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LEADERSHIP AND *MESTIZAJE*:

A Case Study of Three Latino Public School Superintendents in Texas

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A Case Study of Three Latino Public School Superintendents in Texas

by

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Dedication

To my parents,
my first teachers.

Acknowledgements

My journey to successfully complete this doctoral program of studies was not a lone journey; it was one to include a community of sage faculty, colleagues, friends, and family. I am eternally indebted to each person who has supported and encouraged me towards fulfilling my long-held dream of earning a doctoral degree. There are many who have shared my life's journey, informing my person, but I wish to acknowledge those who have been particular actors and voices during the course of my doctoral studies at The University of Texas at Austin.

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Thank you for sharing my journey.

**LEADERSHIP AND *MESTIZAJE*: A case study of three Latino
public school superintendents in Texas**

Publication No. _____

John Steven Cisneros, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

Supervisor: Rubén D. Olivárez

This study described and analyzed the characteristics of three Latino public school superintendents in the state of Texas and gained insight into their leadership behaviors; particularly their leadership styles, and the influences of cultural, familial, social, and other environmental factors on the leadership behaviors of the participants. This study considered the notion of *mestizaje*, that social, cultural, and historical experience of persons of Latino (Iberoamerican) extraction; how *mestizaje* informs leadership behaviors. The study followed qualitative research design and protocols, and utilized the case study method. Data gathered through three semi-structured interviews with each of the three participants, direct observations, and document reviews informed the findings. Findings regarding the characteristics of Latino public school superintendents and the influence of *mestizaje* on their professional behaviors surround four themes: empowering for leadership; informing leadership behaviors; leading for social justice; and school district functions in action. The notion of agency emerged as a primary consideration in the conclusions,

reflecting the imperative relation between social, cultural, and historical experiences, and one's position as a superintendent. The multiple subjectivities inherent in mestizaje are conversely opportunities for being transformational; thereby the locus of forging multiple objectivities.

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Superintendent Lopez and Superintendent Cantu each utilized a comparable metaphor when commenting on the role of Latino superintendents in the current social, political and cultural context; Superintendent Lopez spoke of “scouts and pioneers” and Superintendent Cantu spoke of “trailblazers” and the Lewis & Clark Expedition. The notion of forging a new path for others to follow, being role models and standard bearers, is suggested by their comments. Superintendent Lopez stated: 96

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

During the 2006-2007 school year 46% of the students enrolled in Texas public schools were Latino, and trends suggest this student population will continue to increase. In contrast, only 9.8% of Texas public school district superintendents were Latino. There is concern that as the Latino student population continues to increase, there are sufficient numbers of Latino superintendents at the helm of those districts with the largest Latino student population. The unique qualities that characterize Latinos call for leaders that are aware of and engaged in the Latino milieu, and view themselves in new ways that demand new skills (Rodriguez and Villarreal, 2001). National organizations such as the Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents (ALAS) believe that there should be a more comparable representation of Latino superintendents with the Latino student population, and are committed to identifying, recruiting, developing and advancing Latino school administrators and thus improving the educational accomplishments of Latino youth. The issue at hand is not simply about symmetrical quantitative representation of Latino superintendents in relation to Latino student population. The hope for greater representation of Latino superintendents in public school districts concerns itself with the role Latino superintendents can play in ameliorating what Friere has termed the *psychology of oppression* (1970), and the opportunity to demonstrate for Latino youth that out of a history of trials and tribulations, Latinos can be effective leaders and agents of change, can model success within the

mainstream culture without necessarily “*selling out La Raza*.” It is not a question of compromising or dismissing the Latino experience, but infusing its heritage into daily life, to be active and productive members of society. In an educational system where the drop out rate among Latino students is more than 5% per year, compared to 2.7% for Whites, a Latino superintendent can play a vital role in demonstrating by their own experience that education adds value to ones life. In an ever expanding global economy, there is an increasing need for a well-educated workforce. It is imperative that Latino students achieve academic success to be competitive in the workforce, as well as realize individual potential. The notion that a Latino will best know and understand the Latino student perspective and model opportunity and possibility for Latino youth is grounded in the shared experience of *mestizaje*, that cultural and historical space of Latinos.

Statement of the Problem

Latino students need role models who can demonstrate that despite the feeling or experience of inequity, or lack of opportunity, there is reason to hope. Latino superintendents bear burden and responsibility to keep reinforcing the positive aspects of the culture so “Latinos take pride in their identity and, at the same time, to constantly emphasize to the dominant community the benefits Latinos are bringing to America and the contributions they will make in the future” (Bordas, 2006, p. 110). Latino superintendents are not only called upon to be role models. They are called upon to be change agents in a society that is part of an ever expanding global economy; one in which the old ways of hierarchical models of leadership are being

abandoned to acknowledge a more collectivist and inclusive model of leadership. That Latino superintendents can accept this challenge reflects a lived experience grounded in a cultural and historical perspective that is the product of multiple subjectivities, one that informs daily life choices. This study attempted to understand the wisdom of the Latino ages that guides and fortifies Latino superintendents; their leadership as expressed through the Ten Functions of a School District.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latino public school superintendents in the state of Texas in order to gain insight into their leadership behaviors; particularly their leadership styles, and the influences, if any, of cultural, familial, social and other environmental factors on the leadership behaviors of the participants.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was the following: **How are the leadership practices of various Latino superintendents influenced by their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in the discharge of various school district functions and responsibilities?**

Methodology

To answer the research question, the study employed the case study method as a subset of qualitative research design. Chapter 3 of this study offered a general discussion of qualitative research, with a more detailed description of the case study

method. Subsequent to the general discussion, this study focused on setting, participants, researcher, process, credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and timeline of the research. The five basic tenets of qualitative research as defined by Merriam (1998) were utilized. They are:

1. Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.
4. It employs an inductive research strategy.
5. Qualitative research provides a study that is richly descriptive (p. 6-8).

Definition of Terms

There are terms particular to this study, whose definition are as follows:

Latino is a panethnic label for persons of Latin American and Mexican/American descent.

Mestizaje is the identity of a group of people; it identifies a history of multiple subjectivities -- a world of indigenous peoples, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the birth of the mestizo, the colonization and decolonization of Mexcian/American people.

Mestizo designates children born of a clear-cut ethnic difference. In the case of Latinos, mestizo designates the commingling of Spanish, African, and indigenous blood, the mixing of races.

Borderlands is a discourse, a language, that explains the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities. It specifically relates to the experience of the Latino population that inhabits the area that straddles the border between Mexico and the U.S.

La Raza refers to a cultural identity magnet that connotes a shared history, worldview, and common values; its literal translation to English, “the race,” does not capture the essence of cultural identity. In the context of this study, *La Raza* refers to the people who share *mestizaje*.

Significance

There is an abundance of literature to address leadership from the mainstream cultural perspective. Authors such as Stephen Covey (1997), Jim Collins (2005) and Robert Greenleaf (2002) address characteristics and attributes of leaders that bespeak collegiality, collaboration and community; however, among the available literature it is only within the last decade that a burgeoning body of literature has surfaced in which particular attention has begun to be given to the unique characteristics, attributes, and behaviors demonstrated by Latino leaders as informed by their culture and personal history. The fast growing Latino population and the concomitant need for Latino leadership suggests a challenge to increase the literature regarding the special contribution that a Latino perspective can offer to leadership theory and practice. This study purports to identify practices among Latinos, which demonstrates effective leadership grounded in their cultural and historical experience.

Assumptions

The most essential assumption of this study regarded the sincerity, depth, and openness of the participants. The subject of this study addressed emotions, beliefs, practices, and personal history that may not necessarily be topics the participants found easy to discuss. It became incumbent upon the researcher, therefore, to establish an environment in which the participants were freely compelled to share and elaborate on the story at hand. The style in which the case study method was employed and presented by the researcher is presumed to have elicited uninhibited responses from the participants.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of this study included: 1) the study is limited to three Latino public school district superintendents in the state of Texas; and 2) the results of this study rely on qualitative research data.

Limitations of this study included the requisite objectivity of the researcher; that the researcher was able to analyze and interpret data to reflect the intentions of the participants. The findings of this study only relate to three Latino public school district superintendents; while there may only be a total of 108 Latino superintendents in the state of Texas, the responses of the research participants could not be generalized to be applicable for all Latino superintendents. Finally, as a qualitative research study, utilizing the case study method, it was limited by its nature and design.

Commented [KRA1]: This version is Latino and the other is Latina.

Chapter Summary

The fast growing Latino student population, with its unique cultural and historical experience, is an invitation for educational leadership that can understand and empathize with this perspective. It calls forth effective leadership that can model for Latino students a transformative experience; one that demonstrates an acknowledgement of culture and history, replete with trials and tribulations, yet is not abandoned and which can be infused into productive participation in the great enterprise that is the U.S.

This chapter introduced a study that purports to consider how cultural, social, familial, historical and other environmental factors contribute to behaviors and characteristics of three Latino public school superintendents in the State of Texas. In addition, this chapter introduced the research question, significance and research methodology employed by this study. The remaining chapters include a review of the relevant literature, elaboration on the research design and methodology, findings from the research, and discussion and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Latino superintendents enjoy a unique position as educational leaders. Their roles are informed not only by their professional knowledge, skills and experience, but also by their *mestizaje*. The confluence of these factors provides a rich opportunity for Latino superintendents to be significant voices in transforming the United States educational system.

The 2000 U.S. census report indicates that Latinos are the largest minority comprising 13.5% of the U.S. population, and each passing year bringing 1.5 million new Latinos to the U.S. By the year 2050, one out of every four Americans will be Latino. (Chong and Baez, 2005; Ramos, 2004). The burgeoning Latino population in the U.S., and thereby Texas, suggests serious implications that will impact different social institutions. The Latino community will be one of the principal crucibles out of which leadership develops, emerges, and is held accountable. No doubt, there is a concomitant need for educational leaders who are prepared to address the unique factors present in this complex and developing milieu as they present themselves in the Texas public schools system.

This literature review examines and defines *mestizaje*, contextualized by the experience of the *borderlands*, through the lenses of critical and LatCrit theories. The notion of *mestizaje* is juxtaposed against indigenous knowledge, and its role to inform the daily lives of Latinos. The leadership framework presented by Bordas (2007) is utilized to develop an understanding of attributes suggested for Latino leadership. The

literature review concludes by suggesting the otherness inherent in *mestizaje* provides profound opportunities for Latinos to be model superintendents. In the context of this essay, the term Latino is used as a panethnic label for persons of Latin American and Mexican/American descent.

History from *Mestizaje*

Mestizaje was born out of oppression. The Spanish conquest of Mexico, and the ensuing subordination of the indigenous people, and commingling of races signify the roots of a marginalized people, the mestizo. Mestizos inhabited parts of Mexico, their homeland, which subsequent to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was their homeland no longer. As residents of this newly acquired U.S. territory, these mestizos were legally, racially, categorized as white, since the U.S. failed to identify a new and unique racial category for them. However, the privileges accorded to Euro-American white peoples residing in the same territory were not likewise accorded to these mestizo whites. The U.S. mestizos were marginalized and discriminated against (Anzaldúa, 1999; Pérez-Torres, 2006; Vento, 1998). Mestizos who occupied land prior to 1848, in accord with Spanish-Mexican land grants, were often displaced post-1848. The burden of proof fell upon the mestizos to substantiate their claim to land ownership; failing to do so, the land in question was deeded to Anglos who had made petition for the land in question. There was economic and social destabilization, which resulted from clearly demarcated racial distinctions. This social destabilization created an environment where one, while living in a space that was once part of one's heritage now belonged to another, as part of a new socio-political-economic order, a

foreigner in one's own land -- an experience of otherness – the experience of the *borderlands*.

Anzaldúa (1999) in *Borderlands: La Frontera*, writes,

I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexico border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions (Preface).

Anzaldúa's words suggest occupying a space to include a certain hybridity and a search for identity, which is born of multiple subjectivities, a space Anzaldúa calls the *borderlands*. The borderlands "is the discourse of people who live between different worlds. It speaks against dualism, oversimplification, and essentialism. It is, a discourse, a language, that explains the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities" (Elenes, 1997, p. 359). Mestizaje and the borderlands attach themselves to the same context, a place of otherness. Mestizaje identifies a history of multiple subjectivities -- a world of indigenous peoples, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the birth of the mestizo, the colonization and decolonization of Mexican/American people. Anyone who shares Latino genealogical roots, likewise shares mestizaje. Mestizo designates children born of a clear-cut ethnic difference. In the case of Latinos, mestizo designates the commingling of Spanish, African, and indigenous blood, the mixing of races. Mestizaje provides new amplitude to mestizo, expanding its basic notion to represent a culture, an intellectual world.

Community from *Mestizaje*

Mestizaje is a descriptive term and a cultural practice, and helps embody the idea of multiple subjectivities. Mestizaje signals the embodiedness of history; as such, mestizaje opens a world of possibilities in terms of forging new relational identities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Audinet, 2005; Elenes, 1997; Perez-Torres, 2006). It is not merely about ethnicity, its particular ethnic cultural artifacts, but institutional life and an evolving sense of community and even peoplehood that functions in a dynamic interaction with mainstream U.S. Anglo-Saxon derived culture and institutions as well as the proverbial American way of life (Garcia, 1998). This interaction does not necessarily imply a desire for assimilation, but rather a lived experience whereby the unique reality that is *mestizaje* is maintained while at the same time participating in and contributing to the larger society.

Latinos' participation in the American enterprise is given new dimension and definition by generational experiences; it is not confined to a single generation, but exists generation upon generation. The generation of Latinos who fled Mexico during the period of its revolution, circa 1910, and relocated to Texas brought with them their own lived experiences and perspectives. The subsequent period of nearly 100 years has seen several successive generations of native-born U.S. Latinos, and has also seen numerous immigrant generations to the U.S. The successive and immigrant generations of U.S. Latinos, as actors of particular historical times and spaces, each possesses its own lived experience and implies a new dimension of reality for them. They are not monolithic, but very heterogeneous. They vary widely in terms of

immigration status, duration in this country, the circumstances surrounding their arrival to the U.S., social class, and linguistic abilities, to name a few. The pluralism within the U.S. Latino population presents a dialectic that presumes the transformative nature of *mestizaje*, wherein the heterogeneous composition of the Latino population invites new and evolving relationships among themselves and the world around them. In the midst of these newly evolving relationships, there are cultural values that transcend generations, time and space; the most fundamental and overarching of these is collectivism (Padilla, 1980; Garcia, 1998; Bordas, 2006; Chong and Baez, 2006).

This notion of collectivism does not refer to the political concept of socialism, but rather to an ancient form of social organization. Collectivist *We* cultures have been on the earth for a very long time; their traditions and histories go back many generations. These cultures, therefore, are stable, with highly defined and specific rules, and they change slowly...are usually portrayed as tightly woven and integrated...Collectivist cultures cherish welfare, unity, and harmony. To maintain these, people behave politely, act in a socially desirable manner, and respect others. The family, community, or tribe takes precedence over the individual, whose identity flows from the collective. People work for group success before personal credit or gain (Bordas, 2006, p. 47).

Mestizaje as a collectivist culture was born out of its indigenous experience.

The mutuality of the early indigenous cultures, their sticking together, was a survival tactic, which centered on the common good rather than on individual gain.

Individuals were defined by one's group and relationship. People shared what they had and cared for one another. The Aztec culture, for example, was organized in multiple family groups who governed themselves. The growing of crops, building of homes, caring for children and trading were all based on the needs of the group. They believed that all human beings are related to one another and that what one does to

another affects oneself (Garcia, 1989; Vento, 1998; Bordas, 2007). Collectivism and its inclusive nature means staying connected to one's roots, being in tune with the history and struggles of one's people is a source from which culture flows. Latinos express this connection in a noticeable way during *El Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, or All Souls Day on the Catholic calendar. Families construct altars in their homes to honor and remember members of the family who have died. The altars are decorated with pictures and mementos of the deceased, as well as *acuzenas* (marigold flowers) and candles. In San Antonio, Texas anyone driving in the vicinity of San Fernando Cemetery II on *El Dia de los Muertos* will encounter heavy traffic due to the many people visiting gravesites of deceased family. If one drives through the cemetery, he or she will encounter a sea of flowers and associated memorials surrounding the gravesites. Due to the heavy traffic created by people visiting gravesites, the cemetery enlists off-duty police officers to direct traffic on the cemetery grounds, as well as the streets surrounding the cemetery. It is important to note that the visitors to the cemetery represent varied Latino generational histories, they are not limited to first or second generations, but include people who are the sixth generation in the U.S. Through time-honored traditions such as the celebrations of *Dia de los Muertos*, *mestizaje* keeps the past alive so it feeds the present. It affirms and strengthens the roots of the past and serves to remind of the pain, struggle and suffering, as well as the joy, hope and dreams of its ancestors. It offers *mestizaje* as a worldview, which recognizes and acknowledges the past as a framework to fashion new relationships and practices with the world and others.

Collectivism is the overarching Latino cultural value, but others have also been consistently asserted, which provide amplitude to this cultural construct (Padilla, 1980; Garcia, 1989; Sue and Sue, 1990; Vento, 1998; Elizondo, 2000; Chong and Baez, 2006; Bordas, 2007). The cultural values most often mentioned include:

- La familia
- Simpatía
- Personalismo
- Respeto.

The Latino tendency towards collectivism is evident in the treasured value of *la familia*, which goes beyond the relations of parents, children and other kin to include other cherished relationships. It includes *los padrinos y madrinas*, the godparents and sponsors for baptisms, weddings, *quinceaneras*, and wedding anniversaries. A longtime or close friend may be a *compadre or comadre*, and referred to as *tio or tia* by the children – honorary uncle or aunt. The notion of *la familia* is quite inclusive, describing the concept of extended family, wherein being considered and treated as family expands beyond blood relations (Padilla, 1980; Garcia, 1998; Elizondo, 2000; Hernandez and Ramirez, 2001; Chong and Baez, 2005; Bordas, 2007). Keefe and Padilla (1987) conclude from their research,

These case studies nicely demonstrate the continued importance of the family in the life of Chicanos, despite extensive acculturation. This finding supports the long-held belief that close familial relationships constitute a core Mexican value – one that persists even with immigration and acculturation (p. 155).

Simpatía connotes the human quality of engaging a value placed on politeness and pleasantness in a stressful situation, positive interpersonal relationships, avoiding conflict and achieving harmony.

In general, Latinos avoid confrontation and seek harmonious interactions at home and at work. Within the extended family, aunts and uncles are favorites of children because of their *simpatía*. Many aunts and uncles become godparents of their brothers' and sisters' children. They proudly and deliberately spoil their nieces and nephews with treats and playful conversations. The relationships grow over time, with aunts and uncles becoming mentors, confidants, and advisers after the children have grown up and become working adults (Chong and Baez, 2005, p. 27).

One important part of family relationships, and any relationship, is *personalismo*, the Spanish word for interpersonal relationships.

One-to-one contact is especially important in the perception of *personalismo*, which pertains to the perceived intrinsic human qualities of individuals who, through their well-meaning interactions, are able to convey warmth and genuine interest in connecting. It is difficult to find an analogy to this cultural value in mainstream behavior because *personalismo* is based on what Latinos perceive. From a mainstream perspective, *personalismo* may be described as unbiased, objective, well-intentioned one-to-one interaction exhibited with a personal, caring and respectful attitude (ibid, p. 23-24).

Perhaps the most important aspects of *personalismo* are respect, honor, and courtesy. It is the trust and rapport that is established with others with the goal of establishing a warm, friendly and personal relationship.

Respeto among Latinos includes two dimensions. An individual earns respect not on the basis of office, position, or even educational achievement, but on the basis of character. However, appropriate deferential behavior is expected based on position of authority, age, gender, social position or economic status, but *respeto* comes about by demonstrating character.

For Latinos, *respeto* (respect) involves the high regard that is granted to a person because of age or position in the hierarchy. *Respeto* is also a form of admiration granted – regardless of the individual’s social, political, or financial standing – because a person is believed to have intrinsically admirable qualities such as honesty, integrity, or courage. In contrast, in the mainstream culture, respect is often earned, not granted automatically to those in charge (ibid, p. 30).

The delineation and review of common Latino cultural values is not intended to evoke essentialism, rather it acknowledges the multi-dimensional and generational experience that is implicit in *mestizaje*, wherein acculturation is taking place yet a retention of traditional cultural values is also taking place. Phinney, Ong and Madden’s (2000) study, *Cultural Values and Intergenerational Value Discrepancies in Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Families*, revealed that while Vietnamese and Armenians experience intergenerational value discrepancies and more immediate acculturation into the dominant American culture within one generation, Latinos’ acculturation process is much slower. According to the study, Latinos, despite the numbers who have experienced increased educational, economic and social status, continue to express attachment to the collectivist values. Keefe and Padilla (1987) in their book *Chicano Ethnicity*, concluded:

In sum, our findings do not support the acculturation-assimilation model, which holds the twin processes as inevitably completed at some future point. Nor do our findings fit the internal-colony model, which postulates complete acculturation but continued segmentation and domination. The pluralism model is best suited to our findings because cultural, social, and structural continuums are identified, accommodating change occurring at different rates in different life spheres. Nevertheless, given its name and the way in which it has been employed frequently, the pluralism model implies the indefinite persistence of ethnic groups who are, for the most part, separate from one another. Our data, on the other hand, call for a neo-pluralism model that can accommodate concurrent states of change *and* continuity, integration *and* pluralism, in ethnicity. This model would require thinking in terms of a

multitude of dimensions, with the possibility of change occurring in each dimension at a different rate and possessing the potential of moving in more than one direction (p. 191).

The community that is continuously being formed and shaped from *mestizaje* does not possess any categorical parameters; however, the experience of its history and culture nurture those enduring values that surround a collectivist framework, and provides the perspective where metaphorical and real dialogue take place to give direction to life in the *borderlands*.

Discourse from *Mestizaje*

Mestizaje possesses a nature of critical discourse that is prompted by the history of multiple subjectivities, and provides a framework to exercise its birthright, wherein all the variety that describes it is utilized to be an agent for the transformation of otherness. Critical *mestizaje* embraces critical theory and LatCrit theory, attempting to understand the oppressive aspects of Latino society situated in the *borderlands*, in order to generate societal and individual transformation (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tierney, 1993). It offers perspective to inspire hope, because despite the past trials and tribulations, people survived and are now thriving. Juxtaposed against critical theory, LatCrit theory is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latino panethnicity, thereby adding a new dimension to critical theory that considers language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Hernandez-Truyol, Harris & Valdez, 2006; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit theory is not incompatible or competitive with critical theory, at its best it operates akin to critical

theory as supplementary and complementary to it (Valdes, 1996). It considers the multidimensional nature of *La Raza*, which is not synonymous with biology and race; rather, refers to a cultural identity magnet that connotes a shared history, worldview, and common values (Bordas, 2006). Critical *mestizaje* is the paradigmatic space where Latinos consider who they are – past, present, and future – and strive to understand how they fit into the world that surrounds them. It provides a perspective to negotiate time and space, whereby the *borderlands* experience is utilized to create ways to negotiate life within social, political and economic institutions, and suggests the notion of human agency -- that knowledge and skills to act on one's behalf, and identify peoples' ever-changing perception of who they are (Anzaldúa, 1999; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Urrieta, 2007). Critical *mestizaje*, and thereby agency, considers the interface of the embodied and social sources of the self, the development of persons around the cultural forms by which they are identified, "the linked development of people, cultural forms, and social positions in particular historical worlds" (Holland, 1998, p. 33). "Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds" (ibid, p. 40) and as they are used more and more can become tools of agency. This notion of persons as actors in their world promotes the ontological considerations to emphasize that one's conception of self is not static and coherent, but variable and interactive. The tools of agency allow for one to develop a sense of personhood; how it is imagined, conceptualized and practiced. For example, a Latino who is in a chief executive position, such as a public school district superintendency, goes about daily

life, negotiating the situations at hand. The superintendent is a recognized community leader, by virtue of the professional position. A school district is notably that of a mainstream institution, a bureaucracy created to reflect traditionally espoused American mainstream ideals. Given this context of a school district, there may well be situations where the superintendent, as a Latino, becomes uniquely aware of his or her difference. How the superintendent becomes an actor and voice in the situation demonstrates the superintendent's sense of agency. The superintendent may possess certain characteristics, attributes, behaviors, or personal preferences, which are most often at play in daily life, but the reality of life as dynamic and ever-changing precipitates how the superintendent acts.

The superintendent may be hosting a community forum to discuss the impending closure of one of the district's schools. The community that comprises the school population is primarily Latino, to include many limited English speakers. In order for the superintendent to most thoroughly deliver his message, it becomes imperative for the superintendent to speak Spanish to those assembled. The superintendent's decision to address the assembly in Spanish recognizes the contextual situation, and the need to navigate this. In essence, the superintendent has exercised his sense of agency; speaking Spanish in this situation is a vehicle to navigate the reality at hand. Daily operations of the school district may primarily take place in English, but when necessary, Spanish becomes the chosen mode of operation. The manner in which the superintendent improvises to address the context, the response to this particular situation is agency. Agency recognizes the situation and

consciously responds to the context at hand (Bandura, 1989; Holland, 1998; Urrieta, 2007). The realities of daily living as taking place in a given social, cultural and historical moment, and how someone such as a Latino superintendent responds to the various variables is a production of agency. Where the actor is Latino, the agency is born of *mestizaje*.

The critical, discursive nature of *mestizaje* reflects the multidimensions of its epistemology and pedagogy, how reality is perceived and the ways of knowing. It calls forth an instantiated knowledge born from the unique experience of the *borderlands* that defines *mestizaje*; a “tacit, intuitive, experiential, informal, uncodified knowledge” (Ellen & Harris, 2000, p. 28). This knowledge is intimated by such terms as “cultural knowledge,” “funds of knowledge,” and “indigenous knowledge.” According to Adams (1995) “Cultural Knowledge is the familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group.” Funds of knowledge, as defined by Moll (2000) and described for the contexts of schools, are the cultural artifacts and bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities. Cultural knowledge and funds of knowledge are attempts to understand and learn about other cultures, they are externally generated, and the work of outsiders looking in to the culture of another to gain insight. Indigenous knowledge is internally generated, it connotes knowledge that an individual possesses, informed by one’s culture, it is how one from within the culture looks out onto the world and creates meaning. Indigenous knowledge,

is a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as

to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group, and forms the basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar (Dei et al., 2000, p 6).

Indigenous knowledge provides a more encompassing source of knowing for *mestizaje* as it captures the concepts suggested by cultural knowledge and funds of knowledge, and goes beyond their parameters to expand these and address the landscape uniquely implicit to *mestizaje*, and by its very nomenclature recalls and actively engages its indigenous heritage. Indigenous knowledge, like *mestizaje*, is not simply becoming familiar with characteristics, beliefs, values, and artifacts of a culture, it is rich and complex in its context of application; it invites the requisite critical discourse necessary for transformation, it calls forth action, in addition to reflection. The notion of indigenous knowledge when applied to *mestizaje* acknowledges that, while it is not contained within a geographic location of its own, nonetheless represents the reality of *La Raza* and their unique state of being. Indigenous knowledge is the amalgamation of *mestizaje*'s multiple subjectivities, cultural practice, intellectual world, history, desire for transformation, its otherness. Indigenous knowledge is that which Latinos carry with them as they intersect with daily life, the *borderlands*. As such, indigenous knowledge extends the discursive nature of *mestizaje* to include a framework out of which to live. Delgado Bernal (2001) suggests the notion of the *pedagogies of the home*, as a form of indigenous knowledge to better understand lessons from the home space and local communities.

Community and family knowledge is taught to youth through such ways as legends, *corridos*, storytelling, and behavior. It is through culturally specific ways of teaching and learning that ancestors and elders share the knowledge

of conquest, segregation, labor market stratification, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance. This knowledge that comes from one generation to the next – often by mothers and other female family members – can help us survive in everyday life by providing an understanding of certain situations and explanations about why things happen under certain conditions (p. 624-625).

Dei et al (2002) in their book *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Context* write,

People brought up in Western societies often equate knowledge with written ‘literature’ and forget that oral traditions as embodied in folkways preceded and helped shape written knowledge. In most traditional societies the spoken world is the basis of cultural identity and a means of transmitting indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. Oral forms of knowledge such as ritualistic chants, riddles, songs, folktales, and parables not only articulate a distinct cultural identity but also give voice to a range of cultural, social and political, aesthetic, and linguistic systems (p. 102).

Indigenous knowledge reinforces Latino cultural values, and facilitates learning and socialization. Whether on the front porch, at church, on the way to a relative’s house, or in other social gatherings, the sharing of stories about family, history, traditions, values and beliefs engage and develop indigenous knowledge. One fundamental and common vehicle utilized to impart indigenous knowledge is a meal. A meal is perhaps the most basic and most ancient symbol of friendship, love, and unity; food and drink taken in common are signs that life is shared. Eating a meal together is the most basic way of sharing common life – it restores what has been lost and gives strength for what lies ahead, it is an age-old way of communicating cultural values and norms, it feeds the soul as well as the stomach (Bordas, 2007; Chong and Baez, 2005; McAdoo, 1999). Indigenous knowledge and the myriad ways in which it is transmitted acts to continue the discourse that is *mestizaje* where Latinos negotiate life, informing choices and decisions, it gives voice to the wisdom of the Latino ages

to guide and fortify, in creation of a mosaic that displays the many pieces and facets of a culture and history all strategically placed to inform the daily life of *La Raza*.

Leading by *Mestizaje*

Out of *mestizaje* arise individuals who by personal choice or design assume positions of leadership. *Mestizaje* is the antecedent for Latino leadership – it is leading by *mestizaje*. Latino leadership is imbued with the history, cultural values, and transformative nature that defines *mestizaje*; the bedrock whence comes its unique perspective. The body of literature, which particularly addresses Latino leadership, is quite limited. There are two sources, however, that treat this topic with note: Bordas' 2007 work, *Salsa, soul and spirit: leadership for a multicultural age*, and Hernandez & Ramirez's 2001 research findings, *Reflecting an American vista: the character and impact of Latino leadership*, are worthy of consideration are included here.

Bordas (2007) posits the collectivist nature of the Latino culture prompts a people-centered view of leadership. Collectivist leadership by its very nature espouses the well-being of people as a whole, not just individuals.

Mainstream leadership today is moving toward a *we* or collaborative form that resonates with communities of color. Like multicultural leadership, collaboration supports a reciprocal and dispersed style in which many people are prepared to participate and share responsibility...for generations the center point of mainstream American leadership was the individual leader. This fashioned a hierarchical leadership form, which was very effective in an assembly-line economy in which people followed orders and looked to the boss or superior for direction. In the last half of the twentieth century dynamics [such as] civil rights, globalization, changing demographics, democratic values, higher education levels, and political awareness that are

transforming leadership into a multicultural form are also dismantling the hierarchical approach. These powerful social shifts are redefining leadership, from the domain of a few individuals to a more participatory and collaborative process that engages many people (p. 78).

The characteristics and qualities that mainstream leadership is moving towards today are affirmed in the cultural constructs of *mestizaje*. Bordas (2007) addresses the leadership styles in collectivist communities by articulating three operative principles:

1. A leader among leaders – community-conferred leadership
2. Leaders as guardians of public values – a tradition of activism
3. Leaders as community stewards – working for the common goal (p.19).

In collectivist cultures, a leader's authority comes from the group.

Leaders are expected to reflect the group's behavior and values. By listening and gathering people's opinions, the leader integrates the group wisdom. The leader must find unanimity within the group first, and then act in concert with it. Like a battery, leaders charge people up, facilitate their working together, and assist them in solving problems. Through empowering others, a community of leaders evolves. Standing out too far from the others or calling too much attention to oneself can damage the group cohesion that is central to collectivist cultures (ibid, p. 84).

The Latino cultural value of *personalismo* resonates with this notion of a leader among leaders, where much of the work to build coalitions and followership towards the group's objectives is predicated on the leader developing good relationships with all constituencies. The leader leads not just by words but also by actions – leader among leaders. “No matter how *important* a leader becomes, she or he must be willing to do the hard work needed for community progress” (ibid. p. 87). In leading by example, individuals are best able to identify with the leader and

believe they can do likewise; it is the measure of the leader's credibility and effectiveness.

Leaders as guardians of public values is the trajectory that emphasizes leadership as community action to deal with immediate issues, while providing leadership and knowledge to develop long-term solutions. The multiple subjectivities that help to define *mestizaje* pose a unique challenge for Latino leaders who must be consensus builders and community organizers, weaving social and political unity from the diverse Latino subgroups. "They must integrate the many issues that touch people's lives and motivate people to work together to address these. In this way, they grow people's capacity to engage in concerted and collective action" (ibid. p. 103). They must inspire people to believe in themselves – they must be community activists to motivate people toward the common good. Latino leaders in their efforts to motivate communities continue the discursive nature of *mestizaje* to move away from the roots of oppression and inequity and towards the possibilities for developing one's full potential.

Bordas's third leadership principle evokes the notion of legacy. *Leaders as community stewards – working for the common goal*, is not concerned with the self-interest or personal influence, or power of the leader. Greenleaf's notion of *servant leadership* best describes the impetus of this principle of leaders as community stewards, which entails delegating responsibility, sharing benefits, and developing people. Servant leaders are committed to serving the people, communities, and ideals

they seek; they seek to serve first and then make the conscious choice to lead (Greenleaf, 2002).

Community stewardship prompts leadership that concentrates on building people's capacity. Leaders grow their communities by engaging people in the following practices: (1) encouraging participation and building consensus, (2) creating a community of leaders, (3) generating a shared vision, (4) using culturally effective communication, and (5) weaving partnerships and connections (Bordas, p. 121).

The three principles cited above flow from the transformative nature and cultural dynamics implicit in *mestizaje* and fashion leadership based on equity, strong communal values, and serving one's community. Bordas' work is complemented by the results of a research initiative conducted by the National Community for Latino Leadership, Inc. (NCLL). In 1999 "The NCLL embarked upon the largest and most comprehensive empirical examination of Latino leadership ever undertaken" (Hernandez & Ramirez, 2001, Preface).

The research initiative sought to understand Latino leadership from the perspective of Latino leaders and their constituents. The research expands the conversation related to the burgeoning U.S. Latino population, to posit that future leaders will increasingly come from the growing Latino community. "This dramatic demographic transformation of the American landscape has implications for the emergence and development of effective and meaningful leadership" (ibid. p 1). The NCLL research survey results identified four general leadership traits Latinos expect leaders to possess, The Four "C's" of Latino Leadership: Character, Competence, Compassion, and Community Servanthood. Character, as a leadership trait, was that most highly desired by survey respondents of Latino leaders.

The primacy of honesty and integrity along with the emphasis of a leader being spiritual, ethical, possessing strong moral values, and being a good person, describes “character.” The public dimension of character demands that leaders keep their word and deliver on their promises. In the words of one respondent, “*que sea un complidor*” – one who does what he say’s he’s going to do. The personal dimension of character has to do with ethical living and spirituality...respondents citing either strong moral values, spirituality, and being a good person as their most desirable quality, this dimension of personal character was one of the most valued qualities (Hernandez & Ramirez, 2001, p. 6).

The second leadership trait Latinos expect leaders to possess is Competence.

“Latino respondents want leaders to be intelligent, experienced and wise. They expect leaders to know what they are doing, know how to get the job done, and produce results. Latinos also expect leaders to use common sense on the task at hand” (ibid, p.6).

The first two leadership traits Latinos expect leaders to possess, Character and Competence, resonate with mainstream cultural values; however, the last two leadership traits reflect a uniquely Latino perspective, Compassion and Community Servanthood.

...they should also be compassionate, loving, and kind. Latinos also want leaders to be humble, sincere, and sensitive to those they would purport to lead. The words “*humilde*” and “*sincero*” when used to describe a person have a different connotation in Spanish than they do in English. They refer to someone who is not just unassuming, but also someone who is unselfish and empathetic toward others...an individual is worthy of respect because of who they are as a person, not just because of what they have accomplished (ibid., p. 7).

The leadership trait, Compassion, resonates with one of the Latino cultural values most often mentioned, *respeto*, where an individual earns respect not on the basis of office, position, or even educational attainment, but on the basis of character.

Unlike the mainstream culture, respect is often earned, not granted automatically (Chong & Baez, 2005; Bordas, 2007).

The notion of giving back to the community is captured in the fourth identified Latino leadership trait, Community Servanthood.

Latinos also believe that their leaders should be dedicated and willing to serve the community. Latinos expect leaders to be community servants. This sentiment was expressed by one respondent, “*que ayude la gente*” – a leader should help the people (community). This suggests a vision of leaders as servant leaders, who give the people or the community their proper place and priority (ibid., p. 7).

Dedication to the community is emblematic of a collectivist culture and the often mentioned cultural value of *la familia*, offers a unique perspective to inform those leadership traits expected by Latinos for their community. “Like other groups, Latinos want their leaders to be competent, but not at the expense of compassion and community servanthood” (ibid. p. 7).

These features of Latino leadership as presented by Bordas, and Hernandez and Ramirez, posit a new way of thinking about leadership, one that is communal, collectivist, and people-centered. This way of thinking continues the experience of *mestizaje*, wherein leadership is informed by history and cultural values, and committed to transformation.

Mestizaje and the Superintendency

The leadership described by such authors as Bordas (2006) and Ramirez (2001) is markedly complementary to the sort of leadership being elicited for the American educational system. Superintendents and other educational leaders are

being asked to pay more attention to the success of a diverse student population, to consider themselves stewards of a community's well-being, and to share responsibility and decision-making with a variety of stakeholders. They must view themselves in new ways that demand new skills, including learning how to work effectively with diverse groups of people. Sustaining change within this context of diversity requires a redistribution and realignment of control, power and predictability.

The experiential and theoretical contexts of education for educators in the past were clearly framed by values, traditions, and practices that worked well with mainstream populations and a philosophy of rapid assimilation into a presumed monolithic Anglo-Saxon culture. Now, the most difficult challenge for educational leaders (principals and superintendents) is to understand the schools of a new century, which primarily serve students who are linguistically and culturally “different” and whose histories and experiences at first may seem incomprehensible to teachers and principals (Trueba, 2002, p. 160).

Today’s school system leaders, superintendents, are being called upon to juxtapose the concerns surrounding these socio-cultural dynamics with the issues involving the ever-increasing organizational complexities of a school system. They are being called upon to be effective chief executive and operating officers, sensitive to the ever-changing social milieu of our society. “The superintendent at different times and in different situations is a leader, coach, manager, follower, motivator, philosopher, missionary, policy maker, politician, sales person, evaluator, and distributor of scarce resources” (Konnert and Augenstein, 1990, p. xiii). In the past, the superintendent of a public school district may have enjoyed a less visible role; however, the role of a superintendent has changed to be that of a highly visible chief

executive who needs vision, knowledge, and skills to lead in a complex environment (Hoyle et al, 2005). Today's superintendent is challenged to meld personal and professional competencies in order to be effective system leaders. Carter (1997) writes,

The keys to being a successful and responsive superintendent, then, are open communication, integrity, hard work, positive direction, core values, sound judgment, and effective decision making. Superintendents should strive to ensure that they clearly understand the diverse interests involved in each decision and are well informed. The successful superintendent is open, accessible, and responsive to all activities (p. 36).

The qualities and characteristics of effective superintendents are complementary to the roles and responsibilities of superintendents. The work, the roles and responsibilities, of a superintendent are aligned with various school district functions, which support the overarching purpose of any school system, the education of the community's youth. The functions of a school district address the systemic activities pertinent to the total operations of a school district. In this regard, sources illustrate the organizational design and behavior of school systems by describing them in terms of characteristics, qualities, and activities. Professional associations such as the American Association of School Administrators, state regulations such as the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), and authors such as Hoyle, Bjork, Collier and Glass (2005) articulate *standards* in describing qualifications for those who would assume the superintendency. Others describe competencies (Konnert and Augenstein, 1990) and task-areas (Candoli, 1991) as they relate to qualities and functions pertinent to the superintendency. The director of the doctoral programs of studies, The Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas at Austin, has

articulated specific school district *functions*, which provide focus for its superintendency preparation program (Olivarez, 2008). Rule §242.15 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), lists the following as those standards required for the Superintendent Certificate. See Appendix A for the full citation of TAC §242.15.

- Learner-Centered Values and Ethics in Leadership.
- Learner-Centered Leadership and District Culture.
- Learner-Centered Human Resources Leadership and Management.
- Learner-Centered Policy and Governance.
- Learner-Centered Communications and Community Relations.
- Learner-Centered Organizational Leadership and Management.
- Learner-Centered Curriculum Planning and Development.
- Learner-Centered Instructional Leadership and Management (TAC, §242.15).

Olivarez (2008) discusses combining administrative, instructional and political leadership theory with real world applications; this is made manifest through the Ten Functions of School districts, which are:

- Governance Operations
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations
- Instructional Support Services
- Human Resources
- Safety and Security Services

- Accountability, Information Management and Technology Services
- External and Internal Communications
- Facilities Planning and Plant Services
- Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations.

The different monikers ascribed to the various activities that constitute the realm of a school system represent iterations of the same fundamental operating schema. Individual authors may choose to categorize the school district functions according to their preferences; however, the essence of these functions that serve to operationalize a school system remain the same. It becomes incumbent upon the superintendent as the Chief Executive Officer of a school district to lead and manage the efforts of the district, regardless of preferred categorizations, towards its essential purpose, the teaching and learning of students. Utilizing Olivarez's (2008) iteration of the functions of a school district, following is a description of each, to provide a perspective for understanding the total operations of a school district.

Governance and operations is concerned with organizational stability to ensure maximum student performance. Grounded in a shared vision and purpose, this function addresses planning, policy development, legal concerns, and prudent fiscal management. The school district Board of Trustees and the superintendent are the primary agents of governance.

Curriculum and Instruction is primarily concerned with teaching and learning. These functions work to establish expectations of excellence and equity in student academic performance, and provide instructional programs for all students. The

functions of curriculum and instruction work to enhance teaching and learning through curriculum alignment, curriculum resources, and assessment to measure student performance.

Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations include the planning for and implementation of specific activities relative to a campus. Staffing needs, such as the number of teachers needed for a preferred student-teacher ratio, counselors, librarians, food service staff, custodial and maintenance staff, school office support staff, and other ancillary staff comprise a major component of campus level operations. The development and implementation of a budget is another activity particular to a campus. Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, such as athletics, music, drama, student clubs, and parent organizations are also included under the area of campus operations. The school district's central administration may provide oversight for the various campus activities; however, implementation of the activities are contextualized, campus by campus.

Instructional Support Services include activities that support effective curriculum and instruction. Professional development opportunities to build the capacity of teachers, effect sound classroom management, facilitate student discipline, provide for students with special needs, provide bilingual and immigrant services, and provide ancillary instructional materials as needed are imbedded in the tasks of Instructional Support Services.

Human Resources is concerned with the recruitment, hiring and retention of district personnel at all levels. The tasks in the realm of Human Resources include

establishing and implementing personnel policies, developing and instituting comprehensive personnel evaluation mechanisms, and monitoring certification requirements specific to professional and classified personnel. Professional development not specific to the tasks of teaching and learning may be facilitated through Human Resources.

Safety and Security Services include tasks pertinent to the campus and district levels. Crisis and emergency procedures are among the concerns of Safety and Security Services, which might include routine procedures for emergency evacuations such as hurricane preparedness, fire drills, and threats of terrorism. In addition, depending on the size of a school district, this may include the operation of a district police department, or an established relationship with local law enforcement officials.

School districts are responsible to maintain information on pupils, personnel, and district operations. The management of this information calls for technology that is able to manipulate the data and fulfill record keeping and reporting requirements. Accountability, Information Management and Technology Services performs those tasks necessary to maintain the districts information and provide data to allow for well informed decision-making. Essential to this school district function is its ability to provide timely information to state and federal agencies, as well as district officials and personnel to plan and maintain effective instructional programs.

External and Internal Communications provides and maintains effective communications that inform all district constituencies in a systematic and comprehensive manner. District constituencies include students, district personnel,

parents, non-parent community residents, civic and community leaders, large and small business operators, higher education leaders, and the media. Media press releases, monthly district newsletters, campus newsletters, e-mails between administrators and staff, e-newsletters, community forums, social functions, campus awards programs, parent club meetings, Web sites, and T.V. and radio interviews are a sampling of ways in which a school district may communicate with its constituencies.

Facilities Planning and Plant Services concerns itself with the infrastructure of the school district. This can include the many tasks pertinent to the design and construction of new facilities: needs assessment, architectural and engineering renderings, and facility construction and readiness. In addition to being concerned with the design and construction of new facilities, this function address the needs for all school district facilities function effectively, safely, and efficiently. Facilities Planning and Plant Services ensure that all of the district's physical plants, equipment, and support systems are necessarily operative.

Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations address effective budget planning, management, account auditing and monitoring to be responsible fiscal agents. The district's income and expenses are processed through this function. When a bond issue is being prepared and presented to the community for its approval, this function plans and implements the bond election initiative. Ancillary district services such as transportation services and food services may be under the direction of Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations.

A school district may be small, enrolling less than 100 students, or as large to include a student population in excess of 300,000. It may be located in a large urban setting or a small rural community. The size and location of a school district do not preclude the requisite functions to effectively operationalize a school system.

Economies of scale may dictate the number of staff and offices to provide adequate oversight in the operation of the school district, but each school district function is essential to fully operationalize the system. What may affect how a school district organizes, plans and executes the tasks of the school district functions is its context. The community complexion, its demographics, may impact how a school district delivers its services. Aware of its socio-political context, a school district does not compromise the integrity of any school district function, but works to consider how best to operate the system within the given environment (Candoli, 1991; Hoyle, et al, 2005; Konnert & Augenstein, 1990; Olivárez, 2008).

Communities represent a set of cultural values and beliefs that must be considered by superintendents in designing, implementing and evaluating the current state of the school district and the need for change. In considering community as an integral part of the overall system and its leadership, particular attention must be given to the unique leadership qualities that are consistent with the cultural ethos of a group; the landscape should belong to those who see it all the time (Hernandez and Ramirez, 2001).

The type of educational leader being called for to transform America's educational system, consistent with its ever-changing demographics includes

characteristics and attributes, which the literature suggests are inherent in the social, cultural and historical legacy that is *mestizaje*. It becomes incumbent upon Latino educational leaders to recognize their own *mestizaje* and assume their role as agents of transformation – out of their own experience of the *borderlands*.

Summary

In 1925, the Mexican philosopher and statesman, Jose Vasconcelos wrote *La Raza Cosmica*, in which he suggested his ideal cosmic race, *La Raza*, a *mestizaje* as a new developing human consciousness, one which would be “fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones” and that would bring all differences together attracting opposites. He posited a philosophical and metaphysical system of a future age. Toward the end of his life, Vasconcelos abandoned his ideal and recognized the impossibility of a cosmic race, and suggested that the ulterior goal of history is to attain the fusion of peoples and cultures (Perez-Torres, 2006; Ramos, 2004; Vento, 1998). The abandonment by Vasconcelos of his idealism and vision is unfortunate. That he did not realize the fulfillment of his vision during his lifetime is also unfortunate, but his relegation of this *raza cosmica* as a singularly defined experience denies the essence of *mestizaje* as developing and an ongoing process. It is not merely a fusion of peoples and cultures as Vasconcelos concluded; it is in process, being created and evolving through the life of every Latino every day. The Latino experience with its multiple subjectivities, its ongoing generational experience, its values and its history – past, present and future -- does reflect Vasconcelos’ ideal of a new human consciousness being fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous

ones. It is a consciousness that is the essence of the transformative nature of *mestizaje* – from multiple subjectivities to multiple objectivities. It is the requisite consciousness that must be possessed by school district leadership who aspire to lead multicultural and diverse school communities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Three Latino public school superintendents were interviewed as part of this study. This study followed a qualitative research design, utilizing the case study method.

The data was collected through interviews with each superintendent and was sorted according to categories of analysis (start codes), based upon concepts delineated in the literature review. The data was interpreted and processed to identify emergent themes, and an analysis of the findings was formulated.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study is the following: **How are the leadership practices of various Latino superintendents influenced by social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in the discharge of various school district functions and responsibilities?**

Case Study Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design approach, and utilizes the case study method. Qualitative research is a paradigm developed in the social sciences that fundamentally depends on observing people in their own territory, in their own time, in their own language, and on their own terms. Thus, it is difficult to anticipate the findings and conclusions. Qualitative research can better capture the

essence of perceptions of phenomena from the perspective of the persons involved, the participants. Several researchers (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) support the validity of this approach to research. As identified primarily with sociology, cultural anthropology, and political science, qualitative research has been referred to as “naturalistic,” “ethnographic,” and “participatory.” Similarly, it is often referred to as exploratory research because of the lack of hypothesis testing found in quantitative approaches. As such, qualitative research allows for creative and more in-depth inquiry into many and varied social phenomenon (Mertens, 2005).

Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative research can be differentiated by the following characteristics:

1. Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.
4. It employs an inductive research strategy.
5. Qualitative research provides a study that is richly descriptive (p. 6-8).

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Mertens, 2005, p. 229).

Qualitative research design is flexible and responsive to the emerging conditions of the study. Many different types of qualitative research are practiced in educational research, including the case study, which is the method employed in this study. A case study focuses on a particular object or case and reaching an understanding within a complex context (Mertens, 2005). The case study method allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003). It allows for an in-depth understanding of a phenomena based on the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

According to Merriam (2003),

The case study can be further defined by its special features. Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic , descriptive, and heuristic.

Particularistic means that the case studies focus on a particular situation, event program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent...*descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. *Thick description* is a term from anthropology that means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated...*Heuristic* means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known (p. 29-30).

This study assumed the ontological perspective of transformative views as it sought to identify the fundamental roles of ideology, organizational dynamics, and the social-political process in the practice of Latino superintendents. It exemplified *ethnomethodology* as it focuses on describing how the participants (Latino superintendents) recognize, describe, explain, and account for their everyday lives

(Mertens, 2005). The study utilizes an embedded single-case design in that the case study is framed within the same context, Latino school district superintendents, repeated with three superintendents.

Sample

The sample for this study was three Latino public school superintendents in Texas. This was a *purposeful* sample, which was based on the assumption that the investigator wanted to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Much like gathering a team of medical experts to review and analyze a particular medical issue, wherein this team is formed because of their expertise, experience, and competence, a purposeful sample is identified as participants for the information-rich perspective they will offer in the case study. Erlandson, et. al assert:

Central to naturalistic research is purposive sampling. Random or representative sampling is not preferred because the researcher's major concern is not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population or universe, but to maximize the discovery of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that occur in the particular context under study. Purposive and directed sampling through human instrumentation increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher's ability to identify emerging themes and take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms (p. 82).

The three superintendents selected as the sample for this study each met the following criteria:

1. The superintendent was Latino
2. The superintendent was the chief executive officer of a Texas public school district

3. The school districts represented by the superintendent have a Latino student population of at least 75%
4. The superintendent has been a superintendent for at least five years.

Chapter 4 of this study begins with a more detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the sample participants. It should be noted that the University protocols governing human subject's participation in research efforts were strictly adhered to. Each participant was provided with an Informed Consent Form with an understanding that participants' anonymity will be enforced. The following provides a cursory introduction to the selected sample group.

Superintendent Daniel Vasquez leads an urban Texas school district, student population $\pm 14,000$ of which 95.4% are Latino.

Superintendent Gilbert Lopez leads a rural school district whose Latino student population represents 90.8% of a total student population $\pm 5,500$.

Superintendent Louise Cantu leads a rural school district with a total student population $\pm 1,200$, with the Latino student population representing 91.2% of the total student population.

Setting

The study is bounded by the context of Texas public school districts whose student population is at least 75% Latino. The three superintendents who comprise the sample group represent school districts in disparate geographic sectors of the state: Rio Grande Valley, South Texas, and San Antonio.

Data Collection

In order to gain a better understanding of the research question, three interviews were conducted with each participant and the interview voice-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and transcripts provided to the respective participants. The interviews were semi-structured and included two phases: 1) Questions and responses to guide the interview towards the primary research question; and 2) Artwork as physical artifacts to elicit impressions, interpretations, emotions, to name a few. The interviews were conducted in order to gain insight into the life experiences of Latino superintendents, the role their cultural and historical background plays in their respective leadership.

There were two sets of questions used during the first two interviews. During the first interview with each participant, there was only one question: Tell me your life story, as much as you would like to share, and how you came to be a superintendent. The questions used during the second interview were adapted from Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (1994, p.7):

1. What experiences were vital to your becoming a superintendent?
2. Were there turning points in your life that relate to your becoming a superintendent?
3. Do you believe your Latino identity impacts or informs your role as a superintendent?
4. How do you compare yourself as a superintendent, to non-Latino superintendents? Are there differences? If so, what are these differences?

5. How, if at all, do you see your Latino background being expressed through three of the ten functions: internal/external communications; curriculum and instruction; and, governance?

The third interview involved the display of three Latino-themed artworks. The artworks were used as a projective technique, wherein the participant interpreted the art with the following questions: When you look at this art, what do you see? Do they remind you of your own life experience? If so, how? The participants were encouraged to elaborate on one or more works.

The three artworks utilized for the projective technique portion of the interview were:

1. *La cocina es donde aprendió mi papa a leer, The kitchen is where my father learned to read* by Edward Gonzales
2. *El ultimo dulce* by Joe R. Villarreal
3. *Las canicas* by Joe R. Villarreal.

The participants' responses to the questions and artworks, once transcribed, allowed an analysis to be performed to aid in the interpretation of the findings. The data analysis began with a review of all interview transcripts, highlighting words and phrases that addressed a particular topic or theme. The researcher made personal notes in the margins throughout the review of the transcripts. Once general topics/themes were identified, each of these sections was reviewed for commonalities, patterns, or differences. The consistent themes discovered between participants' responses were examined in light of the literature reviewed for this study.

Data Analysis and Validity

This study utilized the criteria for judging quality and critically analyzing qualitative research as suggested by Mertens (2005). The criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, and positionality.

Credibility

In qualitative research the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way that researcher portrays their viewpoints...a researcher should seek to use as many of these strategies as possible, because the goal is to provide evidence from a multiplicity of sources of the credibility of the research (p. 254).

The credibility test in this study included prolonged and sustained engagement, peer debriefing, persistent observation, member checks, and triangulation.

The *prolonged and sustained engagement* strategy was employed as each participant was interviewed on three occasions, with each visit lasting a minimum of one hour.

The *persistent observation* strategy was executed through the follow up phone conversations. These phone conversations took place after the initial findings per interview were shared with the respective participant.

Peer debriefing took place at several points after the data had been collected, transcribed, and initial coding had taken place. The researcher consulted with university faculty members whose expertise is in the area of research design and

study, during which time a review of emergent themes and data coding took place to arrive at agreement on same. In addition, discussions with peers and colleagues transpired to allow the opportunity to verbally articulate thoughts and ideas regarding emerging themes; in essence, it was the opportunity to “think out loud” and have someone not intimately familiar with the details of the interview transcripts respond to the researcher’s thoughts and ideas, as per emerging themes and ideas. Anonymity as regards participants’ identity per transcript, emerging themes and coding were maintained during all peer debriefing activities.

The *member checks* strategy, “which is the most important criterion in establishing credibility” (p. 255) was utilized to verify with the participants the constructions that were developed from the data collected and analyzed. Notes made during each interview were shared with each participant during the subsequent visit, and a follow-up phone conversation took place after all interviews had been completed to allow the participant to verify and clarify the researcher’s perspectives, as well as those of the respective participants.

Triangulation involves “checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (p. 255). In addition to the questions asked of participants and the projective technique employed through use of artwork, the researcher observed each participant interacting with office staff and community members, attended a local school board meeting to observe the participant, and reviewed local handbooks and newsletters.

Transferability

In qualitative research, the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context. The researchers responsibility is to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make such a judgment. Extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture is known as “thick description” (p. 256).

Each participant was visited on three separate occasions, at a minimum of one hour in duration. The primary purpose of multiple visits with each participant was gathering as much data as possible, encouraging participants to elaborate as deemed appropriate. The multiple visits allowed the researcher to garner a better understanding of the time, place, context, and culture surrounding each participant.

The researcher had CDs produced from the audio recordings of each interview, which in turn were downloaded via computer onto the researcher’s iPod. This allowed the researcher to easily listen to each interview in various settings, and develop an appreciation for the subtleties and nuances present by the respective participant’s tone of voice and inflections. The verbatim transcripts from the respective audio recordings of each interview were typed onto letter size paper. Copies of these transcripts were enlarged to 300%, and these pages were posted on the walls of the researcher’s home office. The oversized copies of each transcript as posted on walls allowed the researcher to visually capture terms, patterns and themes that may not have been as easily captured on regular, letter size paper. Both mechanisms, downloading audio files onto the iPod and producing oversized copies of transcripts, provided additional opportunities for the researcher to critically interpret the data at hand and produce a truly thick description of the phenomenon that was studied.

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the protocol to be used in the study, which details each step in the research process. The structure and contents of this study as described in Chapter 3, METHODOLOGY, delineates the protocol of the research process for this study. It suggests a structure that can be replicated to yield the same level of findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher's imagination. Qualitative data can be tracked to its source, and the logic that was used to interpret the data should be made explicit (p. 257).

This study assures confirmability by way of audio recordings of each interview, verbatim transcripts of the recordings, the researcher's field notes, and digitized copies of the artwork used for the projective technique portion of the interviews. These mechanisms allow the means for the data to be traced to its original source.

Authenticity

Authenticity seeks to answer the question, Has the researcher been fair in presenting views? (Mertens, p. 257). The researcher became better informed about each participant's perspective and intention of remarks during the interviews by way of *member checks* with each participant. At the beginning of the second and third interviews, notes from the prior interview were shared with participant to verify perspectives. Subsequent to the final interview, a phone conversation was held with each participant to clarify perspectives, as necessary.

Positionality

The research question was developed to be as objective as possible when considering Latino public school superintendents. The goal was to conduct a research project, which would offer new knowledge to the field of research surrounding the identity and practices of Latino public school superintendents. Qualitative research design protocols that are often cited by scholars and researchers were employed for this research project; however, it is impossible to completely divorce the researchers interest in this topic from the study's implementation. The researcher is not an uninterested bystander; rather, someone who is keenly interested in the professional lives of Latino public school superintendents, and how their Latino perspective is manifested in their professional behaviors.

This study was conducted with three Latino public school superintendents in Texas. The researcher purposefully defined the selection criteria for the participants. The researcher has a keen interest in Latino superintendents and their leadership experience, which indisputably informed the structure of this study. This study is not conclusive, but only represents the particular context wherein is found each of the participants. The knowledge that was gained by way of this study does not represent universal truths, but only that which arose from data gathered during each of the respective interviews conducted during the course of this study. Thus, these texts are incomplete and only represent specific positions in terms of ethnicity, time, and location.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study surrounded two primary factors: the bias of the researcher and the limited, selected sample. The researcher has a personal interest in the research topic and question. As a Latino, aspiring to the superintendency, the researcher was very curious and interested to see the responses of the participants and attempted to maintain objectivity in listening to recorded and written transcripts of the interviews; thereby, not compromising intentions of participants' responses as analysis took place and findings were articulated. It was a consistent challenge for the researcher to not infuse personal feelings or beliefs into the data analysis process. This made it all the more imperative that the mechanisms and strategies for assuring quality data analysis were employed.

The second primary limitation of the study involved the limited and selected sample case studies. The sample was comprised of three Latino superintendents of public school districts in Texas. While the number of Latino superintendents in Texas represents only 10% of all superintendents in the State, nonetheless those selected for participation in the study are only three out of 108 Latino superintendents. The emergent themes and related data analysis reflects the perspectives of the sample and cannot necessarily be interpreted to represent the perspectives of all, or even a majority, of Latino superintendents. The purpose of this study was to gather responses from only three Latino superintendents and this was accomplished.

The third primary limitation, which is related to the second, concerns itself with the term *Latino*, which is oft cited as a panethnic term. As such, it suggests a universal agreement for the definition and description of those persons who share

Latin American or Mexican American lineage. For example, the differences suggested by persons whose racial, ethnic or cultural background as Cuban, compared to persons of Mexican background may, at their most essential level, share a common Iberoamerican background, but the characteristics, behaviors and artifacts that demarcate Cuban and Mexican experiences provide for a uniquely defined ethnic identity.

Timeline

The study identified the following timeline to collect data, interpret and analyze the data, re-visit participants with initial findings, finalize findings, and prepare final manuscript of the research report:

1. Mid-February through mid-March 2008, conduct three interviews of each participant;
2. Mid-March through April, conduct initial interpretation and analysis of data;
3. April 2008, share initial findings with respective participants;
4. April 2008, prepare final manuscript of research report;
5. Late April 2008, present research report to doctoral treatise committee.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used to conduct the case studies of three Latino public school superintendents in Texas. A general discussion regarding the unique characteristics that describe qualitative research was offered as a way of introducing this research design as the basis for the study, and the use of the case study method. The mechanisms and strategies that determined selection of the

sample, data collection, data analysis, limitations of the study, and timeline for completion of the study were provided. The protocol to guide this study was described as the way to arrive at responses to the fundamental research question:

How are the leadership practices of various Latino superintendents influenced by their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in the discharge of various school district functions and responsibilities?

Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose and design of this research seeks to determine how the experience of *mestizaje*, that uniquely cultural, social and historical perspective that is essential to the Latino experience, informs and is manifested in the professional lives of three Latino public school superintendents in Texas. A series of questions were developed, which served to guide the semi-structured interviews with the three participants who comprised the research sample group. Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions. The interviews were recorded and a verbatim transcription for each was developed, and used as the primary tool in the analysis phase of this study.

This chapter begins with a demographic summary, comprised of narratives about each of the three research participants. The narratives provide information about each participant's background and characteristics, which are an integral part of the research question that seeks to identify how their Latino perspective, *mestizaje*, manifests its self in their leadership as public school superintendents. In addition, the narratives allowed the participants to share their journey, their story, of their ascendancy to the superintendency. The background and characteristics were not criteria for selection of these participants' role in this study; however, this information provides a backdrop to better understand and appreciate the participants. While most of this information became known through the respective interviews, additional perspective and information was garnered by observation of the

participants in their professional setting, review of participant authored materials, and other source documents.

Subsequent to the demographic summary are the findings of this study. They represent the major themes, which emerged from the interviews. The major themes emerged through review and analysis of the interview transcripts. Within each major thematic category are variations related to the theme.

The third and final section of this chapter is an analysis of the data that emerged through the interviews. This analysis considers the findings within the context of the literature review. The analysis provides a response to significant points or assumptions, which were derived from the literature.

Demographic Summary

The sample participants were selected based on criteria as presented in the Methodology chapter. Three would be participants were identified based on cursory knowledge of and acquaintance with these individuals; however, after contact with these superintendents, the researcher and his faculty advisor agreed to consider alternate participants. Two of the initially selected superintendents considered for the research sample were not able to commit the time to participate. The third superintendent, while considered Latino by numerous of his colleagues, is in fact, not Latino. The research sample, therefore, was comprised of three Latino public school superintendents in Texas, with a minimum of five years superintendency experience who were able to commit to the requested time. The sample included two men and one woman. Two of the participants were raised in small or rural communities and

the remaining participant was raised in a larger, urban community. Each of the participants was born in the United States, two as second generation and one as third generation. The participants represent 35 years of combined superintendency experience, in a total of four different school districts. Following is the background narrative for each participant, with a pseudonym assigned to each.

Superintendent Daniel Vasquez

Superintendent Vasquez was born and raised in the same community where he now serves as superintendent. He was an only child, raised by his grandparents, who were immigrants from Mexico. He attended the local public schools, and upon graduation from high school entered the U.S. Marines and served on location during the Viet Nam conflict. After his honorable military discharge he enrolled in the local community college, utilizing his GI Bill allowances. He continued on to earn his Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees from The University of Texas at Austin. He is in his sixth year as superintendent of a mid-sized school district. This is his first and only superintendency, and he will retire at the end of the current academic year. The school district, with an approximate student population of 14,000, is within the city limits of a major Texas city, and contiguous to the city's namesake school district. In the words of Superintendent Vasquez, "this is an inner city school district." Except for five years working in another local school district, he has spent his entire career in education in the school district of which he is now superintendent. He began his career as an elementary school teacher in the same school in which he completed his student teaching assignment. At the end of his second year of teaching he was

encouraged by the district's Assistant Superintendent to assume the position as the district's Supervisor of the Bilingual Federal Program, a position he held for two years. He was hand chosen by the then superintendent to become high school vice principal, and enjoyed a six-year tenure at the high school. The principalship of the elementary school where he had begun his teaching career became available and he was selected for the position, which he held for eight years. At the time Mr. Vasquez assumed the position as principal, the campus was poorly rated and was perceived as a "dumping ground" for teachers who didn't want to teach. Despite this perception, under Mr. Vasquez's leadership the campus was rated #1 in the district on the basis of its reading and writing scores. At the end of the eighth year as principal, Mr. Vasquez was offered a position in another school district, which he reluctantly accepted, saying "they made me an offer I couldn't refuse." Within the first year of his tenure in this other district, Mr. Vasquez looked forward to the day he would return to his "home" district; however, it took five years for him to be able to do so. During the five years Mr. Vasquez was away from his "home" district there had been six different superintendents. Upon his return to his "home" district, Mr. Vasquez accepted the principalship of a low performing campus, and made a commitment to the superintendent that he, Mr. Vasquez, would deliver a recognized school in three years. The school received "recognized" status from the State in two years. Mr. Vasquez's success did not go without notice, and after only two years was he convinced by his superintendent to accept the position of Assistant Superintendent for Administration. At the end of five years the superintendent was preparing to retire

and Mr. Vasquez was approached to consider the superintendency. Mr. Vasquez was not interested; however, he received calls from two Board members, five district administrators, and community members, all encouraging him to apply. In his own words, “By that time, [I thought], man, maybe I owe this district for taking me back.” When Mr. Vasquez submitted his application, no one else applied. Mr. Vasquez was announced as superintendent in 2002; when he retires at the end of the current academic year, he will have completed a 36 year career in education.

Superintendent Gilbert Lopez

Superintendent Lopez was born and raised in a small town approximately 55 miles southeast of the State Capitol. He is the oldest of five children who were raised by their parents, both of whom immigrated to the United States. He attended a local Catholic parochial school through Grade Four, after which family circumstances necessitated a transition to the local public school. He earned his bachelor’s degree at a local college, before earning his Master’s degree from The University of Texas at Austin. Mr. Lopez was a classroom teacher for four years before being approached by his superintendent to return to school and obtain his mid-management certification in order to become a principal. Upon receiving his mid-management certification, Mr. Lopez was assigned as principal of an elementary school, the same school he attended during his elementary years. The school, which has historically served the local Hispanic population, would become integrated the year Mr. Lopez became its principal. After three years he was assigned to become principal at one of the district’s junior high schools, succeeding a well-loved principal who had been in that

position for over 30 years. During his two-year tenure at this junior high school, Mr. Lopez completed several physical plant and instructional initiatives, which precipitated a public outcry when it was announced Mr. Lopez was to be re-assigned to lead the other district junior high school. This assignment was to last only one year, since Mr. Lopez was invited to matriculate in a doctoral program of studies. At the end of two years of doctoral studies, Mr. Lopez accepted the position of Deputy Assistant Superintendent in the same district where he now serves as superintendent, a position he has held for 23 years. In the words of Superintendent Lopez, “this is my 23rd year as superintendent, and my 38th year in the business.”

Superintendent Louise Cantu

Superintendent Cantu was born and raised in a small West Texas border town. The family traveled extensively to Mexico, but she spent most of her time in Texas with her grandmother, attending the local public schools. The town in which her family lived did not have a high school; thus, Ms. Cantu was required to commute 60 miles to and from high school, each day. Her ambition at the time of her graduation from high school was to be in the news media, to become a news anchor person. After two and a half years in the communications studies program of a large West Texas state university, Ms Cantu was no longer interested in a career in the news media, and desired to be closer to home and family. She transferred to a university closer to home, changed her plan of studies and earned her degree in English. Ms Cantu was an English teacher for five years at the same high school she attended. During her tenure as classroom teacher, Ms Cantu pursued obtainment of mid-management

certification. There was a regular turnover of campus administrators, and upon learning of Ms Cantu's newly acquired mid-management certification, the district leadership assigned Ms Cantu to her first campus level administrative position. In her sixth year at the high school she was assigned as its Assistant Principal, and was named interim principal during the second semester, for the remainder of the school year. She and her husband had recently become parents with their first child; at the superintendent's suggestion, in order to lessen Ms Cantu's professional duties and allow her to be more available to family, Ms Cantu was assigned as Assistant Principal of the district's elementary school. This assignment was to last only one year, and with the next school year she assumed the position as the school district's Bilingual Education Director. Having already obtained her mid-management certification, the transition from campus level to district level administration prompted Ms Cantu to consider pursuing superintendent certification. As with her work towards mid-management certification, Ms Cantu was considering pursuing the superintendent certification for use sometime in the future. The superintendent certification program in which Ms Cantu enrolled was designed to be completed under the supervision of an already certificated superintendent, with Ms Cantu's own superintendent as her supervisor. Ms Cantu was assigned a final activity by her supervisor, her superintendent, in order to complete the program. The superintendent handed Ms Cantu a brochure, an advertisement of a job posting for a superintendency in the State, and Ms Cantu was to develop her own personal and professional materials as a simulation activity in response to the brochure. Soon after completing

this assignment, Ms Cantu received a call from the search consultant conducting the superintendent search described in the simulation activity. Unbeknown to her, Ms Cantu's supposed simulation activity packet, had been submitted for consideration, and she was invited for an interview. She accepted the invitation, considering the interview process to be good experience, including constructive feedback, for the time when she would actively pursue a superintendency. Ms Cantu was one of five candidates scheduled to be interviewed, with each interview session lasting two hours. Hers was the last scheduled interview, lasting four instead of the scheduled two hours. The next day, Ms Cantu received a phone call from the search consultant offering her the job. She ultimately decided to accept the job and was superintendent in this district for three years. She was the first woman and first Latina to be named superintendent in this district. During her tenure the district's school received the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon School award. Subsequent to this superintendency, Ms Cantu and her family relocated to Austin where they resided for two years while she pursued doctoral studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Towards the end of those two years Ms Cantu began the process to return to work in a school district, and was in the process of being interviewed for a position as an Area Superintendent in one of the largest urban school districts in the State. She became aware of a superintendent vacancy in a much smaller South Texas rural community, and pursued this opportunity, as well. Thus, Ms Cantu was simultaneously interviewing at two school districts, one a large urban district and the second a small rural school district. She realized her decision to pursue her first superintendency and

doctoral studies had precipitated her family's relocation, and purposefully included them in making the decision to accept one of the two current job offers. Upon her husband's and children's strong encouragement, Ms Cantu accepted the superintendency of the small rural school district, and is preparing to complete her third year in this position. There are 1,076 public school superintendents in Texas, and Ms Cantu is one of only 17 Latino women superintendents.

Findings: Major Themes

Several common themes emerged from the interviews, which warrant further discussion. These themes are perhaps key elements in ascertaining how *mestizaje* intersects with the professional experiences of Latino public school superintendents. The reader must be cautioned, however, since it is not the intent of this research study to develop new theory and generalize its findings to all Latino public school superintendents. The intent of this study has been to explore various aspects surrounding the professional experience of Latino public school superintendents and identify points for future research in this much under-researched area. The general and specific findings of this research should be viewed as a platform upon which new research may be developed.

The emergent major themes include the following, and each will be discussed more thoroughly in the subsequent pages:

- Empowering for leadership
- Informing leadership behaviors
- Leading for social justice

- School district functions in action

Empowering for Leadership

The series of interviews began with asking each participant to tell their own story, including how they arrived to the superintendency. As each participant spoke of their transition from being a classroom teacher to their first administrative position, they were consistent as they told of being invited or assigned to administration. The notion of empowerment, the sense of making stronger or more confident, is evident in the participants' stories as they moved from classroom experience to administrative experience. Each was content to remain a classroom teacher for longer than they did; however, others thought differently. Others, primarily supervisors, recognized leadership potential within each of the participants, and acted to have them transition from being a classroom teacher to administrative positions. For example, Superintendent Vasquez stated:

I did my student teaching, 4th and 5th grade; they assigned me to the Assistant Principal. He loved it because he got to leave class, and he'd leave me alone. I got to do a lot of stuff myself, and it was a good learning experience. Well, in December I found out that this teacher was leaving to go to California. The principal came to me and said, I know you will be done in December, would you like to stay and teach. I told him, sure. Lo and behold, I got a job there. I taught. I taught for 1 ½ years, but because I'd done my student teaching that fall, they gave me credit for one full year, so I was actually there two years. And a position opened up in central office, it was supervisor in the bilingual federal programs area. The Assistant Superintendent, her name was Ms G, she said there was going to be a position and it would be good to apply. I didn't know, maybe. I talked to that vice principal that I worked with and he said it could be a good opportunity for me. So I went ahead and put my name in the hat and I was chosen, and I was at the central office for two years under the federal programs.

As Superintendent Vasquez went on with his story, he talked about the end of his second year in the federal programs office.

So anyway, I'm sitting in the office two years later and I get a note that the superintendent wants to see me, Mr. B. I'm thinking, what did I do, you know. I walked in and he was sitting back in his chair and he looked at me, and he said, "G, I want to transfer you." I'm thinking, oh man, he's going to put me back in the classroom – what did I do? I started to ask, you know, why, and he said, "I'm going to put you in H High School as a vice principal. That's how I ended up at H High School, and I was there six years.

Superintendent Lopez told of his experience during his fourth year as a classroom teacher, when he was approached by his superintendent:

I taught for four years, and then Mr. B, the superintendent asked me did – he wanted me to go back and get a certificate so I could be a principal, and I first told him I didn't want to be principal. I just kind of thought that the classroom would be what I wanted to do. So he convinced me and he had me call Dr. M at the University of Texas...I was at the university for a year – came back [home], and was an elementary school principal at the school that I told you I had to go to, which was segregated at the time. Mr. B, in his wisdom, the reason he sent me to the University of Texas for that year, was because his plan was to integrate all schools that following year. I'm sure my background as being Hispanic, a neighborhood product and somebody from the [town] – maybe the transition into this thing would be, you know, something that would not receive as much attention.

Superintendent Cantu began her college studies as a communications major, planning for a career in the news media. She decided to change colleges and also changed her major to English, which she claimed was "really her first love." Upon graduation from college, Superintendent Cantu decided she wanted to teach:

...and decided my calling was teaching, so I already had an English degree, and so I got certified to teach and was able to go back to my hometown, where I graduated from to teach English, and that was really what I wanted to do. I just wanted to go back and make a difference for the community that I grew up in...I worked with five principals in the five years I was a teacher, and I always adapted to what they wanted, because I was there for the kids. But by that time I was pretty tired of having to, here comes another principal, what

are they going to want. And, made me believe I could be a principal and create that stability that we were all craving. As a teacher, I wanted my principal to last more than two years, but it seemed it was a revolving door. And so, I decided to go back to school and get my administrative degree. And so, when I went, I just thought whenever I needed it – it might be three years, five, whatever, I would be prepared to provide that stability for a campus. When they found out I was taking classes, they immediately said they could go ahead and get [me] an emergency permit and let us make you an assistant principal. I said, wait a minute, I wasn't asking for that fast, I was just trying to take classes to one day become a principal. Anyway, they recommended me and I became an assistant principal, working on my mid-management...I was being promoted pretty rapidly, more rapidly than I expected.

As the interviews continued, the notion of empowerment was expanded as the participants discussed situations or people that have impacted who they are and how they act today. In various ways, being empowered was equated with others having confidence in their abilities, even when they did not see that themselves. In some instances, it was only in hindsight that the participants realized that certain experiences served to encourage a confidence in themselves.

Superintendent Vasquez told about his being placed in the vocational education, nonacademic track in high school. The decision to do this was made by the guidance counselor, who also let this student know he was not college material. As Superintendent Vasquez reflected on this experience, he stated:

...Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would go to college. I'd already been told that I was not college material. I believed it, I always did what I was told...That was the mentality, well that was the mentality of school personnel, of those who had the power to place people, or to place kids where they thought they should go. Right or wrong, [in hindsight] I think it was mainly wrong. Do I have any regrets? No, actually, because that later on gave me more of a confidence builder knowing that I could do that. I wasn't upset because I was placed in shop. Back then, I didn't know the difference. I thought that was the way it should be, that's the way it is. But as I grew older, I realized there was a big difference. I really thank Dr. M for what he did. It

really, later on, kind of showed me that I have what it takes to do what I want to do, you know. It gave me that confidence.

Superintendent Lopez told the story of one man who left an indelible mark on his life. The man was the truant officer for Superintendent Lopez's childhood district.

One encounter with the truant officer developed into a lifelong friendship. He stated:

I remember because I was being bullied, I would take my lunch money, and they would take my lunch money – then they would say, okay I'm going to take your lunch now. They would take your lunch. For a while there...while I was going through that phase there, I remember I [would wave] to my mom goodbye, and when she went inside, I went underneath the porch and read. I mean I was a good reader. Second day – I mean – I got out from under the porch – third day I was sitting under the porch. I don't know what I thought I was going to do – live there for the rest of my life. But anyway, I just did not want to go to school. It wasn't that I didn't like school – I liked the classroom, I didn't like some of the kids. So I'm reading my book and...my visiting teacher had a senior ring that he would use to knock on doors. He was a truant officer – he has since passed away, but he would use that ring – (sound of knocking) – and like I said, it was a small house, so I'm sitting under the porch and he is right on top of me. I could hear my mom softly walk to the door and he said (gruff voice) "Mrs. Lopez – Gilbert is not in school today." My mom said, "he left for school this morning." (Gruff voice) "Well I don't know – he's been absent for three days, and I'll guarantee you that if he doesn't go to school tomorrow, I'm going to file on you in court, Mrs. Lopez!" Mom: "Mr. V, we will be there tomorrow, I promise you. When he gets home, his daddy will take care of it." So that night, again, give me a break here – I'm 10-11 years old, thinking I can live under the porch for a while. So, I scoot out of there and go to the garage and wait for the lights to go out. I make my way in, thinking I could go in and go to bed with my brothers, and the next morning, do the same thing. Well of course that didn't work. As soon as I hit the front porch, the lights came on and my dad and I had a little discussion about the importance of school, and ... but I think he understood that I was having a hard time and he felt – he told us – he gathered us together and he said "I'm going to send you to public schools because I can not afford to keep you all in private schools.", which was fine with me. After that discussion, and he – I think that is the only time my dad paddled me – so the next morning – this is what – talking about people who affect/impact your life –the next morning, (sound of knocking) there was a knock on the door and I knew it was the senior ring calling. My mother went to the door. "Mrs. Lopez, is Gilbert ready to go to school?" She said "yes, but I will take him." We lived about two blocks – three blocks – from the school. He said, "no let

me take him.” She said, “okay.” So I got into the car with him, and I think at the time he was driving a 53 Chevrolet – kids were mean to him ‘cause they would call him names. He was a real short man and rotund. Always wore a burr cut, and when he would go to the neighbors, kids would shout all kinds of things at him – he was a decent man. There was a neighborhood in [our town], on the river, The Gardens, it is still there, and he drove me into The Gardens and he showed me those homes and he asked me, “What is the difference in these homes and where you live?” I said, “These are prettier.” He said, “Yes, a lot of doctors and teachers and professional people live in this neighborhood. Don’t get me wrong – your dad – where you live, your dad is trying to do the very best, but he didn’t go to school so he doesn’t make as much money as these people – you need to stay in school to make a better life for yourself – you go to school, grow up, and you can buy a better home for your parents.” Anyways, that made an impression on me, and it wasn’t that I was going to quit school – that wasn’t it – I just wanted – I felt like going to another school – he did that to me for about a week, and he became a friend. I go back to school and finish, and I go to UT and I’m the principal of the school that we are integrating. By the way, Mr. V was still the truant office for the district after all those years, and it came to pass that [when] I went looking for kids and knocking on the doors with my senior ring, with Mr. V in tow. In fact, he was still alive when I came here [to this district], and the forms that we are using here today for non-attendance, are the forms that he used...he died of a heart attack. He was a good person. [While at UT] we went through...some sort of debriefing for a leadership development course that we took – a guy gave us an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper with an O on it. It said, “Make believe that this is the board of directors of your life, and give me 10 people that you consider to be the board of directors of your life. People who have created the most impact, that made you what you are today.” Of course, at the head of the table is my mom and dad, and on the flip side is Mr. B and Mr. V. There are a few others, RK, RH, and people that have really taken the time to say, hey, you are going to be a good administrator.

Superintendent Cantu talked about her positive view of self that was

engendered by her mentor superintendent. She stated:

[I]n going back to my superintendent that I had, that worked me like a slave. She knew, she was preparing me for something bigger and I didn’t know that...I can talk to my friends who are principals, but it’s not really at that level of board relationships and all that. So, I made it a point to start mentoring women into the superintendency to see who I could find who needed some guidance, a belief in themselves, because I didn’t have it. My superintendent did and she kept pushing me. She sent all that, my resume and

all my papers, without really me really knowing because she knew that I had the qualifications, even though I didn't really think so.

Each participant, while openly discussing the Latino perspective as a superintendent, was quick to clarify that in their professional setting it is most important to be recognized as an effective administrator, who happens to be Latino. Each participant expressed pride in being Latino; however, when it came to the professional arena, being perceived as an effective administrator took precedence over being a Latino. For example, Superintendent Vasquez stated,

I don't assess myself as a Latino superintendent versus an Anglo superintendent, you know...I don't see myself as any different than any other superintendent. It's about doing the best job, regardless.

Superintendent Lopez stated:

To me, I'm proud of the fact that I'm Hispanic, but I wanted them to know that I'm an administrator, a professional administrator, first, who happens to be Hispanic. Simply from the standpoint that I didn't want anything given to me to reach a quota or to do anything of that nature, but I also didn't want to be ruled out simply because [I was Hispanic]...[when] I was going through the UT program, I don't think they were training Hispanics to be an administrator, they were training administrators who happened to be Hispanic. I think there were some things they had to take into consideration for us, but we were administrating here, we don't send in different reports to TEA because we are in South Texas or whatever.

Superintendent Cantu's remarks not only concerned her ethnicity, but her gender, as well. She stated:

I knew that I was the very first female, Mexican-American superintendent, and the very first female superintendent [in that district]. So I was having two whammies against me. I was a female, they'd never had any female superintendent, and I was Hispanic and they'd never had a Hispanic superintendent. That community was about 86.67% Hispanic, but they'd never had a Hispanic superintendent, much less a woman superintendent. And so, I really had to work hard at, you know, building relationships. And then having

the confidence that being a woman I can run the district and Hispanic has nothing to do whether I could do it well or not.

Superintendent Cantu repeated several times about her assuming administrative roles sooner than she expected, and provided a unique perspective as to why she chose to act upon these possibilities, especially her first superintendency. Superintendent Cantu stated:

Going back to my [original district], remember the man who was supposed to retire at the end of the year, remember I was bilingual director, he announced he was leaving, and the board moved immediately to name me principal. They didn't even do a search. They said, okay, we know who we want, we are going to put her in that position. So, in the meantime I'm going through the interview process [for my first superintendency], and they name me principal for the elementary campus. So, when I go back and tell them that I am going to go ahead and take the superintendency, I think the board really was very hurt that I didn't want to stay in the community and be a principal. I could have, but it probably would have been another fifteen years before they would have seen another woman, a Hispanic woman, as a superintendent. You know, I was good for all these other jobs, but for the superintendency, I think they were very much willing to offer it to a man, before they would offer it to a woman. Even though they had an Anglo woman, they were having some issues with her, so at the end of the year, she left and I left. I mean, there was good turnover, but I think the board was very disappointed that I didn't take the principal position there, and they knew immediately that they wanted me for that position. But I had to make a choice, a board that was willing to offer me the job, and have the confidence that I could lead a district and a board that was happy just putting me as a principal of a campus. It was a tough decision.

The interviews revealed that each of the participants did not ascend to the superintendency, or any administrative position, on their own accord. Superintendent Cantu was the only participant who considered educational leadership as a possibility, but for some point in the future, not as soon as it came upon her. The participants' entrance into educational leadership was fostered by others; individuals who were already in positions of authority and who realized the leadership potential within each

participant. In addition, each participant was empowered for leadership by instances that left an indelible mark on their person.

Informing leadership behaviors

During the interviews, when the projective technique was employed, there were three Latino themed art pieces displayed. The participants were asked to consider how these artworks remind them of their own life story. The participants chose the same artwork on which to comment, *La Cocina es donde aprendió mi papa a leer* (*The kitchen is where my father learned to read*) by Edward Gonzales. Each participant recounted memories of growing up, and stories and events that left lifelong impressions upon each of them. These memories, these impressions are the basis for influencing their leadership behaviors. How each participant, as a superintendent, acts as they do, and why they act as they do emerged as a theme during the interviews. The participant superintendents spoke of the various influences that work to inform their leadership behaviors; those influences that have helped shape their perspectives, their values, to inform their daily decision making. These influences are primarily internal; they are the memories and experiences of childhood, family, school, church, culture, and community.

Each participant emphasized that, in the professional arena, being a good superintendent who happened to be Latino was most important, as noted in an earlier section of this chapter, they nonetheless offered comments regarding the role being Latino plays in their professional situation. It adds a dimension, it adds a unique

perspective, it serves to inform their leadership; how being Latino informs their leadership comes in a variety of ways.

Superintendent Vasquez, reflected on his own background and that provided insight to working for and with his district's population, the same school in which he grew up. He stated:

I guess having grown up in an area with a culturally significant sameness within the area, you know, Hispanics/Latinos have a tendency to gravitate to others, so I grew up in a barrio that was 99.8% Hispanic. That in itself I think, gave me some insight as to these Hispanic students' and families needs and priorities. Having gone through the, I guess, the need for support, the need for educational equality. I can see where these parents or a small percentage of these parents have not made education a priority, because in essence, they've given up. If the parents give up, then you know what kind of students you are going to have. Those are problematic students. Is it the fault of the student; is it the fault of the parent? You see – I think I can understand that having come through a culture system that dealt with it. In my case, I think I was successful, in coming through that with the help of my grand parents. The fact that they emphasized education – the fact that they emphasized the need for me to have a good foundation in education to be successful. I didn't know that at the time – they did. I saw that and I see these others, as these parents don't know the difference. And so, their priority is not and has not been for that child's education. That's where I come in. I understand that, and I understand what their priorities are – their priorities are survival. That's basically it – they want to survive. They want this child to contribute to this family. If that child was to drop out and start working, the better for them because they think that is the answer. They don't see beyond that – they don't see that if this child gets a formal education, that would mean more money for the family. They don't see that. I see it and I can relate to it because that was taught to me early on. I was fortunate to have someone do that. They don't. There is an insight where a Latino superintendent would have a step up on another superintendent, I think it would be that. Another superintendent coming from a non-Latino, non-Hispanic setting, would they be able to understand that or would they see that as a problematic family, or a problematic child and send him to an alternative school – send him to whatever, take him to court. In essence, their whole lives, they've been in court – they've been paying for what they don't know, and they don't know cause they don't know what to do. They are stuck within certain parameters and they don't know how to get out. They don't know that an education is going to help them because they are living for the now and living to survive.

They don't think they have a choice. Again, going back to the Hispanic background, I think I understand that and that is my job to help them get out of that rut. In this district, that is why we implemented a social worker program because we had a lot of kids with problems, who missed school for a variety of reasons, and when we sent the social workers out, it was usually not only one child – it was all the other siblings having the same problems. All of a sudden, the children coming to school were having attendance problems, they were having discipline problems, and those again stem from the family having problems – either they can't pay energy bills, they owe a lot of money – it stems from something within the family and it carries over to the kids. If we had not implemented our social work program, would we have ever found that out? Probably not, and the way we normally deal with these sort of problems, with attendance problems, is, again, send them to the alternative center, send them to court, and we think this is the cure all. It's not. So – again I have to fall back on knowing the culture, having lived through that type of culture, and understanding what priorities are. So – I guess in one sense, a characteristic of a Latino superintendent is having the insight to, I guess, forecast what will happen to this child because of his family. Again, a non-Latino superintendent – I don't really think they can see that because they haven't lived through this culture difference.

Superintendent Lopez recalled the story he had shared about his encounter with the truant office, Mr. V, who became one of his lifelong friends. The initial encounter was precipitated by Superintendent Lopez's truancy, due to his not wanting to go to school to avoid being bullied; however, Mr. V used this opportunity to instill in Superintendent Lopez an appreciation for going to school, getting a good education, to better his life circumstance. Superintendent Lopez shared about that experience and understanding that he was not alone; the appreciation for a good education needs to be imparted to those students who may not realize this, due to family circumstances, backgrounds like his own. Superintendent Lopez stated:

One of the things I do with the population I serve is that I have a leg up on empathy because of my own upbringing... There are several who still live the experiences I had, I think, as I drive the neighborhoods around here. I can relate to, you know, where you see their cars parked, and you see when you go to the elementary schools and you see mothers show up with their kiddos,

there is still the same existence I grew up in. It's still out there, it hasn't changed.

Superintendent Cantu's perspective on how being Latino informs leadership addressed the need for leaders to be aligned with community values and culture. She stated:

For example, reflecting back on all the principals I had [when I was in school], many of them Anglo, they didn't fit in the community. Our community is 99.9% Hispanic and a lot of the principals were Anglo. They'd come in with different ideas of how a school should be run, but they never connected with the community, with parents. And so [when I became superintendent], I felt there was a need for leaders who were really aligned with community values, with the culture.

Throughout the interviews the participants intimated how they conduct business is based upon their backgrounds; how they were raised, the values imparted by their parents and family, and particular incidents. As one participant stated, "I have a repository of memories to tell me what is good and bad, what is important and right." The most prevalent topic that surrounded the participants' background and values was education. Unequivocally, the value of education was mentioned and elaborated upon as something that was deeply instilled on the participants at an early age.

Superintendent Vasquez, who was raised by his grandparents, recalled memories of how his grandfather taught him to read and impressed upon him how important it was for him to get a good education. Superintendent Vasquez stated:

My grandfather had a sixth grade education from Mexico and my grandmother had none. He brought with him, I remember at least three textbooks that he brought with him from Mexico. So before I went – back then when I started school, there wasn't any Pre-K or K, you just went into first grade and so on. Well, before I started school, he had already shown me

how to read in Spanish. To me, it was such an easy transition, and so I became a good reader. Actually, in first grade, I was one – and I still remember cause I was 1 of 5 – 5 kids who knew how to read. So the following year, when we were promoted to second grade, the principal had 5 desks outside her office and she taught us. It wasn't the classroom teacher – she taught us because we were the only ones who knew how to read in second grade. I attributed that to my grandfather – he would do things like, you know, he would sometimes sit with me and give me the book, and he showed me the letters. I don't remember every detail because I was so young, but I remember learning how to read in Spanish. Even before I saw an English word, I could read Spanish. When – back then when you bought life insurance, you usually had an agent that would drive around and go house to house to house. Well, we had an agent and every time he'd come over to the house, because my father had a couple of policies for he and my grandmother, he would always ask me to sit there and listen to the conversation. I never understood why, but I do now. He was trying to get me to learn, to listen, to learn, and to see these people who had an education and the kind of jobs they had. He would make me sit there and I would listen to the conversation. Sometimes, when I grew a little older, I could tell that my grandfather didn't really understand what the agent was saying when he was talking about the policy B, term life, what have you, but that's why he had me there. He wanted me to learn this; he wanted me to understand what he was going through... I think back – gosh, it was my early years. My grandmother didn't know how to write, but as I mentioned before, they became naturalized citizens. Well, when you do that you have to sign your name. I remember my grandfather sitting there and teaching my grandmother how to write her name. You know, how to print and write it in cursive. I remember sitting there and watching – that was my first teaching observation, I guess. But, low and behold, she learned how to write her name – she couldn't write anything else, but she could write her name. When they went, and I think verbally, they took that assessment verbally, they both did well. I still remember they would both sit there and they would study together. I still remember the governor was Price Daniel because I remember they had to know the governor's name. My grandfather would say, "The governor of Texas is?" and my grandmother would say, "Price Daniel". Sure enough, that's the learning process. Those days I was learning through them, and really, I wasn't even aware of it, but it was happening. If I ever got a formal education or introduced to a formal education, it was through my grandparents and what they did. I guess if you are looking at it in terms of values, it was basically learning itself became a valuable instrument. I could sense it – I could see why you had to learn – I mean here were my grandparents at their age, and they were learning because they were going to become citizens. They had to do it because that is the only way they could become citizens. That was a value in itself. Sitting there listening to the - like the insurance agent would come in and talk about life

insurance – my god, you know – I didn't know it then, but I know it now. Then I thought it was boring. I'd sit there and think why do I need to know this? But, I guess my grandfather was doing it for a reason. He wanted me to learn, and learn as much as I could, the way he knew how to teach me. I guess the value of a good education was first and foremost for him – it wasn't for me – I was too young to know the difference, but it was for him and I think, later on in life, I saw the importance of that. So that became a value to me, and so, I basically did the same thing with my two boys. I told them, fine – you can do anything you want to do. If you don't want to go to school, if you want to go in the military, that's fine, but you're going in as officers, you're not going in as enlisted men. So, you finish college, you can go into any military branch you want. So, again, the value of education. The more education you have, the better the job, and I saw that, I understood that -- understood that at an early age. So naturally, as you get older, you know the difference between a high school graduate being able to make a decent salary and a college graduate and the difference there. That's what I pointed out to my sons. This is the difference – this is what you need to work towards. They understood so they did what they had to do. They, like me, didn't understand at the onset. They just wanted to finish high school and do wherever, but they know now. Just like I do – I learned later on “Oh, that's why he was doing it”... You learn by watching, and I think that is what I did – I just internalized what was happening and I didn't even realize it. He [grandfather] would also take me out to work – I picked cotton; I cut sunflower seeds that were 10 foot tall; I picked cucumber; a few other jobs, that you know, I mean, that taught me a lesson. The lesson that it taught me was that this is not what I wanted to do, this is tough, this is hard, you know. If I can get a good education, I won't need to do this.

Superintendent Lopez, once again, recalled his memory of Mr. V and the influence this man had on his value for education; however, added that his parents also stressed the value of education. He stated:

I don't know early on what I thought I was going to do when I grew up...but, you know, you relate to your dad's profession, which my dad was a body and fender guy, he did what it took to put food on the table. I was proud of him, I'm still proud of him and how he basically instilled in us the desire, the importance of, and the value of a good education. It would have been real simple early on in life, because as a youngster you think, well, I don't like school, the best thing to do is go and help your dad, the best thing to do is to go to work. I think it would have been real easy for me to fall into that mindset, because I loved my dad, I loved helping him, and while he preached schooling and education, I think he would have been happy if we had helped

him, because it was an economical issue, but I think my mom was, and still is, [the one] to really push education.

Superintendent Cantu recounted how her grandmother, with whom she spent much time as a child, was always telling stories to impart values. In regards to education, she stated:

She [grandmother] always had some stories like that to tell me about – education and about the value of education – why it was important for me to continue to go to school, and reading, and always wanting to do good for your community.

The value of education was the most pervasive value identified by the participants as instilled in them by parents and others. The family’s place in shaping the participants’ overall value system and informing leadership behavior appears to be significant, as each participant reflected on various aspects of their background and the place of family.

Superintendent Vasquez recalled his senior year of high school, and the concern he had for his future after high school, since he had been told by his guidance counselor during freshman year that he was not college material. He followed a family tradition, entered military service, and spoke of how this experience has been influential on his leadership behavior. He stated:

So, come March, my 18th birthday, my senior year...I start thinking, “what am I going to do? Two months before graduation, what am I going to do?” I had worked, as a matter of fact, I worked with a company, the previous summer, as a carpenter, because I loved woodwork. I helped build houses. I knew I didn’t want to do that for the rest of my life. And so, I went to see a recruiter, it was a Marine Corp recruiter, and they said, “hey, do we have a deal for you. We’ll put you on this 120 day delayed plan, you join now, and you don’t have to leave until after graduation.” I said, “Wow, that’s a great deal.” The reason I always knew I was going to go into the military, my uncles had all been in the military, my grandfather had emphasized the – he came from Mexico and

he loved America. He was a naturalized citizen, he was always talking about how lucky he was to be in this country. So, naturally, you feel a certain allegiance to the country. So I felt I needed to join the military. I already knew I was going to join the military, I wasn't going to college...all in all [in the military] what we received and how you respond to your supervisors, with respect, with the knowledge that if you don't do what they tell you, there is going to be a consequence. All that stays with you. You say okay, that's what life is about. Well, to make a long story short, when I became vice principal at one of the high schools here, I approached it in that manner – these are the kids, we are the supervisors. If we tell them what to do, they should do it. If they don't, there should be consequences. But they need to know what those consequences are because I knew what the consequences were when I was in the military...when you deal with staff...when I tell them that I need something, or we need to do this, I don't have to follow through and ask them again, it's done. They know it has to be done.

As Superintendent Vasquez was recounting the influence of family on his life, he commented on his grandparents, the significant influence they have had on his life, and his own influence on his children.

I consider myself – I did okay – I was successful, but it wasn't me, it was my grandparents. They were guiding me. They knew what direction I should be headed for. If I strayed, they kind of pushed me back to the same path. That's what was happening to me. I wasn't aware of it, just like my boys. They weren't aware why I was – their only comment was, 'Oh, dad, do I have to go to school?' Or, why do we need this? It was always a question, do I need this – do I need to go – well, yeah. You try to explain, but they didn't understand. Now they do, but back then they didn't. Same thing with me, I had no idea what they were doing, but it worked. Again, it was due to the family influence, and that's what I mean by close-knit family value. It doesn't have to be your immediate father, mother; mine were my grandparents. Those were them, they were my parents. The fact that someone was there who was interested in me; that's why mentoring at this point in time is such a big deal in the schools...I think the main thing I learned was the difference between right and wrong. We can choose a road and it's our choice. The road is either a good one or a bad one, you can always tell. The road you choose is the life you are going to make for yourself. I think what they were instilling in me is to know the difference between what's good and bad, what's right and what's wrong. I learned that early on...They were strict, but to a certain point. I was allowed to do things, but to a certain point. And I knew that. I didn't stray far from that, because I knew if I did, I might not get another chance to go; that type of thing...I remember being scolded sometimes because I did wrong, but

I also remember being praised, and that is the key. We can scold all we want, but if you never receive praise you're never going to repeat that same act.

Superintendent Lopez, after telling of his varied professional experiences segued to tell how these experiences have shaped who he is as a person and a professional. He stated:

I became superintendent 23 years ago, so this is my 23rd year as superintendent, and my 38th year in the business. Yeah, these experiences, I'm not sure how they hammer, how each experience hammers your face or your being. I think first and foremost, you are a product of your family upbringing, and that translates...your strategies and your mode of operation, and your professional world are gauged in the – the characters traits and values that you are raised with in your family...I think my early move to public school, from Catholic school to public school, had an impact on me. First of all, I think it had an impact on my self concept to where I felt like for a little while there that I was the best reader at the other school, and I wasn't – it wasn't that I wasn't the best reader at that public school, it was just that it didn't appear to be a big priority – it was just survival, I think. I remember playing baseball and I was a decent baseball player, not the best, but decent. I would go out there and intend to do the right thing, and the big guy would hit the ball and I would go park under it, and call it off...[but the big guy] would holler in Spanish, something like, "I'm going to get you after school". So you'd put your hands down, and the teacher who didn't understand Spanish, would clap and holler, "run, run." So, then he'd score. He would kick a football up in the gym, and I'd go tell. You were supposed to do that or get in trouble. I was having a conflict of values, I guess; I was told to do the right thing, but every time I would try to do the right thing, I would get in trouble [with the big guy].

During a different portion of the interviews with Superintendent Lopez, the discussion about values continued. Superintendent Lopez reflected on values that his parents instilled in him, and which he claims are religiously grounded.

Some of them are religious based. I don't know, but my mom and dad [encouraged] respect for authority, you know, treating people how you want to be treated. I think it's based a lot on our religious beliefs. That line, about being up front with people, not hurting people intentionally, everybody deserves a chance, everyone deserves respect; so if a person if that person is doing something to me, I want to be real slow to try to do the same thing to

him. My first reaction is that two wrongs don't make a right. Granted, we are all human and I guess my, it's strange in a way, probably a weakness too, you tend to give people more than one chance...I think, when I say values, I mean they sound kind of trite and redundant, "Leave it to Beaver" kind of things. I think those values translate into – I just don't think you can divorce yourself and say a good administrator doesn't care about people...I think it is caring for people, being honest, being respectful, and I think they are all based in my religious upbringing. Somewhere down the line, I think we still, whether it is tomorrow or ten years from now, I've got to be accountable to somebody else after I'm dead and done. I think, that's my belief that I think if you handle these people the right way, based on my religious values, because you know, I know when I leave this world I think there is an accountability system up there and I want to hit the exemplary level when I get there.

Superintendent Vasquez and Superintendent Lopez, when making statements about the genesis of their values and how their background informs their leadership referred to the artwork that was discussed earlier in this chapter, but neither as poignantly as Superintendent Cantu.

Superintendent Cantu's statement included the artwork's reminder to her of her own experience, most especially the influence of her paternal grandmother. Her grandmother's story's served to impart values, moral lessons, to distinguish right from wrong. The stories also imparted a value for education and doing good for one's community, one's people. Superintendent Cantu further expounded on this artwork to include her perspective on the need for a greater number of Latino leaders, and the requisite need for leaders who model character. Superintendent Cantu stated:

Well, it definitely reminded me of my grandmother, on my father's side, and also my grandmother on my mother's side. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother on my father's side. She was the one that was always telling me, you know, stories. She always taught me a lesson with a little story. In fact, I grow up – my mind was full of imagination because of all the stories that she would tell me. They were actually moral lessons – in a way – I didn't know, I just remember the kind of stories that she would tell me, you know, about not wanting, not running away or not going off without telling people where you

are going and she would tell me a story about this young lady who did that, and what ended up happening to her as she got – we lived in an area that was hills and mountains. She always associated it with close by. There was a girl that lived in this area, and she decided that she was just going to go off and didn't tell anyone where she was going. The bears came and got her. They kept her there for many years, and you know, she would go on and tell me stories. Kind of in a way to teach you, you know, respect your parents – tell your parents where you're going – you don't want to just go off, but in a way that it kept my imagination going – is that true? I'd always look at the mountains and look at them, and wonder if there were bears out there and do they really take people. But the respect for nature – the end of the story was that those bears did return her, but they returned her as a kind of a different person, understanding more of nature and it was scary to think that you could be taken away from those you loved, but in a way, it was respecting the grandeur of nature and what's out there. She always had some stories like that to tell me about – education, and about the value of education – why it was important to me to continue to go to school, and reading, and always wanting to do good for your community – it was always about your people – you always wanted to come back and help your people. It was ingrained in me that, whatever you do, it – you know – you're not just raising yourself – you're raising your whole community. I think when I spoke to you last time about me wanting to be back and give to that community, the community was my high school. What I could remember was maybe – I was one of the top students to graduate from there, going off to college and still struggling and thinking, if I'm struggling and I was one of the top students, I wonder how students that are not considered to be as high as I was, how did they make it? That made my mind up to come back and really make a difference and help them have a better future, be better prepared to face whatever happened. It goes back to those roots of doing things for your people, for – you know that you would always come back and you would always come back to those that helped you get ahead. Even if I left, I knew – something always drew me back to do doing – making a difference in people's lives – even though I'm not where I thought I would be in P City and R City, I end up doing things again because I feel I owe it to the young – the youth of today to make a difference – to be able to give them the opportunity to succeed. When I was telling you last time that we see the demographics, we are a majority minority state now, yet we don't see the kind of leadership that needs to be in positions of principalship and supertendency, and even just elected officials across the state. It's not very representative of the kind of population that exists. How does that happen? Well – it's lack of preparation on our part. We might be 80% minority but we're never going to get ahead if we don't concentrate on helping these kids get the values – hard work, of valuing education, wanting to get a head, and then coming back and making a difference. We have a lot of people that are very self centered, I think, that – when I say that, I think of

people that have gone to the top and because they have concentrated, they don't have the right character – they end up falling. You talk about Henry Cisneros could have been president – one of our top leaders; Lena Guerrero, I think – who are the other ones – there are several in just the State of Texas – but you think nation wide, how many of them end up reaching positions of great responsibility and authority, and end up for some character flaw, or self-centeredness, or ego problem – they end up loosing and falling. I always thought if I could write a biography on fallen stars – Hispanic leaders that were on their way up and had a lot of potential, what caused them – what was it – that made them have – make decisions that bumped them off wherever they were at. I think it goes back to what you are talking about – the values and the ... whether people are – you have to do what is right. The other one I was thinking of was the superintendent from Dallas ISD – Yvonne Gonzales – talk about an opportunity to lead one of the largest districts, one of the largest, like Houston – in Texas, you know – could have made a big difference and what do you do – something so dumb as to buy yourself furniture with school district money. How can that be? I'm thinking – what could have prevented her from doing that? You don't know if she was set up, or it she thought she could get away with it, but again it goes back to character. Character and doing what's right, regardless of what temptations are out there – whether they be temptations of the flesh, temptations of money, whatever temptations. I think that all goes back to your original roots and your values and you how you were educated – to make those decisions and do that right thing, whether people are watching or not, or whether you're going to get caught or not. It just – I think I have my grandmother to thank for a lot of who I am value wise. She always made it a point to teach me the values, but always with something I was going to remember. It wasn't just something "you shouldn't do that – you shouldn't do that". It was always more than don't do it because I tell you not to do it – it was more this is the reason, this is the story, and then I'd get it. I'd say "Oh – well you know...". You don't do it because your grandmother, your parents told you not to do it. She was a great influence and when you mentioned the artwork, immediately, I was drawn to it when I first saw it – I just felt like that is exactly what I would do. I would read – my mother would have to drag me from my bed with a book – she would sit me at the table and watch me eat. I would have my book and I'd be eating, and it was always about getting lost in the travel of wherever I would go through the book. Reading was a big part that also helped me solidify values. A lot of what I read was historical. I wanted to read about Amelia Earhart – heroes, heroines – people that I looked up to. That little library in my hometown, I pretty much read everything in that Library by the time I was in fifth grade. They valued that and that picture right there definitely talks about the little kid reading, the grandmother cooking, the smells as you are reading, it just brings all kinds of memories back.

Only one of the three participants spoke of the role of their immediate family in the participants' professional advancement. On several occasions during the interviews, Superintendent Cantu spoke about her family and how her ascendance to the superintendency affected them. Accepting positions in different towns and her enrollment in a doctoral program of studies precipitated uprooting and relocating her family. Her comments suggest the importance of family in her life and the angst she experienced when considering to uproot her family for a professional opportunity.

She stated:

[When I was offered the job for my first superintendency] I didn't know what else to do, so I call my husband and I tell him, "You've got to meet me at home, because I have something very important I have to talk to you about." He knew. He was very supportive of me going back to school for my superintendent certification, very supportive overall. So when I called him and said I can't talk to you over the phone, I need for you to go to the house, we're going to need to talk about this in person. So when he got home and I told him about it, he almost fell back. He said, "but you weren't really interested in the job." I know, I wasn't. "But you're not really going to take it, are you?" We had just built a brand new home, started a family, extended family was there, was being promoted fairly quickly. He had a business there with his brother. So when this happened, the choice was mine to make. Leave a brand new house, leave extended family, leave a husband, since he would not be able to leave. It was a tough choice for both of us to make. He left it up to me. "I didn't really think you were interested in it, but if this is the case, I am willing to support you and do whatever we need to do."...They gave me a three-year contract to begin with. I had three little kids, so I moved myself, by myself, with three kids to a new district to be superintendent. There were a lot of sacrifices my kids had to make. My oldest, who is 16 right now, was a 3rd grader and my baby was a Pre-Ker. So I had a Pre-Ker, 1st grader, and 3rd grader. The kids were always there close to me when I was working late in the office, but it was a change because they did not have their dad with them, it was only on weekends. It was probably my son who was the most vocal about how I wasn't satisfied with being a principal, that I wanted to be a superintendent, that it didn't matter that I dragged them away from their dad; just tearing at my heart. It changed within a year. He was happy and fine...I think that everything I was looking at or reading about, like family, especially Hispanic women [spoke of the challenges for women be mobile], but my

husband was very supportive. But had I said, you know what, because I'm leaving my husband, my kids are going to be without a dad, I'm leaving my extended family; I could have easily have said no. It's sort of foreign territory, I want my family together, and maybe I was criticized at some point...[When I was contemplating beginning my doctoral studies] I had to talk it over with my family. Because that meant that instead of being two hours away from my husband, I was going to be nine hours away, and he couldn't commute to see us every weekend. So we talked it over, and he was very supportive. He said that if this is really what I want to do, then he didn't think it would work long distance. He said, "I'm willing to move with you and make it work." That's when we decided and sold our house, sold the share in the family business, and decided that we needed to make it work as a family and help me with my dream of getting my education...I really wanted to get back into a school district, and my thing was I wanted to move into a bigger district, and urban district. I wanted that kind of momentum. [At the same time] I had heard about the superintendent search for this district and was encouraged by my sister to apply, which I did. And I thought, you know what, [since my family has moved on my account] I'm going to give [my family] an opportunity in this decision. They loved [this town]. They said, "Mom, this is where we want to be." I said don't you want to be in a big city where they have malls and everything. They said no. I said, well, if I get the job, this is where we're going to be. We were on the road, on our way out of own, and I received the call to offer me job in this district. The kids were ecstatic, this where they wanted to be. The first think they wanted, to buy a dog, because they saw the superintendent's house and said we need to have a dog. So we bought a dog and here we are.

During the interviews the participants commented on how certain professional development opportunities uniquely informed their leadership. These opportunities were apart from the usual professional development opportunities in a given academic year. They were unique to points of transition, when the participants were moving from one administrative experience to another.

Superintendent Vasquez was in the midst of his first principalship at a school that according to himself, enjoyed a less than illustrious reputation. According to Superintendent Vasquez the school was known as a "dumping ground" for teachers who were no longer productive. During his tenure as principal at this school, the

student's reading and math score on the state assessment were so much improved that these scores were the highest of all scores for like schools in the district. The Texas Education Agency issued the school a certificate to recognize the improvements, and Superintendent Vasquez was invited to participate in a recently established leadership program at the Texas Education Agency. Superintendent Vasquez stated:

I was very proud of that. At that point, that is where I joined the TSII [Texas School Improvement Initiative] Program...I was one of the first cohorts, there were 20 of us from throughout the State of Texas, two from this area...I learned a lot through that program. I got to visit other districts and other schools and a lot of what I picked up – I picked up the good with the bad – I'd come back and we'd incorporate that. We did so good that another district called me up and said they would like me to come over and be their principal at a certain school.

Superintendent Lopez was approached by his superintendent and asked to consider becoming a principal; the conversation included the need to secure mid-management certification. Superintendent Lopez enrolled in a year-long, mid-management certification program at the University of Texas at Austin. The program was operated jointly with another university located in the Rio Grande Valley. The cohort from Austin would periodically meet with the cohort from the Rio Grande Valley to discuss their progress, classes and the state of education in Texas. The opportunity to visit with others in the program, as well as the exposure to the sort of faculty who operated the program was impetus for Superintendent Lopez to consider the need for more Latino educational leaders. Superintendent Lopez stated:

We would meet periodically. It was mostly Hispanic superintendents, Hispanic administrators, and I met some of them who were a little bit more activist, who looked at it more as what we can do as a Hispanic administrator, as opposed to just an administrator and then being Hispanic. There were discussions about that in our groups – it was a good experience...there was a

professor at UT, a guy named Dr. L, who told us when we were going through the pilot program, “when you get out there, your job is to negate every negative stereotype that people have of Hispanics. Whatever it is, you do the exact opposite, and that’s your job, because there are some walls out there right now”...when I got to go to UT and hang around those [kind of faculty] who give you an eclectic smorgasbord that you can go, “I’d like a little bit of that, and a little bit of that, and then flavor it with some of yours”...I think that what it’s done for me from the experience that I had with these folks...it caused me to look at what I do as a calling.

Superintendent Cantu was in the midst of meeting success in her first superintendency, when she was recruited to pursue doctoral studies. It was not an easy choice to leave her position, and the district’s Board of Trustees was less than thrilled; however, Superintendent Cantu enrolled in the doctoral program of studies and with her family relocated to Austin for two years. During the interviews, Superintendent Cantu commented that she was always reading professional journals and materials to keep abreast of the most current thought and practice in educational administration, but her experience at the university was different. She stated:

Those two years I spent at the university were wonderful, because they opened my eyes to a lots of things that in the rat race you don’t have time for. Even though I did like to read and all that, but really critically looking at the pieces from a different perspective, and then I had such excellent professors like Dr. S. They made you think, your brain was hurting by the time you got done with class. Because they just put it in so many perspectives and made you question, why is this and why is that. I got the benefit of a lot of those professors that really helped you see things differently. I don’t regret doing that, but I was getting antsy and wanting to go [back] into a district. All those things I had learned, and thinking I can’t believe I did that when I was a superintendent. And so, I thought the next time I get a district, this is how I am going to do it. So it just sort of evolved, that I wanted to get back into a school district.

Leading for Social Justice

There was no question asked during any of the interviews which directly addressed prejudice or racism; however, each participant shared stories and experiences that poignantly reflect the insidious nature of prejudice and racism. The various statements made by the participants regarding prejudice or racism did not possess a tone or attitude of regret, resentment, or anger. In fact, the statements made by the participants that included recollections of their exposure to and experience with prejudice or racism served as a backdrop to articulate their own professional agendas towards providing equal opportunities for all students. The participants also made statements related to leadership and the need for a more proportionate share of Latino leaders, aligned with the increasing Latino population in Texas, especially within the public schools. As noted in an earlier section of this chapter, the interviews with each participant began with having each participant tell their individual history, sharing as much as they would like about how they ascended to the superintendency. It was during the first interview, while sharing their life stories that each of the participant superintendents commented on their respective experience with prejudice and racism.

Superintendent Vasquez talked about being raised by his grandparents and their influence on his view of differences in others. His awareness of the differences in others was not learned at home. He stated:

I was raised by my grandparents, and I was raised to believe that education is the way, you know. I wasn't raised to somehow find excuses for not getting an education. I wasn't raised with a racial discriminating sense, you know. I never once heard my grandparents speak about any other race or culture in

any way negative towards them or anyone else. And so I guess I grew up believing that everybody is the same. When I was going to school, I had a lot of friends, different races and genders, and I couldn't see the differences. It wasn't until later, I was older, that I saw – okay, they have a bigger house, you know. They have a nicer vehicle, that type of thing. But I didn't grow up at home learning those differences, those I learned outside the home...I started seeing a difference when I reached, and got into Viet Nam. It was very polarized. I could see the blacks going to the blacks, the Hispanics going to the Hispanics, the Anglo going with the Anglo, and the others were kind of at a loss, because there weren't many others left. That's when I began to wonder, you know, I was used to talking to everybody, but here, I wasn't kept from going over to the blacks and talking to them, but it wasn't expected. You kind of dealt with your own kind, as they say. I had never really experienced that until Viet Nam. I came back and I started my formal education, college wise, and I saw somewhat the same thing. The Anglos were staying with the Anglos, the Hispanics with the Hispanics, etc. At that time there weren't as many Hispanics in college as there were others, and there weren't many blacks. Well, I understand why now. This so called Viet Nam War, either way you look at it, it was called a rich man's war, or a poor man's war. Those who couldn't afford college, more than likely would be drafted, and those were the ones out there. The majority of those who couldn't afford it were Hispanic or black. You didn't see as many of those in a university and colleges as you did of others. I think this is part of the separation. There was animosity among people.

Superintendent Vasquez's statements about his military experience reflected an overt experience of prejudice; however, his statements about his school experiences illustrate that only in hindsight was he able to identify that prejudice was operative in his life. When he entered first grade he was one of only five students who could already read. He and the other four students were placed directly under the principal's tutelage due to their reading ability and provided individual instruction, and Superintendent Vasquez's parents were proud of his accomplishments. He also spoke of his high school experience and what he perceived to be the mentality at that time, and how this affected his educational opportunities. He stated:

When I was a freshman in high school, there was a counselor, he's probably not around anymore, Dr. McK, and he would come into the classroom. I don't remember what classroom he would come into, I was a freshman, and he would come in there with a little time clock. I remember he came in and gave us this test, put the time clock down. I remember writing and before you know it, the alarm went off. He picked up all the papers. About two weeks later, he called everyone into his office, individually. He called me in and said Daniel, you are not college material so I'm going to place you in wood shop, metal shop, leather. I love woodwork, I love it. I can weld with the best of them – I can keep a bead. But, you know, you were dealing with that type of mentality back then. When I went to school, I'm going to say the school was about, as a freshman, maybe 60-40 Anglo, as a freshman. By the time I was a senior, I think that changed and it was more 70-30 Hispanic. There was a change that was coming, but unfortunately, when I got there, that was the way it was. And so, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would go to college. I'd already been told I was not college material.

As the interviews with Superintendent Vasquez proceeded, he returned to this memory of high school. The notion of “that was the mentality” was addressed as he illustrated its effect on his professional behaviors today. He stated:

In that area of the south side at that time, it was predominantly Anglo. The mentality was easy to see. Anglos were always being placed in academic classes. Hispanics, the majority [of them], were being placed in the shops. The other types of classes. A few Hispanics got into [academic classes], like your good athletes. Some of them were good friends. I played ball also, but I wasn't a star player. You could tell – look at the star players and look at their course selection. They weren't selected, they were being placed. So, again, that was saying, “that was the mentality,” well that was the mentality of school personnel, of those who had the power to place people, or to place kids where they thought they should go. Right or wrong, I think it was mainly wrong...you can't pigeonhole people. That's what they were basically trying to do. If you were Hispanic and they thought you couldn't achieve based on that little test or whatever that test was, then here you are, you are going to be placed over there. If you do well on that test and you are a good athlete and you are a different race, then hey, you can go to college, you are good material. I think that – sure that has stayed with me. I look at – I'll give you an example. We started an automotive program here in this district. It was initially a “mom and pop” type shop. I heard of this program in the Houston area, so we went to visit. It was a state of the art automotive program. That was what we needed, and what do we need to do to get it? ...we went through the process...we were approved and we have been with the program for about

1 ½ years now – some of our kids who have met the criteria, the expectations of those kids has skyrocketed. Some of those kids have gone from there to dealerships, working in dealerships earning 50, 60, 70 thousand dollars a year, minimum, right out of high school...we had one with the BMW plant, who is being sent for more formal education in reference to their cars. I don't see kids just having to go to "mom and pop" while I know they can do this other. It's been proven. I've seen it here in this district...that in a way reminds me of the expectations they had for us. What expectation did Dr. McK have on me and many others versus the expectations that we have on these kids...if I'd thought there is no way for our kids to do this it wouldn't have happened. But I knew we could. What's to keep us from doing it?...unless you take those risks and chances, where would we be? There would be no advantage to us. Again, going back to my experience, I have to say, yes, Dr. McK's decision on me does influence what I do.

Superintendent Lopez, while he was sharing his personal history, recounted his experience as a student in the local public school where he would later return as its principal. He was a student when the school was segregated, and would be the principal when the school became integrated. He stated:

I went to a Catholic school for the first five years of schooling. Then because of family circumstances we had to move to public schools...the schools were segregated, so they moved us to schools for people like me. There was a school for black kids, and a school for brown kids...when I got to the public schools and they segregated kids like they did, I was at a school where it was a majority of migrant students. If you did not finish in May there, they automatically retained you, so a lot of the guys were migrants so they would leave in April and not come back until October. So consequently, they were overage. I was in class with 16-year old kids, and in the 7th grade with 17-year old kids. When I was a 6th grader, it was not unusual to come in and somebody would say, someone would take roll, and they would say, "so and so is not here today, what happened?" "He got married, Miss, over the weekend." It was a totally different experience; I think it put a little dent in my self-confidence because all of a sudden it wasn't about reading, it was about surviving, the bullying, and those kinds of things...I finished high school...went to college...and became a teacher. I taught for four years, and then the superintendent asked me did – he wanted me to go back and get a certificate so I could be a principal...[I went to UT] and there was a program Pan American University Program at Austin. At the time there were 10-12 kiddos from the Valley who were in Pan Am getting their mid-management certificate. We would meet periodically. It was mostly Hispanic

superintendents, Hispanic administrators, and I met some of them who were a little bit more activist, who looked at it more as what we can do as a Hispanic administrator, as opposed to just an administrator and then being Hispanic. There were discussions about that in our group so we – it was a good experience also...I came back to [my hometown] to be the elementary principal at the school [I attended], which was segregated at the time. The superintendent, in his wisdom, the reason he sent me to UT for that year, was because his plan was to integrate all schools that following year. I'm sure my background as being Hispanic and a neighborhood product and somebody from that town, maybe the transition into this thing would be, you know, something that would not receive as much reaction, because I didn't know it at the time, because I was gone that year, but when he announced it a year ahead of time, there was some – there were changes and people don't want to change. Hispanic students had always occupied that school and now we're going to mix everybody. I would want to talk about those [UT] experiences the first year coming back as a Hispanic administrator in a school and neighborhood that had always been Hispanic, but the comments made to me by people that had never been in that area of town really, really opened my eyes as to what certain people's attitude was. To the point, I sent one of those parents to the superintendent.

Superintendent Lopez returned to this memory of the parent who confronted him, telling details of that encounter, and how this has influenced his professional behaviors. He stated:

I was 27 years old, a principal, and he [the parent] says to me, "Can my daughter wear shoes to school here?" I said, "Yes, sir, why do you ask?" And he said, "Oh, I thought this was a Mexican school so they couldn't wear shoes..." I escorted him into my office and I said, "We need to talk about this." I said, "Sir, I don't appreciate those kinds of questions." He said, "Well, I just tell it like it is." Then he said, "I want to tell you something. If my little girl is not in a room with more of her own kind, I'm going to break somebody's back, and you know who that is." I said, "Sir, this conference is over. I don't need to talk to you anymore. I'm just going to tell you this, your daughter is going to get the best educational experience she can while she is here...I could have just packed my car and said, this is never going to work here...but, I guess, if I hadn't had people like Mr. B, [superintendent] and some of the folks to cause me to step back and put it into perspective, that this is just a small ripple, you are doing bigger things here, you are a much bigger person than this...it's caused me to look at what I do as a job as a calling. I think, I honestly think to some degree, of those who are in education or educational administration, if we loose some of the calling, we are loosing

part of it...what has fueled me is to do – try to do things to make it a level playing field. I never walk into a place saying I'm going to do this because this kid is this color – I try to do it for all so this one doesn't get left out, or this one doesn't get left out. To do the reverse, I would be guilty of doing what I have seen in the past, what others did. What I try to do is just don't leave the [Little B's] out of this world – the kid who was sitting under the porch, because he wanted to be in school, but the system just wasn't there.

During each of the interviews with Superintendent Cantu she included comments regarding being a woman and a Hispanic. Her statements did not refer to overt experiences of prejudice or racism; however, they did indicate that Superintendent Cantu is keenly aware of the role that women and Latinas have historically played as leaders, and the challenges to be equally worthy of consideration for leadership positions as any male would be.

I guess early on I was very hard on myself, more than anybody. I was really hard and wanted to get everything perfect. And the reason for that was, I felt that I was carrying the torch for many women, that if I didn't do it well then they would go back and say, "See, we gave her an opportunity." Going back to if I hadn't been successful in [my first superintendency], if I had failed, I would probably not gotten a chance any where else. But if a man fails in one job, it's okay, he'll go get another job. But for a woman, it's really hard. You fail once, and they don't want to give you another chance. Not only in that district. I've seen it happen where there was a female who didn't work out, they're like, "We don't want any more females," as if all females were the same, rather than looking at that person. But if males fail, they don't say, "We don't want anything to do with males anymore." If a male fails we'll just fill it up. It's okay if we bring in another male to the position, but if a female fails, it's because she's a female, not necessarily because of the person who got there. So I really felt that the weight of that that I had to be successful, that I had to do the best job possible, because a lot depended on what happened after me...I guess I didn't realize I was unique until I went to state conferences and the regional service center meetings. We have regional advisory council meetings every month, and the first month that I went and they introduced me, I was the only Hispanic female superintendent in the whole region. There were about 50 districts. I believe I was the only Hispanic, too. All the others were Anglos. There were two or three Anglo females there, so we at least had more female superintendents than you would normally find.

Superintendent Cantu not only elaborated on her identity as a woman and Latina as regards her work as a superintendent, she commented on her role as a model for others, both adults and students. For Superintendent Cantu being a role model is one with her professional behaviors. She had commented earlier about Latinos being the majority minority, but not being sufficiently represented in positions of leadership. She stated:

I think you are definitely a role model. The more kids see you in leadership positions, it's an "I can do it, too". I was mentioning [before] the superintendency for me did not even cross my mind until I saw the first woman in a superintendent's role. That fact that she was white didn't even matter, but it was just a woman. I had never seen that before. I had always seen males in the superintendency, and they were pretty old. If I wanted to prepare for the superintendency, it didn't really hit me that there was a possibility until after I saw her. I think the more our young people see people that are prepared, have taken leadership roles, they've opened the doors for you already, it's up to you to get in there and make a bigger difference. It's kind of the trailblazer that will go before you, they are going to have a lot of issues that you might not have following in their footsteps, but if it hadn't been for those people opening the doors for you, those doors wouldn't have been opened. I think the more our young people see that is a possibility, the more doors will be open to them. I guess the inside barriers they will have of not even thinking of the possibility will be gone, because they've already seen it. It's not like it can't happen – it can happen...the more people are familiar with different leadership styles, whether they are values of Hispanics or females, or whoever it might be, I think it just opens it up to different perspectives and different leadership styles that otherwise would not have been present if it's only dominated by a particular gender or ethnicity.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, each participant reflected on how they were empowered by others; they were encouraged and nurtured to assume various leadership positions. As the interviews continued, the participants would discuss their own leadership role to include empowering others, which involved encouraging students and adults to better themselves, implementing programs to motivate students,

exposing them to new life possibilities, and reminding them to not forget whence they came. By the superintendent participants own self-admission, they realize as leaders their leadership behaviors are essential to have any initiative come to fruition.

Superintendent Vasquez, when recounting the experience of planning for and implementing his district's state-of-the-art automotive program did not hesitate to comment that the program was a result of his vision, which involved two components. First, he believed the current "mom and pop" program was not sufficient to meet the needs of today's market economy, and second, he wanted to demonstrate that students will respond to whatever expectations have been defined for them. He stated:

Why do we settle for mediocre [mom and pop], when we knew we could have this [state-of-the-art] automotive program? If the expectations are there, they will rise to those expectations...if I had thought there is not way for our kids to do this, it wouldn't have happened. But I knew we could...I mean, that is not bragging, you are saying to these kids, "hey you can do this, you can handle it." We have about 50 dealerships, when we have a meeting once a year, we just had it before the Holidays, we had about 30 dealerships come over. It's a luncheon. We have the kids there and we have presentations and all. Then we have the kids who have been hired by these other companies, the one from BMW came and spoke to the other kids. It benefits the dealerships, because they don't have to train them, they are already trained, so by the time they get there, they can do the work. [The dealerships] don't have to spend anything on training. It's a win-win situation for everybody. But again, would this be here if I, and I'm going to brag myself, because I started the program. I wanted the program to work and brought it here. I saw what we had. I knew we could do better. Here we were changing spark plugs, changing carburetors; I wanted to teach them something that would help them in their future. What were we doing to prepare these kids? We weren't preparing them. Well, we did that...That's the way I see it. So what am I doing here? I guess I am part of the ones trying to motivate these kids, to do the best they can. Could I work in another district? I'm sure, but I feel comfortable, I feel at home. I feel like I know this community, you know, because of my background and I guess that is part of the cultural background. I felt, well, maybe I can make a difference. I feel like I have.

Superintendent Lopez spoke, regarding his hopes and aspirations for the students in his district. He addressed academic achievement, but there was more an emphasis on the students' quality of life; the role of each student to develop their potential and do well, and open doors for others. He stated:

I'm real proud of every kiddo that does well, and each of them has their own challenges to deal with, whether it's life or whatever. And again, this philosophy about hopefully, when I got here in this district, and hopefully when I leave here, that I will have added some value from my presence here. Hopefully, you leave a place a little better off than the way you found it. You pass the torch to someone else. The concerns sometime that I have, the reservation with – and I don't mean this the way it might sound – I want us to be part of the American Dream in those kinds of things, but to a degree, once you reach it, this life long goal of being all you can be, that you don't adopt an attitude of "I've made it – that's all that I'm here for". You can assimilate to a degree that you don't forget [your history]...sometimes people really tell you what they think to your face, or with an elbow, which has the same effect. But going to Yale or Texas or wherever, that you're kind of helped put a foot in the door for other people that come from the same background; that you are basically representative of good hard work, dedication, stick to it, and not a reflection to the point that you loose that translation. Yes, we want to be all tings, just like everybody else, but also realize the fact that education has been, and will be the key to getting us to the next level. Always keep in mind there are still some coming up behind you so that you don't lose that – that's the thing I hope we never lose...I think there's a difference and still some challenges [being Latino] that can make a difference. I think there is something to be said for that. I think my MIT student, my Yale student, if I had something to do with putting, in their past, a program or experience that either made them want to pursue this goal, or facilitate that goal that was to be, then I would have felt that I made a difference, I made a little difference...So, if you can orchestrate experiences in such a way that it catapults a youngster to a different mind set to where he wants to advance, then you've done what the Constitution of Texas says, that schools are there for the general diffusion of knowledge. Well, that sounds kind of nice, but I mean, it's not just like dealing cards. There is a lot of chemistry that needs to happen and you've got to ignite the desire.

Superintendent Cantu is consciously at work to encourage other Latino women to assume positions of leadership. She realizes as a Latino woman she is a

minority among minorities, and has assumed an active role to encourage other Latino women to consider leadership positions. She talked about the districts in which she has worked; while comprising a majority Latino student population, they had a minimum number of, if any, Latino administrators. For Superintendent Cantu, her desire is twofold, to encourage Latinos and to encourage women into positions of leadership. She is actively involved in mentoring other Latino women through her position as a superintendent and as a colleague. She was quite loquacious and stated:

I try to mentor different women that I feel have [leadership potential]. In going back to my superintendent that I had that worked me like a slave, she knew she was preparing me for something bigger and I didn't know that. I try and give back as far as mentoring other women. I remember the first time I ever went to a superintendent's meeting, naïve as I was, never understanding the few number of women. So the first meeting I go to, I look around for women. Okay, I need to talk to others, and see what they're doing, and see what they're going through. Just to latch on to some body, and go, you know what, you're in the same position I'm in and let's talk about some of the issues we're having. And all I saw was bald headed old men. It's really lonely. It's really lonely, when who am I going to talk to who are going through similar things. I can talk to my friends who are principals, but it's not really at that level of board relationships and all that. So, I made it a point to start mentoring women into the superintendency, to see who I could find who needed some guidance, a belief in themselves. Because I didn't have it; my superintendent did and she kept pushing me. She sent all that, my resume and all my papers, without really me really knowing, because she knew that I had the qualifications, even though I didn't really think so. I wanted to have everything possible, step A-Z, figured out before I went into the superintendency. And so, I guess from that I have a very, that's one of my goals, to inform others that you don't need to know everything to be in the superintendency. You have to be very clear about what your beliefs are, because they will be tested every time, and really have kids as a focus...Had I not taken that position [my first superintendency], I would have never learned and it would have been a dream unfulfilled for many years until someone blessed me and said, you're right for the superintendency...So it was always with that, trying to find key people to mentor. I was always aware of the gatekeepers of the superintendency. So I would always surround myself with different people, because you never know who's going to be able to open that door in the future. I was always involved, like I said, in UIL, and this was

because of people who believed in me. So I was always trying to open doors for people, male or female, but of minority descent, because it's – I guess you've heard of the crab-bucket syndrome, crabs trying to get out of the bucket, and the others pulling them down so they cannot get out. And that's what I knew, the dog-eat-dog world, where instead of helping you up as a woman, it was always trying to pull you down, because if I'm not there you can't be there, too. And I think it was more prevalent against the Hispanic community, and I was very much aware of that from where I came, because I felt I was being held back from being a superintendent there by people that would never believe I had the qualifications. And it wasn't just because of who I was, but because I was a Hispanic, and their idea was probably a male, Anglo superintendent. And so, to overcome all those obstacles, I feel like it just needs to be educational. And all these women that are very capable, I started nurturing, meeting with them, sharing my story, telling them, "you know, I'm not perfect and I don't know everything, but you know what, you just have to go out there and trust yourself that you can do a good job." And so, in many, many instances where I had the opportunity to name people to certain boards or make recommendations for promotion, I was very active in trying to get more women into leadership positions.

Superintendent Lopez and Superintendent Cantu each utilized a comparable metaphor when commenting on the role of Latino superintendents in the current social, political and cultural context; Superintendent Lopez spoke of "scouts and pioneers" and Superintendent Cantu spoke of "trailblazers" and the Lewis & Clark Expedition. The notion of forging a new path for others to follow, being role models and standard bearers, is suggested by their comments. Superintendent Lopez stated:

My first experience as principal, when I walked into that first office to be principal of an integrated school, the questions I was asked by a single parent; I could have just packed my car and said, this is never going to work here. This guy, that was one person, that is what I constantly try to remember. If I make an inroad with two, three, or four, then their offspring may be acculturated with a different background. I think it's getting better. I'll tell you what I think is helping. [Superintendents] Chavez up in round Rock, Hinojosa in Dallas, Duron in San Antonio, and Montenegro in Arlington. As I step back, I'll tell you that 25 years ago, I didn't know that the day would ever come that this would happen. I knew Jimmy Vasquez when he was in Edgewood [school district], he was a pioneer. No, I guess Jimmy was a scout. The scout goes out there and if you find an Indian and kill him or anything

else, then the pioneers come on when the scout clears the land. Jimmy was a scout, because he was out there when there were not very many people around him. But what Jimmy did in his suit against the State at that time really was a wake up call, it's been followed by Edgewood v. Kirby, I and II and III....I don't know the statistics or demographics, but if we are not at 60% Hispanics in Texas right now, we are pretty close to it...I still can't get over the statistics about superintendents, that one 108 out of 1076 are Hispanic...a lot of us are going to be scouts in the profession that we are in.

Superintendent Cantu used the metaphor of the "trailblazer" and stated:

[T]he superintendency for me did not even cross my mind until I saw the first woman in a superintendent's role. The fact that she was white didn't even matter, but it was just a woman. I had never seen that before...I think the more our young people see people that are prepared, have taken leadership roles, they've opened the door for you already, it's up to you to get in there and make a bigger difference. It's kind of the trailblazer that will go before you. They are going to have lots of issues that you might not have in following in their footsteps, but if it hadn't been for those people opening the doors for you, those doors wouldn't have been opened. I think the more our young people see that it is a possibility, the more doors will be open to them...more of those doors that open for other minorities, the bigger the opportunities that people are going to have...It takes belief. One of the words we use is that we are a standard bearer. We are the flag carriers. We carry the flag for the rest of the districts that need to be like us. We are going to take some hits, but in the end, we will be helping our kids to be the type of person we need them to be...I tell them [our district team] the trailblazer saga; it takes the trailblazer, the one that goes through and makes the trails. The pioneer is the one that comes right after the trailblazer. The trailblazer fights everything, and they don't need for you to tell them how it is. They are out there, Lewis and Clark, they are out there wanting new routes. That is the reason we had explorers, because they wanted to find new ways, new riches; they had dreams.

Superintendent Cantu remarked on her identity as a woman, the perceived expectations placed upon her, and her awareness in doing as good as job as possible.

Reflecting on her first year as superintendent in her current district she stated:

If I had failed with that first year, I think it would have been so detrimental to any other woman who would have applied for this position, because it would have gone back to the 'woman thing' instead of just me, my personality; it's me, who I am, not necessarily my gender. If I succeed, I think it will be good

because I will have proven and the next person, let's say it's another Hispanic female will not have to be held to such high standards as I am being held to, because I was the test case.

Leading for Social Justice thematically addressed oppression, activism, advocacy, and image. While no interview question was directly concerned with prejudice and racism, the participants recounted memories of incidents that illustrated their respective experience with these. The participants commented on the role of superintendents in empowering others, especially students. The participants' comments suggest that they are committed to the tenets of social justice; providing equity and excellence for everyone.

School District Functions in Action

Each of the participant superintendents were asked to consider three of the ten functions of a school district, and reflect on how their leadership behaviors are manifested in each of these selected functions. Given the selected school district functions, the participants were asked to address how they operationalize these, how they put these functions into practice. The three selected school district functions chosen to elicit a response were: Internal and External Communications; Governance; and Curriculum and Instruction. The researcher was anticipating each participant to articulate the specifics of initiatives as they relate to the selected school district functions; however, the participants responded by offering their philosophical perspectives about each function. The participants' statements were broad in scope, similar to sharing a vision, with samples of programs and initiatives interjected to illustrate a point.

During the interviews, when commenting on the work of a school district, each participant suggested that the primary mission of a school district should be to do what is in the best interest of its students. This perspective was included in comments about Internal and External Communication, Governance, and Curriculum and Instruction, to appear as an over-arching theme for all school district functions. As Superintendent Vasquez was providing details of Internal and External Communications in his district, he told of engaging the community to approve a bond issue, which included meeting with community residents, many with no children enrolled in the district's schools. He stated:

We meet with part of the family [community] and present our needs, and low and behold, the past few bond issues have gone through and passed. They [community] have joined the bandwagon and said they will help us, they will block walk, they will do all of this because it is for the children. These are people with no children in school, but they know the benefits that will come to this district.

When Superintendent Vasquez was discussing Governance, he stated:

A lot of their [Board] decisions are politically motivated, not necessarily for the good of the district, the children, it's what's good politically. So, I need to consistently remind them why we are here. It's a matter of where is their priority and are they making sound decisions on what is needed here, or are they making decisions to please constituents.

Superintendent Lopez recounted his own experience, his transition from parochial to public school, and the challenges to be accepted to pursue his education. He referred to himself as different, which today implies that teachers need to be aware of students' differences and provide opportunity for all. He stated:

I tell our teachers and staff that we have to remember that everybody is different with different [experiences]... What has fueled me is to do, try to do things that make it a level playing field. I never walk into a place saying I'm

going to do this because this kid is this color, I try to do it so [no kid] gets left out. What I try to do is just don't leave the [Little Gilberts] out of this world, the kid who was sitting under the porch, because he wanted to be in school, but the system just wasn't there...it's about the kids.

Superintendent Cantu provided two perspectives when commenting about the purpose of the district. She commented on the district's necessary role to do what is in the best interest of the students, but also included comments on how this focus on students will benefit the larger community. She stated:

[My first superintendency] was kind of a sleepy little community district, and we started focusing on kids' needs. And when that started happening, kids started waking up, and the community started waking up. They got excited about things that happened. We had a bond issue, and passed the bond issue. So, we looked at facilities. There were facilities that were really deteriorating and nobody really did anything about it. I said, kids deserve [better], we don't have to have our money in the bank if we're not even meeting the kids' needs. We also applied for a renovation grant of about a million dollars, and were awarded the grant. In all, we had lots of projects going on in the community, after school activities, and we had money to do the things they had always dreamt of doing. We had worked very, very hard, and it was just to prove to them that when you set your goal to look at student success and focus on them, and this being the core business that we're here for; that's kids and ensuring their success, it can happen when you focus on it.

In speaking of her current superintendency, she stated:

It's been a great challenge and I love working with that board. They are committed to making change happen for the sake of kids...we're developing a leadership team that will sustain changes for the long term. So we're not saying the superintendent gets to make all the decisions. We make them as a team in the best interest of the kids. Not necessarily what I want. It might be my idea, it might be someone else's, but if its in the best interest of the kids, we're going to do it.

During another portion of this interview, Superintendent Cantu commented how we are preparing kids to serve the greater community. She stated:

What kind of kids are we producing? Kids that can take bubble tests, that's all we're producing. Are we producing the next generation of inventors, are we

producing the next generation of kids who are going to take our social issues and really think through them to try and find solutions? No!...I really believe that we're here for one reason, and that's to ensure success for our students for the future. I don't want to be an 80 or 90 year-old lady, and can't live in a community because it's filled with crime or people that don't care about you. I just don't. I feel we have an opportunity to make a difference for the future, and if we fail to take that opportunity then we have to suffer the consequences.

Each participant was asked to consider Internal and External Communications as one of the ten functions of a school district, and comment on how, if at all, their Latino perspective influences the operationalization of this function. The participants spoke of how they communicate with district personnel, students, parents, other constituencies such as neighborhood communities, and community and business leaders. They discussed their goal to provide as much information as possible to have all constituencies aware of the different initiatives and events happening within the respective district. Each participant, at different points of their interviews, voiced concern that in this age of accountability with so much focus placed on the outcomes of high stakes tests the other good things happening within the district are overlooked. There appeared to be a desire to balance the need for reporting student outcomes with informing the community of the other events and initiatives of the district, which create a well-rounded experience for the students; preparing students for their place in a global economy.

When asked to comment on Internal and External Communications, Superintendent Vasquez commented on his district's mission statement, which includes the term, "family." He provided a brief historical overview, wherein his district's mission statement reflects the district's geographical setting, a section of the

city that includes the boundaries of one of the Texas Missions. The lifestyle of the Missions, the interdependence of its inhabitants and that sense of family, which according to Superintendent Vasquez is a continuation of the Hispanic culture, continues to pervade how the district communicates, internally and externally. One example of this is the masthead of the district's newsletter, which includes an image of the Mission and the district's mission statement superimposed over this graphic.

As Superintendent Vasquez discussed Internal and External Communications he stated:

Our roots stem all the way back to the early days of the SJ Mission, and if you recall, the families at the mission early on, maybe 150 years ago, it was the family village atmosphere that was permanent throughout...[our district] is unique in that the community is a family, they are family oriented. We are very much involved with the local churches, different denominations, and the district lends itself to this type of meeting and communication. We've hosted several meetings at our facilities, allowing them the use of space. We meet with the people at the local churches when we are wanting to pass a bond. So what do we do, we meet with that part of the family and present our needs...they say they will help us...almost all of our elementary schools have been rebuilt, state of the art. And again, it wasn't us, it was the community. The community believes in this district, part of the family. Hispanics are the majority [population], they are culturally significant. The Hispanic and the family is very close, and this district is no different.

Superintendent Vasquez continued his remarks about the importance of internal and external communication, stressing external communications as being the more important. He stated:

Externally is first and foremost. Our community relies on us to tell them what we are doing. If we don't communicate to this community, what we have done, where we are at, what we are doing, then there is not buy-in. we have been able to be very successful in some things that we have done. There is an article [in the local paper] where we have ten of our schools, they are among the top ten in Texas. We do that consistently. The reason we have that [in the paper] is because, immediately when that happens we get the word out.

Community, parents know what is happening; staff knows and students know. We bring in parents, we tell them this is what we are doing, this is what is going to be assessed, this is what it looks like. We tell the parents what the students are going to be doing. That in itself helps because that is part of the communication we have with parents. It's a difficult task to communicate to the community. We have an areawide newspaper that goes to 78,000 homes within our school district. We try to get as much positive information in that as we can. We don't do much with the large city newspaper because people have to pay for that. A lot of our community doesn't pay for a newspaper, so we try to get the free stuff. We also have our own newsletter. Even this doesn't get to everybody, but at least it's out there. I have in the past had luncheons for the business community in this district. The last one we had about 30 businesses from the area come in. We treated them to a lunch. We had students from the high schools and middle schools present to them as to what types of programs they were in, and low and behold, some of the business people went wild. Only a few people know about what we are doing here in this district. I've met with major business people like BZ and RMc personally and talked about our district. In some cases, they've never even heard of our district until I brought it up. We know that communication is the key, and we're doing everything that we can.

Superintendent Lopez offered the least comments on internal and external communications. However, he provided examples of internal communiqués, handbooks, and newsletters that included language encouraging students, parents, and board members to “spread the good news” about the district. Superintendent Lopez has lived and worked in the district for 23 years. He made reference to the small town atmosphere and his longevity in the community, which allows him to be very visible and involved with district activities and those of the larger community.

In contrast to Superintendent Lopez, Superintendent Cantu reflected extensively on her communications efforts in each of the three years since assuming her current position as superintendent. For Superintendent Cantu, communications is aligned with the value of the “golden rule.” She stated:

I guess it goes back to the value of the golden rule – treating everyone how you want to be treated, and being respectful to people. I can guarantee you that even if I have an angry parent sitting out there waiting for me, by the time they leave my office, they will be calm and they will understand. They may not agree with everything I have to say, but they will understand what it is I’m trying to do. That communication with the community has to be one of respect, especially since I’m not from here. I can’t come in assuming that I know everything about this community. I need to be respectful of their ways and where they are coming from. At the same time, my job is to educate them. If they have a bad attitude towards school, there must be a reason. I have to listen to what that is, and educate them about what it is we are trying to do. I also have to develop their trust. I think I mentioned to you in the previous interview, it was not existent – the respect and the trust for this office was not there. I had to come in and start mending fences and start building relationships, building bridges with community members. My role as community builder and helping bridge those two communities – it was very critical. They see me out there very active in the community so that when I started asking for their support in what we are doing at the schools, such as the bond election, such as a roll back election, everything that we have asked the community, they have supported. That is pretty amazing – two elections in one year – I had a roll back election in September, and we turned around in February, and we called a bond election for \$50 million. They had, within that same school year, we went out to our voters and demanded – I couldn’t have done that if my first year I hadn’t developed relationships, and if I hadn’t developed that trust that I’m here for the kids – I’m here to do what’s best for them.

As Superintendent Cantu continued to discuss her perspective on communications, she commented on her efforts to meet the community, including what she called “community chats.” She stated:

I attended all sorts of meetings, working with the City Council. I belong to the Catholic Church here, so I was very active in the church. I was very active in the women’s club. A lot of my activities around are in the woman’s club – educational retirement teacher’s organizations – just being very visible at the campuses – different functions that the campuses had, meeting parents for open house, holding – this is the first year we’ve done this – but holding community chats with some of our tax payers – anyone who wants to come in can at these community chats. I’m just there to listen to their concerns, and it gives me an opportunity to tell them about the district – tell them what we are trying to do. It’s worked out great they see me as very approachable. People that don’t know me might think different things of me – she is very aloof, or

she's never going to talk to us. I'm not – if you invite me in to have coffee at your house, I'm going to have coffee at your house. I'm going to sit down with you and have a conversation. Just being very approachable and when people have talked to me, listen. That is the most critical thing – listen. Sometimes they have great insight to things that you have never seen or might have thoughts. I've learned early on that you have two ears for a reason – to listen more than you talk, and so I've listened to community members, especially those that have been here a while and probably grew very sarcastic or hypercritical about the school system.

Each participant was asked to consider Governance as one of the ten functions of a school district, and comment on how if at all their Latino perspective influences the operationalization of this function. Each participant offered a unique perspective when commenting on Governance, with one common theme shared by all of them, the element of trust and maintaining a healthy relationship with the board.

Superintendent Vasquez utilized the analogy of a “Blue-Collar Board” and a “White-Collar Board” to discuss Governance in his district. He did not discuss particular initiatives or board activities, but instead spoke about the board's demeanor. He stated:

I have worked for 15 different board members. None of the sitting board members now hired me. I have a very good rapport with every single one. One is questionable, but even he has asked me for some references on his behalf. I think the reason that has happened is because I treat each of them the same. I don't treat anyone of them any different than I would another. I don't share secrets with one and not another. I don't speak to one and not the others. I treat them all the same, and that method has worked for me. When there are so many negatives, so much mistrust, when there is so much to the political atmospheres, especially then, because I'm not a politician. I hate politics with a passion, and I don't play politics and that's why I tell you, I treat every board member the same. It makes a big difference, especially to the board members, because even though they may not trust you, they trust that you are going to do the same for everybody else...now let me talk to you about boards. If you look at [this city] and you look at the south and the west sides, and you look at those districts, there is a big difference in how boards of trustees operate. Personally, I think – I look at it as blue-collar boards and

white-collar boards. Let's take the north district, for example. Those boards of trustee members, they are more than likely heads of businesses, heads of big businesses, they know a lot of people; they have a lot of people under their direction, they have power within their business. You come south, most of your board members are typical politicians. They are not head of business, they are not head of a big corporation, they are just community people who for whatever reason ran and go elected. Where is there power? Their power may not even be at home. The only power they have is when they come to a board meeting and they sit there as a board member. Big difference. Blue-collar is very hands on, and white-collar basically lets administration run the district...we don't see any big business out here...we can divide this city and you look at everything up north, look at their achievement. A lot better than the south end. All big business is up north. Where are all your doctors, attorneys – where do they live? They are mostly up north, nobody down here. People don't understand that makes a big difference. Where is the motivation for these kids, what do they see on a day-to-day life? We have a lot of our kids who will graduate and they want that big house and that big job. Those that make it, where do they go? They go to the northside. What's left here? So, we still have a problem and people don't see it, especially board members. These kids here have potential, they don't have the opportunity. The resources are not here. This board looks at it with blame. They don't blame the kids, which is good, they blame the administration, because they should be doing what the other districts are doing. They forget about what's in the middle. There are a lot of other things that come into play and they don't want to see that or they just don't see it at all. These people are not educators. They don't understand how education works and functions. A lot of their decisions are politically motivated, not necessarily for the need of the district, or the good of the students, it's what is good politically. It's a matter of where is their priority and are they making decisions on what is needed here, or are they making decisions to please constituents. How do you deal with that? But, that's what I mean by blue and white collar [boards].

During the interviews with Superintendent Lopez, he commented on developing and maintaining trust with district personnel, the community and the Board. This has been a career-long goal, which he stated has served him well, and most of this has taken place by including them in planning for the future of the district. He is now working with Board members who are several years younger than he, who were in elementary school when he first went to work in that district, but

asserts that they receive the same level of respect as any other Board member. In commenting on Governance, Superintendent Lopez stated:

So even at this stage in my career, I try to gain their trust. I was [recently] talking to a Board member about some concerns from a parent of a kid in high school, and I said I'd look into it. He said he knew I would. This young man is about 16 years younger than I am, he has been on my board for about seven years; yet [as young as he is] there is no way that I would intentionally do anything to lose his trust, because I respect the position that he holds. I'm going to go out and try to get him the answer, because I want him to know that we are on top of things. He is a lot younger than I am, and I know he will wait, but I like his approval and I need to treat him like all other Board members. Someone could say 4-3 is a good vote, but you shoot for 7-0 [vote] every time you go out there, you may not always get it, but you go out looking for a 7-0 vote. Now, in some instances, 4-3 made it, but they are all still important. All of them have their different qualities, their different perspectives and opinions, but I think for the most part, you deal with people that have good intentions. I think sometimes we just want to do it to get from point A to point B. I was telling this [same] Board member that I was listening to a radio program, and they were talking about the farm. You plant, you cultivate, and you harvest. You can't go from planting to harvesting right away. Or you milk a cow today and you say, I'm going to be gone so I'm not going to milk her for the rest of the week. You just can't do that, you have to milk her in intervals, when she's ready to. It's the law of the farm, it's how we approach the organization, certain things have to happen even though you may think you're ready to move. I have to remind myself of that, because we deal with, I mean our business is everyday, we need to remember that they [Board] come from all walks of life; not that they don't understand, they understand it, but we still have to step on every stone...I was talking to the Board the other night. I have each principal put together [a binder] for each campus. The first part is "What did you do for the fall semester?" and the second part "What do you propose to do?" Each semester I have them do that, and I sit down with them; it's kind of a planning document, and then I take it to the Board. Planning is something I really work on with [the Board].

When Superintendent Cantu offered her comments on Governance she spoke of the importance of the relationship between a superintendent and the Board.

[When I was offered my first superintendency] I realized that I didn't need to know everything, that I had the support of the Board, that I was going to be learning, that I was a quick learner, that I had the confidence of the Board, and whatever I had to learn I would learn it as fast as I could. It was that

relationship that really made a difference...I guess [other women] they may want it, but not everything that comes with the superintendency, such as the board shift. You have seven bosses you have to work with. As an assistant superintendent, you just have your superintendent you have to work with. But as superintendent you have seven other individuals that you've got to bring to consensus; that you've got to teach so they all understand. It could be draining. There are seven personalities, and you've got to build relationships with them, otherwise you're not going to have a team. It's going to go in different directions, and you're not going to be able to accomplish what you need to accomplish when they've got personal agendas. Very early on, I learned that you've got to focus on something that's important that will hold all of you together, and it goes back to beliefs. What do you believe about schools? What do you believe about kids? And if you really believe that we're here for kids, that you were elected for that reason; you weren't elected to give jobs to your friends, you weren't elected to give raises to teachers. You were elected because you were trusted to make a difference for kids. And that is not to say that they try to stray, but you've got to bring them back, and when that happens, what can they say about you. That you're doing your job and focusing on what needs to be focused.

As the interviews continued with Superintendent Cantu, and she commented on being selected for her current superintendency, she spoke of trust and its importance to be able to accomplish her job. During one observation of Superintendent Cantu interacting with the Board, the researcher noticed how two Board members approached Superintendent Cantu to seek her perspective on a district matter. The researcher was curious to observe how these Board members were going to address the Superintendent; what might be their demeanor, their tone of voice. The Board members did not appear to be patronizing in any way, but sincere in their query. It seemed the Board members did not have a clear understanding of an issue that was being openly discussed, and their tone of voice suggested they knew the Superintendent would provide clarity. There appeared to be an atmosphere of trust, wherein the Board asked for clarification on issues, not to be challenging, but to

better understand. This interaction suggested a consistency with Superintendent Cantu's remarks about her relationship with the board. She stated:

I was very honest when I interviewed in telling them if they're not here for kids, then I'm not the right person to hire. If you really want to make changes for kids, then I'm the right person to hire, but if not don't hire me because I'm not going to last and you're not going to like what I do. That was very clear up front and they've let me do my job. But it goes back to trust; they trust and believe me. They have to have some of those beliefs already, otherwise it's going to be chaos. Golly, I'd hate to be superintendent in that district, and you can feel it. Like I said, when I went to [my first superintendency] I felt that mesh. When I came here, I felt it, we just really fit. They were wanting leadership, it had been a pretty unstable district; for three or four years they had been in litigation with the superintendent that was here. They didn't trust the superintendent. The didn't trust the office of the superintendent. I had to come in and start building a lot of bridges with the community, with the staff, with the Board. Trusting that I was going to do my job. If the other superintendent was gone all the time, I had to be here and I had to work extra hard, harder than anybody in the community so that they could see I was serious. I wouldn't ask anybody to do anything that I wasn't willing to do myself. That's all I did that first year was build trust, build relationships. When I started really demanding things, there was already a year of relationship building. They knew what I was about...the community has seen a peaceful time. The Board meetings used to be a circus, because they were at each other's throats. All the Board members, with the exception of maybe one or two were on that board, and people can't believe how they get along today. They're very amicable; we talk and it's business. We focus on what's important and it works. It was the dynamics between the superintendent and board that was here before; it just wasn't working out. Same board members, but a different focus and it works.

When Superintendent Cantu was asked to elaborate on what she had done to actualize the difference in board behaviors and attitudes, she stated:

I think early on, having a lot of goal setting sessions with them, visioning. Getting the vision out there that would unite us. Talking about things that they wanted to see, instead of focusing on daily, little, trivial stuff, let's focus on the big picture of what it is we really want for the district. I was very upfront and clear about their role as Board and my job as superintendent. Where that line is to letting me run the district, trusting that I have the best interest of the students, and proving that...Before they [Board] seemed to micromanage, but I think it was because they didn't have the confidence in the superintendent.

There was a lot of mistrust...It's been a great challenge and I love working with that board. They are committed to making change happen for the sake of kids

The final function of a school district on which the participants were asked to comment was Curriculum and Instruction. As with their responses regarding the other functions of a school district, the participants did not necessarily offer extensive detail of programmatic designs or practices to illustrate their perspective. The participants' comments about Curriculum and Instruction suggest a requisite commitment to equity and excellence, accentuated by high expectations for all students and teachers. Two participants, Superintendent Vasquez and Superintendent Lopez contextualized their comments with their personal memories and experiences.

Superintendent Vasquez recounted his experience from high school, when he was told he would never go to college and was placed in the vocational education track. His retrospective of this experience has served to inform his attitudes toward expectations for all students and the programs afforded them. He is keenly aware of the lack of resources and opportunities within his district's boundaries, and how these factors contribute to students' overall performance. He stated:

I remember he [counselor] came in and gave us all a test and put the clock down. I remember writing and before you know it, the alarm went off. He picked up all the papers. About two weeks later he called everyone into his office, individually. He called me in and said, "Daniel, you are not college material so I'm going to place you in wood shop, metal shop."... You don't pigeon hole people. That's what they were basically trying to do. If you were Hispanic and they thought you couldn't achieve based on a little test or whatever that test was, then here you are, you are going to be placed over here... I think that sure, it has stayed with me... Did my experience influence what I have to do with the NATAG (advanced automotive) Program, for example, I'd have to say yes. If I had thought there is no way for our kids to do this, it wouldn't have happened. But I knew they could. What's to keep us

from doing it? The only difference is that we need to have the equipment, material, and the instruction that the “other” schools have. We got the right instructor, we got that shop into an automotive presentable area... Well, we did that, and we have another program that we are trying to get underway, that’s out print shop... Kids get to learn state of the art print shop machines... We have a film school, and our kids have won “Academy Awards” for their work... Unless we take those risks and chances, where would we be? There would be no advantage to us.

Superintendent Vasquez continued his comments, addressing his district’s challenge with an increasing immigrant population. He stated:

I came through an educational system that did not allow the language to be used in school or you would be punished. So I came through an era where I really had to learn English real quick... Not an easy thing to do. It’s not easy [for me] now, you can imagine as a youngster. Having lived through that has made me a little more aware of what perhaps some of these immigrants are going through as they come to this nation. All of a sudden they are thrust into having to learn English, and even though we have bilingual classes, keep in mind that our bilingual classes may be a different dialect than what they are used to. You are having to re-teach them anyway, whether they had a language or not. Then we have the people who are not lingual, they don’t have a language. They come to school and there is no language, one way or the other. You’re having to start from square one. I’m aware of that and I think I’m aware of it because I went through that... it depends on who you are and how you are going to learn. Again, it depends on our instructional delivery for our students. That has a lot to do with it. That’s what I’m conscious of – are we teaching these kids the way we should so that they can learn the materials.

Superintendent Lopez did not mention any particular academic subject when discussing Curriculum and Instruction. He spoke of two co-curricular activities to illustrate his perspective of providing opportunities for students to consider opportunities removed from their immediate experiences. He recounted an experience from his studies to obtain his mid-management certification, where one of his professor’s directive was to negate stereotypes that people have of Latinos, which he has hoped to do by “leveling the playing field” for all students. He stated:

I was talking to one of my principals about her son, who is going to be an architect. No one in her family has been an architect, so my first question was how did he get to that point? We do something here called a senior project; everyone who is a senior has to do a senior project. Part of it is, they develop the artifacts and they show a PowerPoint presentation, whether it's a Special Ed kid or whatever. You dress up before a board of community members, teachers, and you do the research. The research is what we are all about. It takes all year, and in the springtime, one afternoon, we have presentations to community boards. This particular youngster, I was asking him, how did you get the mindset of being an architect? He said, "senior project." I will fight anybody who says senior projects are not good...so, if you can orchestrate experiences in such a way that it catapults a youngster to a different mindset to where he wants to advance, then you've done what the Constitution of Texas says, that all schools are there for the diffusion of knowledge.

During this same interview, Superintendent Lopez told a story about his first trip to his current district, the first interview for his initial position as Assistant Superintendent. The incident has become the cornerstone for one of the initiatives in his district, which regards academic preparedness and expectations. He stated:

I remember coming to town and interviewing, and I told someone at the Texas Education Agency that I had interviewed here. The first thing they said was, "[That district], boy, they always have a good football team." When I arrived to work here I told the superintendent, you know, I might have been hired as your assistant, but it would be nice if they say, "Hey, they have a great academic team, and by the way they have a good football team."...[We have kids going to MIT, Yale, Trinity] and one of the things I hope we put into place that helped them since I've been here is the Academic Decathlon Program. I'm on the Academic Decathlon Program Board, and the biggest thing for me was during TASA Midwinter conference the Board had breakfast and they were passing around the results of the State-wide competition. In the medium schools, there are 79 schools, with 25 in this Region. They put the scores together for the state, which is how they mark off who goes to state competition. We were number one in the state as far as points; I thought, what a deal. I remember when we first started this program, the best thing that happened was the meal when we went to these functions, because we were just getting started. So, when I look back at that, it's not about who gets the credit, it's about the impact it had or does have, and I've seen some impact already. Kids are feeling good about themselves, which in turn makes them do better...The Academic Decathlon, that's what makes me feel so good when we were sitting around the table; for that moment in time, they weren't

focusing on the negative, on some of the standards that we are still needing to work on, they were focusing on that which were successful and that was one of them.

Of the three participants, only Superintendent Cantu addressed Texas' promotional gate high stakes test, The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Her comments regarding Curriculum and Instruction suggested her dismay with the TAKS and her enthusiasm for what she termed, "deep learning." Like the other participants, Superintendent Cantu did not delineate specific curriculum, rather addressed the culture of learning that she is working to develop within her district. Her vision and direction for the district have implied making difficult decisions, but she spoke of enjoying a healthy relationship with her board, and their support of her work. She prefaced her comments by referring to her own experience as a classroom teacher. She stated:

I think I was able to be very effective with my kids because I was very close to their age, but I was very demanding of them. There was nothing those kids wouldn't do for me. That's when I realized the power you have as a teacher in transforming kids' lives. I was very involved with the kids. I loved working with the kids after school, and it was just really exciting to see how kids respond when they see that you care about what they do.

As Superintendent Cantu continued to comment on Curriculum and Instruction, she referred to her first year in her district and her concern for its condition, which included a elementary school that was rated "unacceptable" by the State. She stated:

I had an elementary campus that was unacceptable. And that's pretty rare to find. An elementary as an unacceptable, it's mostly middle and high schools. There's so much to be learned, so when you're looking at an elementary as unacceptable, that means the foundation is really not that good. So what can you expect for kids when they get to middle school and high

school. That was a big concern, that curriculum-wise we were not doing our job... We started focusing on curriculum. My curriculum person left. She had been here for 25 years. She gave me the opportunity to bring in a new person with a new perspective and really focus on curriculum, which is the core. That's what we're here for. It was again, night and day difference in what we were doing before and what we are doing now. Focusing on engaging work for students. Our teachers have to design work that is engaging for students. I hate it when our students are saying I'm bored, I'm having to read Chapter One and answer the questions at the back. What's engaging about that? It's about retraining and changing the culture of the whole district, not just the classroom, but the whole district; that we're not going to be satisfied with mediocrity. That we're not going to be satisfied with passing a minimum test, and stop focusing on the test and focus on learning for learning's sake. Those kind of big initiatives that we have, that will take years for that culture to establish itself, but the start is already there. It's focusing on the kind of work we give our kids. And I tell them, you tell me what resources you need to ensure these kids are learning at very deep levels. We don't want superficial kinds of learning, which is what had been happening. They'd change the question on the [TAKS] test and the kid would flunk it, because it wasn't exactly like they learned it. Instead, learning and thinking critically about something, whatever test you put in front of them, whether it be the SAT, the ACT, the TAKS, the ITBS, whatever test you give kids, if they've learned it they will be able to do the test right. But if they've only learned it a particular way with a particular trick, the minute the question's in another format than they've learned it they're going to flunk it. That was basically what they were doing here and it was not working. It was just not working. Another thing was aligning the curriculum from Pre-K-12 so we could start with a strong foundation... The sky's the limit. I'm willing to go to the board and ask for as much money as we need to make sure the kids get that fabulous education they need.

Superintendent Cantu's perspective on Curriculum and Instruction extended beyond the campus and the local community to include the need for appreciating its global implications for students. Her message was not intended only for teachers, but the board and the community at-large. She stated:

I was willing to bring my own kids into this system. What I want for my kids is what I want for all kids. I wasn't going to expect my kids to get preferential treatment. I expected my kids to get what everyone else was getting. I expected that to be very high; I wasn't going to put up with mediocrity... There is an executive assessment that the district goes through,

and it addresses understanding the need for changes. One of the standards says if you are going to create change, you have to understand why we are changing. I really focused on that standard my first year, understanding the need for change...A lot of it had to do with the real world. I used a lot of information from the book, *The World is Flat*; a lot of things that took them from this little town. These kids we're preparing for an unknown future, so that first year was really concentrating on the bigger world...I used the PowerPoint presentation, *Did You Know*. I continued to stress an understanding of why we've got to change. The world is changing, everybody else is changing, why do we continue to do the same things we've done over and over?...We can't afford to close our eyes to what is happening in the real world because we are preparing the next generation of leaders. If we are not preparing them well, they are going to be delegated to a life of poverty and working poor, and that's not what we want.

Analysis: Lessons Learned

This section of the chapter will discuss the significance of the findings presented above within the broader context of the literature reviewed and cited in Chapter 2. The discussion will be aligned to the findings for each of the major themes presented earlier in this chapter.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latino public school superintendents in the state of Texas in order to gain insight into their leadership behaviors; particularly their leadership styles, and the influences, if any, of cultural, familial, social and other environmental factors on the leadership behaviors of the participants. The literature that addresses the notion of Latino leadership offers a broad and somewhat essentialist perspective congruous with Latino panethnicity. This poses a potential challenge to best understand this study's research sample. Each of the participants self-identified as Hispanic, specifically as Mexican-Americans; thus, the analyses of this study reflects this

perspective, which should not be interpreted to possess an essentialist Latino panethnicity.

The participants' self-identification as Hispanic and their conscious efforts to acknowledge this perspective, as suggested by the data, should not be presumed to represent the perspective of all Hispanic superintendents in Texas. These analyses are limited to the data derived from this study whose sample included three participants. The analyses do not purport to present a new theory, but reflect the nature of case study methodology, which allow for a heuristic approach to the phenomenon.

The analyses are presented according to the major themes that emerged from the review and analysis of the interview transcripts. There are instances where a portion of a participant's transcript served to address more than one theme. The analyses utilizes these selected transcript portions as applicable to the theme being analyzed, with its concomitant literature.

Given the findings of this study, the important questions to be considered are: What do the findings mean? What can be learned from the data? The remainder of this chapter seeks to respond to these questions according to each of the major themes identified:

- Empowering for Leadership
- Informing Leadership Behaviors
- Leading for Social Justice
- Functions of a School District in Action

Empowering for Leadership

There is an abundance of literature on leadership that addresses the notion of empowerment, which appears to be consistent in describing the sorts of behaviors that illustrate empowerment. These include expressing confidence and trust in individuals, delegating responsibility and authority for important activities, helping individuals find and demonstrate their hidden potentialities, cultivating and building individuals' capacity by encouraging professional development, encouraging and supporting individuals' initiative, including individuals in decision making, recognizing individuals' important contributions and achievements, and discussing individuals' hopes and dreams. The essence of empowerment calls forth individuals to move beyond their current circumstances and consider possibilities, which appear out of their reach or simply never considered (Blanchard, 1999; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 1991; Greenleaf, 1991; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Thrall, McNicol & McElrath, 1999; Yukl, 2006).

Very early during the interviews with each participant, they respectively commented that their journey to the superintendency began with encouragement by their superiors; asking the participants to consider an administrative position. The perceived encouragement from the respective superiors, as well as their confidence in the participants' abilities highlights this notion of empowerment. None of the participants was necessarily seeking another professional position at the time, and yet they were approached by their superiors to consider one.

Daniel Vasquez was content to continue as a classroom teacher when he was approached by his district's Assistant Superintendent at that time who encouraged Daniel to apply for a particular central office position. The Assistant Superintendent also sponsored Daniel in his quest to obtain the appropriate certification. A few years after this episode, Daniel met with the superintendent for what he thought would be his annual evaluation. The superintendent delineated Daniel's accomplishments, only to tell Daniel he was being assigned as assistant principal of the district's high school. In a similar type of meeting with his retiring superintendent, Daniel was encouraged to apply for the district's superintendency; being told that if he applied it would be a closed process, not open to external candidates. As the only applicant, Daniel was unanimously selected by the Board of Trustees as the district's superintendent. Each of these episodes highlights attributes of empowerment: Daniel's being encouraged to apply for his first central office position, being praised by his superintendent and thereafter being appointed assistant principal at the high school, and finally his ascendance to the superintendency with no competition. These episodes bespeak confidence, trust, and belief in Daniel and his abilities; characteristics of empowerment as described by the literature.

Gilbert Lopez recounted the story of being approached by his superintendent and being told he needed to return to school, obtain this mid-management certification; thereby, prepared to assume the principalship of the same elementary school that Gilbert attended as a youngster. In this instance empowerment can be identified as Gilbert was essentially told he would become principal, and being

encouraged and directed to obtain his mid-management certification. The superintendent demonstrated a confidence in Gilbert's abilities, as well as recognized the necessity of providing professional development for Gilbert. Gilbert's journey included his matriculation in a doctoral program of studies, which included his being appointed as an assistant superintendent in the school district where he has subsequently served as superintendent for 23 years. His invitation and encouragement to pursue doctoral studies demonstrates empowerment by his superintendent at that time.

Louise Cantu's unsolicited appointment as vice principal of the high school in which she was teaching, being mentored by the district's superintendent, and the submission of her resume for a superintendency unbeknown to Louise illustrate a belief in her abilities, a cultivating of her potential, and delegating authority and responsibility to her.

Complementary to the participants being empowered, each of the participants commented on their role to empower others. Daniel Vasquez and Gilbert Lopez spoke of their belief that despite life circumstances, students can achieve when others believe in them. Daniel repeated his story about the advanced automotive program in his district, and Gilbert repeated the story about his district's Academic Decathlon Team and its success to illustrate their belief and practice of believing in, maintaining high expectations for, and cultivating and building students' capacity.

The complementariness of the participants as being empowered to act upon new possibilities, and thereafter empowering others resonates with Greenleaf's (1991)

notion of *trustees*, wherein what one has been given or experienced to develop one's person or organization is in turn given to others for their own development. Being a *trustee* is the essence of what Greenleaf calls *servant leadership*. Houston and Sokolow's (2006) treatment of empowerment suggests it is the process of individuals realizing their internal hidden assets and acting upon these. There are innumerable metaphors and analogies utilized to illustrate the notion of empowerment. Whatever these may be, the participants' statements complement the notion of empowerment and demonstrate how these experiences empowered them for leadership.

Informing leadership behavior

The research question that drove this study sought to determine how the participants' Latino perspective manifests itself in their leadership practices. The literature that suggests attributes and characteristics that are uniquely Latino address the social, cultural and historical contexts, which are embedded in the notion of *mestizaje*. As such, Latino leadership behaviors are informed by a critical discourse that considers the struggle for power, place and personhood that are embodied in *mestizaje*. The intersection of one's background and experience serve to inform behaviors, and what these behaviors signify. Indigenous knowledge proceeds to be the vehicle whereby an individual, through one's social, cultural and historical experience, develops knowledge of self and surroundings. It is suggested that indigenous knowledge informs behaviors. Indigenous knowledge presumes the stories, rituals, artifacts, and relationships of a people, and how these factors serve as

the trajectory of one's life (Audinet, 2005; Dei et al, 2002; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Perez-Torres, 2006).

The participants' unanimous selection of Edward Gonzales' artwork, *The kitchen is where my father learned to read*, elicited numerous stories of the participants' background and experiences. These stories, memories, and reflections illustrate how one's indigenous knowledge is formed and how this informs daily living.

Daniel Vasquez told the story of growing up in and being a product of the school district where he is now superintendent. His familiarity with the neighborhoods and the community provides an understanding of the dynamics that are manifested in the school district. Being familiar with, understanding, and knowing the culture of his school district illustrates instantiated knowledge; his own background provides a knowledge base from which to act. Daniel was raised by his grandparents and the values they imparted to him also inform who he is and how he acts; chief among these was the value of education. As naturalized citizens, Daniel's grandparents' journey to become United States citizens included Daniel learning alongside them and developing an undisputable appreciation for this nation. He attributed his value for the family to his grandparents. As a freshman in high school, his relegation by the school counselor to a vocational education plan of studies, instead of an academic subject plan of studies, did not necessarily leave Daniel with bitter memories; nonetheless, the memory of this experience has stayed with Daniel as he considers what is best for those students under his charge regardless of their life

Figure 1: La cocina es donde aprendió a leer mi papa. By Edward Gonzales.
Used with permission of the artist



circumstances. Each of these snippets from Daniel's stories give credence to the notion of indigenous knowledge, that fountain of a person's knowing and understanding of the world around them.

Gilbert Lopez's episode about his experience as a 5th grade student and the truant officer, which Gilbert repeated on more than one occasion during his interviews, is an indelible memory for Gilbert. In his own words he used this episode to highlight his goal to not exclude any student from the system. Gilbert's story of the first days of his first principalship at a newly integrated campus, being confronted by an apparently prejudiced parent serves to remind him daily of the racism that exists in the world, and his personal agenda to combat this. Gilbert commented on the values imparted by his parents, stating, "I think it's based a lot on our religious beliefs." In each of these incidents, Gilbert is reflecting on his background and experience, and how this continues to inform who he is and how he acts.

Louise Cantu's recollection of her grandmother telling stories to teach her a lesson, to include not forgetting whence she came and giving back to her people, nicely illustrated this notion of indigenous knowledge. Louise's stories about her first superintendency and her realization that as a woman superintendent she was a double-minority, being woman and Hispanic, has served for her to actively mentor other women to be leaders. Her comments about Hispanic leaders whom she described as possessing character flaws, resulting in their losing high level positions of influence, were followed by concerns that she and others serve as models for the students in schools. The recollections suggest that Louise is very cognizant of her background and experiences, which help to shape who she is and how she acts.

The unanimous recollection by each of the participants, where advanced studies served to amplify their knowledge, skills, and experience suggests that these

experiences contributed to informing their leadership behaviors. Daniel Vasquez talked about being a member of one of the first cohorts of school leaders to participate in the Texas School Improvement Initiative; the exposure to new ideas and other districts, his bringing these ideas back to his own district. Gilbert Lopez recalled being told that upon completing his studies, his job was to negate all the stereotypes folks have about Hispanics. Louise Cantu recounted how her doctoral studies afforded her the time to think critically about issues confronting education, and reconsider how she needed to act as a leader. In each of these episodes there is evidence to suggest that each participant's experience of indigenous knowledge was increased, and served to inform their leadership behaviors.

Informing for leadership as a thematic category attempts to capture those influences on the participants that have served to shape that body of knowledge from which each draws direction and guidance in their decision making. The body of knowledge that is internally and externally grounded is a summative experience of those things that have happened naturally in one's life. It is *indigenous knowledge*, and assists in defining one's personhood and how one acts in the world.

Leading for Social Justice

The literature on *mestizaje* presumes a critical theory position. Critical mestizaje embodies the social, cultural, and historical experiences of struggle for power, place and personhood. It does not suggest that Latinos isolate from or enter into conflict with dominant structures, but proposes that the experience of mestizaje opens a world of possibilities in terms of forging new relational identities. Critical

mestizaje is the paradigmatic space where Latinos consider who they are – past, present, and future – and strive to understand how they fit into the world that surrounds them. It provides a perspective to negotiate time and space (Anzaldúa, 1987; Audinet, 1999; Elizondo, 2000; Hill & Mitchell, 2006; Perez-Torres, 2006). The juxtaposition of critical mestizaje with the participants’ life stories suggests an embodiment of mestizaje. The participants’ stories resonate with the transformative nature of mestizaje; out of their experiences the participants are creating new identities for themselves and others (Audinet, 1999). The participants’ role as educational leaders present a unique avenue by which they can embody mestizaje and be leaders committed to transformation and social justice. They can create and direct opportunities towards equity and excellence for all those in their school communities.

Daniel Vasquez recounted during his interviews his experience as a senior in high school and his decision to join the military. It was not until his tour of duty in Viet Nam that race mattered. This experience was not necessarily filled with prejudice or overt racism; however, as the troops self-separated by ethnicity and race it was Daniel’s first realization of ethnic and racial difference. In a similar fashion, it was not until Daniel enrolled in college and met academic success that he realized his experience as a high school freshman, being told he was not college material, reflected institutional racism. Daniel stated that his being Hispanic provides him an insight to best understand his district community, and his experiences compel him to consider how he can provide the best opportunities for his students. Despite their life circumstances, students will respond if he and other educators present high

expectations for achievement and demonstrate a belief in their abilities. Daniel has utilized his own experience of institutional racism to be the catalyst to create for his district's students a learning environment that promotes equity and excellence.

Gilbert Lopez directly encountered racism as a newly assigned principal, when the father of one of his Anglo students approached Gilbert to ask if the child could wear shoes to school, since his was the Mexican school and the perception was they didn't wear shoes at that school. Gilbert's awareness of racism was amplified during his graduate school studies. One of his professors gathered all his Hispanic students, including Gilbert, and essentially charged them to go forth with the job to negate all the stereotypes folks have of Hispanics. Gilbert's recollection of these experiences and his commentary on these, imply a consciousness to create opportunities for students to become scouts and pioneers for themselves, with the realization that they are opening doors for others who will follow. Gilbert specifically mentioned his role to "build up" students, and *servant leadership* as the way he desires to lead and model for those with whom he interacts.

Louise Cantu is self-admittedly conscious of being a Hispanic and a woman, and the role this plays in how she conducts her personal and professional affairs. In her own words, she feels she carries the torch for many women, to be an example of a successful woman. Her belief that the more our youth see people who are prepared and in leadership positions, the more they will see the same as a personal opportunity was conveyed in her interviews. Above all, Louise's comments about learning, not simply to satisfy state testing mandates, but for deep learning that will impact how

students think critically and prepare them to be active participants in a global marketplace appear to suggest her commitment to equity and excellence in education.

An analysis of *Leading for Social Justice* suggests that those in positions of educational leadership possess an ideological perspective committed to providing equal opportunities for all students. Where these educational leaders embody mestizaje, such as the participants, it is suggested mestizaje informs how they strive to be agents of transformation and change, which is consistent with the literature.

School District Functions in Action

Bolman and Deal (2003) in their work, *Reframing Organizations*, posit an organizational landscape to include four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each frame has its own image of reality, and like a telescope, combining different lenses (frames) provides the necessary focus to view the object at hand. “Successful managers take advantage of the same truth. They reframe until they understand the situation at hand. They do this by using more than one frame, to develop both a diagnosis of what they are up against and strategies for moving forward” (p. 15). Public school superintendents, like other corporate Chief Executive Officers, are being challenged to exercise the same management and executive skills to meet complex organizational issues. Effective superintendents need to understand and facilitate the operationalization of the Ten Functions of a School District, which inherently create a school system. The complexity of school systems demands energetic, visionary and courageous leaders who can engage others in the growing demands for improving student achievement. Superintendents must be advocates for

students, and committed to fostering equity and excellence. They must be mindful of the everchanging demographics of their immediate community and the needs of a multicultural environment. They must understand and appreciate the various constituencies of the district. Superintendents must be able to understand the organizational landscape and be able to reframe as needed. They must be managers when necessary, and leaders always. Superintendents must be leaders who act on what they believe. Above all, superintendents must lead the work of the district to provide the best teaching and learning for all students (Bolman and Deal, 2003; Bordas, 2007; Candoli, 1991; Greenleaf, 1991; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier & Glass, 2006; Olivarez, 2008; Yukl, 2006). The analysis of the theme, School District Functions in Action, considers only three of the Ten Functions of a School District: Governance, Internal and External Communications, and Curriculum and Instruction.

Governance is concerned with the structures that provide overall direction for the district. This may include specific policies and procedures, and it has been suggested that it also includes providing a vision to fulfill the essential mission of any school district, the education of all students. Key voices and actors in Governance are the superintendent and the Board of Trustees.

Superintendent Vasquez discussed Governance by way of highlighting his work with the board. He utilized the analogy of the “blue collar board” and “white collar board.” His comments suggested his concern that his current board is comprised of individuals who delight in the exercise of power, which they do not necessarily find in their professions; the board meetings is the place where they can

exercise power with their vote. Daniel commented that the political expediency of their decisions, most often responding to constituency concerns, compromises what should be the primary focus of the board, doing what is best for the district and the students. Daniel's comments did not necessarily address organizational structures; however, they are consistent with Bolman and Deal's model of the political and symbolic frames. The political frame is concerned with power, conflict, and competition. The symbolic frame is concerned with culture, meanings, and purpose. Daniel's critique of his board illustrated his need as superintendent to engage the community towards what is in the best interest of students.

Gilbert Lopez offered remarks that suggested his concern for gaining and maintaining the trust of his board members. He commented that board members each possess different qualities, different perspectives and opinions. Using the metaphor of the farm, he expressed the need to plant and cultivate before you can harvest. The same with boards; the right seeds (purpose of schools) need to be planted and they need to be cultivated (strategic planning) to harvest (successful bond election). Gilbert discussed engaging the board in nearly every discussion regarding planning for the district's immediate and long-term needs. It appears that Gilbert's comments on planning provided some illustration of necessary structures to fulfill the Governance function. His metaphor of the farm suggests the symbolic frame, wherein culture and metaphor are central concepts. Gilbert's perceived need to plan, which includes discussion with the board, seems to reflect those attributes of an effective superintendent as mentioned in the literature reviewed for this study.

Louise Cantu commented on the vital importance of developing and maintaining good relations with the board, and working together on a common goal. She stressed the importance of doing what's right for kids; this must be the focus of a board. She commented on the need to develop trust between her and each board, and them with one another. Louise spoke of the value of creating and sharing a vision for what the board deems important for the district. Louise's comments on governance seem to reflect those attributes of a superintendent as suggested by the literature: creating vision, acting on what she believes, and doing what is in the best interest of students.

In commenting on External and Internal Communications, Daniel Vasquez quickly turned to the notion of family as the focus for how his district communicates with its constituencies. He spoke of the need to broadcast the perceived positive activities and events taking place within the district, in order to counter balance the negative perceptions that can magnified and result from one unfortunate experience. Daniel suggested that regular communication encourages a sense of ownership and participation in the work of the district, as in a family. Daniel expressed concern that his district's location prohibits opportunities for students that can be in another sector of the city; thus, his consistent advocacy with large business leaders who may not even be aware that his district exists. Daniel's comments suggest an awareness for the need to communicate with the district's various constituencies, to best engage them in the work of the district. This awareness seems to reflect the attributes of

superintendents suggested by the literature, which address responding to the various constituencies in a district, and being aware of the district's demographics.

Louise Cantu premised her comments about internal and external communications by citing the "golden rule" as the motivator for how she interacts with others; treating everyone with respect, as you would want to be treated. She continued her comments to include her job to educate the community about what the district may be trying to do, and develop their trust. The school district publishes a newsletter, but Louise commented that her presence and visibility in the community is the most important form of communication. She acknowledged that she is not from that area and her credibility has developed as she has become more involved with non-district community activities. Louise's apparently conscious efforts to create an atmosphere of trust among her and the community seems to reflect the literature, which suggests a superintendent's need to be aware of the community, and engage the community in the district's vision. Louise's comments seem to reflect the symbolic frame suggested by Bolman and Deal, wherein inspiration is the image of leadership.

The analysis of the participants' comments to address their role in Curriculum and Instruction began with Daniel Vasquez's statements. He recounted the same experience as before, when he was a high school freshman, being relegated to the vocational education track, and being told he was not college material. By his own self-admission this memory serves to inform how he considers programs for the students in his district, which includes creating high expectations and taking risks and chances. Daniel talked about the need for instructional delivery wherein the district is

teaching the kids in a way so that they can learn the materials. Daniel's comments were not as cursory as they appear; he appeared quite energized as he spoke about having high expectations for his students, and his belief that they rise to the level of the expectations. He began his comments about curriculum and instruction telling of the number of campuses in his district that have earned the state's "recognized" distinction. His voice appeared more animated as he seemingly bragged about these honors. Daniel's comments and his body language seemed to suggest a desire to maintain quality curriculum and instruction, with an emphasis on providing good quality programs for the students, despite the limited resources that seem to be available in the community. These attitudes seem to resonate with the literature that discusses providing quality programs to increase student achievement, maintaining programs that are mindful of the needs of the community, and requiring a superintendent that is energetic and courageous.

Gilbert Lopez seemed to premise his comments about curriculum and instruction on the notion of providing opportunities for students; having them consider the possibilities beyond the local community. Gilbert's comments suggest a concern for equal opportunities, as he said, "level the playing field" for all students. He cited two academic initiatives, the senior project and the district's academic decathlon team, to illustrate how the district is encouraging the students' scholarship, beyond the traditional classroom setting. The inflection and apparent animation in Gilbert's voice as he commented on the successes of the district's academic decathlon team, to include self-admissions of pride, suggest a commitment to equity and

excellence in academic achievement for all students. He commented on three current seniors who have been accepted into and plan to attend Ivy League schools. Again, the apparent animation in his voice during these comments suggest a pride in, and his acknowledgement that acceptance and enrollment in such institutions signify a high level of academic achievement. His comments also suggested these students' impending enrollment in these schools mark a cultural achievement, since very few students from the area venture too far away from their part of Texas if they attend college. Gilbert's comments about curriculum and instruction seemed to resonate with Bolman and Deal's notion of the symbolic frame. His seemingly animated comments about the senior project and academic decathlon team appear to be holding these initiatives up as icons, with special meaning assigned to them. The seemingly special place of these initiatives within the district resonate with the tenets of the symbolic frame. Gilbert's work to develop the two initiatives mentioned above suggest that attribute of superintendents identified in the literature, acting on what one believes.

Louise Cantu's comments suggest a significant commitment to increasing students' academic performance; however, these comments challenge the current state of affairs as the most effective way to accomplish this. Louise's comments about curriculum and instruction seem to be rooted in her self-proclaimed commitment to deep learning; a learning as she says, for learning's sake, not simply learning test taking strategies. Louise commented on her belief that by creating engaging learning opportunities for students, the desire to attend school is increased, thereby positively

affecting attendance and reducing the dropout rate. Her comments about teachers and their resistance to change seems to be rooted in an awareness for the need to create an understanding of the need to change, which implies building capacity and a belief that change is necessary for the betterment of students. She commented that her vision of learning includes preparing the next generation of inventors and individuals to think critically to address the social ills of the day. Louise acknowledged that her district's work to create a culture of learning will take time. She commented that while she is very hopeful for increased student achievement and "deep learning" she openly admitted to telling the board and the community that if this cultural and programmatic change is not effective she is willing to bear full responsibility for this. Throughout all of Louise's comments on curriculum and instruction there appeared to be indicators of numerous attributes of effective superintendents as suggested by the literature. Louise seemingly recognized the complexity of the district organization and provided energy, vision, and courage to implement changes that were identified as necessary. She appeared to be quite aware of her constituencies, and the inherent challenges to engage them in the change process. Her repeated reference to doing what is best for kids suggests a strong commitment to lead the work of the district to provide the best teaching and learning for all students.

Discourse from Mestizaje

The findings of this study, and their implication on the manner in which it is suggested that Latino superintendents fulfill their professional roles and responsibilities appears to give credence to the discursive nature of Mestizaje and

leadership. *Mestizaje* possesses a nature of critical discourse that is prompted by the history of multiple subjectivities, and provides a framework to exercise its birthright, wherein all the variety that describes it is utilized to be an agent for the transformation of otherness. Critical *mestizaje* embraces critical theory and LatCrit theory, attempting to understand the oppressive aspects of Latino society situated in the *borderlands*, in order to generate societal and individual transformation (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tierney, 1993). It offers perspective to inspire hope, because despite the past trials and tribulations, people survived and are now thriving. It adds a new dimension to critical theory that considers language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Hernandez-Truyol, Harris & Valdez, 2006; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). The discursive nature of *mestizaje* considers the multidimensional nature of *La Raza*, which is not synonymous with biology and race; rather, refers to a cultural identity magnet that connotes a shared history, worldview, and common values (Bordas, 2006). Critical *mestizaje* is the paradigmatic space where Latinos consider who they are – past, present, and future – and strive to understand how they fit into the world that surrounds them. It provides a perspective to negotiate time and space, whereby the *borderlands* experience is utilized to create ways to negotiate life within social, political and economic institutions, and suggests the notion of human agency -- that knowledge and skills to act on one's behalf, and identify peoples' ever-changing perception of who they are (Anzaldúa, 1999; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Urrieta, 2007). Critical *mestizaje*, and thereby agency, considers the interface of the

embodied and social sources of the self, the development of persons around the cultural forms by which they are identified, “the linked development of people, cultural forms, and social positions in particular historical worlds” (Holland, 1998, p. 33). “Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds” (ibid, p. 40) and as they are used more and more can become tools of agency. This notion of persons as actors in their world promotes the ontological considerations to emphasize that one’s conception of self is not static and coherent, but variable and interactive. It is suggested that the tools of agency allow for one to develop a sense of personhood; how it is imagined, conceptualized and practiced. How a Latino superintendent becomes an actor and voice in a given situation demonstrates the superintendent’s sense of agency. The superintendent may possess certain characteristics, attributes, behaviors, or personal preference, which are most often at play in daily life, but the reality of life as dynamic and ever-changing precipitates how the superintendent acts. In essence, these superintendents seem to be developing intricate and strategic ways to negotiate their professional, gendered, ethnic/cultural identities into unique hybrid leadership styles.

Leading by Mestizaje

Hernandez and Ramirez (2001), in their work *Reflecting an American vista*, delineate Four “C’s” of Latino Leadership: Character, Competence, Compassion, and Community Servanthood. They suggest that the first two “C’s” character and compassion are leadership traits expected of any leaders, regardless of race or ethnicity. However, the “C’s” of compassion and community servanthood are

suggested to be unique as leadership traits expected of Latino leaders. The findings of this study appear to be aligned with the Four “C’s”; the emergent themes as derived from the analysis of the data address the notions of social justice, servant leadership, giving back to the community, and understanding and appreciating one’s background. Without any mention of the Four “C’s” while conducting the interviews for this study, it becomes interesting to note the alignment of the findings of this study with the framework presented by Hernandez and Ramirez (2001).

Summary

This chapter identified several important themes or aspects about the characteristics and professional behaviors of Latino public school superintendents. The significance of these themes was discussed within the broader context of the literature presented. Four areas of new knowledge emerged from the data and each has the potential for further research efforts. The four themes that represent the most significant components of the characteristics of Latino public school superintendents include the following:

- Being empowered by others presumes a responsibility for Latino superintendents to likewise empower others;
- Latino superintendents’ leadership behaviors are informed by knowledge that has developed through social, cultural, historical, and formal educational experiences;
- Latino superintendents’ experience and background that include prejudice and racism compel them to embrace the tenets of social justice in their leadership;

- Latino superintendents must be qualified to lead and manage complex school systems, regardless of race or ethnicity

This study addresses mestizaje and its association to the professional lives of Latino superintendents. It appears quite clear that there is a marked association, one that may not be noticeable to the casual observer, but present in the manner in which the selected participants effectuate the operationalization of the business of a school district.

This study represents an exploration into the characteristics of Latino public school superintendents. A case study method was utilized to accomplish this, which was appropriate in attempting to understand little known aspects of such a phenomenon as the professional lives of Latino public school superintendents. In this case, the academic literature related to Latinos who are superintendents and their role as educational leaders is limited. It is hoped that this study will serve as a catalyst to encourage additional research of this phenomenon.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations of this study. It hopes to represent a new beginning for those resilient and tenacious enough to accept the challenge and further explore this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Any attempt to understand and describe the impact of mestizaje in the professional life of a Latino superintendent implies recognition of its organic nature. Mestizaje is not static. It is a process, and represents social, cultural and historical multiplicities. The reality that considers the iterative nature of mestizaje, at its fundamental level, acknowledges that the organic nature of mestizaje is the birthplace of a new consciousness. The confluence of its multiplicities creates a new reality for the experience of mestizaje within each Latino. These same multiplicities provide a preamble to the reality of globalization; wherein, diversity and multiculturalism reflect an evolving complexion of humanity, and its implications for the interactions among cultures and peoples. Thus, each Latino's experience of mestizaje is unique. There may be complementary elements shared among any number of Latinos, but to categorically define mestizaje applicable to all Latinos is impossible. Every Latino's life story, experience, background is a pastiche to create a unique identity. Recognizing the complexity of the relationship between mestizaje and Latino superintendents is to recognize this relationship as ever changing, forging new relational identities and allowing for its transformative nature to be exercised.

Having stated this, it is hoped that the overall significance of this study will be in its contribution to better understand how mestizaje, as a paradigmatic locus can be the trajectory whence Latino superintendents intersect with daily life. How, when, and if at all mestizaje informs a Latino superintendent's professional behaviors is debatable, thus the reason for a question, data collection, analysis and conclusions.

This inquiry yields new understanding and knowledge that may in turn undergo the same cycle of inquiry. It is hoped that the results of this study may serve as a beginning point for further research.

It was never the intention of this study to create new theory regarding mestizaje and Latino superintendents. At best, it is hoped this study will contribute new knowledge to the understanding of leadership behaviors of Latino public school superintendents, especially as it relates to their personal social, cultural and historical journey. In the realm of literature about leadership there is a dearth regarding Latino leaders, much less Latino superintendents. Therefore, adding to the body of knowledge associated with Latino superintendents was the primary goal of this study. A secondary goal of this study was to identify its possible implications and areas for future research. Based on the findings and analysis discussed in Chapter 4, this study has accomplished these goals.

The remainder of this chapter will re-state the research design, provide a summary of the findings, present conclusions, suggest implications for practice and future research, and end with personal reflections.

Statement of the Problem

Latino students need role models who can demonstrate that despite the feeling or experience of inequity, or lack of opportunity, there is reason to hope. Latino superintendents bear burden and responsibility to keep reinforcing the positive aspects of the culture so “Latinos take pride in their identity and, at the same time, to constantly emphasize to the dominant community the benefits Latinos are bringing to

America and the contributions they will make in the future” (Bordas, 2006, p. 110). Latino superintendents are not only called upon to be role models. They are called upon to be change agents in a society that is part of an ever expanding global economy; one in which the old ways of hierarchical models of leadership are being abandoned to acknowledge a more collectivist and inclusive model of leadership. That Latino superintendents can accept this challenge reflects a lived experience grounded in a cultural and historical perspective that is the product of multiple subjectivities, one that informs daily life choices. This study attempted to understand the wisdom of the Latino ages that guides and fortifies Latino superintendents; their leadership as expressed through the Ten Functions of a School District.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latino public school superintendents in the state of Texas in order to gain insight into their leadership behaviors; particularly their leadership styles, and the influences, if any, of cultural, familial, social and other environmental factors on the leadership behaviors of the participants.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was the following: **How are the leadership practices of various Latino superintendents influenced by their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in the discharge of various school district functions and responsibilities?**

Methodology

To answer the research question, the study employed the case study method as a subset of qualitative research design. Chapter 3 of this study offered a general discussion of qualitative research, with a more detailed description of the case study method. Subsequent to the general discussion, this study focused on setting, participants, researcher, process, credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and timeline of the research. The research sample included three Latino public school superintendents in Texas. Three one-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews were recorded and verbatim transcripts were produced from these recordings. Subsequently, the transcripts were reviewed and analyzed to identify emergent themes, which were the bases for the research findings.

Summary of Findings

This study identified characteristics and professional behaviors of three Latino superintendents in Texas, and how their Latino perspective is manifested in their leadership practices, as understood through a sampling of the Ten Functions of a School District. A Latino perspective presumes a consideration of social, cultural, familial, and historical experiences, which coalesce to fashion *mestizaje*, that locus particular to persons of Iberoamerican extraction. Presuming *mestizaje* as the foundational element in this study, the findings suggest four dominant themes to capture how *mestizaje* informs the participants' leadership practices. The four themes

are: empowering for leadership; informing leadership behaviors; leading for social justice; and the Functions of a School district in action.

Empowering for Leadership

The participants acknowledged that their individual journeys into educational administration began when someone such as a supervisor made the overture and invited each to consider becoming an administrator. During the study there was nothing to suggest that the participants would not have become administrators; however, when the participants did initially become administrators was precipitated when someone already in an administrative position expressed encouragement, confidence and belief in the participants' professional abilities. Conversely, the participants each suggested that one of their roles is to encourage and develop others, who could be peers or students. Empowerment suggests making someone stronger and more confident, and enabling them to do something. A major finding of this study identified the participants were empowered to consider administration. The participants became educational administrators and have changed jobs or positions because someone has demonstrated a belief in them or made them to feel confident in their abilities. The participants experienced empowerment. In the same way the participants suggested they have been empowered to assume positions of leadership, they believe one of their roles is to empower others. It becomes incumbent upon those who have been empowered to thereafter empower others.

Informing Leadership Behaviors

It seems that every participant possessed a unique style of conducting business. How they prioritize their work and how they interact with others appears to be grounded in a personal ethic and value system derived from an accumulated body of knowledge. The individuals' social, cultural, and historical experiences of life have coalesced to create a body and system of knowledge unique to the individual. Such a body of knowledge is suggested to be indigenous knowledge. Presumed universal values such as respect for others or the value of education are suggested to have been instilled by family, not necessarily in a contrived or formal fashion, but through daily life. This intimates a development of knowledge in an organic or natural space. The presumed profundity of this knowledge and its place to inform behavior bespeaks the notion of indigenous knowledge. The second dominant finding of this study suggests that indigenous knowledge is fundamental to informing how the participants maneuver the professional landscape.

Leading for Social Justice

The third dominant finding is concerned with issues of social justice. The participants suggested they are motivated by issues of social justice in their leadership. Their personal experiences with prejudice and racism and the associated memories of these experiences compel these educational leaders to place as a priority their efforts to create an atmosphere of equity and excellence for all, especially students. It is suggested, where they have construed a personal life experience as unfair or biased based on their ethnicity, the participants have committed to ensure

that their own leadership practices and the systems for which they are responsible do not display these same sorts of biases.

Functions of a School District in Action

The findings from this study suggest that where the Functions of a School District are concerned, there is a need to operationalize these through a leadership that considers an appreciation for organizational landscape as interpreted through the Four Frames (Bolman and Deal, 2003). The three Functions that were considered in this study were not merely interpreted by the participants from a structural perspective that includes images of policies and procedures, but appeared to be interpreted with consideration for the political, human resources and symbolic frame. The participants indicated their awareness of the need to empower others, facilitate the organizational agenda and power base, and create meaning when addressing each of the Functions.

When the participants considered Internal and External Communications, they did not simply list the communication outlets, such as media and newsletters. They described the need to develop relationships with the district's constituencies, which includes developing trust between the system and the constituencies. They described the need to consider the inherent struggle for power among constituencies, and thus assume leadership to develop the district's agenda and distribute the power base. The participants also recognized the need to create a unique culture for each district, to inspire and create meaning for the district. When considering Governance, and Curriculum and Instruction Functions there appeared to be the same considerations.

Conclusions

The design of this study precipitated a heuristic development to understanding the Latino superintendent phenomenon, wherein a better understanding of the interplay between the participants' mestizaje and their professional behaviors would be developed. Limited academic literature exists to address this phenomenon, thus this study sought to add to this body of knowledge.

Given the nature of this study, the following proposition is advanced. There is a resultant association between Latino superintendents' professional behaviors and mestizaje. The data gathered and analyzed seem to suggest that these Latino superintendents are primarily concerned to be effective educational leaders committed to increasing student achievement; however, they are cognizant of their mestizaje, which informs their professional behaviors and compels them to be agents of transformation. It should be noted that while this study has attempted to present an accurate depiction of the participants, it cannot fully capture the innumerable nuances of the superintendency, and in the case of the study's three participants the magnitude of the respective indigenous knowledge and its influence on the professional behaviors of each participant.

Implications for Practice

The challenges of the superintendency are innumerable, to include providing leadership for complex organizational systems. Where a superintendent may be Latino, this study suggests evidence to demonstrate the opportunity for one's mestizaje to add value to the superintendency. In the State of Texas, with its ever

growing Latino population, the unique needs and perspective posited by their own mestizaje, Latino superintendents may be best able to align themselves with the values of this growing population; being models and agents of transformation.

Implications for Further Study

As noted earlier, there is limited academic literature that addresses Latino superintendents; thus, the opportunities for further study are multitudinous. In relation to this study, three specific areas for further study are offered.

This same study could be replicated with a larger sample to reveal similar or different outcomes; better able to increase or diminish the validity of the current findings. It is possible to conduct a study that would focus on only one of the current findings, such as *Leading for Social Justice*, and develop a more in depth depiction of those attributes and practices that demonstrate leading for social justice. A replication of this study to include language among the core identifiers of mestizaje, to be described as the social, cultural, historical, and linguistic experiences might be considered for future study. Finally, a study that addresses the use of racial/ethnic monikers to investigate if self-designation as Latino(a), Hispanic, Mexican-American, Chicano(s) provide any implications in leadership styles or behaviors.

Personal Reflections

This study is but one invigorating journey by the researcher to better understand the notion of mestizaje, especially as it relates to the superintendency. Prior to commencing on this study, my understanding and perception of mestizaje

was informed by a short volume, *The future is mestizo*, by Virgilio Elizondo. In many ways this volume spoke to my spirit and awakened my mind to a potentially rich arena for consideration. Surely, as a Mexican-American who grew up in an environment that consistently reminded me of my difference, I was enthralled by the notion that my difference could possibly be a good thing.

The gift of this study has come by way of hearing three well-regarded sitting superintendents tell their story. While each story is unique in its own way, the findings of this study suggest certain commonalities among them. The elements of the commonalities, and what they suggest, are at the heart of the gift. This study acknowledges the place of mestizaje as one of multiple subjectivities, those socially scripted positions. However, the stories of the participants demonstrate the transformative nature of mestizaje, of which Audinet writes, where these superintendents are forging new relationships and positions to denounce the pejorative nature of multiple subjectivities and model mestizaje's multiple objectivities. The study calls to mind the words of Cesar Chavez: *The end of all education should surely be service to others.*

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VITA

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