive interpersonal relationships among educators at a school may assist educators in offering empathic understanding to students. However, school and district policies do not often explicitly address empathic understanding and relationship building.

For example, the interview protocol for educators included a question about school or district documents addressing relationship building with students. In response to this question, two teachers referred to questionnaires they had developed for getting acquainted with students at the beginning of a term. One counselor, Ms. Santana, referred the researcher to the school's brochure describing her school's college-going culture and personal attention to students. Another educator directed the researcher to her personal philosophy of education statement. The remainder of educators interviewed did not know of any documents specifically addressing relationship building with students. The reason for this lack of documents—or, at least, educators' lack of knowledge of such documents—may be that relationships are not seen as important. On the other hand, these documents may not exist simply because relationship building is considered to be an obvious part of the teaching and counseling process.

Implications of Essential Condition II

School leaders can create empathic climates to support educators in developing empathic understanding. In addition to looking at the behaviors and dispositions of individual educators, it is important to consider how the organizational context of schools promotes or constrains empathic understanding. In the present research, a high percentage (48.5%) of Latina/o first-generation college students identified an AVID teacher as the school adult who provided the most support during

high school. This finding suggests that promoting AVID-like conditions in schools, especially around relationship building, might hold promise for improving academic achievement. How can schools implement structures that contribute to relationship building between adults and youth?

Currently, public education faces constraints due to shrinking budgets and increased accountability requirements. One consequence of this economic atmosphere is extremely high counselor to student ratios in high schools in California. For example, in California the average counselor to student ratio is 945 to one, compared to 477 to one in the nation as a whole (California Department of Education, 2011). Considering this stark reality, it becomes the responsibility of all adults in a school to form empathic relationships with students. To this end, programs that provide extra support to first-generation students, such as AVID, help ensure fewer students fall through the cracks. In addition to AVID programs (as these are also being cut due to budget woes), schools can leverage other resources to provide connected adult relationships for students.

Programs such as Achievement for Latinos through Academic Support (Larson & Rumberger, 1995), Puente (Gándara, 2002), GEAR up (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), and Migrant Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) are structured to monitor student progress and provide extra academic and social support to first-generation high school students. Programs and structures like these provide a context for strong interpersonal *relationships* between high school adults and youth, allowing for the exchange of needed information about high school graduation and post-secondary opportunities. Among Latina/o first-generation college-bound students, undocumented students represent an especially vulnerable group.

Educator empathy may help ensure equity for undocumented students. In the current political climate, student immigration status is a sensitive topic. As the undocumented students interviewed for this study attested, young people are often fearful of discussing their immigration status with school adults. They fear they may be judged negatively, and that teachers and counselors will give up on them if they believe their post-secondary options are limited by their status. At the same time, in order for educators to offer needed information to students, it is imperative they know which students require the information. Therefore, if schools wish to assist undocumented students in graduating and pursuing post-secondary studies, establishing connected, trusting, empathic relationships with students is essential.

Carlos, one of the undocumented students interviewed for this study, described how his story affected Liliana, the coordinator of a college access program, and her future interactions with other students in his situation. He recalled Liliana telling him "I've never realized the struggles that AB 540 students have gone through, but because of what you're going through it has changed the person that I am, and now the person that I am is going to do everything possible to help you succeed and raise money so you can continue your dreams of going to college and helping you major in what you want to major in." The understanding Carlos experienced from his teachers and counselors motivated him to mentor other young undocumented students. Carlos talked about how he formed a connection with another student in the same situation:

> I can remember my history teacher during spring break this year called me and told me about this student that was just like me in his history class. He was quiet, he has all these good grades, and he's an undocumented student, and he wanted me to come to school and talk to him. I was more than pleased to do so. So that Friday I met with the kid, and I explained to

him the struggles I went through and I told him that it is possible. "You can go to college." Because his parents told him that he can't. I told him, "Don't listen to your parents. They're wrong. You're an AB 540 student. You know what AB 540 student stands for?" He said, "No." So I told him the history about it. I told him that, "It's like a bill that allows undocumented students to go to college, but they can't receive financial assistance, but now that the [California] DREAM Act passed make sure to fill it out because you're going to be able to receive financial assistance." He was like, "Okay," so I felt like I was [my counselor] at that moment. That brought a smile to his face, and so I just let him know and I gave him my contact information, like my cell phone. I told him to friend request me on Facebook and I've been checking up with him to see how he's doing.

This is an example of educators as "empowerment agents" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Because of his relationships with empathic educators, not only was Carlos able to attend the university; he also became a change agent in his home community and at college. According to Rogers, "an empathic way of being can be learned from empathic persons" (p. 6). Educators, and educational leaders in particular, have the power to model and spread empathic attitudes and behaviors in their school communities. Systems built on a theoretical foundation that emphasizes the primacy of empathic understanding and relationship building hold promise for improving outcomes for undocumented students, and underserved students in general.
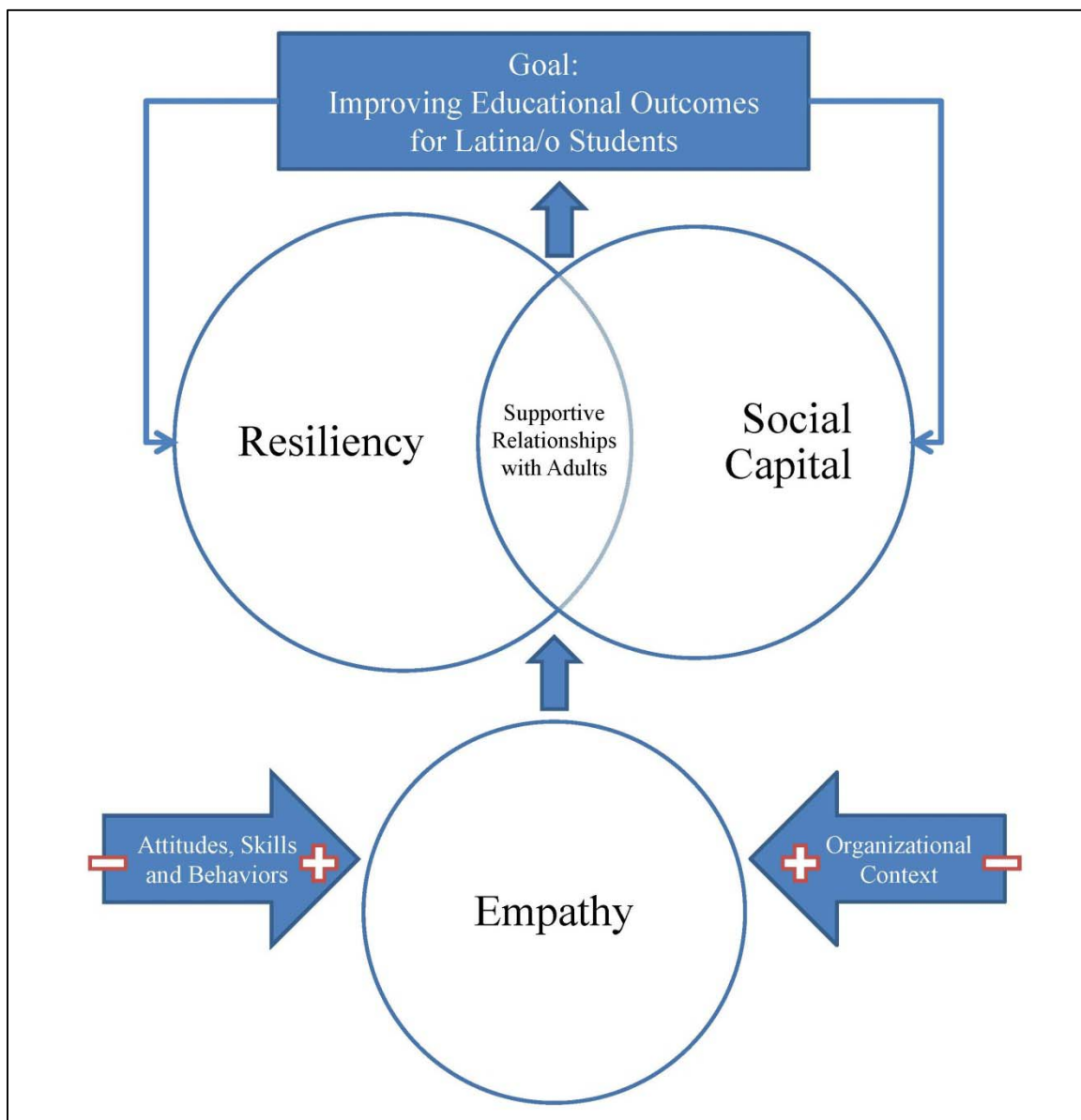
Expanded Conceptual Model

Figure 5.1: A Systems Approach to Empathic Education for School Success. This expanded conceptual model shows how increasing educator empathy may help enhance supportive relationships between Latina/o students and adults at school, and how the essential conditions of educators' attitudes, skills, and behaviors, and organizational context can support or constrain empathy.

Findings from the present study suggest a revised theoretical model showing the

importance of empathy for promoting supportive relationships between Latina/o first-

generation college-bound students and educators. While the model proposed in chapter 3

focused on the importance of educator empathy for building supportive relationships with students, findings from this work suggest the need for a model that considers not only relationships between individuals, but also takes into account the organizational context surrounding those relationships. This expanded model incorporates two essential conditions that, when present, may support empathic understanding: 1) educator attitudes, skills, and behaviors; and 2) organizational context. Conversely, when educators do not have the necessary attitudes, skills, and behaviors to offer empathic understanding to students, relationship building may be constrained. Meanwhile, the organizational context and climate of a school can either promote or impede empathic understanding.

Implications of expanded conceptual model for practice and policy.

Use what we know about empathy to build empathic school communities. The past decade has seen an explosion of research about empathy and empathy development. If the educational community chooses to focus on empathic understanding, abundant psychometric scales, educational materials, and programs are available for developing empathy. For example, University of California at Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center offers a clearinghouse of research on the "psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being" (University of California at Berkeley, 2012), including myriad resources related to empathy development. Other organizations are promoting empathy development for students (Roots of Empathy, 2012), and providing resources for measuring and developing emotional intelligence, including empathy (Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, 2012). Research suggests empathy is essential to the learning process (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Rogers, 1969). Empathic understanding should be considered when selecting and training educators.

Create and maintain structures to support Latina/o first-generation college students. When educators work to understanding the perspectives of students, they are better able to offer needed support. Although individual educators can have a significant impact on student success, systems need to be set up to ensure access to empathic relationships with educators for all students. Organizations within schools can address the specific needs of students striving to be the first in their families to attend college. Programs can benefit first-generation students by offering mentoring, career exploration, college tours, test preparation, tutoring, and college application assistance. However, programs dependent on outside funding sources are at the mercy of fluctuations in budgets and grants. One way to ensure students receive needed relational support is to focus on empathy development for all educators. This will keep schools focused on the importance of relationships to student success. Even in times of economic constraint, principals, teachers, and counselors who understand the centrality of relationships to academic achievement will continue to focus on empathic understanding.

Recruit and develop Latina/o educators while building cultural competence of all educators. While we continue to work to strengthen pipelines for underrepresented groups to enter the education profession, we must also ensure those who currently work in schools have the skills needed to support students effectively. This means all adults working in schools need to understand students' perspectives and backgrounds, including those aspects of students' worlds that relate to culture. Student and educator respondents expressed a desire to see more Latina/o educators in schools. Teacher preparation programs should actively recruit and support Latina/o students to ensure the racial and ethnic makeup of the teaching force more accurately reflects the diversity of the

population in schools. Meanwhile, developing cultural competence for all current and future educators, regardless of ethnicity, must be a priority in schools of education if we are to respond effectively to students' needs.

Limitations

This study offers insight into empathic relationships between high school educators and Latina/o students who will be the first in their families to attend college. Findings from this research can help educational leaders design programs to improve relational support for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. However, this study has certain limitations. These include limited sample size, context, and the timing of interviews. For the quantitative phase of the study, although the sample was representative of students participating in the Equal Opportunity Program, the relatively small size of the sample of Latina/o respondents (n=141) limits validity. In addition, the survey sample is not representative of all Latina/o first-generation college students in California or the United States, as these students all attended one state university in Southern California. In the qualitative phase, the size of the sample limits generalizability. With only 22 student and seven educator participants, it is impossible to describe the universe of experiences of Latina/o first-generation college students and the high school educators who support them. Finally, the timing of interviews is a limitation of the study. The researcher chose to interview college students about their experiences in high school. Student participants were asked to remember details of relationships with educators during high school. In some cases, participants found it difficult to recall specific details, as up to two years had passed since they graduated.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on empathy development for educators. The expanded conceptual model introduced here shows that necessary conditions for building empathy in schools include educator competencies and organizational context. If empathy is a necessary trait for educators, how can educator empathy be developed? Future research might test the implementation of professional development programs geared towards increasing emotional intelligence and empathy in teachers, counselors, and administrators. Lessons from medical education about professional development for empathy could be applied to this context.

Research on empathic school culture and climate. How can schools best be structured to ensure an organizational culture built on empathic understanding? Future studies might include research focusing on how schools create climates that nurture strong, empathic adult-student relationships. Even after high school, first-generation college students continue to require understanding and support. In California, college graduation rates for Latina/o students (34.8%) are lower than those of their white peers (47.4%) (Lumina Foundation, 2012). The need for relational support from empathic educators does not end when students receive a high school diploma. What current programs provide sustained supportive relationships that follow students during the transition from high school to college and beyond? What is the effectiveness of these programs? Case studies of schools with higher graduation rates and college matriculation rates for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students could offer insight into the type of organization culture that best supports students, and how to best nurture such a culture and climate.

Concluding Remarks

Latina/o students are now the majority of students in California's public schools. Many of these students will be the first-generation to graduate high school, and even more will be the first in their families to attend college. There is an urgent need to close the achievement gap for Latina/o students, the fastest-growing demographic group in the nation. Research shows there are many factors that can increase academic achievement of Latina/o students. One factor may be enhancing opportunities for empathic, supportive relationships with educators. The present study provides insight into how teachers, counselors, and others working in schools can effectively provide relational support to Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

In an era of accountability constraints and budget cuts, an empathic attitude is free. Educators do not need degrees in psychology to build supportive relationships with students. Empathic, empowering conversations can happen during class, in between classes, after school in the parking lot, or in the counselor's office. Schools and districts can support empathic understanding by creating and maintaining organizational structures and climates designed to ensure students receive relational support. Building relationships takes time, effort, and attention, yet is essential if we are to provide the support necessary for students from underserved groups to achieve high school graduation and college matriculation.

Findings from the present study suggest that educator empathy may be essential to providing a more equitable and culturally responsive educational process for students from a historically underserved group. The educators described by student participants for this study exemplify empathic understanding. For students, the experience of being seen and understood by educators who are working to understand their backgrounds,

hopes, and fears is crucial. Meanwhile, the educators interviewed for this research discussed their high degree of job satisfaction, asserting that their careers are fulfilling because of their empathic relationships with students. How would the educational process change if schools were organized around empathic understanding? What would happen if educational leaders considered creating empathic school environments to be their first, most important task? Findings from the present study indicate that empathic understanding may help educators transcend cultural differences and that empathy along with high expectations can significantly affect students' belief in their own potential. This research suggests empathy may be a critical element for improving educational outcomes for Latina/o first-generation college-bound students.

It is sometimes assumed that in order to have empathy for someone, our experience must be similar to his. However, this research suggests that educators need not share students' backgrounds in order to connect with and relate to them. If we care about understanding our students as people, have the courage and compassion to enter their worlds, and the skill to ask questions, listen, work to understand their perspectives, then we can build bridges between educators and students. Building such connections may be a key to achieving educational equity for an increasingly diverse student population. Relationships are the foundation for learning, and empathy is the cornerstone upon which relationships built. We need empathic educators, empathic leaders, and empathic educational organizations.

APPENDIX A: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE (UNDERGRADUATES)

Dear College Student,

I am a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the supportive relationships that high school educators form with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. You are being contacted because you are Latina/o student who is the first in your family to attend college.

Through this research, I am hoping to identify dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of high school educators that enable them to form supportive relationships with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. I believe this study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve outcomes for first-generation college-bound Latina/o students.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will receive a writing prompt via email asking about your experiences in high school. You will respond via email to the writing prompt. You will also be interviewed individually. The interview will have a conversational style and will last approximately one hour. During the interview you will be asked to describe your experiences with teachers, counselors and other adults at your high school. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying the information.

Your confidentiality will be respected throughout this process. Pseudonyms for schools, districts, students, and educators will be used to minimize the risk of identification. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research project. If you would like to participate, please reply to this email by July 15, 2011. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,
Beverly Prange
xxx-xxx-xxxx
bprange@sdcoe.net

APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE (EDUCATORS)

Dear Educator,

I am a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the supportive relationships that high school educators form with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. You are being contacted because you were identified by your colleagues as an educator who is skilled at providing support to Latina/o students who are the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college.

Through this research, I am hoping to identify dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of high school educators that enable them to form supportive relationships with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. I believe this study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve outcomes for first-generation college-bound Latina/o students.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed individually. The interview will have a conversational style and will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your experiences offering support to Latina/o first-generation college-bound students. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying the information.

Your confidentiality will be respected throughout this process. Pseudonyms for schools, districts, students, and educators will be used to minimize the risk of identification. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research project. If you would like to participate, please reply to this email by July 15, 2011. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Beverly Prange
Migrant Education Program Specialist
San Diego County Office of Education
xxx-xxx-xxxx
bprange@sdcoe.net

Exploring Relationships between High School Educators and First-in-Family College-bound Latina/o Students

Invitation to Participate

Beverly Prange, a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), is conducting a study that seeks to explore the supportive relationships that high school educators form with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. You are being contacted because you were identified by the Mini-corps Coordinator as a Latina/o student who is the first in your family to graduate high school and attend college.

This study has the following objective:

To identify dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of high school educators that enable them to form supportive relationships with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college.

Requirements of Participation

You will be interviewed individually. The interview will have a conversational style and will last approximately one hour. During the interview you will be asked to describe your experiences with teachers, counselors and other adults at your high school. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying the information.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. These include:
1. Loss of personal time necessary to participate in the interview and review of the interview transcript.
2. Psychological risk is possible as interview questions may elicit painful memories related to educational experiences.
3. Potential breach of confidentiality.

Safeguards

1. Interview sessions will be restricted to 45 minutes.
2. Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher for analysis purposes. Only the researcher will listen to and transcribe the

information you provide. The audio tapes will be destroyed following final analysis; no later than August 31, 2011.

3. Pseudonyms for schools, districts, students, and educators will be used to minimize the risk of identification.

4. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.

5. If you are experiencing a negative emotional response, the interview will be stopped and you will be directed to needed resources.

6. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

Benefits

Although your participation will yield minimal or no direct benefits to you, we believe the study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve outcomes for first-generation college-bound Latina/o students. Participants may receive a copy of the study upon request.

Questions/Contact Information

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Beverly Prange, bprange@sdcoe.net, xxx-xxx-xxxx, or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Mark Baldwin, mbaldwin@csusm.edu, 760-750-4306. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at 760-750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

□ I agree to participate in this research study.
□ I agree to have the interview audio taped.

_____   _____

Participant's Name   Date

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature

Exploring Relationships between High School Educators and First-in-Family College-bound Latina/o Students

Invitation to Participate

Beverly Prange, a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), is conducting a study that seeks to explore the supportive relationships that high school educators form with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. You are being contacted because you were identified by your colleagues as an educator who is skilled at providing support to Latina/o students who are the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college.

This study has the following objective:

To identify dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of high school educators that enable them to form supportive relationships with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college.

Requirements of Participation

You will be interviewed individually. The interview will have a conversational style and will last approximately one hour. During the interview you will be asked to describe your experiences providing support to Latina/o students who are the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying the information.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. These include:
4. Loss of personal time necessary to participate in the interview and review of the interview transcript.
5. Psychological risk is possible as interview questions may elicit painful memories related to educational experiences.
6. Potential breach of confidentiality.

Safeguards

7. Interview sessions will be restricted to 45 minutes.
8. Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher for analysis purposes. Only the researcher will listen to and transcribe the

information you provide. The audio tapes will be destroyed following final analysis; no later than August 31, 2011.
9. Pseudonyms for schools, districts, students, and educators will be used to minimize the risk of identification.
10. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.
11. If you are experiencing a negative emotional response, the interview will be stopped and you will be directed to needed resources.
12. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

Benefits

Although your participation will yield minimal or no direct benefits to you, we believe the study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve outcomes for first-generation college-bound Latina/o students. Participants may receive a copy of the study upon request.

Questions/Contact Information

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Beverly Prange, bprange@sdcoe.net, xxx-xxx-xxxx, or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Mark Baldwin, mbaldwin@csusm.edu, 760-750-4306. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at 760-750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

□ I agree to participate in this research study.
□ I agree to have the interview audio taped.

_____   _____
Participant's Name   Date

_____
Participant's Signature

_____
Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR EDUCATORS

Exploring Latino Students' Experiences of Supportive Relationships at School

Date	
Time of Interview	
Place	
Interviewer	
Participant/email	
Title	
School	
School District	

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how school adults like teachers, counselors, administrators and others can better support students in graduating from high school and going on to college.

Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher for analysis
purposes. Only the researcher will listen to and transcribe the information you provide. The audio tapes will be destroyed following final analysis; no later than August 31, 2012.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the
interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you
decide not to participate. If I ask you a question you do not feel comfortable answering, just let me know.

Questions:

1. Tell me a about yourself. What is your position at this school? What are your responsibilities?

2. Think about a student you are currently working with or worked with in the recent past who was or will be the first in his/her family to graduate from high school and attend college. Tell me about this student.

3. What types of support did you provide to this student?

4. What challenges, if any, did the student face as he/she worked towards graduation? How did you learn about these challenges?

5. Describe your interactions with this student.

6. Does your ability to understand a student's perspective—put yourself it their shoes—play a role in your relationships with students?

7. Do the culture and policies at your school/in your district help you offer this type of support to students?

8. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latino high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences working with Latino first-generation college-bound students?

10. Are there any documents related to policies at your school that address support for first-generation college students?

11. May I contact you in the future with follow-up questions?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Exploring Latina/o Students' Experiences of Supportive Relationships at School

Date	
Time of Interview	
Place	
Interviewer	
Participant	
University	
Year (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)	
High School(s) attended	
School District(s) attended	

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how school adults like teachers, counselors, administrators and others can better support students in graduating from high school and going on to college.

Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher for analysis
purposes. Only the researcher will listen to and transcribe the information you provide. The audio tapes will be destroyed following final analysis; no later than August 31, 2011.

Your participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you
decide not to participate.

Questions:

1. Tell me a about your background and your education. What was your school experience like?

2. Think back to when you were in middle and high school. Was there an adult at your school who you felt understood and supported you?

3. Who was this person?

4. When you say that person understood and supported you, what does mean?

5. How did you know this person understood you and supported you?

6. Did this adult support and motivate you in terms of your academic achievement?

7. Describe your interactions with this adult.

8. What did this adult say to you that you experienced as supportive?

9. What else did this adult do that helped you?

10. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latina/o high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

APPENDIX G: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE (SURVEY)

Dear Student,

I am a Migrant Education Program Specialist and a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the supportive relationships that high school educators form with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college.

Through this research, I am hoping to identify dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of high school educators that enable them to form supportive relationships with students who are Latina/o and the first in their families to graduate high school and attend college. I believe this study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve outcomes for first-generation college-bound Latina/o students.

Your confidentiality will be respected throughout this process. You may be assured your responses will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no negative repercussions should you decline to participate. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research project. If you would like to participate, please click on this link to complete the online survey: www.surveymonkeyxxxxxxxxx.com. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,
Beverly Prange
xxx-xxx-xxxx
bprange@sdcoe.net

Supportive Relationships

Thank you participating in this short (15 minute) survey! The purpose of this research is to gather information to improve educational outcomes for Latino, first generation college-bound students by exploring the support students experienced in high school.

The survey is voluntary, and there are no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. You many decline to answer any question, and may exit the survey at any time. To acknowledge your help, you have the option of entering a drawing for one of four $50 Target gift cards, 4 $25 movie theater gift cards, 5 EOP CSUSM messenger bags, or 5 EOP CSUSM travel mugs if you complete and submit the survey. Details are provided when you complete the survey.

By answering and submitting the survey, you are agreeing for your answers to be used in the research. All information collected will be kept confidential by the researcher, and no names or identifying information will be included in the reports or research articles.

1. How old are you?

- ○ 18
- ○ 19
- ○ 20
- ○ 21
- ○ 22
- ○ 23-25
- ○ 26-28
- ○ 29-35
- ○ over 35

2. What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male

3. Please select your year in college.

- ○ First year
- ○ Sophomore
- ○ Junior
- ○ Senior

4. What high school(s) did you attend?

Supportive Relationships

5. How many siblings do you have?

- ○ 0
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ more than 5

6. Choose the one that best describes you. I am the:

- ○ Oldest in my family
- ○ Youngest in my family
- ○ A middle child
- ○ An only child

Other (please specify)

_____

7. What is the highest level of school your mother completed?

- ○ None
- ○ Elementary school
- ○ Middle school
- ○ High school
- ○ Some college
- ○ Associate's degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ Advanced degree
- ○ I'm not sure

Supportive Relationships

8. What is the highest level of school your father completed?

- ◯ None
- ◯ Elementary school
- ◯ Middle school
- ◯ High school
- ◯ Some college
- ◯ Associate's degree
- ◯ Bachelor's degree
- ◯ Master's degree
- ◯ Advanced degree
- ◯ I'm not sure

9. What is your race/ethnicity? (choose all that apply)

- ☐ African-American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ White
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American

Other (please specify)

10. If you have older siblings, did any of them attend college?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ I don't have older siblings

11. Were there any adults at your high school who supported you in achieving high school graduation and college admission?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Supportive Relationships

12. Please share about your experiences in high school seeking support to achieve your academic goals.

13. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latino first generation college-bound high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

Please think of the one adult at your school who made the most difference for you in helping you achieve your academic goals. The next several questions will ask you to describe this person.

14. What is/was this person's main role at the school?

○ English Teacher   ○ Migrant Education advisor

○ Math Teacher   ○ Secretary

○ Science Teacher   ○ Custodian

○ History Teacher   ○ Principal

○ Teacher (other subject)   ○ Vice Principal

○ Counselor   ○ Coach

○ AVID teacher   ○ School Psychologist

○ AVID tutor

Other school adult (please specify)

15. What is this person's gender?

○ Female

○ Male

Supportive Relationships

16. This person's race/ethnicity is

☐ African-American

☐ Latino

☐ Hispanic

☐ Asian

☐ White

☐ Native American

☐ Pacific Islander

☐ I'm not sure

Other (please specify)

17. Is this person's race/ethnicity the same as yours?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Somewhat

○ I don't know

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18. For the person you identified as providing the most support to you in high school, please rate this person as to each of the following behaviors/attributes.

This person...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Understands my feelings	○	○	○	○	○
Understands my concerns	○	○	○	○	○
Seems concerned about me	○	○	○	○	○
Seems concerned about my family	○	○	○	○	○
Makes assumptions about me without asking for my input	○	○	○	○	○
Can view things from my perspective (see things as I see them)	○	○	○	○	○
Asks about what is happening in my daily life	○	○	○	○	○
Is a caring person	○	○	○	○	○
Shows concern for my overall well-being, not just how I am doing in school	○	○	○	○	○
Asks me how I feel about my problems	○	○	○	○	○
Arranges for adequate privacy when talking with me	○	○	○	○	○
Is always in a hurry	○	○	○	○	○
Takes my perspective into account when making decisions	○	○	○	○	○
Is judgmental	○	○	○	○	○
Understands my cultural background	○	○	○	○	○

19. What did this supportive adult do that helped you in high school?

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20. What do you think teachers, counselors, principals and other adults at schools need to know to better support Latino first generation college-bound high school students so they can graduate from high school and go to college?

21. Would you be willing to be interviewed individually for this study?

○ Yes

○ No

22. If you are willing to be interviewed individually for this study, please enter your name and email address.

Name:

Email Address:

Thank you

Thank you for participating in the survey!

23. If you wish to be entered in the drawing for one of four $50 Target gift cards, 4 $25 movie tickets, 5 EOP messenger bags, and 5 EOP travel mugs, please provide your name and email address so that we may contact you if you win.

Name:

Email Address:

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