

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Leo Rasca-Hidalgo for the degree of Doctor of Education in Community College Leadership, presented on June 29, 2001. Title: The Re-Discovery of Soul, Reclamation Spirit Anew: The Influence of Spirituality on the Persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) Transfer Students at a Small Liberal Arts University.

Abstract approved: Redacted for Privacy

Alex Sanchez

Low completion rates have created serious "leakage points" (Astin, 1988) and "severe hemorrhaging" (Lango, 1996) in higher education to a large number of Hispanics. Traditional research on college persistence, which has blamed the students' culture for low performance, is inaccurate.

Little research has specifically investigated academic persistence from a cultural perspective. Spirituality is a dynamic dimension among this cultural group. It is an untapped richness that Hispanic students bring with them to higher education.

The study focused on six participants' understandings of spirituality from a cultural perspective. The purpose of the study helped participants voice the influence of their cultural spirituality and critically reflect the university's role regarding this cultural dimension.

The research question was: What does spirituality, from a cultural aspect, mean in the context of persistence by Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transfer from a community college to a small liberal arts university?

Critical theory, emphasizing phenomenology and critical consciousness, was the epistemological perspective. An *indigenous methodology* was used. Such a critical perspective and indigenous methodology embraced the participants' 'border knowledge

Three data collection methods were used. A 43-Item Likert Survey, twenty-four *diálogos* (individual conversations), and three *círculos de cultura* (group discussions).

Data was interpreted with the following findings. The majority of the participants' survey responses indicated that matters of the spirit are important and significant to them. Through the *diálogos* the participants expressed interpretations and critiques by indigenous modes of language that spirituality did influence their persistence. In the *círculos* the participants developed insights interconnecting spirituality and persistence. Spirituality was expressed through various images: "a push," "passion," "a driving force and desire," "an inner force," "*La Virgen*," and a "quiet inner strength." Most importantly, their persistence was influenced by a family-centered spirituality grounded in their cultural heritage.

This qualitative study highlighted the six voices. Each case consisted of an interpretation of the participant's phenomenological understanding and growth in critical consciousness.

The co-investigators' enriched the analysis by their cultural intuition and bicultural understanding. The following themes emerged from participants' visual and written summaries:

- Family.
- *Quien Soy Yo?* (Who Am I?)
- Quiet Inner Strength
- Recognizing My Background.
- Encouraging Me to Persist.
- Critical Consciousness of the Interrelationships of One's Culture.

Study concluded with testimonies from the co-investigators. Researcher proclaimed: it is important to listen to students voice why they persisted from strengths within their culture.

The Re-Discovery of Soul and Reclamation of Spirit Anew:
The Influence of Spirituality on the Persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o)
Community College Transfer Students at a Small Liberal Arts University

By

Leo Rasca-Hidalgo

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Leo Rasca-Hidalgo

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**The Re-Discovery of Soul and Reclamation of Spirit Anew:
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CHAPTER 1: FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

I have been intrigued for many years now as to whether Mexican American Chicana (o) students who continue in the university see spirituality as contributing to their persistence. As Bogdan (1998) notes in speaking of a researcher's dilemma to pinpoint the focus, it is not my position to prove, through some causal relationship, that spirituality is a cultural factor of persistence. Rather, I want to understand Mexican American Chicana (o) college students' meanings of spirituality and their dynamic relationship on their being persistent in the university experience. The focus, therefore, of the study was to describe and understand spirituality from the cultural perspective of six Mexican American Chicana (o) community college transfer students and the relationship of spirituality to their persistence at a small liberal arts university.

This research study was multidimensional. I began the study by embarking on the path of critical science. Using Comstock's (1999) work "A Method for Critical Research," in which he cites seven phases of critical science research, the present study centered only on the first two steps, (1) the identification of an oppressed group, Mexican American Chicanas (os); and (2) the meaning, values, and practices of a particular phenomena, i.e., how spirituality influences their persistence at the university. Both address the status of the participants and the particular focus. The study was viewed through a Mexican American Chicana (o) lens. The indigenous perspective included: (1) indirect expressions of description and meanings; (2) recognition of richness, nuance, and complexity of language; (3) openness to expression of feelings and emotions; and (4) unity of feeling and truth. Finally, there was the dimension of a methodological approach

indirect expressions of description and meanings; (2) recognition of richness, nuance, and complexity of language; (3) openness to expression of feelings and emotions; and (4) unity of feeling and truth. Finally, there was the dimension of a methodological approach that connects participatory research (Ada and Beutel, 1993; Park, 1993; Reza, 1995) and Freire's (1971) dialogue and critical consciousness.

Significance of the Study

Changing Demographics, Access, and Achievement

The issue before us is that America's demographics are changing drastically. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1996), more than one out of ten people in the United States is Hispanic. Of those described by the U.S. government as Hispanic, Mexican Americans represent the largest group. In 1996, the United States Census Bureau reported more than 65 percent of Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican descent. They are the nation's fastest growing major sub-population and will provide a substantial portion of the future growth in the United States labor force.

It is critically important to realize that in 1990 only a little more than 5 percent of the Mexican American Chicana (o) population of 25 years and older had completed four years or more of college. They were the group least likely to complete college (Metke, 1993). Alarming, the research conducted to date shows a clear pattern of low completion rates and low transition from one level of education to another. Astin (1988) refers to the low completion rates as creating serious "leakage points" in the educational system. These points reflect the large number of Hispanics and other ethnic minorities who are dropping out. Hispanics as well as African American and Native Americans are more underrepresented at each progressive transition point in the educational system

(American Council of Education, 1990). In fact, given the educational achievement of Hispanics, one might go so far as to liken the leakage points to severe hemorrhaging that threatens the economic well-being of Mexican American Chicanas (os) specifically, and society in general.

Traditional Persistence and Attrition Studies

Persistence and attainment studies over the past twenty-five years have tried to ascertain why students drop out of higher education prior to completing their identified goals (Clark-Tolliver, 1996). Most of the previous research on Mexican American Chicanas (os) in higher education has focused on the negative, examining dropout rates and low performance and often attributing lack of persistence to the culture of Mexican American Chicanas (os). Later studies that considered attrition rates as emanating from socio-cultural issues include a common experience of oppression among students of color (Lango, 1998). It is my assertion that this body of research incorrectly blames the culture for inordinate high dropout rates and low performance among these students.

Minorities and Community Colleges

Community colleges traditionally have remained the primary access to higher education for Mexican American Chicanas (os) since the 1960s, when colleges and universities began to open their doors to non-traditional students in great numbers. As of 1988, at least 60 percent of the Mexican American Chicana (o) students enrolled in higher education institutions were concentrated in community colleges. In general, community colleges increasingly tend to enroll students who are minorities, from lower social economic strata (SES), and who have lower educational aspirations. In addition,

according to Cohen and Brawer (1989) and Lee and Frank (1989), these students come with lower academic preparation and have lower achievement levels. Grubb (1991) found students enrolling in community colleges are increasingly Mexican American Chicana (o) and African American.

Specifically, Mexican American Chicanas (os) attempting to transfer from community college to senior institutions pose another set of concerns. Some researchers (Brint and Karaabel, 1989) report the overall transfer rate to be as low as 5 percent and as high as 25 percent. The number of Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transfer to universities is relatively low compared to white and other ethnic minority students. According to Lango (1999), for the few who transfer to complete their college education, the progress has been slow with an average awarding of degrees to Mexican American Chicana (o) students of 2.5 percent per year as a percentage of all bachelor's degrees awarded. This is especially dismaying when compared to an average award percentage of 85 percent for students of Euroamerican descent (Lango, 1999).

Need for New Persistence Criteria

This present study is significant because it illuminates alternative criteria to understanding the persistence and attainment of the few Mexican American Chicana (o) students who do transfer and complete college, in contrast to the traditional research studies cited above. Lango (1998) has noted the positive impact that the use of dialogue has on Mexican American Chicana women voicing perception of their persistence and critical reflection of their empowerment with regard to completing a baccalaureate degree. The present study supports this venue of participation through in-depth dialogue and critical reflection on spirituality as they influence participants' persistence.

A new road of study must be embarked upon that searches for criteria heretofore not considered. The purpose of using these other criteria reveal differing perspectives for understanding the Mexican American Chicana (o) experience as it relates to the interconnection of spirituality and persistence. As we “make the road as we walk” (Freire, 1990) in solidarity, the journey with the six research participants refreshingly reveal other ways to understand the retention of this growing number of diverse cultural learners from a cultural perspective. Gonzalez (1997) reminds us of the limited body of research on Latino student retention. The present study addresses this need for such research with a specific focus on retention and the need to better understand the spiritual background and experiences of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students.

There is the need to look for additional influences of persistence outside of the traditional models that have been promulgated. Specifically, what do Mexican American Chicanas (os) call upon that emanates from their cultural background? Spirituality, as a sustaining, motivating, and challenging internal force and/or belief, is a central dynamic among non-European cultural groups (Standfield, 1998). In union with the cultural dynamics of family and respect, spirituality is essential among the Mexican American and Mexican people and is passed down from generation to generation. All Mexican American Chicana (o) students, whether they are conscious of it or not, possess and bring a richness of their cultural background to higher education. For these students, spirituality is an untapped richness they bring (Terenzini, Jalomo, and Rendon, 1992), but which has not been researched from a cultural perspective and its effect on persistence (Love and Talbot, 1999). The present study concentrated on the cultural dynamic of spirituality for six Mexican American Chicana (o) community college students who transferred to a small liberal arts university.

Listening To the Voices

What is critical as we begin the 21st century is to ascertain from diverse cultural students, who are persisting to graduation, their perspectives on what influenced them to persist to degree completion. As co-investigators in this study, the participants voice their cultural perspectives and what it is like to experience the power of spirituality in their persistence at both the community college and the university levels. Mirande, (1975) and Standfield II (1998) have posed that the reality of spirituality is an inherent richness and a critical dimension within the Mexican American Chicana (o)'s indigenous heritage. It may be that this internal dynamic is also operative in influencing Mexican American Chicana (o) college students. I am convinced this uniqueness is important for postsecondary educators to acknowledge and understand.

The study was motivated by the hope that information and insights received from the participants would shed light on aspects of spirituality. These included reflection for self- renewal; experiences with the transcendent; unity and solidarity among people; and trust in divine intervention. The following authors contemplate each of these aspects respectively: Rendon (1999), Greenleaf (1998), Mirande (1985), Bolman and Deal (1995), and Freire (1996). The four aspects of reflection, transcendence, human solidarity, and faith, from within the student's culture, may be the dynamics that underpin the traditional factors which have been historically attributed to the retention of all college students including Mexican American Chicana (o) college students. Traditional research studies have identified academic preparedness, academic and social integration, parents' educational background, and family income level as the factors attributable to the persistence of American college students. However, the present research study provides additional significant information to students—in elementary schools, high schools, alternative schools, and postsecondary education institutions—that will encourage them to

persist in terms of a cultural dynamic within their own cultural background. This study is a source of hope for those students (Garcia, 1999).

Leadership and Instructional Effectiveness for the New Majority of Students

Given the significant growth in numbers of Hispanic students in the educational system including community colleges and universities, it is important that postsecondary administrators, faculty, and student services personnel understand the non-traditional aspects that can affect the persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) students. This is the opportunity for colleges and universities to provide training in multicultural education to all educators and support personnel. Such institutional commitment may help adult learners with their cultural consciousness (Pizarro, 1993) as well as assist them to reclaim their internal strength, which may have been lost through the processes of acculturation and assimilation. In addition, educational institutions need to see what the new majority of students bring to postsecondary education: unique learning and intellectual inquiry processes that are inextricably connected to their spirituality.

Focus Question

The following question guided the design in its scope, depth, and breadth:

What does spirituality, from a cultural aspect, mean in the context of persistence by Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transfer from a community college to a small liberal arts university?

This question was explored using Comstock's (1989) critical science approach, his phenomenological phase in particular. That is, the participants' reflection on the description and the meaning of the influence of spirituality in their lives from a cultural perspective informs all points of discussion and leads to unique conclusions.

It is necessary to view non-traditional students from their own unique cultural dynamics. Spirituality is a strength within the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture and may be the underpinning that influences the persistence of the small percentage of Mexican American Chicana (o) students who do earn bachelor's degrees.

Overview of Methodology

The reality of the spiritual dimension emerges through participants' responses on an initial mailed survey and their comments in both individual and group interviews. The individual and group interviews are a reflective process of critical dialogue that include a "multicultural context, personal experiences, and emotional responses" (Reza, 1995).

Critical Science Perspective with a Phenomenological Emphasis

Through a critical science approach, both the participants and I reflected on the participants' spirituality as it affected their persistence at the university. According to Comstock (1989), critical research "begins from the life problems of definite and particular social agents who may be individuals, groups, or classes that are oppressed by and alienated from social processes they maintain or create but do not control" (p. 378). The study uses the first two steps of the research model. The first step looks at the identification of a social group whose interests were progressive in light of their experiences of oppression and alienation. The cultural and spiritual heritage of Mexican American Chicanas (os) has been marked historically with conquest, colonization, assimilation, and all forms of discrimination to the present day. The second step of Comstock's critical science centers on the development of an interpretive understanding of the intersubjective meanings, values, and motives held by the participants in the study.

The other phases of Comstock's (1989) critical science method emerged through the use of Freire's dialogue.

By focusing, however, on the first two phases of Comstock's critical science method, the study begins with a phenomenological emphasis in order for the participants to have an awareness of the richness and influence of spirituality in their cultural upbringing. Through spiraling processes of dialogic conversation, self-reflection, and contemplation, the participants as co-investigators voice their experiences, descriptions, and meanings of spirituality.

Methodology - An Indigenous Approach

An indigenous approach to the methodology is implemented for two reasons. One, the focus of the study addresses an aspect of the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture. Two, both the researcher and the participants are from the same cultural background. Standfield II (1998) calls for creating an indigenous qualitative methodology and methods, the "inclusion of non-Eurocentric logics of inquiry may enhance participant response, reflection, and critique of a topic that is central to their culture" (p. 347). An indigenous methodology includes the knowledge, definitions, and interactions from a non-European perspective. Upon reflecting on the work of Standfield II (1998) and Hall (1986), it is my position that the dominant way of knowing and reasoning is abstract, linear, deductive, measurable, and articulated in objective terms. On the other hand, diverse but unvoiced ways of knowing, which are not part of the hegemony, are culture bound. Reasoning from this alternate perspective may be viewed as concrete, spiraling, inductive, intuitive and are expressed in subjective terms.

In terms of the present focus on spirituality, the use of an indigenous methodology brings out the inter-subjectivity of each of the participants. It also draws forward their

conscious or unconscious collective memory of the Mexican American Chicana (o) community in which they were raised. According to Standfield (1998), an indigenous view of spirituality is central rather than marginal to the understanding of human development. The researcher's and co-investigators' view of the phenomena are seen through cultural lenses in order to focus, ponder, create, communicate, reflect, and share the new knowledge that is rooted in the sacred, the emotions, and the subjectivity of their Mexican American Chicana (o) cultural context. An indigenous approach, as just defined, highlights the phenomena sought after as well as the prominence of the participants who possess lived experiences of the spirituality, though it may have been forgotten or lost. Those experiences are learned through their cultural upbringing with parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Yet, the memory of past understandings and events become blur through the assimilation process of schooling. The significance of spirituality is determined by documenting the choice and use of words, images, and metaphors; their level of affectivity in sharing and articulating their points of view; and the expression of their non-verbal cues. Other factors articulated during the process are noted for informal and formal analysis by both the researcher and the co-investigators.

Clarification of Key Concepts

Spirituality

Prior to understanding the phenomenon of spirituality, it is necessary to ascertain its meaning (Van Manen, 1990). There is no commonly accepted definition of spirituality. The following is a range of perspectives.

The most common meaning is also the most superficial; one associated with mere institutionalized church membership, religiosity, and ritual. Spirituality may also be

viewed as an internal force that sustains a person's meaning, purpose, and hope in life. Spirituality in this case is at the heart of the human search for fulfillment (Tillich, 1959; Canda, 1989; Snell, 1991). Bolman and Deal (1995) point to a reality called soul. Spirituality may be a belief in a force greater than oneself, according to Booth (1992) and Wittmer (1989). For Bhindi (1997), spirituality is "an awareness of having forces or a presence greater than ourselves." Others have described it as a movement towards union and a communication with God (McGill and McGreal, 1988; Fox, 1983). Benner (1998) calls spirituality "a response to the deep and the mysterious yearnings for self transcendence and surrender." It may also be understood as a quiet sense of living (Lee, 1991).

Freire (1998), in expressing spirituality, uses the word "faith," which is a sustaining, motivating, challenging internal force where the focus is on the struggle for a more people-centered society. Faith "never allows me to say stop, settle down, things are as they are because they cannot be any other way" (p. 104). Freire goes on to say in Pedagogy of the Heart, "I am in my faith" (p.89). "... It mobilizes me. I am engaged in different forms of action coherent with faith. The prayer of the spiritual person asks God for strength and courage to fight with dedication to overcome injustice" (p. 65).

In summary, spirituality in this study is used to mean that dynamic of each person's interior life with a consciousness of a transcendent force/person greater than oneself. Spirituality expresses that relationship in various ways of awareness, yearning, communication, sustenance, interaction, commitment, and action to God, the Transcendent One, the Spirit, *El Señor*, *Nuestro Señor*, and *La Virgen*. Spirituality, the central core of the human being, is the fountain from which springs motivation, strength, and authentic action with the self, the transcendent Other, and with humankind.

Persistence

Staying power is critical for all those community college and university students who are faced with the traditional insurmountable barriers of personal lack of confidence, academic under-preparedness, insufficient income and social and cultural integration. There are methods for addressing each of these barriers, but such methods may still not influence students from diverse cultural backgrounds to persist.

Identity is also a concern with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly with students whose first language is not English. Their language is just one of several interconnected dynamics of culture. Others include family influence, way of knowing, nature of family values, interaction with others, and spirituality. Nieves (1991) notes the relationship between spirituality and white students' persistence in higher education. However, for Mexican American Chicana (o) students who have had a traditional cultural upbringing, there is an internal force within them whether or not they're aware of it. Research is needed that examines the methods of persistence for students from cultural groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican American Chicanas (os).

Mexican American Chicana (o)

Many terms have been used to label a group of people who will be totaling 30 million in the United States by the year 2010 (Fox, 1997). Among the various terms used are "Mexican," "Mexican American," "Chicano," "Mexicano," "Raza", "Hispanic," and "Latino." Generally speaking, it appears that those who prefer to call themselves Mexican or Mexicanos still speak Spanish and maintain strong ties with Old Mexico. According to Elizondo (1983), those who prefer to call themselves "Mexican American" usually accept

their Mexican heritage but linguistically, socially, and culturally identify more with the United States mentality and lifestyle. Those who prefer to be called Chicano or Raza are those who are struggling to emerge with a new “adversarial” identity (p. 20). Hispanic is a term used by the United States government during the Reagan administration as an umbrella term to encompass all the diversity. Segments of “*la gente, el pueblo*” disregard the term “Hispanic” because, even though it speaks to the Spanish influence, it leaves out the indigenous roots of the people. Since 1975, the influx of immigrants from Central and South America has led to a variety of new labels (Robinson, 1998, Fox, 1998). The term “Latino” is now popular to identify the people who come from countries other than Mexico, specifically persons of Latin American descent from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica and South America. At the same time, many Mexicans also describe themselves as “Latino.” The term used in this research study, “Mexican American Chicana (o),” represents a continuum of the political, social, and economic reality of the people. It represents the range of persons, from those who have undergone varying degrees of the acculturation and assimilation process in American society to those persons seeking an identity of their own making.

Culture

Also closely connected to a clear understanding of the context of this research study are the reality and the concept of culture. Banks (1994) notes that culture may be defined on multiple levels. We can understand culture to encompass a particular group’s foods, holidays, patterns of dress and artistic expressions. At the level of human interaction, distinctions of culture can be understood in terms of family relationships and communication styles. Culture may also be understood as the particular social, political, economic, and spiritual contexts of a group. Embedded in all these layers are the cores of

any culture: attitudes, beliefs, and values pertaining to life and living as forced and shaped by national realities. Understanding today's variety of cultures is necessary due to our increasingly multicultural society emerging in the 21st century, and the interaction among such groups. As a result, culture must be understood, not only as sets of traditions, but also as constantly emerging with changing of values and social-political relationships. It is comprised of a world view created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that includes a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion, and how these are transformed by those who share them (Nieto, 1998). With these preliminary remarks on the topic, I now turn to the core of the research study.

Description of the Setting

Western Oregon University (WOU), a member of the Oregon University System (OUS), is located sixteen miles southwest of downtown Salem, Oregon, the state capital. The university, founded in 1856, serves a student population of approximately 4,700 students, including 320 students from diverse cultural backgrounds. One hundred and seventy-five are Hispanic with forty-two of these students transferring from community colleges. WOU is an appropriate location to conduct the study for three reasons. One is the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in Marion County of 33 percent in one year (1998). The second is that Chemeketa Community College, located in north Salem is only a twenty-seven minute drive by car from WOU. It has the largest student enrollment of 5,000 Hispanic students among the state's seventeen community colleges. Third, WOU's strategic plan, spearheaded by President Betty J. Youngblood, includes the diversification of students and faculty for both enrollment and retention. The present study also received support of the Provost and Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

Section Summary

The fewer than 5 percent of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students persisting to degree completion has been attributed to traditional models of research, which have focused on a variety of factors particular to the average college student: white, middle class male. Research studies that report low completion rates of Hispanic college students (Astin, 1988) place the causes of failure on the individual, the culture, and the family background (Astin and Burciaga, 1981; Barhona, 1990; Genera, 1993; Pincus and Decamp, 1989). The present research study seeks a new way of approaching the issue of persistence among Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students. By listening and understanding their perceptions of spirituality in their lives and their persistence in the university, the present research acquires insight into creating new kinds of educational environments in which more Mexican American Chicana (o) students transfer to the university. By providing a place of self-discovery and intellectual inquiry, all college students are empowered to persist.

For the indigenous cultures of the Americas, spirituality and daily living are inextricably intertwined. This worldview has been passed on to the native peoples' descendents of today. Significant aspects of today's Mexican American Chicana (o) experience (as described on page 13 for the purpose of this study) are at once familial, spiritual, political, and educational. And for each group, however they call themselves, these lived realities are perceived and expressed with variation and uniqueness. Within the Mexican American Chicana (o) heritage, all are interconnected. Through the dominant perspective of research, each would be analyzed in a linear fashion. In contrast, an indigenous perspective sees the interconnections of the components and simultaneously discovers, reflects upon, and turns into action the whole.

Finally, I entered the research with an understanding and an appreciation the Mexican American Chicana (o) community college students. I sought to discover their meaning of spirituality from a cultural perspective and its impact on their resiliency in the university experience. Openness to the fact that information gathered during both the individual and group interviews would reveal that spirituality varies in terms of degree from individual to individual. For some, it would not be a major influence while for others it is. Since spirituality is pervasive in the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture, my hunger to discover launched me into the territory to explore and learn anew.

CHAPTER 2: MY UNDERTSANDING OF SPIRITUALITY AND PERSISTENCE

Introduction

This section reviews related literature embedded in the focus of the study and its central research question. However, within the context of an interpretive study, it is important to share my perspectives of the salient experiences and knowledge with which I entered the study. I will address specific concepts in selected literature that guided the rationale for the methodology, including the manner of interacting with the participants, the procedures for collecting data, and the mode for interpreting the data. Chapter Two is organized in the following manner: (1) "Researcher's Perspective," which articulates a description of my epistemology; (2) "Rationale for Related Literature" which explains the importance of each of the four concepts as they relate to the study; and (3) "Review of the Related Literature," which provides perspectives from articles, studies, and books for each of the four concepts pertaining to the key concepts

Researcher's Perspective

As an educational leader of a new majority of learners, I confronted myself and embarked on a journey to discover the description, meaning, and significance of spirituality in the lives of six Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students as well as in my own. Embarking on this search of solitude and solidarity with the participants, I was reminded of a story that I heard many years ago.

A Story

Before time began, there were three gods. Each of their spirits was the fullest of love, life, creativity, community and power. In time they agreed to submit their spirits into the chaos. Each of the gods took the gifts of themselves and hurled them into the vacuum of space.

In an instant, the universe, galaxies, and the planets were formed. On one of the planets, the three gods decided to hurl the gifts of themselves upon it. In an instant, there was sky, land, and water. In the sky were the birds of the air. The land was filled with a mosaic of crawling animals. And the deep was filled with the fish of the sea.

The three gods still had more gifts of their spirit: love, life, creativity, community and power. In unison they hurled the spirit of themselves. In an instant there was a woman and a man.

And still there was spirit left. They asked one another where the spirit was to be given. They all agreed to share themselves with the woman and the man, but not immediately.

One god said, "Let's hurl the spirit beyond the universe and galaxies." The second god responded, "They will find it right away." The third god said, "Let's put it in the deepest parts of the sea." The first god responded, "They will also find it right away." Then the wisest of all the gods said, "Let's place the spirit where they will think least to find it, within each one of them!"

The above "gift of the spirit by the gods" resides within each woman and man. This is the driving force that empowers, guides, and gives direction to people and their aspirations as they navigate through life's experiences of *alegería y dolor* (joy and challenges). Such unseen energy and perspective can be observed in the parenting of children, the leading of people in organizations, the teaching of learners, and the persisting of adult learners in the community college and who then on to the university. It is my position that, as the non-traditional student maneuvers through the Academy, it is the consciousness of life in the spirit and calling upon its intensity that pushes her or him to degree completion.

Spirituality matters a great deal in spite of current society's apparent resistance to it. To reflect upon, claim, broaden, and revise spirituality for an education that is

liberating and transforming is a matter of faith. The words of Brazilian educator and critical thinker Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Heart (1997), has conveyed this idea well: "spirituality speaks of trust in a reality hoped for" (p. 108). In the area of education, Freer says the following about his spiritual roots:

It is not easy to have faith. Above all, it is not easy due to the demands faith places on who experiences it. It demands a stand for freedom, which implies respect for the freedom of others, in an ethical sense, in the sense of humility, coherence, and tolerance.

To know and understand my research perspective became a journey into my experiences and conditioning. A few years ago in an Educational Leadership graduate course at the University of Oregon, a professor discussed the concept of "Ontogeny." Human beings are the sum total of all that has preceded them. I am as well the total of the thinking, learning, and teaching which have preceded me. Particular seeds were planted, some nurtured, and some left to germinate on their own (personal, Edson, 1992).

I would summarize my formal and informal learning experiences in the following manner: "Either all life is sacred or all life is meaningless. Either we are made in the image and likeness of the Lord or we are not." God's love is at the core of each human being. It is my belief as a Catholic Christian that human beings are valuable because they are valuable to the Lord. Our unique value is embedded and connected in relationship with God, the Lord of Universe, the Creator.

The knowledge that I received and assimilated mirrors the social context and times in which I have lived. Banks states that "Knowledge reflects the social context and time in which scientists live and work" (Banks, 1997). Scheurich and Young (1996) say, "Researchers use an epistemological frame that fits their social history." I would say that the social context of my upbringing, in the barrios of Los Angeles, influenced not only the learner in me but also the teacher, servant leader, and, now, the researcher. "*Soy yo!*"

The next stage of my development occurred in college during the mid-1960s, where I double majored in theology and social science. It was in the first discipline that

the concept of "sacredness of life" from earlier years matured. This is when I was first introduced to the oppressed of Egypt and the Prophets crying for justice. I reflected that the Lord was involved with the wretched of the earth. The Lord of the Jewish covenant heard the enslaved and oppressed, the cries of the poor ones in Egypt. The prophets were spokespersons for a God not only of faithfulness and kindness but also of justice. Later, the son of Yahweh, Jesus of Nazareth, did what he saw his father doing: he taught the poor and healed the brokenhearted.

It was also at this time that I studied the life of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719) who taught poor youth in Paris. Little did I know the impact that De La Salle would have on me. Who would have known that thirty years later, I would come across the title of a book by Dale Parnell (1988), who speaks of the "The Neglected Majority." In it are numerous citations showing that more than 50 percent of minority students and poor students are in community colleges rather than four-year institutions (Rendon, 1996; Nieto, 1997; Cushner, 1996; and Ovando, 1998). For me, both De La Salle and Parnell speak of what would be my commitment to teaching the poor.

As a senior in college in 1968, an event occurred that has remained with me all these years. My professor, Peter Riga, came late to our seminar class one day during the spring semester. As he opened the door, he motioned us to come with him. Six of us crammed into his 1960 Buick and he drove us to the UC Berkeley campus. He hurriedly parked as close as he could to the UC campus. As we walked toward University Avenue, we smelled the stench of tear gas. Peter went up the steps of Sproul Hall, which was completely jammed with humanity. At the top he began talking to someone. We could not see with whom due to all the people who were shoulder to shoulder. I only heard a voice say, "Peter, thanks for joining us in Selma! Who do you have with you?" That is when Peter turned around and I saw him. Peter introduced each one of us to him. When it came to me, I saw him in his black suit and matching thin black tie. He extended his to

me. As our hands clasped together, he asked what I was studying and what I wanted to become. When I responded that I wanted to be a teacher, he simply smiled and said, "Teach them well! And join us in the struggle!" Dr. Martin Luther King's words to me have been close to my heart and in the work I have endeavored to do with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

During my teaching days in East Los Angeles in the early 1970s, as I saw myself too passively trying to respond to the "teacher and learner's cries in the classroom," I came across a book by Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) shocked me into realizing the process of how learners were acquiring knowledge. The "banking concept" bluntly named the kind of learning I was "giving" students during those beginning years of my teaching career. Learning activities amounted to mounds of knowledge I had deposited into the students. Those weekly quizzes and tests were the withdrawals of that knowledge. It was a transaction of knowledge-in and knowledge-out. It was a knowledge gathering of contrived interaction yet devoid of context, feeling, and relevancy to their lived experiences in the ghetto! As a result of reflecting critically upon my situation as a teacher, I began to dialogue with students on themes relevant to them. Subsequently, a growing consciousness began to emerge within me.

In 1973, I started graduate school in order to fill my cup with more knowledge in order to help the students. The first course in the master's degree program in religious studies was taught by an old Jewish rabbi. The book for the course, by Abraham Herschel, was titled The Prophets. The book spoke of the compassion and justice of the Jewish Yahweh. The rabbi communicated his understanding of the Jewish God as a "personal power outside of ourselves who communicates loving kindness and faithfulness to all, especially the poor." I also had course work in the religious history of the Mexican American. From a historical perspective, I began to understand the ramifications of the culture clash between the indigenous of the Americas and European colonizer. It was a

conflict between the Spaniard father and the indigenous mother of my ancestors. Earlier, I had understood it in Freire terms of “oppressor and the oppressed.” As the course work continued, I also read and began my discovery of Gustavo Gutierrez (1973), A Theology of Liberation; Enrique Dussel (1976), History and the Theology of Liberation; and Jose Miranda (1974), The Bible and Marx, A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression. At that time, I realized that liberation theology addressed and critiqued the ongoing struggle of the poor to overcome oppression in the Latin American countries of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Brazil. Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest, viewed Jesus as a liberator of the poor. For Gustavo Gutierrez, Christianity was a way of life in which committed persons have the responsibility to build the kingdom of compassion, justice, and reconciliation on the earth. Reading these books was in concert with similar thoughts I’d had in the past. One of those thoughts from my college days was by a German theologian, Karl Rahner (1971), who asserted that Christianity must have a “preferential option for the poor.”

Along with graduate school during the 1970s, I joined in Caesar Chavez’s boycotts on behalf of farm workers. As a result of those lived experiences, I redesigned courses such as “Images of Justice and Injustice” for my students in East Los Angeles. Only then did the readings of Freire’s Education for Critical Consciousness; Gustavo’s Liberation Theology; and De La Salle’s Christian Education of the Poor begin to come to the forefront of my consciousness. I coupled these intellectual experiences and the conversation with Dr. Martin Luther King to my emerging pedagogy.

Also related to my graduate work was a four-day conference I attended in Los Angeles. Claire Fitzgerald, Director of the Graduate Education program at Boston College, gave the keynote address. What struck me most was when she spoke of the film she used with her master’s candidates. The film recounted Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, and the meeting he had with the country’s other bishops.

The bishops, during a retreat, shared stories of themselves, their priests, religious sisters and brothers, lay leaders, and the peasants. They recounted how some of them were dragged out of their rectories or convents by the military. They were taunted with red paint in the middle of the busiest streets of their cities because of their meetings with the peasants. These bishops, priests, religious sisters and brothers, and lay leaders had entered into dialogue with the poor by helping them to become critically conscious of their reality. At the end of the film, Cámara is seen waving good bye to the bishops on the bus, knowing that he may not see some of them again. As the rickety old bus goes down the dirt road, the following words came across the screen: "These are truly dangerous men!" As the lights went on in the hall, Fitzgerald shouted, "We must educate for dangerous people! We need a new breed of leader for the times are out of joint!" Those words have resonated over and over again in my memory and in my soul!

My continuing journey of the past ten years has focused on the element of culture. Instructional leadership and critical pedagogy need to address and connect learning processes to students' cultures and not ignore and alienate them. What are needed are strategies that are consistent and resonate with diverse students' ways of knowing and modes of interaction. In an American society that is increasingly multicultural, elements of the learning process must not only be culturally sensitive but also culturally competent. As the 1990s drew to a close, it has been refreshing to revisit Freire. After reading Teachers as Cultural Workers (1998), I discovered the same concepts found in De La Salle (1643). He had said, "Counteract those schools that are inhuman places and where coercion and punishment are the order of the day and substitute human communities in which love is the motivating force in the learning process and a preparation for the real life they will face" (in O'Connell, 1981). I found similar thoughts in John Dewey's work, Need for a Philosophy of Education (1934). Reading one of Freire's more recent works, Pedagogy of the Heart (1997), has renewed my commitment to teaching and serving poor

students. It opened my eyes to the profound impact of learning from human beings through dialogue.

I have also discovered Jack Mezirow (1981,1990), Adult Learner Theorist, and Laurent Daloz (1986) Humanist. These writers' ideas complement my tendencies as a learner/teacher/leader. As an adult learner, these two authors brought me to another perspective to human learning: transformational learning. Clark (1993), in Transformational Learning, explores the work of Mezirow, Freire, and Daloz. For all three writers, dialogue and critical reflection facilitate the learning process, human development, and leadership process. At the same time, Clark (1993) describes each as a constructivist: "meaning exists within ourselves" (Mezirow, 1989); "We are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action" (Freire, 1970). And "as human beings, we are active participants in the process of making meaning, of constructing ways of knowing the world that help it cohere in a way that makes sense for us." (Daloz, 1990). These principles are valuable in working with learners who need to experience the emancipatory force of the words for "the truth shall set you free." Truth for Freire is critical consciousness that leads to personal and societal responsibility. For Mezirow and Daloz, truth is new meaning after critical reflection. For me, my understanding of truth emerged as a belief that persons can call each human being to a fuller life. A fuller life is a life of freedom, critical consciousness, solidarity, and justice.

As I embark on the research of my life, I now make the bold statement that American education has been controlled by the dominant perspective. Postmodernism is calling for the emergence of other perspectives such as critical theory, feminism, phenomenology, and "indigenized theories and methods" (Standfield, 1998, p. 336). Such research perspectives are needed in order to create discourse on: 1) the purpose of schooling in an ever increasing multicultural society; 2) the knowledge bases to be shared

with diverse learners; and 3) the process of eliciting, listening to, and reflecting on the experiences, desires, and mindsets of low-income, diverse college students.

My current way of knowing is with new lenses. I have the humble gratitude to have heard new voices (Anzaldúa, 1997; hooks, 1994; and Freire, 1998) who express the feelings of my spirit and those of my students over the past thirty years.

Researcher Disclosure Summarized

I, therefore, entered the present study with the aforementioned experiences and knowledge bases both described and critically reflected upon. As a Mexican American Filipino educational leader, spirituality, critical consciousness, and cultural intuition are the lenses through which I engaged in dialogue with the participants. It is through these multidimensional perspectives that I listened openly to the participants and participated with them in acquiring new understandings of spirituality and persistence. The present research has been informed by what I have communicated with you in a narrative format and as well as with the following body of literature.

Rationale for Related Literature

There has been a paucity of literature on spirituality per se as it pertains to higher education. There also seems to be a lack of literature on spirituality related to Mexican Americans Chicanas (os) who have transferred from a community college to a four-year university. There are some studies in which researchers "recommend topics of spirituality for future study" (Brantley, 1992; Muniz, 1994, Springfield, 1987; and Hurtado, 1991). According to Anzaldúa (1993), spirituality is an aspect that is engrained in the consciousness of the Mexican American Chicana (o) people. Leach (1989) notes that

student development perspectives need to change dramatically as the student population changes to include issues of spirituality. There needs to be more of a culturally based focus when addressing intellectual, career, and social needs particular for the new majority of students in postsecondary education. In the many years I have worked with students from minority groups, it seemed that somehow spirituality has been the motivating factor for their persistence in their life's daily challenges. The present study was conducted to ascertain the degree of influence that spirituality has had when it comes to education in lives of six Mexcian American Chicana (o) community college transfer students. For the most part, education has been experienced as an abstract (Hall, 1986) filling of the brain (Freire, 1971) with particular knowledge (Banks, 1998, Scheurich, and Young, 1997) through particular processes foreign to students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 1996). There is a need to make a connection between technical access and information overload, and/or the consumption of intellectual capital with the humanity (spirituality) of adult learners (Pizarro, 1992).

The body of literature below addresses spirituality from five perspectives. First, there is a further understanding of spirituality, which began in section one. Second, we briefly looked at the importance of spirituality to people and, in particular, to student development. Third, is a consideration of the aspect of the transcendent as connected to presence, consciousness, and culture. Finally, I looked at the influence of spirituality on Paulo Ferire and Gustavo Gutierrez who are central to the research study in terms of my epistemology and specific methodological strategies.

Review of Related Literature

The body of the related literature addresses: (1) spirituality; (2) persistence; (3) the acculturation and assimilation phenomena; and (4) a new phenomenon known as

“Academics of the Heart.” The review covers critical concepts from a variety of sources that resonate with my own experiences of persisting to the bachelor’s degree. As a qualitative study, insights into the literature presented in this chapter emerged again throughout the study.

Related Literature on Spirituality

Interiority of Spirituality

The sacred and the spiritual are present to all of humanity and have been expressed in an infinite number of different ways. According to Abalos (1992), in Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political, “Traditional social scientists merely cite the residual categories of religion in an empirical, positivistic, and behavioral manner” (p. 110). Beck (1986), in attempting to answer the question, “What is Spirituality?” also concluded that it has to do with “interiority,” with something inside a person. From the central core in each human being emanates meaning, purpose, and action. A person with spirit acts according to forces deep within her or his being rather than just by the norms of typical or required behavior. The various religions of the world are attempts to formulate spiritual experiences and to direct persons towards certain external reference points.

Characteristics of a Spiritual Person

Beck (1986) gives a list of twelve characteristics of the spiritual person. From among them, the following became pertinent to the study:

- Awareness – a person who is “awake” and “enlightened,” largely seen as a product of spiritual experience rather than intellectual training.

- A holistic outlook – a person who is aware of the interconnections of things of patterns within the whole.
- Integration – one's inner power which is constantly involved in the total life of the person.
- Hope – a person with an outlook and who moves confidently into the future. (p. 151)

Spirituality and Cultural Upbringing

Stanard, Sandhu, and Painter (2000), in an article titled *Assessment of Spirituality in Counseling*, addressed the issue of cultural upbringing and the assessment of spirituality. They did so from an Afro-cultural perspective. Their conceptual framework of spirituality as a worldview or fundamental organizing principle in African culture is expressed as follows:

This view includes a belief that a non-observable and non-material life force permeates all reality and that sensitivity to this takes priority in one's life. It is a belief that goes beyond church affiliation and includes the transcendence of physical death and a sense of community with one's ancestors. (p. 78)

Spirituality and Transcendence

Pate and Bondi (1992) and Kelly (1994) referred to a broader belief in one's transcendental connectedness in the universe. From a Native American viewpoint, Smith (1995) in *A Cherokee Way of Knowing*, related to the transcendent as "direct experience of the holy." And the "holy" permeates all of creation. God, the religious, the sacred, the source of all being, the undifferentiated source, the holy, was always considered an integral part of life (Abalos, 1992). In support of the present study, the article discussed how the Native American religion and Euro-American religions envision "God." Euro-American religions are based "on a principle of determinateness of things" (p. 242). For the indigenous tribe, there is the recognition of *Wakan*, described as a universal principle

“not considered as separate from that which has been created.” Also, particular to the present study is another distinction regarding the way of knowing the “Great Spirit,” according to the Native American. Their way of knowing of the transcendent, presence of the Other, consisted of four aspects: (1) sensory experience; (2) daily observance of the created world; (3) experience of community; and (4) sense of reality conveyed through story. This is unlike Euro-American religions in which “God” is known through theoretical constructs. Spirituality for the indigenous Cherokee is also recognition of “otherness” within oneself. Smith (1995) explains “otherness” as:

That which is external to oneself yet also present in one's being. “Otherness” would imply that spirituality serves more than personal religious experience. It also recognizes that, in relating to the ‘other,’ distinct from the self, one is also relating to the presence of that ‘other’ in the core of one's own being. Each person is both an individual and a part of a created order. Full humanity would, therefore, require meaningful participation in the totality of life, not just personal development. (p. 251)

Spirituality and Self Reflection

I turn briefly to the issue of self-reflection. It is with indigenous peoples that the knowledge and wisdom of “God,” the “transcendent,” or the “Great Spirit” has been preserved. For the Navajo people in particular, wisdom brings about spiritual well-being. It is the wisdom of the elders that “has been passed from generation to generation and finds roots in one's being, becoming the source of strength throughout one's life” (Benally, 1992). It is through culture that a person's consciousness is organized (Hefner, 1998). How consciousness is organized tells people the distinctions, the unity, and the interconnections of the daily experiences in one's individual and community life. For Hefner, another word for the organization of consciousness is spirituality. Self-reflection on those matters born out of and passed on through one's culture is facilitated through

sayings and stories. For Hefner, organization of consciousness and the action of self-reflection is the “main entrée to spirituality for our times” (p. 180).

Spirituality and Student Development

With a broader understanding of spirituality connected to interiority, cultural upbringing, human attributes, presence, and self-reflection, I now turn to spirituality and its place in higher education. Love and Talbot (1999) addressed spirituality with student affairs personnel in higher education. They notes that the academy has been reluctant to address the topic of spirituality because of its association with religion, just as it is an uncomfortable topic to discuss in society. Collins (1987) is also in agreement with Love and Talbot (1999) that spirituality is a disquieting issue in America as well as on college campuses since it is perceived as a private matter. Love and Talbot (1999) strongly noted that “unfortunately, the profession’s failure to engage in discussions of spirituality and spiritual development may contribute not only to foreclosure on matters spirituality, but also to general narrowness of perspective and an inability or unwillingness to think critically and explore value-related issues” (p. 363). The present study addressed higher education’s inability or unwillingness to address or include spirituality and forms the basis for me as an educational researcher and leader to consider spirituality in relation to students’ persistence in college. By the colleges’ and universities’ failures to address students’ spiritual development, they are ignoring an important aspect of their students’ humanity. Support for this position is well stated by Love and Talbot (1999), who declare:

Student affairs professionals need to reflect on their own spiritual development. This means considering how they derive meaning, purpose, and direction in their lives, how they are growing in

connectedness with self and others, and how they are or are not growing toward a greater openness to a relationship with an intangible and pervasive essence beyond human existence and rational knowing. (p. 371)

The above literature contributed to the focus of the study by establishing that the genesis of spirituality resides within each person. Spirituality has been viewed from a cultural frame of reference. In addition, spirituality, as an important aspect of human development, has not been carefully thought out in higher education. Now is the time to do so.

Spirituality and Paulo Freire

Crucial to the present study is the work of Paulo Freire. He has been noted for his critical theory regarding the education of the masses in terms of liberation from all forms of oppression. To his readers, Freire's work is known for his scholarship in critical consciousness, liberation pedagogy, and the dialogic learning. However, little is known about his spirituality that influenced his thought and praxis (action). Below, I reflect upon his intellectual influences, spiritual dimensions of his pedagogy, and his influence on a Latin American theologian.

Central to my study is Freire's philosophy regarding: (1) view of and interaction with human beings; (2) critical consciousness of humankind's condition in society; and (3) vision of education as transformational to the learner. What is most unique, however, is that his philosophy is embedded in his theology and his spirituality. Freire's spirituality became crucially connected to my research focus: a culturally compatible methodology to understand participants' spirituality as key to their persistence in overcoming their university struggles. In We Make the Road By Walking, Horton and Freire (1990), he makes the humble statement, "If you ask me then, if I am a religious man, I say no, I'm not a religious man.... I would say that I am a man of faith" (p. 246). For Freire, what is

central to him is that interior dynamic of presence of spiritual power rather than the possession of intellectual beliefs expressed only by devotional practices and rituals.

Three radical French Catholic intellectuals had a significant influence on Paulo Freire: Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, and Teilhard de Chardin. The following summaries of these three thinkers are from Kuhne's dissertation titled "Community Pedagogy of Critical Hope: Paulo Freire, Liberation Pedagogy and Liberation Theology" (1998).

Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) favored a prophetic church in which "God" is involved in the historical context of the masses. Both Maritain and Freire saw the study of human beings and their lived experiences as central to any literacy and action toward freedom and emancipation of the people and society. French Catholic personalist philosopher Mounier's (1905-1950) theme of the "radical humanization of man" referred to an inherently progressive and optimistic view of human history. Mounier emphasized the ability of individuals to shape history and progress (Elias, 1994). Freire combines his spirituality with Mounier's revolutionary vision. The most important aspect of Mounier's (1905-1950) work to influence Freire was Mounier's analysis of authenticity. Mounier argued that the "Church should identify authentically with the people and that revolution was potentially the clearest expression of love" (p. 78). Such concepts influenced Freire's expressions of authentic collaboration with and for the oppressed.

Teilhard de Chardin's (1881-1955) impact on Freire centered on the Jesuit priest's evolutionary vision towards human consciousness. His fourth movement which he terms "Christogenesis" is the thrust of the human group into the unity of a community" (Kuhne, 1998, p. 81). Such an evolutionary theology influenced Paulo's concept of "conscientization" (critical consciousness). As a result of incorporating Chardin's ideas, Freire began to view humankind as a process of moving toward some spiritual end.

All three of these French thinkers promoted some common ideas and concepts that appear in one form or another in Freire's spirituality:

1. All three emphasize humanity as the starting point for theological or philosophical endeavor;
2. All three remain hopeful in the face of bleakness of their historical times (World Wars I and II, the Depression);
3. All three believe in humankind's transcendent capacity to remain dynamic in resistance to overwhelming forces of oppression;
4. All three are eclectic in their approach to philosophy and theology, all with the goal that reason serves faith. (Kuhne, 1998, p. 83)

Freiren Spirituality and Liberation Theology.

Kuhne (1998) viewed Freire's liberation theology as "a spiritual pedagogy and a pedagogical spirituality" (p. 93). Schipani (1981) marveled at how Freire had worked out the meaning and implications of his own faith in relation to education. Schipani (1981) described characteristics of Freire's religious and theological epistemology:

- A conception of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, that is, a God actively engaged in the development of humanity and in the course of human events.
- Jesus of Nazareth is perceived as a radical transformer or the liberator who calls people to realize human life in a community of freedom and love.
- The church is called to be an effective living witness of liberation, an agent of hope actually involved in the struggle against all manifestations of oppression and alienation. The Christian Gospel is essentially prophetic, utopian, and revolutionary (Schipani, 1981, p. 56).

Paulo Freire's methodology of critical consciousness contained spiritual metaphors that flow from the characteristics noted above. In Politics of Education, Freire (1985) stated that "those who don't make their Easter, in the sense of dying in order to be reborn, are not real Christians" (p. 13). This statement makes it difficult to argue for a

reading of the resurrection metaphor as anything but a spiritual and religious light. In one of his most direct statements regarding his spirituality, Freire declared:

I never yet felt that I had to leave the Church, or set aside my Christian convictions, in order to say what I have to say, or go to jail, or even refuse to. I just feel passionately, corporately, physically, with all my being, that my stance is a Christian one because it is 100 percent revolutionary and human and liberating. (p. 187)

Men and women's vocation is humanization; it is in the soul of each (Freire, 1970). In other terms, the primary reality of all people is growth toward a liberating spirituality. It is embedded and permeates the "anima," the spiritual dimension of each human being. Freire (1971) looks at humankind's struggle for emancipation, especially the poor from marginalized cultures from a spiritual perspective. In Pedagogy of the Heart (1987), Freire expressed more of these kinds of thoughts:

- Salvation implies liberation. (p. 104)
- Spirituality is faith in who sustains, motivates, and challenges me. Faith has never allowed me to stop. In my faith I am mobilized and engaged in action. (p. 134)
- This is the prayer of the believer. Ask God for strength and courage to fight with dedication to overcome injustice. Faith is the power to struggle for a more people centered society. (p. 105)

Freire's Influence of Gustavo Gutierrez

Many theologians and liberationists refer time and again to the importance of Friere's theory of the conscientization process for liberation to occur. However, the best known is Gustavo Gutierrez, whose A Theology of Liberation was published in Spanish in 1971, a year after the seminal Pedagogy of the Oppressed in 1970 by Freire. Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest, accepted Freire's theology that viewed Jesus as a liberator of the poor. For him, Christianity is a way of life that committed persons have the responsibility to build the kingdom of compassion, justice, and reconciliation on the earth. Gutierrez's

theology of liberation is born when faith confronts the injustice of the poor. This confrontation of faith, in association with the reality of poverty, is summarized in the expression “preferential option for the poor” as declared in 1968 by the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin, Colombia. Gutierrez’s seminal concepts in which he defined liberation theology given at the conference are found in his published book, A Theology of Liberation:

The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society. This theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle that the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors.

Liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and dignified life, the creation of new humankind—all pass through this struggle. (p. 174)

In the English translation of A Theology of Liberation, Gutierrez (1973) spoke of the need for and the importance of spirituality of liberation. He realized from the beginning that a theology that does not come out of an authentic encounter with the Lord (the creator/spirit in indigenous terms) could never be fruitful. Real engagement fuses together the spiritual experiences of the transcendent with a person’s daily interactions of compassion with others, especially those in need. More than ten years later in We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People, Gutierrez (1984) viewed spirituality as involvement in the world and solidarity with the masses of the poor who struggle to be fully alive. In the struggle for liberation for the sake of love and justice, Gutierrez saw a distinctive way of following Jesus coming into existence among the poor of Latin America. Solidarity with the poor, in their struggle for freedom from the mechanisms of domination, required what he termed “conversion” (p. 96).

It is important to note that, for Gutierrez (1984), “authentic theological reflection has its basis in contemplation and in practice” (p. 136). One can detect the incorporation

of Freire's influence. For Gutierrez, theological reflection consisted of becoming critically conscious in matters of spirit as they are embedded in the daily experiences of people born out of their solitude and community. Gutierrez (1984) concluded his work with the following words:

Discourse on faith reflects a way of living the faith; it has to do with the following of Jesus. As a matter of fact our methodology is our spirituality. My aim on these pages has been to reflect on the experiences of walking that is going on today in Latin America, the experience of the road to holiness. Spirituality is a community enterprise. It is the passage of a people through the solitude and dangers of the desert, as it carves out its way in the following Jesus of Nazareth. This spiritual experience is the well from which we must drink. From it we draw the promise of resurrection (p. 137)

The uniqueness of these two men's perceptions of liberation theology permeated their praxis (action) as spiritual pedagogy and pedagogical spirituality. For Freire, there was an inherent connection between liberation theology and liberation pedagogy. The nature of the relation between the two strands is the dynamic of spirituality. It is through spirituality and critical consciousness that justice is addressed and the emancipation of the oppressed becomes a reality in a person's lived experiences, including one's journey in higher education.

Related Literature on Persistence

There is an overabundance of research on retention, for example (Rendon, 1995; Cummings, 1992; Nora and Rendon, 1989; Rendon et al, 1988; Astin, 1985; Terenzini, 1987; Richardson and Bender, 1987; Santiago, 1986; Lopez and Madrid, 1976, Macias, 1976; and Tinto, 1975). Another term commonly used in the literature is "persistence." The standards for persistence among college and university students are based on traditional subjects (the traditional white, middle-class, male university student) used in research studies (Lee, 1985; Wilson and Melendez, 1985; Astin, 1982). In those studies

that focus on minority students, the literature makes the distinction among retention, attrition, and lack of persistence among the Hispanic and Mexican American student both in community colleges and universities. Studies on both Hispanic and minority students, with foci on the attrition and dropout rates from colleges and universities, are indicative of what I call the use of deficit methodological models. Criteria used for the mainstream college student are used to examine why minority students fail. The emphasis is on why minority students fail, not on why they do not persist and why they are not resilient. Such studies focus on the deficits of college students of color. An important unanswered question is, "Why is there no research that considers the strengths of minority students, especially Mexican American Chicana (o), who persist in colleges and universities?"

There is also a need for research literature specific to Mexican American Chicanas (os) in the retention/attrition areas but viewed from a cultural perspective (Muñiz 1994). The past studies have focused on those negative experiences that cause Mexican American Chicana (o) college students to drop out of college. However, there is a lack of other perspectives that look at persistence by addressing the untapped potential of adult learners given their particular context of culture, class, and gender. What is needed is persistence literature from other standpoints.

The voices of those persons from cultures of silence must be heard instead of the voice of educational authority. The dominant voice of the school pressures students to acquiesce to a dominant socialization process of education. It stifles the heart, petrifies the humanity, and eventually leads to "loss of soul" (Reyes, 1992). For those Mexican American Chicana (o) students who are persistent, another perspective is needed that stems from a positive model. My research is based on such a perspective.

The majority of the literature on academic persistence has been on non-ethnic students. The literature provides models of attrition that have focused on criteria particular to the traditional white, middle-class, male university student: academic

preparation, social integration, financial stability, and cultural congruence. The richness of diversity has not been taken into consideration. Tinto (1975), a leader in retention studies for the past twenty years, has provided models of retention and departure. His model on departure (attrition) appears to suggest that all individuals, regardless of race, class, or gender, must affiliate with the current academic and social systems of the institution. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds who do not persist have been measured based by such standards.

Provost (1988) notes that factors in the environment such as peer group relations, involvement, and campus residency are indicative of persistence. Genera (1993) is of the position that students persist if successful in the following areas: academic and personal assessment; academic and career counseling; cooperative learning/peer group support; mentoring; and parent interaction. Awe (1995) notes that Pascarella and Terenzini found significant differences in the perceived academic and social integration for persisters and non-persisters.

At the same time, the major foci of many studies are placed on the relative importance of academic persistence of cognitive or non-cognitive factors other than race-related status (Brady, 1991). Bennett (1996) is of the position that for bilingual college students to persist, they had ethnic bias to overcome and the need to master the English language. The conclusion is: students will persist and succeed if they take the initiative to become economically self-sufficient and maintain a strong trust in education.

Barhona (1990) found that first-generation students are disadvantaged well before entering college, which makes it difficult for them to attend college and, later, to persist in college. Earlier research tended to be student centered in "blame the victim" explanations, according to Pincus and Decamp (1989). Researchers argued that low attainment rates for students from low income and minority backgrounds are related to such factors as personal characteristics associated with the individual and the home environment as well

as associated with poor academic performance and preparation in high school (Astin and Burciaga, 1981).

For the few traditional studies that focus on the influence of race and culture on persistence, there seem to be conflicting findings. For example, Perry (1981) concluded that racial factors are not strong predictors of persistence. Davis (1991) is of the position that non-Caucasian students have the least probability of completing a degree and are most likely to leave school, often after only one or two terms. However, Davis differed from Perry (1981) in that students' race has a greater impact on academic success than all other variables. For those who attempted to research cultural criteria on persistence, Helm (1994) saw no relationship between general and social efficacy, locus of control, or spirituality on academic success.

Other studies, particular to African American students, have focused on interpersonal interactions and social adjustments. Bourne (1995), in looking at adjustment modes among African American college students, identified five pertinent areas: (1) alienation/isolation; (2) assimilation/acculturation; (3) biculturalism; (4) particular ethnicity; and (5) cultural relativism. The areas of acculturation and assimilation and biculturalism were significant for the study in that Mexican American Chicana (o) students, who may not perceive spirituality as influencing their persistence, either attribute it or are influenced merely by the presence of these adjustment modes. One's identity stems from the roots of the person's particular culture. However, when one is pressured to relinquish elements of culture (directly or in very subtle ways), one may (consciously or unconsciously) adjust or feel forced to survive due to the loss of soul. In trying to persevere with a fractured identity and a broken heart, one capitulates to adjustment modes.

Some literature began to address elements of the spiritual in terms of students negotiating the collegiate experience. Anderson (1991), in studying African Americans,

found that these students highly respect traditional Afrocentric values such as spirituality, harmony, and group support within the community when choosing coping strategies. Addison (1996) noted that high spirituality more consistently relates to college adjustment, coping resources, and locus of control than does religious affiliation. Sharp (1998), who studied returning students, recorded that a spiritual outlook on life helped adult students cope with demands made by the return to college and, in turn, offered hope for success.

Concern about retention of students and attrition rate of students from diverse cultural backgrounds must be viewed from another perspective hitherto not considered. My research on persistence and spirituality from an indigenous approach requires administrators and educators take action to facilitate the development and academic success of these students.

Related Literature on Assimilation/Acculturation

Generations of Mexican American Chicana (o) students have undergone degrees of assimilation, especially in the American institution called school. This long-term process, unconscious for most students, has resulted in the loss of cultural aspects such as language, customs, and spirituality. According to Chicano authors and scholars, there has been a "Loss of Soul" (Reyes, 1993) among the current generations. Reyes (1993) passionately articulated—at the annual 1999 Northwest Association of Special Programs for TRIO professionals and educators—for a Chicano Paradigm, which calls for a "reclaiming of our soul."

Anzaldúa (1993) sees the "mestiza (o)," who is labeled as "Mexican American Chicana (o)" or "Hispanic," as straddling two or more cultures. In her work, Toward a New Consciousness (1993), it is her position that we, as educators, who serve the new majority of students, must create a new mythos. It needs to consist of an indigenous

New Consciousness (1993), it is her position that we, as educators, who serve the new majority of students, must create a new mythos. It needs to consist of an indigenous consciousness in which there is a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave. What has occurred over the years, especially through the institution of schooling, has been the systematic development of the dominant society's consciousness into our youth. It has been termed as the "socialization process" in which there is the gradual eroding of perspectives and ways of knowing handed on to the younger by family members. Such a process has created an ongoing tension within the youth between the values of the home culture and those of the school culture. And the perceptions, values, ways of interacting, and ways of knowing are reflected of the society at large.

Loss of Soul

Acculturation has been defined as culture change, which results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936). This is the process of adjustment that a person of an another culture goes through when adapting to the dominant culture. Nieto (1996) understands acculturation when one group takes on and incorporates one or more cultural traits of another group. This additive process results in new or blended cultural patterns of the new group to the dominant group. However, the culture of the new group in society will remain intact when it comes to value systems, social interaction styles, language usage patterns, and gesture expressions.

Different from acculturation, assimilation occurs when the new group or person takes on the traits of another culture, leaving behind the original cultural identity (Banks, 1994). There is a letting go of inherited customs and manners. Language is one of the first important elements of the home culture to be lost. Under the pressure of trying to fit in and be accepted by the dominant group, there is the slow process of losing pride in their cultural background. In addition, the assimilation process causes a person to lack the desire to maintain their language and culture as they interact in the dominant society.

Reclaiming of Soul

Pizarro's (1993) The Development and Significance of Racial Consciousness among Chicana (o) and Latina (o) High Youth speaks to the connection between levels of one's consciousness to the degrees of assimilation. What I termed as "loss of soul" and the need for the "reclamation of one's spirit," Pizarro views as degrees of informed consciousness. Two of the aims of his study were to determine how Chicano students' racial consciousness is formed and to make connections between racial consciousness and student outcomes.

In citing critical theorists such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1989), Apple (1982), and Aronowitz (1985), Pizarro agrees with them that the constant lower class, educational, and economic statuses held by racial minorities in this country are a function of the dominant culture's design. Pizarro's review of the literature regarding the need for an empowering education explains that minority students must be allowed to become active in their schooling. Their experiences and their significance both as students and co-educators with the school must be accepted and respected (Ashcroft, 1987; Comer, 1985; Cummins, 1986; Garcia and Noble, 1987; Simon, 1987). Such non-traditional treatment has had a devastating impact upon Chicano/Latino students' views of school, thus, affecting their behaviors and their personhood.

The students in Pizarro's study shared experiences of failure. Of the many citations in his dissertation, the following is an example of the participants' voice:

They [teacher] need to pay more attention to us, you know, not just like be "another Latino, whatever." I mean like ... really pay more attention to us and...it'll give us more self-esteem ... and then we'll try, you know. If they give us more attention, we'll know that someone cares...that we can become someone. (p. 88)

Pizarro concluded that few Hispanic/Latino students are at the level of informed racial consciousness. Those students at the informed level see the need for change and

action. They are critically conscious of the impact upon their psyches (souls) by conformity to the dominant culture. They are more informed by the continual messages from teachers, administrators, and parents, which push them towards adopting a model of individual success and improvement. For Pizarro (1993), Chicano/Latino students are in a state of “learned helplessness” (p. 135) where they believe there is nothing they can do about the problems they perceive. He believes that when students have someone who serves as a promoter of their racial consciousness, they become more aware of the issues that relate to them as Chicanos/Latinos in this society and their consciousness becomes more informed. When they have a promoter for their educational success, they will do well in school.

Pizarro’s position is consistent with his discussions on Freire’s point that pedagogy for the oppressed must include an education for critical consciousness. The students’ lack of racial consciousness coupled with the assimilation process they experienced gives rise to “loss of soul in our youth” (Reyes, 1992). Unfortunately, by remaining uninformed, students engage in conformity which does not challenge the myriad of school practices that contribute to their school failure, but more importantly, that do not support their internal strengths.

Related Literature on Academics of the Heart

Rendon (1999), who has done numerous studies on Hispanic students, has called for a spirituality model in higher education. She cites the following characteristics needed, as postsecondary education is experiencing a “new majority” of learners coming to the community colleges and universities: (1) honor diverse ways of knowing; (2) practice relationship centered teaching and learning; (3) engage the heart and intellect; (4) engage in contemplative thought; (5) honor differences and togetherness; (6) commit to compassionate action; and (7) celebrate in body, mind, heart, and spirit. These elements

are related to Hall's (1986) work on high context cultures, Shor and Freire (1998) on Liberatory Education, Palmer's (1998) spirituality motif in teaching, and hooks (1994) in teachers giving voice to adult learners.

Given the seven characteristics espoused by Rendon (1999) above, selected characteristics will be discussed at this time. First, honoring diverse ways of knowing challenges Blake's (1996) position that all ways of knowing are to be cognitive and abstract. For him, education must remain secular. He is against any sort of spiritual education, whether it comes from religious perspectives or indigenous worldviews. On the other hand, Huebner (1995) sees the need for the fusion of education and spirituality. For him, knowledge can also be seen as sacred.

A second characteristic of this particular discussion of a spirituality model for higher education is the relationship-centered teaching and learning perspective. According to Valadez (1993), a pedagogy inclusive of the affective domain as well as the learners' realities and cultural perspectives is needed and to be valued, especially for the new majority of students who come from high-context cultures (Hall, 1986). Such cultures reason through intuition and interact not from a functional standpoint but from a relational point of view. Community colleges and universities must be transformed to include other perspectives in order to address the need to re-create their role of fostering minority student achievement. Institutions are challenged to embrace the students' ways of knowing that may be stronger on the side of humanity and the spiritual than the secular, pragmatic, and technological side of education. Dickmann (1980) supports the emergence of a new construct in which learning practitioners engage the heart and intellect.

A third characteristic of Rendon's (1999) model is engaging the learner in contemplative thought. The soul of active learning (Jacobsen, 1995) is the balance of the cognitive with the affective domains of the human being. A non-consumption view of information and knowledge brings the adult learner to another level of thinking. Pizarro (1998), in *Contesting Dehumanization: Chicana/o Spiritualization*, calls for a new mode of learning in which the content, process, and context for new knowledge is intertwined with other domains of the learner. Knowledge acquisition must be inextricably connected

with the learners' humanity (spirituality). The learners' humanity was developed in the home culture just as their way of learning. And such dimensions were shared by the parents and the elders as "truth telling", that is to say, through stories. Wisdom of the elders was interconnected with the lived experiences of the core family, extended family members, and well as the many influences of the outside world.

Section Summary

The topic of spirituality must come to the forefront of the persistence literature. Students come into the school system with cultural strengths but they are not recognized and respected, let alone are these other dimensions of being and knowing utilized in the teaching and learning process. Both the students and their cultural strengths are the descendents of a people who have endured. The persistence literature has been pejorative when the focus is on students of color. Attrition rates among African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics are euphemisms for the dropouts, that other class of people who have somehow entered higher education. Education needs research that observes and listens to students who know how to succeed according to strengths within their culture. Acculturation and assimilation processes of the past must be seen for what they are: tools of continuing colonization and domination of peoples. In our own times, each one of us continues to be acculturated and assimilated in the ways and standards of the dominant culture. I have been acculturated and assimilated in this society. I have become bicultural. However, the full human development of peoples calls for a recognition and respect of one's heritage. Organizations which commit to understanding, appreciating, and being in solidarity with different cultural groups participate in the emancipation and transformation of those groups who have been on the margins of society. There is a need to change higher education and its praxis from a one-dimensional enterprise both in the delivery and consumption of knowledge to a multidimensional endeavor in which there is a balance between cognitive and the affective domains. There is the urgent need to reflect

on the concepts and issues of spirituality, persistence, assimilation, and academic learning from cultural perspectives.

The above review of the related literature lacked direct information regarding college students and spirituality as well as literature particular to Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students and their spiritual roots. A person's identity and soul are found in the roots of one's culture. Cultural upbringing yields not only customs and behaviors but also consciousness, matters of spirit, and ways of knowing. As noted earlier in the words of Freire, (1987): It is spirituality that sustains, motivates, and challenges."

Challenges and struggles are part of the experiences of all learners, many of whom come from a legacy of oppressed histories. And these realities are also encountered in the collegiate experience. Yet, spirituality can sustain persons through academic, social, and cultural barriers of persisting. More so, spirituality and education can lead to one's vocation to address the needs of humankind (Freire, 1970; Gutierrez, 1973; King, 1967) from a particular perspective and/or a combination of perspectives (De La Salle, 1643; Freire, 1997; Heschel, 1962; Mezirow, 1990).

Persistence literature, which typically focuses on minority students who do not graduate, is studied from the traditional benchmarks used for all students. The present study arises from this overwhelming need to look at the persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) college students from a research perspective different from traditional studies. Kuhne (1998) noted that Freire (1974) focused on an education that contributed to human development, but from a political perspective. His view of education was opened to the learner and his/her context. Freire's (1998) passion and vision for a liberating education were grounded in his spirituality of love, justice, and hope.

Infusion of academics of the heart becomes present through relationship-centered teaching and learning (Rendon, 1999). Pizarro (1998) calls it "connecting intellectual inquiry with humanity and spirituality" (p. 47). Rendon (1999) articulates the need among the learners for a learning that touches the heart and is centered in relations. Critical reflection is enabled through dialogue; in-depth dialogue leads to action.

The current related literature had informed me to a certain point. Reading the text of these words must now be balanced with the reading of another text, the words of the participants who voiced their experiences of spirituality as connected to education, family, interaction, and persistence in the academy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY -- AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH

Let me first make it clear that I refuse to accept a certain type of scientific criticism that insinuates that I lack rigor in the way I deal with these issues or the over affective language I use in this process. The passion with which I know, I speak, or I write does not, in any way, diminish the commitment with which I denounce or announce. I am a totality and not a dichotomy. I do not have a side of me that is schematic, meticulous, nationalist, and another side that is disarticulated or imprecise, which simply likes the world. I know with my entire body, with feelings, with passion, and also with reason.
(Freire, 1992, p. 30)

Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, the research study was multidimensional. The third chapter first includes the rationale for the qualitative case study approach from a critical theory perspective. Second, I will explain the use of the particular critical theory approach used. Third, I will give the rationale for the lens through which the study was conducted: a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective. Also presented will be salient information on the researcher and the participants' backgrounds. The fourth part of this section describes the case site and participant selection process. Fifth is a review of the study's design and its elements. The latter includes the actual data collection process as well as the reflective and critical analysis methods used. The chapter will conclude with strategies actually used to ensure trustworthiness of the data that was collected.

Rationale for a Critical Theory Approach

The relative pros and cons of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective inquiry paradigms have been well-documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990; Smith, 1983). Patton (1990) has

contrasted these two competing methodological paradigms: logical positivism uses quantitative and experimental methods to test deductive generalizations while critical and phenomenological inquiries use qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in a particular group (Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman, 1987). Bender (1993) stated that the qualitative researcher desires to understand unique human experiences and to share both the understanding and the process of that understanding with the reader (p. 60).

As Patton (1990) suggested, the decision regarding which methodological paradigm to follow should lie in the appropriateness of the method based on "purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available" (p. 39). Yin (1994) also outlined three conditions the researcher should consider when choosing a research strategy: "(1) the type of research question (s) posed; (2) the extend of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events; and (3) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events" (p. 4).

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to understand the participants' descriptions and meanings of spirituality as well as their critical reflection on the influence of their spirituality with their persistence in higher education. It was therefore required that qualitative research methods undertaken in this study we beyond those used for determining "the essence or essences of the shared experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 70). Furthermore, a combination of strategies seen and used from a cultural perspective was employed in order to bring out and describe the connection between truth and experience (Mirandé, 1985). As a critical theorist I focused on the oppression of a people in one area, namely, the experiences of Mexican American Chicana(o) students navigating through higher education. The research methods used allowed the participants to voice those experiences and subsequent critical insights.

Critical Theory Defined

Early critical theorists, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jurgen Habermas, were concerned with the dominance of positivist science and the degree to which it had become a powerful element in 20th Century ideology. These critical thinkers argued that science had become “scientistic”, believing in its supreme power to answer all significant questions. They saw a great danger for modern society: the threat of reason itself. Reason had been replaced by technique (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). In the middle and late 1960s, Habermas believed that modern science was “inherently oriented to possible technical control” (Outhwaite, 1994). For these men of the Frankfurt School, the intellectual project of critical theory was to recover from early philosophy the elements of social thought that uniquely concerned the values, judgements, and interests of humankind. Habermas was concerned that “scientism, science’s belief in itself” (Outhwaite, 1994, p. 26) evaluated all human knowledge in terms of natural scientific knowledge. He was of the position that there were different kinds of knowledge that were shaped by the particular human interest they serve. He felt the need to develop a systematic critique of positivism. Habermas contended that human knowledge is constituted by virtue of three knowledges: constitutive interests which he labeled the “technical,” the “practical,” and the “emancipatory” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

As a result, seeing knowledge and the communication of that knowledge through language, Habermas (1963) called for social sciences to require a non-scientistic methodology. Adorno (1947) and Simmel and Lukacs (1950) also became skeptics of empirical research. Criticalists maintained that research studies in the social sciences—ranging from the political, economical, gender, educational, and religious spheres—must be seen, analyzed, and interpreted through the experiences of those people at the bottom of any social pyramid, that is, the oppressed. Today’s social scientists view the political and

religious patriarchy in which “we have lived has deprived us of the creative dialectic of masculine-feminine” (Abalos, 1992, p. 139). Abalos goes on to say that to “rediscover this in ourselves will be to rediscover women as concrete persons and end the frozen structures that violate us, both men and women” (p. 139). Having become more aware of the original forms of critical theory such as economic and gender oppression, I moved to a form of oppression in the educational domain in the present study.

Critical Theory Research Defined

Critical theory research maintains that all men and women are potentially active agents in the construction of their social world, the knowledge of that world and their interests, and their personal lives. Its core agenda seeks the empowerment of people through the transformation of self and reality (Ada & Beutel, 1993; Freire, 1974, 1994). Critical theory research engages its participants in a process of active self-understanding of oppression. To be consistent with this perspective of people, I used a methodology based on dialogue rather than the scientific behavior of observation or experimental manipulation of people as subjects.

Comstock’s (1989) methodology is based on the same principle of Habermas (1963): “society is a human construction and people are active subjects of that construction” (p 371). Congruent with critical theory’s view of knowledge as “emanipatory,” the construction of knowledge frees the participants from outmoded and reified conceptions of reality. Participants are engaged in intersubjective understanding and agreement on the norms, values, and meanings of the particular phenomena.

Aims and Characteristics of Critical Theory Research

Three aims of critical theory research that were pertinent to this study according to Comstock (1989) are:

- (1) To begin from the intersubjective experiences and understandings of participants in their social setting;
- (2) To enlighten the participants in self-knowledge as they read their world; and
- (3) To return participants with a program of education and action designed to change their understandings and their social conditions (p. 378).

Freire (1995), from the perspective of his adult literacy process, complements these aims by his reading of one's circumstances as arriving at the critical level of knowing by beginning with the learner's experience of the situation and the "real context" (p. 53). Comstock (1989) says, "self-conscious practice will liberate human beings from ideologically frozen conceptions of the actual and the possible" (p. 179). Comstock also sees the aim of critical theory research as a process of empowerment whereby participants are able to construct a coherent account of the underpinnings they have of their world. Its effect is to heighten its subject's self-awareness of their collective potential as the active agents of history. Active engagement of the participants in the research process increases the awareness of social action and subsequent effective political involvement. Comstock's (1989) research method focuses on the emancipation of those groups and classes that are presently being dominated. I combined Comstock's (1989) method with Freire's, (1985) processes of dialogue, reflection, and critical consciousness.

Gall & Gall and Borg (1999) see critical theory research based on the following assumptions:

- Certain groups are privileged over other groups. Certain groups have greater opportunity than other groups.

- Oppression has many faces. It examines cultural categories that are used to separate social class, at risk characteristics, and marked language.
- Language is central to the foundation of subjectivity. (p. 361)

The criteria of truth for critical research centers on the following principles.

Human beings change themselves by reconstructing the society. They can attribute meaning to the social process. Truth claims emanate from the participants through their values, language, and action. The interaction of the awareness of aims and of process is the basis for planning action, which implies methods, objectives, and value options (Freire, 1985).

Critical Theory Research Process

The particular critical theory approach used in this study comes from Comstock's (1989) "A Method for Critical Research." It consists of seven phases.

- (1) Identify social groups whose interests are progressive.
- (2) Develop an interpretive understanding of the inter-subjective meanings, values, and motives held by the subjects.
- (3) Study the historical development of the social conditions and the current social structures that constrain the participants' actions and shape their understandings as a result of current actions based on frozen ideologies.
- (4) Construct models of the determinate relations between social conditions; intersubjective interpretations of those conditions; and participants' actions.
- (5) Elucidate the fundamental contradictions that are developing understandings.
- (6) Participate in a program of education with the subjects that gives them new ways of seeing their situation.
- (7) Participate in a theoretically grounded program of action that will change social conditions and, in addition, will engender new less-alienated understandings and needs. (pp. 379-386)

This study focused on the first two phases. The rationale was provided at the beginning of the study (see pages 1 & 2). The six Mexican American Chicana (o) student participants were encouraged to voice their intersubjective meanings and values of their spirituality as related to their persistence to complete their university degrees.

The phenomenological perspective for this study was built on the philosophies of Hegel (1770-1831), Heidegger (1970), and Husserl (1965). Hegel referred to phenomenology as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Heidegger (1970) believed "imagination as the root of the two stems of knowledge: understanding and intuition" (p. 11). The German philosopher Husserl (1965) defined this science as "the study of how people describe things and experience them through the senses" (Lauer, 1965). His basic assumption of phenomenology was:

That we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness. Initially, all our understanding comes from sensory experience of phenomena, but that experience must be described, explicated, and interpreted.... Interpretation is essential to an understanding of experience and the experience includes interpretation. (Lauer, 1965)

Husserl, according to Levinas (1973), was "concerned with the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge and believed that meaning is created when the object is brought to consciousness" (p. 27). The focus of phenomenology is on truth according to the person. The basis of knowledge is held within the self and knowledge becomes a reality only when brought forth to perception and consciousness. Elias (1994), who viewed Freire as a phenomenologist, noted that:

He was deeply involved in describing stages of human consciousness and the process of changing consciousness. He accepts the principle that exploration of consciousness is necessary for knowledge of reality, since this exploration enables the knower to study the reality that appears to the perceiving subject (p. 37).

Langer (1989) connects phenomenology, as a methodological assumption, to existentialist philosophy as a means to awaken persons to an awareness of their fundamental involvement in a natural-historical-cultural milieu. She sees the existentialist perspective as a basis for the science phenomenology and stresses that women and men are not neutral observers rather are active participants in an ongoing, open-ended, social-historical-cultural drama. It is at this juncture that I saw the critical theory, phenomenological, and existentialist perspectives intersecting and supporting this study's methodological approach. By connecting these three viewpoints with Freire's spirituality, my focus as a researcher was to encourage the participants to voice the keen awareness of their cultural strengths as well as of their freedoms and responsibilities in the shaping their present situation.

Only by securing this foundation through the phenomenological phase did the co-investigators proceed to the next phases of the critical theory research. At the outset, the phenomenological phase was undertaken in this study. The designed strategies were aids for the participants to articulate their experiences of spirituality from their cultural upbringings as well as the experiences of that spirituality as they persisted in the university. From this step, a critique emerged from the participants' reflections and interactions with one another. It was only through dialogue in the phenomenological phase that succeeding phases of the critical theory approach emerged (Comstock, 1989, p. 385). To reiterate, this research study concentrated on the in-depth dialogue regarding the phenomenology of spirituality with the participants' persistence in the university.

The methodological focus in the phenomenological phase of the critical research approach employed was dialogic and reflective. Its method was dialogue (Freire, 1971; Comstock, 1989). As such, the employment of dialogue was an essential component to the research process. According to Park (1989), the dialogue did indeed played a vital role in the research process. To dialogue meant to talk as partners in an exchange of not only

information but also of sentiment and values. Dialogue became the means of discovering the shared problem, the connection of lives, and the common ground for action. (p. 12)

Dialogue engages deep thoughts and emotions and allows for “naming of one’s world” (Freire, 1970, p. 69). In dialogue, each person reveals part of herself/ himself and enters the dialogue with the hope and trust that people are capable not only of knowing but knowing more profoundly (Ada and Beutel, 1993, p. 88).

I entered into dialogue to affect the participants’ heightened self-awareness of their personal and collective potential. This dialogic interaction was not intended to generalize on their human experiences; rather it was a reflection of their persistence experiences and both the participants and myself learned from one another and at the same time (Lango, 1999). Freire (1985), in The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation, notes:

The dialogue process as an act of knowing implies the existence of two interrelated contexts. One is the context of authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects. This is what schools should be—the theoretical context of dialogue. The second is the real, concrete context of facts, the social reality in which men [and women] exist (p. 51).

At the same time, my responsibility as an educational researcher was to “listen loudly to what [the] participant has to say...” (Ada and Beutel, 1993, p. 88). The mere recounting of participants’ experiences about how spirituality and persistence unfold while at the university must go beyond memorization. As an educator who experienced the act of knowing, together with her/his students, through dialogue is the sign of the act of knowing. As an educational researcher I found that I had to listen, clarify, and record carefully the “wisdom of self” in each person (Ioga, 1988).

Emerging Chicana (o) Perspective

Traditional research, according to Mirandé (1985) in The Chicano Experience. An Alternative Perspective, is one in which I as a “researcher, from a diverse cultural background, may be pressured to adopt a prevailing perspective and to reject, directly or indirectly, one’s cultural heritage” (p. 204). This study was unique in that the cultural background of both the research participants and myself were the same. It was therefore imperative that the methodology perspective embraced the culture heritage of both. The research study also operationalized through an indigenous methodology the interconnections of spirituality, education, and social-economic realities. Furthermore, a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective guided the study. The participants, who were co-investigators, and I sought the truth of the influence of spirituality that is so embedded in our culture. There was need for a perspective that was compatible and respectful of both the participants and researcher’s uniqueness and richness in the areas of communication modes, ways of reasoning and knowing, reflection and analysis, construction of meaning of a phenomena, and subsequent action (Freire, 1997). These processes needed to spring from within our own culture.

I saw that the practice of a methodology that connects, unites, and embraces the “both/and” of the lived experiences of the sacred among Mexican American Chicana (o) would speak of recognition and respect for both the participant and the researcher. A perspective that separates the person from her/his milieu is unacceptable from a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective (Mirandé, 1985). Bernal (1998) strongly expressed the great need for an *indigenous methodology*. “A Chicana (o) [*religio methodology*] addresses the failure of traditional research paradigms that have distorted or omitted the history” and knowledge of Mexican American Chicana (o) persistence in college. (p. 7) Standfield II (1998) echoed a similar compelling viewpoint: “For some educators of

culturally diverse backgrounds it is time to step out; for all of us are compelled to create indigenous theories and methods to grasp the ontological essence of people” (p. 352).

From this perspective, I viewed the Mexican American Chicana (o) as the fusion of two cultures resulting in *mestizaje*, the new race of the Spaniard father and the indigenous mother. Due to the four hundred years of a combination of conquest, colonization, internal colonization, and discrimination from society’s institution, there has been an active consciousness of Mexican American Chicano(a) people of resisting oppression. The Chicana (o) culture became adaptive with coping mechanisms that provide warmth and support in an otherwise hostile environment.

Out of this context of *mestizaje*, La Raza’s values include: oneness with nature; welfare of the group; openness in the expression of feelings; verbal humor; and art. There is also the importance of welfare and feelings of others, courtesy and manners, diplomacy and tactfulness, solitude, elaborate and indirect expression, respect, and subjectivity (Mirandé, 1985).

Significant for our methodological purposes, the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture embodies a richness, nuance, and complexity of language; unity of person with her/his social context; unity of participation and observation; and a unity that merges and unifies truth and feeling. Below (Figure 3.1) is a graphic of the Chicano experience as compared to the dominant culture.

Figure 3.1
Indigenous Methodology

Indigenous Perspective of Lived Experiences	Non-Chicana (o) Perspective of Lived Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect of nature. • Learning through intuition and feelings. • Cooperative. • Concern for welfare of the group. • Live in order to work. • Relations as for bonding with persons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjugation of nature. • Learning through ideas and abstraction. • Competitive. • Concern for success of the individual. • Work in order to live. • Relations as a function between persons.

From Mirandé, (1985) in The Chicano Experience. An Alternative Perspective.

Such a critical indigenous methodology embraces the cultural understanding: the “border knowledge” students bring to the research process. Rhoads and Valadez (1996) noted that “those who possess border knowledge --- knowledge that resides outside the canon, outside the mainstream --- must be incorporated into a learning community that recognizes distinct groups.” (p. 174). I embraced this view as means to not only understand, but also to empower the participants to re-commit or reclaim the meaning of spirituality in their lives, in the university they attend, and in the society in which they live.

The lived experience of spirituality influencing a person to persist in the university is a subjective one. Thus, this research study concentrated on the phenomenological phase of the critical theory method as elaborated by Comstock (1989). Yet, out of deep reflection and critical process, a new objectivity emerged that speaks authentically and truthfully to the increasing masses of diverse adult learners, including the Mexican

American Chicanas (os). Mirandé (1975) bases his Chicano model of truth and reality in a new way. His way of knowing and perceiving “what is” stems from the following five points.

- (1) Racial richness of the group, including their spirituality;
- (2) The cultural uniqueness, the nuances of the people’s language;
- (3) The very lived experiences of the individual as well as the collective;
- (4) The dynamic contextual cues; and
- (5) A reasoning process that is grasped in the intuitive. (p. 213)

For Mirandé (1975), this way of knowing has its roots in the realities of the indigenous and mestizo person.

According to Rhoads and Valadez (1996), Mexican American Chicano (a) community college transfer students enter the academy with their way of knowing and knowledge base outside the mainstream. The institution must develop structures that encourage the new majority of students to share the knowledge they bring (Jalomo, Rendon, & Terenzini, 1991). As a researcher I, too, needed to develop a “structure” that invited the participants to share the experience and reflection that they possess as they are related to spirituality and persistence. But due to years of the assimilation process, the people are “cut off from the sense of the sacred” (Abalos, 1986, p. 32). The use of an indigenous approach must also be connected not only to the ways of knowing of the researcher, but also to that of the participants. Again Standfield II (1998) was helpful to my perspective: “As educational researchers are faced in serving multicultural adult learners, there is the need to study learners’ experiences within the unique cultural contexts rather than alien cognitive maps for research design” (p. 234). In doing so, the participants would be able to engage more critically on the spiritual aspect of their culture and that their comments and responses would convey the nuances of their biculturality.

A critical theory approach with an extensive phenomenological perspective was best suited for capturing and communicating an analysis of Mexican American Chicana (o) students connecting their spirituality to their humanity as well as the intellectual inquiry process. The phenomenological phase of the critical approach was also more disposed for obtaining descriptions, understandings, and meanings of Mexican American Chicana (o) students' perceptions and experiences regarding the research question.

Coupled with a Chicana (o) perspective, the strategies aided the participants in voicing what they have experienced yet what may also have been forgotten due to the subtle pressures of American schooling. Culturally competent interaction brought forth what may have been very well been lost in the assimilation process. Deep dialogue yielded the richness, loss, and recovery of the spiritual influence of their collegiate experiences.

Researcher's Background

Traditional research methodology would address researcher "bias" at this time. Rather, I speak of positioning my research perspective in terms of Standfield's (1998) "indigenous methodology," Mirandé's (1975) "richness of communication modes," hooks' (1994) "giving voice," and Freire's (1972) "pedagogy of critical consciousness." I express my epistemological perspective which grounds these strategies of the research into a bilingual/bicultural piece of reflection titled "Quien Soy Yo?" A full English translation can be found in the Appendix A.

Quien soy yo?
(Who Am I?)

Soy el hijo de Antonia Cleophas Hidalgo.
Es la mayor de cinco hermanas y un hermano.
La familia de Hidalgo (mi abuelito) y de Cammaduran (mi abuela)
lived Las Vegas, New Mexico

I am the son Marcellano DeLeon Rasca!
Nació in the islands colonized and named after Philip of Spain.
Grandfather Cosme worked with water buffalo. He gave the few *pesos* he had
y su machete to my dad when he left the Philippine Islands at age sixteen.

Mi mamá only went *al grado diez*. *Mi padre* says he went up to grade three.
He worked Alaska's fish canneries, San Joaquin Valley's fields of cotton,
asparagus, y *tomates*. He raised us on his best jobs: hotel busboy in "LA, LA"
land, and then janitor. Mom worked at a 5 and 10 cent store.

My high school was *puro mexicanos y negros*. I applied to a school for
future leadership training *en la comunidad*. Returned letter said they didn't
need anyone with Spanish surnames.

Teacher asked: "*Qué vas hacer después de high school?*" "I donna know." He
got me to college. *Mi mama lloró* when I left. My "Filipino father" in a heavy
accent said "be a good boy" and cried proudly!

Tenia meido at the college! Five hundred miles from Los Angeles! The students
walking behind me would say: "Hey spic, what are you doing here?"
"No greasers here!" Wanted special major. Advisor said, "Best you study
Spanish". Forged his name from then on, and double majored.

Taught East LA *muchachos y muchachas*. I had forgotten
their beautiful olive skin. Reminded me of *mi hermana hermosa*. Coming
home, like I forgot! I disliked and was embarrassed about the old neighbor-
hood. *Mi alma* was lost! Inside I was screaming to reclaim it.
Worked even weekends with the students. They took so much out of me,

Cup was getting empty. By *milagro fui* to Grad school.
Y otra vez, leer y leer (Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Allan Figueroa) y
escribir: "Rationale for a bilingual, bicultural high school education for Mexican
Americans."

Then *la huelga* for teacher rights. Lost my job. *Con mi esposa* Nancy,
Jeremiah Jesus y *los cuates* (David y Jonathan Horacio) *fuimos al norte de*
Califias. At San Joaquin middle school, *la mayoría de los estudiantes eran*
pobres. Stockton was a great place in the San Joaquin Valley.

La directora, Lois Silva, *me preguntó*: "*Quires ser director de escuelas donde*
hay alumnos pobres?" *Otra vez a Grad school*. *Pero el jefe del school district*
me exclamó: "*No me gusta ni queremos, ni nescitamos Mexican-Filipino*
school administrators."

Again, traveled north a Oregon! Soy director, but Oh! *la política*.
Garicas a Dios, me puso en la universidad.

I helped "Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, and poor white students" in Upward Bound, and other TRIO government programs. Para que? *A darles ganas a cumplir grados 6 a 12, ir la universidad*, and persist, *con la amima de nuestra cultura y con college persons who understand them!*

La Virgen has been there all these years. My grandmother had all those candles in front of the picture. Only recently, am I seeing her, *y también su hijo*. He, too, *era un maestro*. The struggle goes on! *Y La Señora* has been there since 1531! *Hijo mío, necesito maestros para nuestra juventud.*

Ojalá! Que tengo amistades que son mis mentors: George Cabrera, Alex Sanchez, Maureen Dolan Castro. Me dicen: "Si se puede! Los colegios no tienen profesores para enseñar y asistir the few Hispanic, African American, Native American, and other poor students y return to la comunidad as leaders.

Quien soy yo? No se! Pero, el Señor sabe. Hermano leo enseñe mujeres y homres come ser maestros..... con el corazón..... del espíritu que vive en los jóvenes y sus padres. Compartir una educación, no solamente para la plata, pero mas importante, para la justicia y la compasión de servir nuestro pueblo.

Cultural Intuition

Complementary to the aforementioned poem is a unique element of my cultural intuition. Dillard (1997) stated that scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds "have argued that members of marginalized groups have a unique viewpoint on our own experiences as a whole." (p. 5). As noted in the poem, I am a member of two cultural groups (Mexican American and Filipino) who have historically been on the margins of American society in such institutions as health, politics, and education. Yet, I have the "theoretical sensitivity—a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Strauss & Corbin (1990) argued that "theoretical sensitivity" comes from four major resources: one's own personal experiences; the existing literature; one's professional experience; and the analytical process itself. I propose that these four sources contribute to any researcher's perspective. It is simply a foundation for a much-needed Mexican American Chicana (o)

methodology. However, it is my cultural intuition which extends my personal experience to include community memory and collective experience.

In particular, this methodology, emanating from cultural intuition as explained above, is open to the community memory and collective experience of the sacred of both the participants and the researcher. The participants' perspective from personal experiences, readings, popular culture, learner experiences in predominantly white community colleges and universities, and the degree of biculturality at home and in society are the visceral "stuff" for their reflection, analysis, synthesis, and transformation. As a cultural entity we, as Mexican American Chicanas (os), need to voice our needs. There is suffering and pain as well as joy that need to be voiced in order to be healed, to be transformed, to be liberated from the systems of oppression (Auzaldua, 1994). As a researcher from the same culture, I was able to understand "los matices" (shades of meaning) as the participants naturally merge truth and feelings in their reflections, conversations, stories, and sayings.

This is the underpinning for having the participants engage also in the *círculos de cultura* (stimulate the community memory) and engaged in the analysis of the data (animate the collective experience). Without an acknowledgement of cultural intuition within the field of education, I am restricted by the cultural hegemonic domination in educational research (Bernal, 1998).

Indigenous Approach

The qualitative tools and techniques were culturally compatible and reflected the internal diversity of the participants. In addition to using "high-context culture" characteristics of reasoning and relationships among the researcher and the co-

investigators, there was also a primary referent to the Mexican American Chicana (o) community of the surrounding region.

Design

The naturalistic and inductive nature of this qualitative inquiry necessitated a flexible and developmental design. Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to this characteristic as “emergent design,” in which the researcher must be sensitive and alert to emergent themes within the data as the investigation begins. Cultural variations were used (Bogdan, 1998). In particular, bilingual and bicultural conversations were encouraged during the preliminary meeting with each of the participants. The manner of *presence* between the researcher and the participants was culturally sensitive in such areas as the emotional tones of the conversations and their use of metaphors. I treated the participants as experts of their cultural perspective when engaged in deep dialogue (Gall & Gall, 1999, p. 293) as they described and made meaning of their spirituality in the context of persistence. I sought rich data by encouraging participants to voice their responses during the dialogues. This was done in terms of their reflections on family sayings and events and traditional customs; recollections of lived social context through oral histories; and the sharing of sayings and collectibles, which uniquely expressed the cultural aspects of their spirituality. Their journey of success and discovery of key phenomena, within a cultural perspective, was described.

Sampling

Six Mexican American Chicana (o) community college transfer students (three females and three males) were involved in the study. Having an equal number of same-gender students was needed to maintain a balance of perspectives. The rationale for six

participants was based on the nature of the phenomenological and critical approaches. Both presuppose deep dialogue in order to gather rich data. It was my intention to encourage the participants to engage in bilingual conversations and articulate their experiences, descriptions, meanings, and critiques of spirituality as they related to persistence. It was found feasible to collaborate with six participants within the time frame of six months to collect the rich data.

These six transfer students well represented the Mexican American Chicana (o) community as the first persons in their families with the potential to graduate from post-secondary education. They were also representative as being the first or second generation of their family to be born in the United States. As a result, they had the majority of their education in American schools and were classified as a "minority" or a "student of color." Each had a certain degree of acculturation and assimilation from that schooling process. In spite of this condition, the majority of the six participants were bicultural to a certain degree, but not necessarily bilingual. They had constant reminders that Hispanics have the highest school drop out rate. According to Hall (1985) it ranged from 53 percent to 64 percent in the 1960's. It has declined since that period but according to Ramierz (1993), between 1971 and 1991 the drop out rate for Hispanics increased from 34.3 percent to 35.3 percent. They know that all Latino subgroups have experienced barriers to their education. They are also aware that Mexican American Chicanas (os) have the lowest rate of college completion. It is five percent according to Gloria (1999). On the other hand, the participants for the research study represented the little more than five percent of Hispanics who do graduate from high school and go on to college as noted by Metke (1993) previously. For this small percentage of Mexican American Chicana (o) college students, they all face the academic, financial, personal, social, cultural, and spiritual challenges of persisting to degree completion.

The participants for the study were selected from among forty-two students who had transferred from community colleges to Western Oregon University. This sample was purposeful in that a trusting relationship had already been established between the student investigators and the researcher. In a significant number of cases, the researcher recruited them from the various community colleges to the university. The final selection emerged from those students who completed and returned the initial survey. Three females and three males were identified using the following four criteria:

- Those students who have already experienced a degree of persistence, vis-à-vis transfer students from a community college.
- Those students who are identified in the university's database as Hispanic.
- Those students who are informative in relation to the research focus.
- Those students who are open to the researcher.

Process

Through the use of the university's Academic Computing Services, a list was generated showing 175 students identified as "Hispanics" who were enrolled for the fall term of the 2000-2001 academic year. From that list, 133 were either returning students or incoming freshmen while 42 were transfer students from either community colleges or other four-year institutions. The research study began just prior to the Fall Term of 2000-2001 with an introductory letter mailed to the forty-two students. (See Appendix B).

The letter included an explanation of the purpose of research study, a copy of the 43-item survey, and a consent form to be signed for those students who wished to be considered for participation in the study. A total of 22 students (52 percent) returned the completed survey. All survey and signed consent forms were dated as they were received between September 6 and October 20. Of that number, 13 students (eight males and five

females) also included the signed consent form. However, due to the length of time it took to receive the surveys, I phoned the first three women and first three men who had returned both the survey and the signed consent form to confirm their interest to continue in the study as research participants. After determining the interest of these first three females and three male students during the phone conversations, I scheduled a preliminary meeting with each of them. In doing so, I discovered that two of the three males did not attend a community college. These two persons had taken courses while in high school for community college credit. Due to the Admissions Office process of evaluating an applicant's transcripts from all schools and colleges attended, these two students were identified as community college students. As a result, they were notified and excused from participating in the study. In turn, I called the next five males according to when I had received their surveys and consent forms. The first two males I called volunteered to be research participants.

The Six Research Participants

The three female and three male participants are described below. The order of presentation of each of the participants is based on the actual order in conducting the first *diálogo*. This pattern was continued in the presentations of the cases and synthesis designs and statements later in Chapter Four as well as for the participants' testimonies in Chapter Five.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a 45 year old, married female. She is a self-proclaimed Chicana. Charlotte was born in Santa Ana, California. Her religious affiliation as she was growing

up was Catholic. Her mother, born in Brawley, CA., is also Catholic and is a high school graduate. Charlotte's grandparents were born in Mexico; the grandfather in Hermosillo and the grandmother in Sonora. Charlotte's father was born in Los Angeles, raised a Catholic, and earned an Associate's of Arts degree. His parents were also born and raised in California.

Charlotte began post-secondary education in 1976. Since that time she had attended four institutions of higher learning, two in California and two in Oregon. After her second school in California (Cal State Fullerton), Charlotte stopped out for approximately twenty years before continuing her education at Oregon Institute of Technology. Prior to transferring to Western Oregon University, she had amassed a 132 credits. During her eight terms at Western Oregon University, which started with the Fall term in 1998, she earned an additional 125 credits. Charlotte majored in elementary education. She completed the coursework for the Bachelors degree at the end of the Winter Term during the research study. Charlotte graduated in June of 2001. She has a teaching position in Klamath Falls as a Resource Teacher.

Jose G.

Jose G. is a 27 year old single parent male. He described himself as *Mexicano*. He was born in Mexico and raised in a Catholic family when he was young. Jose's mother was born in *Santa Clara, Mexico*. She went to the third grade. The mother's parents were born in the state of *Jalisco, Mexico*. Jose G.'s father was also born in Jalisco. Like his wife he completed the third grade.

Jose G. lived in Mexico until he was 15 years of age. From that point of his life until 1996, Jose accompanied his father into the United States as a seasonal farmworker in the states of Texas, California, Washington, and Oregon. In 1995 he enter programs such

GED and Job Corps. From the urging of counselors in those programs, Jose attended Clatsop Community College in Astoria, Oregon where he earned 75 transferable credits. Jose began his university studies in the Fall of 1998. Jose majored in Corrections with a minor in Business. Jose graduated with his Bachelors degree in June of 2001. He is presently working in Salem, Oregon's Probation Department. He is contemplating applying to Graduate School to study Business.

Rita

Rita is a 27 year old single female. She proudly calls herself Chicana. Both of Rita's parents were born in Texas. Both Rita's mother and father were born in Texas. Her mother's father was born in Nueva Leon, Mexico while the mother was born in Texas. The parents of Rita's father were both born in Mexico.

Rita began college at Linfield College in 1991. She stopped out during her first semester at the private college. Rita returned to school after four years of full time work. She took courses at Chemeketa Community College before transferring to Western Oregon University during the Spring Term of 1995. Her major was in Sociology. After graduating from Western, she worked for an insurance company. Rita then worked with ESL high students. She is now a college recruiter for Portland State University. She is preparing to go to Graduate School on a part time basis.

Jesus

Jesus is a 33 year old married male. He is a first generation Mexican American. His parents were born and raised in California. Both sets of grandparents were born in

Mexico. Both his parents and grandparents' religious affiliation is with the Catholic Church while Jesus was growing up.

Jesus attended Chemeketa Community College on a part time basis for seven years. Upon receiving his Associate of Arts degree he transferred to Western Oregon University at the beginning of 1999 Academic Year where he majored in Geography. He graduated at the end of Winter Term during the course of this research study.

Nicole

Nicole is a 34 year old, single, female head of household with two children. She was born and raised Catholic in Minnesota. She is a first generation Chicana. Both of Nicole's parents were also born in St. Paul, Minnesota. They are both high school graduates. Her mother's father was born Winnipeg, Canada while the mother is from Montana. Nicole's grandparents on her father's side were born in northern Mexico. Both sets of grandparents were Catholic.

Nicole began her college education in 1996. Nicole transferred from Cambridge Community College in Minnesota to Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. She earned a combined 25 credits from these two community colleges. She moved on to Western at the beginning of the 1997-98 Academic Year. During this time she has completed 145 credits while majoring in Sociology and minoring in Legal Studies. Her goal is to go on the Law School and become a lawyer. At the end of the upcoming Fall Term Nicole will complete her Bachelor of Arts degree requirements. She looks forward to receiving her diploma at Western's Graduation in June of 2002.

Jose S.

Jose S. is a 27 year old single male. He sees himself as Chicano. He was born in Portland, Oregon of Catholic parents. Both of Jose S.'s parents were born in Texas. Jose's mother earned a GED. The father completed 12th grade. His mother's father was born in Leon, Mexico while the mother was born in Sesien, Texas. The parents of Jose's father were both born in Texas.

Jose started college in 1995. He completed 36 credits at Linn-Benton Community College prior to transferring to Western Oregon University the following year. He majored in Corrections with a minor in Sociology. Since graduating from Western, he worked shortly as a Community Liaison Coordinator in a Bilingual school. He is now an Adult Probation Officer for Linn-Benton County.

Strategies for Soundness and Trustworthiness of Data

In qualitative research, the word validity is often synonymous with trustworthiness. To ensure this, the following strategies were used:

- **Member Checking**: The co-investigators served as a check throughout the informal and formal stages of analysis process. An ongoing dialogue regarding my interpretations of the co-investigators' reality and meaning ensured cultural intuition.
- **Clarification of the Researcher's Disposition for the Study**: At the outset of this study, the researcher's perspective was articulated in Chapter Two under the heading of "Researcher's Perspective" and earlier in this Chapter as noted in "Researcher's Background."
- **Triangulation of Data**: Data, from both phenomenological and critical consciousness perspectives, was also collected through other Mexican American Chicana (o) students in Chicano/Latino courses conducted both at Chemeketa Community College and Western Oregon University.

These external sources come from among four other groups of students totaling an additional 81 Mexican American Chicanas (os). Group One consisted of 26 older students (between the ages of 22 and 42) who are Mexican American Chicana (o) instructional assistants. They were members of a Chicano/Latino course taught in the Fall Term of 1999-2000 at Chemeketa Community College. Group Two was a group of 10 traditional age students enrolled in a "Introduction to Chicano Studies" course during the Spring Term of the same academic year at the university where this research was conducted. Group Three consisted of 29 students (26 Mexican Americans) enrolled in a course titled "Chicano/Latino Studies: Historical Overview," which occurred in the Fall Term of 2000-2001 at Chemeketa Community College. Group Four consisted of 22 students of varying ages and cultures. Nineteen of those students were Mexican Americans, Chicanas (os) and Latinas (os) in a course called "Chicano/Latino Studies: Economic and Political Overview." This class also took place at Chemeketa Community College during the winter term of 2000-2001. The texts used in all four courses included chapters on spirituality, education, community, and cultural identity. After each of the sessions addressing the above topics, I took notes in recalling in what the students actually said and/or paraphrased their comments as they pertained and substantiated what the six research participants had voiced during their individual *diálogos* and the *círculos de cultura*. Pseudonyms accompanied the actual quotations from these students as noted in Chapters Four and Five.

Data Collection

Three primary means of data collection methods were utilized over the course of the study: initial survey, in-depth individual *diálogos* (dialogues), and *círculos de cultura* (culture circles).

Survey Stage

The first stage of the data collection was a 43-Item Likert Survey. It was mailed during the second half of August of 2000 to all forty-two students who had transferred from community colleges. The last three of the twenty-two surveys were received by the middle of October during that Fall Term. The purposes of the survey were as follows:

- Orient prospective participants to the research focus.
- Generate interest and understanding of the scope of the research study regarding spirituality.
- Get a sense of responses in order to find out if the research focus needed to be narrowed.
- Inform the researcher of any tendencies among the transfer students' responses to particular aspects of spirituality and/or persistence.
- Sensitize the researcher to possible revision of initial interview questions.

Diálogos

The second stage of the data collection was taken from the six selected Mexican American Chicana (o) community college students. The first round of *diálogos* was conducted in late September. The remaining three rounds of *diálogos* and continued during that Fall Term and into the Winter Term. Each participant, at different degrees of acculturation and assimilation, participated in the four in-depth, open-ended individual conversations. A total of 24 dialogues were conducted among the six participants. According to Denizen (1970) and Bender (1993), in-depth interviews are the most appropriate choice when the researcher is concerned with ascertaining the subjective meaning and experience of participants. Elias (1994) notes that Freire cites existentialist Karl Jaspers regarding the uniqueness of humankind: "Men and women exist to transcend, discern, and enter into dialogue" (p. 35).

The individual dialogue sessions were organized, at first, around researcher questions of persistence and spirituality. Each *diálogo* began with the participants discussing two questions on persistence and two questions on spirituality of their choosing from the prepared list. After initial responses to the questions the remainder of each *diálogo* were driven by the co-investigators' own questions and concerns as they becoming more aware of spirituality related to their persistence.

During these informal conversational dialogues, the comments, and/or follow-up questions which emerged from the participants' immediate context were made in the natural course of the conversations. The *diálogos* were built on and emerged from the participants' and researcher's sense of solidarity of culture and experiences. I recalled how Freire drew on Jaspers for the concept of dialogue "based on love, humility, hope, faith, and trust as key to creating a critical attitude" (Elias, 1994, p. 36). Similarly, the *diálogos* were created by the cultural intuition of the researcher, the participants, and the circumstances. Both the participants and I communicated to each other primarily in English. Yet, there many times that we asked questions and/or answered questions in Spanish or in Spanglish (a combination of both English and Spanish). On the following is a matrix, (Table 3.1) of the nuances that were operative because of the very cultural background of the participants. This is unique to an indigenous approach.

Table 3.1
Indigenous Variations of Dialogue

Mode of Dialogue	Characteristics of Utterances	Impetus for Deep Dialogue
Informal Conversational Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments/questions emerge from the immediate context and are made in the natural course of the conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogues are built on and emerge from solidarity of culture and experiences. • Dialogues are created by the cultural intuition of the researcher and participants and in particular, university circumstances.
Dialogue Guide Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics and issues that might be shared are brought up at the beginning of each dialogue. Both participant and researcher agree on what topics and issues with which to start the dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness increases feeling of <i>carnalismo</i> (Mexican American Chicana (o) solidarity) in each participant. • Dialogues remain culturally conversational, situational, and reflective.

The *diálogos*, understood as cultural, reflective, consciousness raising conversations, were focused on the participants' experiences, concepts, and thoughts on spirituality and their feelings and ideas of its relationship to persistence and higher education. My approach to the *diálogos* proceeded along the following lines. Prior to the first dialogue, the participants were given a brief introduction of the research focus, the research process, and the intent of the research endeavor. They were asked if they had any questions or concerns that needed to be addressed prior to the beginning the *diálogos*. The participants were asked to make comments, if they wished, regarding to the Spirituality

Survey that they had completed. In-depth dialogues revealed the inner power which moves participants into the future (Beck, 1986). Through the *diálogos*, the participants reflected critically, and later on in the culture circles, on their experiences of the holy (Smith, 1995) and their growing awareness and consciousness (Hefner, 1998) of a sense of community with one's ancestors (Stand, et al., 2000). At the very same time, the I also had the opportunity to reflect on my spiritual development (Love and Talbot, 1999), not only during the *diálogos* but also during the informal and formal analysis phases of the data collection. The dynamics of the *diálogos* and subsequent critical reflection continued during the generation of themes with the participants. The participatory environment (Ada and Beutel, 1993; Lango, 1995; Park, 1993; Reza, 1995) empowered both co-investigators and myself to identify themes, to critically reflect on situations, and to pose new assertions and knowledge. The liberating interaction emerged from authentic collaboration (Mounier in Kuhne, 1998) on the implications of one's spirituality in relation to education (Schipani, 1981). Furthermore, the continuing critical reflection during the analysis phases touched upon Freire's (1987) position that "spirituality is faith in who sustains, motivates, and challenges me" (p. 134). It was through the *diálogos* that the phenomenological phase of the study was addressed. Through the medium of the *diálogos*, the participants and I further made the road by walking into the area in which the meaning of faith/spirituality called for the creation of a new humankind who pass through the experiences and struggles of unjust societies. Such critical reflection enhanced by *diálogos* can revive spirituality upon which to base a commitment to abolish injustice and build a new society (Gutierrez, 1973).

As noted above, the participants and I together agreed on what issues, questions, and concerns with which to start each dialogue. This participatory process allowed for openness and the increase of "*carnalismo*," (Mexican American Chicana (o) solidarity), with each participant. The *diálogos* remained culturally conversational, situational, and

reflective. The catalysts for the *diálogos* ranged from the following as they related to culture aspects of each of the participant's reality:

Childhood Memories	Family members
<i>Dichos</i> (sayings)	<i>Alegría y dolor</i> (Joy and sadness)
Practices	<i>Corridos</i> (history sung in songs)
Music	<i>Los artes</i> (the arts)
Feelings	Places
Family	Moments of quiet
Events	<i>Lo que es</i> (What is) and <i>sueños</i> (dreams)

As noted above, the “diálogos” were conducted bilingually as needed and were transcribed and translated (if needed). The co-investigators were sent, within a few weeks, a copy of the transcribed interview prior to the next dialogue session. The purpose was for the co-investigator to reflect on the dialogues, check for accuracy as well as assist with the process of preliminary thematic analysis. This empowered/enabled the participants to deepen their thoughts as they reflected on themselves regarding the meaning and understanding of spirituality and its influence in their persistence in the university. The participants' comments or responses to my written transcriptions of the dialogues were copied and used for the cultural circles. The second round of *diálogos* were completed during the third week in November of that Fall Term.

Círculos de Cultura

The third stage of the data collection was two planned *círculos de cultura* with the same six participants. According to Morgan (1985), “the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group” (p. 12). From an indigenous perspective, group interaction is common to the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture. Mirandé (1985) calls it the uniqueness of the “collective” which is tied to the aspects of “*familia*”

and extended support systems who gather in “*la cocina*” (around the kitchen table) and at significant events such as religious holidays. These interactions will be noted as “talking circles” or “*círculos de cultura*.”

The first planned culture circle was held on Saturday, November 18, 2000 after the second round of *diálogos* had been completed. The second planned “*círculo de cultura*” took place on Saturday, January 20, 2001 after *diálogo* four was completed with each of the participants. However, a third *círculo de cultura* was added to the study as a result of conversations with the participants at the beginning of *diálogo* three which took place in December, a week after the initial culture circle. The participants felt that an analysis, identification of emerging themes, and the creation of thematic statements could not be accomplished in the one remaining planned *círculo de cultura*. The third *círculo de cultura* occurred one week after the second culture circle on Saturday, January 27, 2001

Overall, these three, two and a half-hour, semi-structured culture circles took place in the context of “*comida y refrescos para platicar*” (food and refreshments as conversations went on). This was congruent to the communitarian aspect of the culture. The group interaction during the culture circles consisted of the participants sharing some information each had discussed in the individual *diálogos* as well as insights from those conversations. New information was expressed as well as differing viewpoints articulated among the co-investigators. The participants voiced a diversity of statements of their discoveries from each of their *diálogos* with me and their reflections between each of the four *diálogos*. The participants and I intuited the need to interact, share insights, and expectations. The conversational aspect served as a catalyst for deeper and critical insights on the phenomenological and critical theory views of spirituality. As will be noted in the findings, one of the participants elected not to participate in the cultural circles. As the five participants spoke, individual and collective thoughts on persistence and spirituality emerged (Mirandé, 1985). The perceptions and insights were expressed through the use of

English and Spanish. As for the latter, it was used as a means to best express and emphasize their understandings and sentiments to each other.

Summary

The methodological tools of in-depth conversation dialogues, culture circles, and participatory analysis and theme generation from an indigenous approach were an implementation of Rendon's (1999) model for the infusion of a spirituality perspective in both community colleges and universities. This research study viewed transfer students not as subjects but as participants engaging in a reality from their perspective. The participants were encouraged verbally and non-verbally to voice their ways of knowing. The roles of the researcher and the participants consisted of relational interaction expressed by respect; familiarity of each others' cultural backgrounds and bicultural experiences; and solidarity in the lived experiences interconnected with spirituality and persistence. The *diálogos* and group sharing consisted of many moments of silence and reflective feelings and thoughts. This is indigenous to the Mexican American Chicana (o) communication. The silence is the indigenous way of contemplating the cognitive and intuitive knowledge sensed and felt as well as reasoned among the people gathered.

In summary, the procedures for data collection included the following specific activities:

1. As the researcher, I framed questions to initially guide the dialogues.
2. I engaged in the *diálogos* (dialogue) with each of the six participants.
3. I transcribed the first *diálogo* from the tape recordings and mailed copies to the each of the participants prior to meeting for the second *diálogo*.
4. Each participant separately read and reflected upon the content of the first transcribed *diálogo*.

5. I engaged in the second round of *diálogos* with each of the participants at which time preliminary themes were beginning to be voiced as a result of the first *diálogo*.
6. I transcribed the second dialogues from the tape recordings and mailed copies to the each of the participants prior to meeting for the first *círculo de cultura* on November 18, 2000.
7. Each of the co-investigators (the participants) and myself separately read and reflected upon the content of the second transcribed dialogue.
8. Five participants and I engaged in the first *círculo de cultura*.
9. I transcribed the first *círculo de cultura* from tape recordings.
10. As co-investigators we separately read and reflected upon the content of the first *círculo de cultura*. A transcription was also mailed to the participant who could not attend because of previous plans to be out of state.
11. Activities 2, 3, 4, and 5 were repeated for third and fourth dialogues.
12. Activities 8,9, and 10 were repeated for second and third *círculos de cultura*.
13. The co-investigators reflected upon the research process, dialogues, and generated themes.
14. The participants developed and expressed critical consciousness, especially during the last two *diálogos* and two *círculos de cultura*.
15. The co-investigators constructed new knowledge and articulated emerging themes through design and verbal presentations during the third *círculo de cultura* on January 27, 2001.

The diálogos and círculos de cultura were conducted over a three-month period during the Fall and Winter terms during the 2000-2001 Academic Year. Below I will explain the phases of analysis that occurred with the transcribed *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* leading to critical consciousness of spirituality influencing their persistence. In-depth dialogues, within an indigenous approach that encouraged knowledge sharing through intuition, emotions, and bilingual language, stimulated the participants' levels of consciousness. Discoveries and realizations of their socialization in schools gave rise to the participants reflecting critically on what had been forgotten and lost. Arising from the participants' consciousness was an understanding, from their experiences, of their degree

of assimilation. Interaction in the focus groups resulted in further consciousness raising. From such fertile ground the participants felt, perceived, reflected, and even voiced the desire to reclaim their indigenous soul (the spiritual dimension) that was nurtured and passed on from their heritage. Cultural consciousness, brought about by a phenomenological perspective, does inform Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students of the assimilation they have undergone.

Analysis and Critical Consciousness

I employed phenomenological and critical reflection to analyze the texts. As Patton (1990) explained, in qualitative inquiry, "there is typically not a precise point at which data collection ends and analysis begins" (p. 377). I engaged in dialogic introspection as a result of the collective dialogues with each participant. Through the participant's verbal descriptions, reflections, and analyses of their own life experiences, I realized that new information can be generated which can empower them to transform their knowledge of the causes of their reality (Freire, 1981). I also listened to the tapes as I read the hard copy to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. After re-listening to the tapes, I read the transcribed dialogues, looking for themes while recalling the words, the tone of voice, and the emotions of each of the participants.

Informal Analysis

Informal analysis was ongoing as I formulated hunches, records, insights, notes, and sayings (Bogdan, 1998) as re-listened to the tape recordings, re-read the transcriptions as well as comparing and contrasting the utterances of each of the participants. I shared with the co-investigators and the beginning of each *diálogo* and during the *circulos de cultura*, the need to add their insights. After each *diálogo* session with each participant,

all transcripts were preliminarily analyzed to identify sentences and passages that related to the topic of the study: influence of spirituality in the persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students. Possible themes were discussed with each participant in subsequent *diálogos*. This provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on the possible themes that were emerging from the *diálogos* as well as construct new themes and new knowledge as a result of relationship of authentic dialogue between each of the participants and me.

Similarly, I analyzed and collected data in cycles as noted above after each series of individual *diálogo* and each talking circle. The purpose of the latter was for the co-investigators to add their own insights as a result of both the individual *diálogos* and the first *círculo de cultura*. It was during the first *círculo de cultura* that the participants began to group the insights shared and commented upon. From the group interaction preliminary themes began to emerge. Through the transcription process and subsequent reflections on what was voiced by the participants during the first cultural circle, I began to analyze the comments and exchanges in lieu of what I heard after first and second *diálogos* as well as the last two *diálogos* and two *círculos de cultura*. Van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenological reflection as the insight into the essence of a phenomenon involving a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experiences. Listening to recorded dialogues, reading subsequent transcriptions, and reflecting on the participants' texts, I made an attempt to uncover thematic aspects (selective highlighting as suggested by Van Manen, 1990). This informal analysis was also included the coding of the highlighted phrases in terms of the researcher's and co-investigators' preliminary hunches, insights, and perceptions.

Formal Analysis

I attempted to conduct the thematic analysis with the co-investigators on the research question during the second and third *círculo de cultura* with insight, cultural intuition, and bicultural understanding into the structures of the experience. Including the participants at a deeper analytical process of making sense of the data helped shape the research findings and was an important source of our joint cultural intuition and experiences in the university. It was the co-investigators during the culture circles who focused on highlighted phrases and, in turn, grouped them according to criteria that we created. These grouped phrases were named according to themes. As a community of non-traditional co-investigators, they reflected on themes in light of their persistence in the university. Preliminary sets of themes were renamed as needed. We agreed when process had reached a plateau. The co-investigators and I jointly voiced recommendations as a result of experiencing the reclaiming their cultural heritage through dialogue, talking circles, feelings, and truth claims. Just as importantly, their participation in this process made them not just subjects of research but also creators of knowledge. Voicing, articulating, and constructing new knowledge is an important characteristic of a Mexican American Chicana (o) epistemology as well as in "scholarship with a focus on how to develop participatory bridges between researchers and subjects which has been increasing dramatically over the past decade" (Standfield II, 1998, p. 350). As for the participant who did not participate in the group discussions, his absence may have influenced how he responded during his individual *diálogos* three and four. Yet, he addressed the questions he selected from his personal experiences. His comments and insights were consistent with his line of thinking during the first two dialogues. The information that the participant shared was valuable and did contribute to the breath of the study.

Confidentiality

In the process of the formal invitation for Western Oregon University's Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students to participate in the study, confidentiality was discussed. For those who returned the survey and responded their willingness to participate, a second letter was sent in which confidentiality was addressed. For those six students who were selected, a form was signed that enunciated the following: (1) confidentiality will be upheld; (2) participants will be referred according to their choice: real names or by pseudonyms; and (3) participants may choose to discontinue their participation at any time (See Appendix B). During the first *diálogo*, I discussed the use of names with each of the six participants. Each agreed that either their first name or their full name could be used. The names of students from the external groups are pseudonyms.

Timetable of the Study

The study began in early September with the mailing of the survey. The *diálogos* took place between late September and December of 2000 at Western Oregon University. In-depth conversations with each participant consisted of four one-hour sessions. Data analysis and collaborative feedback were completed after each session. In addition, each participant was to participate in two one and one-half hour culture circles. The first *círculo de cultura* occurred in mid November after the completion of the second round of dialogues. The second planned cultural circle as well as additional culture circle were conducted in January of 2001 after completing *diálogo* four with each of the participants. Reflections on the participants' descriptions, interpretations, and critiques would be addressed throughout the study. February through June was dedicated for further reflection, in-depth analysis, identification and interpretation of the findings, and

declaration of the study's recommendations. On the following page (Table 3.2) is a summary of the research design explained above.

Table 3.2
Research Design Summary

<p style="text-align: center;">Title</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Re-Discovery of Soul and Reclamation of Spirit Anew: The Influence of Spirituality on the Persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) Transfer Students at a Small Liberal Arts University</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Focus of the Study:</u></p> <p>To describe and understand spirituality, from a cultural perspective, of Mexican American Chicana (o) community college transfer students and spirituality's relation to their persistence at a small liberal arts university.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Purpose of the Study:</u></p> <p>Participants become aware of the richness and influence of their cultural spirituality.</p> <p>Participants discourse critically the university's responsibility in addressing spirituality in instruction and student services.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Research Question</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Give Voice to Mexican American Chicana (o) College Students.</p> <p>What does spirituality, from a cultural aspect, mean in the context of persistence by Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transfer from a community college to a small liberal arts university?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Review of Related Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spirituality - Persistence & Resiliency - Assimilation/Acculturation - Academics of the Heart 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Classification of Primary and Secondary Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey responses on selected items. - Participants sharing insights and feelings during individual and focus group dialogues - Oral histories that speak of spirituality affecting their persistence in post-secondary education. - Documents that show model institutions or programs that are effective in the retention of students of color due to cultural competent strategies.
Indigenous Variations of Dialogue		
<p style="text-align: center;">Mode of Dialogue</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Characteristics of Utterances</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Impetus for Deep Dialogue</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Informal Conversational Dialogue</u></p>	<p>- Comments/questions emerge from the immediate context and are voiced in the natural course of the conversation.</p>	<p>- Dialogues are built on and emerge from solidarity of cultural experiences.</p> <p>- Dialogues are created by the cultural intuition of the researcher and participants and the present circumstances.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Dialogue Guide Approach</p>	<p>- Both participant and researcher agree on what topics and issues with which to start the scheduled dialogues.</p>	<p>- Openness increases feeling of <i>carnalismo</i> in each participant.</p> <p>- Dialogues remain culturally conversational, situational, and reflective.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Open-Ended Dialogue Comments</p>	<p>- Wording and sequence of comments emerge from the giving and the receiving by each other.</p>	<p>- Participants and researcher respond to each other increasing a fusion of the responses.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Justification of Methods</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Process for Analysis</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Timeline</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honors research action from cultural perspectives of both the researcher and the participants. - Allows face to face encounter between each participant and the researcher. - Allows for openness and flexibility in responses. - Gathered data provides insight on unconscious thoughts, feelings, and habits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal thematic analysis after each series of individual dialogues and after each focus group dialogue. - Formal thematic analysis with the co-investigators on research question with insight, cultural intuition, and bicultural understanding into the meaning and structures of spirituality and persistence. 	<p>September - December, 2000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mail survey. - Enter into four dialogues with each participant with informal analysis. <p>January, 2001</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convene two culture circles with co-investigators for formal analysis. <p>February - June 2001</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflections, written findings, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This Chapter reports the findings gathered from the interactions with six Mexican American Chicana (o) men and women (three females and three males) who transferred from a community college to a four-year university. The time in conducting 24 *diálogos* (individual conversations and discussions) and three *círculos* (group conversations and discussions) spanned five months during the Fall and Winter terms of the 2000-2001 academic year. The Chapter consists of three major sections: (a) preliminary findings; (b) a case for each of the participants; and (c) emerging themes.

Section One focuses on the preliminary findings and discussions of the data collected. As noted in the previous Chapter, three means of data collection methods were utilized: an initial 43-Item survey, in-depth *diálogos*, and *círculos de cultura*. Each of these sources were utilized in the following fashion:

- Recounted the process in which the data were collected according to the criteria described in Chapter Three.
- Highlighted responses from the participants with my interpretation.
- Summarized the general yet salient findings of that data.

Section Two, a case study for each of the participants, is the heart of the findings. By focusing on each of the six cases I heard the voice of each individual speak from her/his spirit. I interpreted what I heard as expressions of their unique cultural ways of knowing. Listening to each participant through the four *diálogos* also reflected their conscious development. Each case culminated with his/her own visual and written synthesis of "what was most significant to him/her" as persons and as Mexican American Chicanas (os) at

their current level of critical consciousness as a result of their engagement in the research study.

The metaphors of journey, concert, and opera were used interchangeably to express the participants' interpretations, meanings, and critical reflections of those experiences that they related to persistence and spirituality as transfer students who are at a four-year university.

Section Three of the Chapter moves from these cases and the co-investigators' synthesis to a discussion of the themes. These themes were identified, discovered, and voiced among these six co-investigators throughout the study—especially during the three *círculos de cultura*—and presented as “what was most significant to them” at that particular time of the study. It is to be noted that during the findings and discussions, at times, additional information from other sources, as mentioned in the previous Chapter, are cited which corroborated the points being made.

Section One

Preliminary Findings Part I: The Survey

Process

The purpose of the survey as a data collection method were as follows. First, the survey served as a means of eliciting from the forty-two Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students' an interest, awareness, and understanding of the scope of the research study regarding the influence of spirituality on their persistence. Second, the survey served as a means to orient the forty-two two Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students to the research focus. Third, for the twenty-two students who had become interested in being a research participant, their responses to the survey items served as a beginning for the

process of recalling their lived experiences central to the research study: spirituality orientation, family upbringing, and community college and university attendance. The fourth aim of the survey was to inform me of any tendencies among the transfer students' responses to particular aspects of spirituality and persistence.

Those respondents who returned the survey responded to all 43 items. The survey consisted of five sections (Appendix B).

- Part I Spiritual Orientation (Items 1-14);
- Part II Challenging Aspects to Persisting (Item 15 with five subparts);
- Part III Influence of Spirituality on My University Education (Items 16- 20);
- Part IV University Responsiveness to My Cultural Needs (Items 21-30); and
- Part V Intellectual Inquiry Connected to My Humanity/Spirituality (Items 31-43).

The survey returns from all 22 respondents were tabulated according to a five-point Likert Scale continuum from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Upon review of the responses, three patterns emerged. These tendencies were noted in a number of the survey items in all five parts of the survey. At the same time, there are some survey items which come up in all three patterns. First, a majority responded with "Strongly Agree/Agree" on several items (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 20, and 29). Second, there was a constant minority who "Strongly Disagreed/Disagreed" on other items (22, 28, 40, and 42). Finally, there was the response of "Unsure" on several other items (28, 29, 40, and 42). Appendix C shows how the responses of the six participants on these particular survey compared among all 22 respondents.

Yet, those responses which spread out all along the continuum (Items 7, 8, 20, 22, 28, 29, 40, and 42) indicated that this group of respondents was a heterogeneous one even though all were identified as "Hispanics." One might speculate that all Mexican Americans would agree to the importance of spirituality and its relation to culture and

one's cultural identity. For example, items 4, 5, and 6 indicated a preponderance of agreement; however, there are also those who disagreed or who were just unsure. Is this range of perception among the 22 respondents due, to some degree, to the acculturation and assimilation experiences of both voluntary and involuntary minorities (Nieto, 1996) as mentioned in Chapter Two? What influences does the Americanization process in K-12 schools have on students from diverse cultural backgrounds? However, in items 22, 28, and 29, those respondents that "Strongly Agreed/Agreed" were fewer in number while there was an increase of responses in which more students were unsure. For those who disagreed, was it because they hadn't experienced the university's recognition of students' culture and it didn't matter to them? Or did these students see the lack on the university's part to address issues that were, in fact, important to them? Ricardo from Group Four reflected that Mexican American Chicana (o) students have to learn about their culture. He said, "*Los dolores* have to be heard so they won't repeat themselves." Such reflections impacted the types of questions that were asked during the *diálogos*.

Again, the responses in items 40 and 42 showed the range of perspectives as to the possible interrelationships between the university's role of providing "academics of the mind" only with "academics of the heart" as proposed by Rendon (1999). The last item (43) showed how the 22 respondents viewed the university's position in their educational process. On the following page, Table 4.1 contrasts those selected items noted as important between the six participants and the respondents according to number and percentage.

Table 4.1
Contrast of Selected Items Between Participants and Respondents

4. My spirituality important to me.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	0 0%	1 17%	0 0%	2 33%	3 50%
22 Respondents	1 5%	2 9%	1 5%	5 23%	13 51%
5. Depth of my spirituality is rooted in my cultural background.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	0 0%	1 17%	0 0%	2 33%	3 50%
22 Respondents	1 5%	1 5%	2 9%	6 26%	13 57%
6. My spirituality influences me as a Mexican American/Chicano(a) person.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	1 17%	0 0%	1 17%	3 50%	1 17%
22 Respondents	2 9%	3 14%	1 5%	8 36%	8 36%
7. My Mexican American/Chicano spirituality is more family centered than one connected with an official church					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	0 0%	0 0%	1 17%	2 33%	3 50%
22 Respondents	1 5%	2 9%	3 14%	7 36%	9 41%
8. La Virgen de Guadalupe was important during my upbringing.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	0 0%	2 33%	0 0%	0 0%	4 67%
22 Respondents	4 18%	5 23%	0 0%	3 14%	10 45%
20. As a Mexican American Chicana (o), it is my spiritual base which strengthens me in my challenges to persist at Western.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	1 17%	0 0%	1 17%	0 0%	4 67%
22 Respondents	2 9%	2 9%	3 14%	5 23%	10 45%
22. The university assists students to understand their unique culture and heritage.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
6 Participants	2 33%	3 50%	0 0%	1 17%	0 0%
22 Respondents	6 29%	8 38%	3 14%	5 24%	0 0%

A second matrix was developed specifically on the six participants. It shows the value that each participant scored for each of the survey items. In the adjacent column are the average scores for the same item from the other 16 respondents (See Appendix D).

Upon tabulating the six participants' responses for each of the 43 items, I did indeed get a sense of the distribution of the responses for all items. What follows is a reporting of some salient findings of the data collected through the survey method. For now, I will limit my remarks on some patterns observed through reflecting on the six participants' responses as a research cohort. The survey items include some of the above as well as other items from one of the five parts of the survey. Below is a series of tables that highlight notable responses from the six participants, and those responses were later found to be consistent in the *diálogos*.

Description of Spiritual Orientation

Table 4.2 shows responses from those items in the Spiritual Orientation section that are descriptive in nature. In particular, item number nine addresses the *interioriness of spirituality* as well as its connection to *transcendence* as noted in Chapter Two. One of Beck's (1986) characteristics of a *spiritual person* is that of awareness. Abalos' (1992) points regarding the concept of *sacred* among the Chicano culture as: "God, the religious, the sacred, the source of all being [as] always considered an integral part of life" resonated in these responses. As will be noted later in the findings and discussions of the *diálogos*, four of the six participants indicated a relationship with the transcendent while the other participants' strength is associated with an internal dimension, a power, an endowment that resides within herself/himself rather than apart from them. The other two participants either disagreed or were unsure of the origin of their strength.

Table 4.2
Source of One's Internal Strength

9. My strength comes from a force/person greater than myself.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	1	0	1	1	3
Percentage	17%	0%	17%	17%	50%

In Table 4.3, item 17 gives a profile of the students' challenges in persisting. The cohort was evenly divided. Item 19, which was intended to initiate the participants' reflection on their current awareness of the connection of spirituality with persistence at the university if any, showed again that even though four of the participants agreed that strength was connected to a "force/person greater than myself," there was one person who disagreed and one person who was unsure. The cohort of the six participants is not a homogenous group; there were differences of perception regarding the phenomena of spirituality.

Table 4.3
Connections Between Persistence and Achievement With Spirituality

17. It has been challenging to stay at Western.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	3	0	3	0
Percentage	0%	50%	0	50%	0%
19. Underneath my attainment of most of my educational goals, academic successes, and personal accomplishments at Western, it is my spirituality that is at the heart of these attainments.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	1	0	1	0	4
Percentage	17%	0%	17%	0%	67%

There was a stark contrast among the group of six participants regarding item 17. Three agreed that their persistence at the university had been a challenging one. As for the other three participants who disagreed, can it be said that their focus on academics and dedicated time to study caused them to see success as personally based rather than from

any other perspective including that of spirituality? Again, as will be noted in the section regarding the *diálogos*, it was clarified that some disagreed because their spirituality made it less difficult while, for the others, staying at Western was not challenging due to their own personal drive. Yet, in item 19, four of the six participants attributed spirituality as the heart of their accomplishments. This shifted position of the six persons contrasted with item 17 needed to be verified later through the individual *diálogos* to determine how the participants describe their orientation of their spirituality, if in fact they possess such a stance.

Interpretation of Spiritual Orientation

The next two survey items gave an indication as to how the research group delineated a meaning of spirituality as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4
Awareness of Spirit in Student's College Life

3. The core of all who I am is in my soul.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	1	1	1	3
Percentage	0%	17%	17%	17%	50%
13. My strength to persist at Western is in the power of divine guidance					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	1	1	1	3	0
Percentage	17%	17%	17%	50%	0%

The data gathered at this initial stage of the study suggested that 67 percent (four out of six) of the participants saw their centeredness as an internal phenomenon and somehow connected with the reality of the transcendent (item 3). Tobin, a student from Group Three, stated to the class that the question "Quién Soy Yo?" (Who am I?) is directed

toward the soul, to be answered by the soul. "Do not tell me that I don't have a soul."

Aimee, who was also in the same class and is bilingual, noted that sometimes she felt that without God it is "like there is a piece of me missing." At the same time, the other two research participants seemed to be at odds at the beginning of this study whether the "soul," a spiritual dimension of their humanity as attributed by Smith (1995), is central to their identity. Similar responses with Item 13 shows that this group of six Mexican American Chicanas (os) is not homogenous on how they interpret their spiritual orientation whether they possess one, have forgotten it, or have dismissed it.

In Table 4.5, item number four was intended to look specifically at the participants' initial response to the major concept of the study. Five of the six participants (67 percent) saw spirituality, however they understood it, as a valuable aspect of their lives. Jose's (from Group Three) comment is representative of 60 of the 87 students in all four groups when he stated, "I am a religious person and in following with my religious beliefs I treat everyone as equal." The remaining participant of the six, for reasons to be explained later, disagreed that it was of value. It was realistic that there would be disagreement regarding the importance of spirituality in the lives of these six community college transfer students.

Table 4.5
Participant's Value on Spirituality

4. My spirituality important to me.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	1	0	2	3
Percentage	0%	17%	0%	33%	50%

In reference to item four, when all 81 students from the four groups were asked to rank order the significant issues of a Chicana (o) experience, given their lived experiences

and their heterogeneous perspectives, spirituality ranked second among 80 percent of these particular students. What ranked first was family!

At this stage of the study, important information from the research participants in this section of the survey also addressed the connection of spirituality with culture. If spirituality is connected to participants' culture then, as Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, and Jalomo (1992) had noted, "Diverse students bring their richness with them to the Academy" (p. 57). Spirituality, as a part of their culture, may have an influence on their persistence in the community college and university. Items 5, 6, and 20 (Table 4.6) focused on this all-important issue.

Table 4.6
Spirituality and Culture

5. Depth of my spirituality is rooted in my cultural background.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	1	0	2	3
Percentage	0%	17%	0	33%	50%
6. My spirituality influences me as a Mexican American/Chicano (a) person.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	1	0	1	3	1
Percentage	17%	0%	17%	50%	17%
20. As a Mexican American Chicana (o), it is my spiritual base which strengthens me in my challenges to persist at Western.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	1	0	1	0	4
Percentage	17%	0%	17%	17%	67%

Five participants (83 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that there is a spiritual connection with their cultural heritage (item 5). Sara, from Group Three, was most succinct of the thinking of the great majority of the Mexican American Chicana (o) students who were enrolled in the Chicano Studies course. She stated emphatically: "I know that being Raza is nothing to be ashamed of; on the contrary having such a rich culture, history, and spirituality among other things makes us unique and being unique is what most people strive to be." The participant who disagreed later indicated in the

diálogos that spirituality was not firmly established in her/his cultural upbringing and experiences. The participant recounted she/he did not make nor understand such a relationship of spirituality and culture to exist in her/his life.

As for item six, a majority of the participants (four of the six,) indicated that there was some kind of bond between spirituality and culture. In addition, there was also some connection of spirituality to who they are as Mexican American Chicanas (os). In other words, for the four participants there was an association with their cultural identity. Donovan, a bilingual teaching assistant from Group One, noted, "My cultural identity influenced me to study my history and strive to be like my family, and most of all to follow the direction of my grandmother." As for the other two participants, one seemed adamant that there wasn't any influence of spirituality as a Mexican American Chicana (o). One of the three male participants, at the outset of the study, declared his uncertainty with this item even though there was agreement in item six that the depth of spirituality was rooted in the cultural background.

Again, it is important to show how the four external groups compared to the responses of the six participants. Three students from Group One had the following to say: "My *tía* (aunt) has kept these beliefs even though my *abuelita* (grandmother) has passed on" (Yolanda). "Our spirituality is something special just because it is unique, original and only us are the ones who really know what it is and what it feels" (Koren). Linda, a high school bilingual teaching assistant, stated in one of her reflection papers: "Hispanic spirituality is a very unique phenomena. Hispanic spirituality must be seen as part and parcel of the creative synthesis of Hispanic value structure and orientation that has emerged from the three roots streams that inform its cultural traits and personality." Jose, who was in Group Four, recounted what a fellow classmate had said to him: "One girl told me that the most important thing for her is her family, then her religion. For her,

spiritualidad means motivation, union, and life. And, third most important is her education.”

Item 20 linked the notion of spirituality and cultural background to the participants' persistence. It was realistic that one of the participants was unsure. It is noteworthy that two of the participants' interpretations with the above three items were inconsistent. For example, the same male participant agreed that his spirituality is rooted in the cultural background (item 5) and it influences her/his as a Mexican American (item 6), yet the same participant was unsure if her/his spiritual base strengthens persistence (item 20). Once again, these responses indicated a variety of perspectives among this supposedly homogenous group of Hispanic university students who have transferred from community colleges.

Table 4.7 below shows the second most important information in this section of the survey findings. Overall, five of the six Mexican American Chicana (o) participants responded that spirituality was more family centered than a religion connected with an official church. From the outset, a majority of the participants indicated a “truth” of their lived experiences. Later, through both the *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura*, they voiced interpretations, in-depth insights, and realized understandings of a spirituality embedded and intertwined in the Mexican American Chicana (o) phenomenon called *familia* (Mirandé, 1985).

Table 4.7
Family-Centered Spirituality

7. My Mexican American Chicana (o) spirituality is more family centered than one connected with an official church					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	0	1	2	3
Percentage	0%	0%	17%	33%	50%

Since this issue took on great ramifications later in the study, it is significant to point out that, in addition to five of the participants indicating degrees of agreement of a family-centered spirituality, there was also unanimity among the four external groups. One student in Group Three, Patricia, summarizes the four groups' agreement: "I thought about it for a second and when you think about it, family is life." In a similar vein in item eight, four of the six participants knew of the *La Virgen* from their cultural upbringing as illustrated in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8
Importance of the Mexican Cultural Symbol

8. La Virgen de Guadalupe was important during my upbringing.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	2	0	0	4
Percentage	0%	33%	0%	0%	67%

Similar percentages were cited among the four external groups. Koren, from Group One puts it best for those who see *La Virgen* as important in their lives. "All I can say is that since I was a child my parents told me a god exists, also that our *madre* (mother) celestial was called *Guadalupe* and has become part of my life because it is part of my heritage." Though the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (who appeared in 1531 to a poor *indio* named Juan Diego in present-day Mexico City) is a national Mexican symbol, not all Mexicans agree to her importance in their personal lives. Both among the research participants and the other Mexican American Chicana (o) students among the four external groups sixteen percent that did not know about this national symbol nor believe it to be a source of strength.

The next series of four tables show salient responses from among some of the items in other sections of the survey:

Part IV University Responsiveness to My Cultural Needs (items 21-30)

Part V Intellectual Inquiry Connected to My Humanity –Spirituality (items 31-43)

These items indicated the participants' perceptions of the university's recognition and incorporation/integration of their culture in the educational process as well as the climate of the campus.

Table 4.9 looked at the participant's perception of the university helping students in general and students helping themselves, in particular, grow in understanding of their cultural heritage.

Table 4.9
Participants' Perceptions of the University's Recognition of One's Culture

22. The university assists students to understand their unique culture and heritage.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	2	3	0	1	0
Percentage	33%	50%	0%	17%	0%
28. The college assists me to understand my unique culture and heritage.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	2	2	1	1	0
Percentage	33%	33%	17%	17%	0%

In item 22, four of the five participants responded that the university was lacking in providing such assistance in spite of the fact that diversity courses are part of the graduation requirements at this institution. Of special interest to me was item 28. At the beginning of this study, I had noted the vast range of opinion in item 28 as to the impact or the lack of influence of one's cultural identity, vis-à-vis, the instructional process.

And in Item 29, as shown in Table 4.10 below, four of the six participants affirm that one's culture is somehow connected to their learning experiences, and it would be "lost" if not included.

Table 4.10
Cultural Loss through the Schooling Process

29. I would experience a degree of cultural loss if Western's instructional process and student services did not take my culture into consideration.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	0	2	1	3
Percentage	0%	0%	33%	17%	50%

Two of the six responded that they are uncertain if culture was (or should be) a dimension connected to the experience of learning. From Group Three, Patricia strongly articulated her perspective. "I want to learn as much as possible because in a way I feel I was robbed of my native history in the public educational system." More noteworthy were the two research participants who were unsure. They presumably had not been aware of the possible effects that schooling has on changing one's cultural worldview. Yet, as shown in Table 4.11, all of the participants responded to item 41 that the university did not connect an "Academics of the Heart" (Rendon, 1999) with an "academics of the mind."

Table 4.11
Intellectual Inquiry Connected to One's Humanity (Spirituality)

41. Western has helped me engage my heart with my intellect.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	2	2	2	0	0
Percentage	33%	33%	33%	0%	0%
42. Western has helped engage my spirituality with intellectual inquiry.					
	SD	D	U	A	SA
Number	0	3	2	1	0
Percentage	0%	50%	33%	17%	0%

The instructional process emphasizes solely an intellectual endeavor rather than an inclusion of the affective domain (Love & Talbot, 1999, p. 27). However, the responses for item 42 showed a greater range. One participant seemed to indicate that her/his

experiences included an instructional process both of the intellectual and affective domains. Two participants were not certain while three of the participants (50 percent) saw no engagement of these two dimensions of their humanity in their learning experiences (Hall, 1996; Freire, 1971; Banks, 1988; Scheurich and Young, 1997, p. 24). The separateness of intellectual inquiry from one's humanity (spirituality), as noted by Pizzaro (1998), is illustrated in the last table below. Again, four of the six participants perceived the university as a place in which intellectual inquiry focuses merely on the acquisition of facts. Another participant elevated that perspective of "fact gaining" to seeing the university as a place to acquiring knowledge from a philosophical perspective. Only one participant perceived her/his intellectual inquiry experiences from the affective perspective, understanding the discovery of self in relation to others, the world, and life's meanings. At the outset, one of the participants viewed the university as providing a learning experience that addresses the intellectual pursuit with the humanity (spirituality) of its learners (Pizarro, 1992, p. 24). Below Table 4.12 shows how the six participants viewed the university.

Table 4.12
Participants' Perspectives of the University

43. Because of your spirituality (however you define it to be) how do you see the university?	
1. A place of acquiring factual knowledge.	(4) 67%
2. A place of authenticity.	(0) 0%
3. A place of truth.	(1) 17%
4. A place of inquiry and discovery of self, others, the world, and life's meanings.	(1) 17%
5. A place of intellectual inquiry that touches my humanity, my spirituality.	(0) 0%

Summary

At this initial stage of collecting data, I found that the majority of the participants responded in similar ways in certain survey items. This is summarized according to the different parts of the survey.

- Spirituality is connected to participants' common cultural heritage.
 - Part I (items 5-8), Tables 2.5 and 2.6
 - Part III (item 20)
- There was an uncertainty and/or definite disagreement of the role of spirituality to persistence in the areas of one's identity among some of the participants.
 - Part I (items 3, 4, 9, and 13).
 - Part III, regarding educational achievement (item 19), and cultural symbols (items 5, 7, and 8).
- There was a range of disagreement, uncertainty, and agreement on the influence of spirituality on one's university education.
 - Part III, (items 16-20).
- There was a range of disagreement, uncertainty, and agreement on the university's responsiveness to one's cultural needs.
 - Part IV, (items 22, 23, 28, and 29).
- There was a range of disagreement, uncertainty, and agreement on the connection of intellectual inquiry to one's humanity (spirituality).
 - Part V, (items 42 and 43).

By tabulating and reflecting on the six research participants' range of responses to the survey items discussed above, I found that there was a diversity of perspectives among this cohort of six students regarding aspects of persistence and spirituality. The divergence of outlooks stemmed from their life experiences as well as from how informed and conscious each was regarding persistence and spirituality. The cohort also seemed to include those who may or may not already possess experiences and insights in relationship to the research focus. The value of reviewing and analyzing the range of responses on certain survey items challenged me to ask if the research focus needed to be narrowed. The very range of responses within several items discussed above showed that the

proposed phenomenological and critical consciousness approaches were indeed commensurate with both the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the six participants. However, the above information did sensitize me to consider the possible revision of initial *diálogo* questions. I now turn to report on the second data collection method: the *diálogos*.

Preliminary Findings Part II: *Diálogos* One and Two

Introduction

The purpose of the four *diálogos* with each of the participants was to ensure the following points as noted in Chapter Three:

- To ascertain the subjective meanings and experiences of participants regarding persistence and spirituality (Denizen, 1970 & Bender, 1993).
- To bring out the uniqueness of each participant: “Men and women exist to transcend, discern, and enter into dialogue” (Elias, 1994).
- To understand that dialogues are built on and emerge from participants and researcher’s sense of solidarity regarding culture and similar experiences.
- To understand Freire and Jaspers’ concept of dialogue as “based on love, humility, hope, faith, and trust as key to creating a critical attitude” (Elias, 1994, p. 36).

Process

A preliminary meeting was held with each of the participants prior to engaging in the *diálogos*. Information gathered from the survey affected the approach used in the preliminary meeting with each of the participants as well as in the preparation of questions for the first *diálogo*. At the meeting, which lasted 60 minutes, several issues were addressed. There was a brief reintroduction and clarification of the research study’s focus and purpose. Each participant was asked to comment on her/his experience while

responding to the survey items. After listening to the initial and short responses by each of the participants, the following question was then asked: "What feelings did you have while completing the survey?" For five of the participants, such an affective question was appreciated. The shift from factual to affective type of questions was done in order to set the tone for the *diálogos*. The significance of the role as a "co-investigator" in the study was emphasized. It was stressed to each of the participants that sharing her/his experiences as Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students would be crucial to the issue-oriented questions of persistence and spirituality.

We addressed confidentiality and freedom to answer or not to answer questions, and that erasing of all tape recordings upon completion of the study would be take place. Each of the participants agreed to four *diálogos* and two *circulos de cultura*. The preliminary meeting ended by scheduling our first *diálogos*.

After these initial meetings with the six research participants, I reflected on the potential rich source of experiences and insights ahead of me. I reassessed the questions for each of the *diálogos* as I reflected on the magnitude of (a) entering into dialogue with six unique Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students; (b) the need to develop a delicate relationship in terms of listening respectfully and openly to each participant; (c) seeing the *diálogo* as a mutual learning of knowledge; and (d) seeing the research study as significant in ascertaining more culturally based understandings of persistence and spirituality. A matrix of protocols was constructed to prepare for each of the *diálogos*. It consisted of cues in terms of my disposition as an educational researcher in relating to the participants from similar cultural backgrounds as my own. The protocols also focused on the *diálogos* as phenomenological and critical consciousness phases of the study (See Appendix E).

Each participant prepared for each of the *diálogos* by choosing four questions from the revised lists, two from the area of persistence and the other two regarding the area of

spirituality. The questions are presented with the description of the *diálogos*. In addition, the participants were to bring two other questions for the two areas. However, after reviewing the field notes of the first *diálogos*, I again found myself needing to revise the questions for the second *diálogo*. This was based on the participants' responses during the initial *diálogo*. Their range of in-depth reflection through stories and bilingual phraseology affected me. As a result, the revised questions were mailed to each of the participants asking them to choose any two questions from the same two areas. At the beginning of each succeeding *diálogo*, the participant would identify the questions they/she/he had chosen to reflect upon and share. In turn, I asked each participant, "Do you have any other questions?" Their responses ranged from "These are fine" to "I got to thinking and I combined several of these questions."

What follows is the sequence how the data was collected. First, each of the participants met with me for *diálogos* one and two. Second, for reasons explained in Chapter Two, the participants met together for *círculo de cultura* one. Third, each of the participants then met again with me for *diálogos* three and four. Finally, the participants reconvened together for *círculos de cultura* two and three. The findings will follow this order.

Prior to reporting on what was found in the process of each *diálogo*, below you will see tables of the revised questions for each of the *diálogos*. In turn, the participants' names have been highlighted, indicating the questions they selected worthy of their reflection and decision to share in the *diálogo*.

Introduction to Diálogo One

The intent of the first *diálogo* was to begin the conversation of the participants' recounting and describing experiences associated first with her/his persistence in higher

education and second on the issue of spirituality. The first round of *diálogos* was conducted initially in my office when participants were free according to their class schedules. Three of the participants, due to their work schedules, met with me after 5 p.m. For most of the remaining *diálogos*, the other three participants chose to meet in one of the library study rooms. In one case, a *diálogo* was conducted on a Saturday in the house of the participant since the grandmother couldn't care for the children. Rather than report on all of the responses for all of the questions selected by the six participants, emphasis is placed on salient responses to some of the questions. Those selected for comment express (according to the motifs discussed previously) for this part of the journey and for the next part of the opera, the range or similarity of responses that expressed the participants' unique descriptions of persistence and spirituality. Other significant responses, which continued to evolve through the *diálogos*, were highlighted in the case for each of the participants. Those are found in Section Two of this Chapter.

Table 4.13 on the next page shows the range of questions and which questions the participants chose for *diálogo* one. As mentioned earlier, each participant was to choose two questions each for both topics of persistence and spirituality from the prepared list as well as their own two questions. It is noted that only two of the six participants came to the first *diálogo* with their own prepared questions.

Table 4.13
Descriptive Questions for *Diálogo One*

DIALOGO ONE DESCRIPTIVE (Naming the Issue) Issue-Oriented Questions	
What is persistence?	
1.	What have been your experiences of persisting in community college? Charlotte
2.	What have been your experiences of persisting at the university?
3.	What have been your feelings in persisting at the community college and the university? Rita, Jose G., Jesus, Jose S.
4.	What are your reflections on persisting at CC? What are some events?
5.	What are your reflections on persisting at WOU? What are some events? Jose G., Jose S.
6.	When you think of someone who persists what comes to mind? Nicole, Charlotte
7.	What are the sources of your persistence? Rita, Jose G., Jesus, Nicole, Charlotte
Participants' Prepared Questions/Issues:	
	Jose G. What is the influence of parents in your persistence? The importance of maturity.
	Jesus M. What is the biggest barrier to persisting? Why do I persist?
What is spirituality?	
1.	What are your experiences of spirituality? A force, person, belief? Rita, Jose G.
2.	What does it do? Strengthens, comforts, motivates ? Rita
3.	Spirituality is expressed in a variety of ways ... <i>en varios modos</i> . Some examples are prayer, mantras, meditation, a practice with candles, photos, kneeling, chanting. What are some spiritual practices in which you engage?
4.	Images, artifacts are central to the spiritual/religious practices. What are your experiences of spirituality from your upbringing, memories? Jesus, Jose S.
5.	Can you share some life events, stories, sayings that have shaped your spirituality? How often did it happen? How did it affect you? Why is it important to you? Jesus, Charlotte
6.	When you think of yourself as spiritual what comes to mind?; What you feel?
7.	We have used the word "spirituality." What do you call what you have described and which has meaning for you? What words, images have you had ? Jose S., Charlotte
8.	What are ways that you express spirituality in terms of your understanding of the word (actions, sayings ... etc.) Jose, Charlotte
9.	In what particular ways do you live because of your spirituality?
10.	What have been your experiences of spirituality while in college?
11.	How was it present while you were going to the community college?
Participants' Prepared Questions/Issues:	
	Jesus What does spirituality represent for me? What does religion represent for me?
	Jose G. Why did I start attending school (community college)/Have my reasons changed?

Responses from *Diálogo* One

On Persistence.

In highlighting the findings regarding *Diálogo* One, let us begin with the issue of experiences at the community college level noted as the first question on persistence.

Charlotte vividly recounted her experience in a math class as an example of persisting in the community college. She said:

I didn't have prior knowledge from high school. I didn't have a clue. I felt way over my head. I would be in tears. It was totally new for me, but I decided to do it. I believed I could even though I didn't have the tools at the time. I worked on it all the time and all this extra time. I would keep at it. I had to learn to study again. I had to finish what I had started 20 years ago.

Yet, at the same time, she also experienced those gnawing feelings of anxiety and second-guessing herself. "I felt frustrated, confusion [laughing]. Am I doing the right thing? The other voice, would say, 'Of course you're doing the right thing. Keep on keeping on.'"

When referring to persons other than parents as sources of persistence, Jesus, Nicole, and Charlotte shared the following. Nicole said, "I chose my grandmother because she persisted years and years with marriage and a lot of children. In her whole life she persisted. And today she is still persisting." Nicole gave the additional insight that there are persisters in all walks of life regardless of class. She mentions her fiancé, Jaime, who works in the field eight, 10, 12 hours a day. "His life is about persistence." It is out of struggle that the persisters emerge regardless of age.

Charlotte talks about two people simultaneously: her sister and a child who represents the age group she will be teaching when she graduates in June 2001.

I think of my sister. It hasn't been easy. Single moms have a lot of walls to climb over. I think of a little kid who learns to read. They really want to read! You see them shine. They are like the ones with a lot adversity but continue on."

Besides persons as sources of persistence, prayer was also expressed. Charlotte described prayer as experienced, as a "physical thing. Ah! It is a sigh that goes through me." When asked, "Does it start way inside? What is it?" Charlotte responded, "That's a tough one! It is like it starts right here [points to chest]. It's like a breath that generates outward [laughs]." She goes on to say, "I wanted to say 'warm' when I was saying it! I say warm but powerful. But I mean all of those things ... quiet power." Uniquely related to the physical aspect of spirituality as a source of persistence, but not directly as an expression of prayer, is Jose G.'s use of the image of "push." In looking at the family, in particular, as a source of persistence among the participants, Jose G. notes that: "My parents are proud of me. When I know that they are proud of me that helped me keep going." Unique to attributing sources of persistence to family are the two questions Jose S. brought to the first *diálogo*. Jose S. wanted to discuss how his family views persistence. He chose to answer the question in a manner that comes natural to his cultural learning and knowing: the telling of a story. Rather than give a commentary on what he said, what follows is the story I heard and to which I could culturally relate my experiences. I picked up much more through the tone of his voice, choice of words, and pictorial sentences.

Jose S.: They have lived through it. We came from a migrant experience. That is persistence in that. They had to make a living. If you are willing to pack up your family, drive halfway across the U.S. with *casi nada* and in extreme conditions and be proud of it. I mean an honest living. That is how my family, to me used persistency. My parents would say, "This is how to do it." But they would not impose it. This is how the entire family views it. I remember going to Minnesota with eleven in the car. We need to go to work. We need to get there! Our family's persistence ... how do I ... ?

Leo: Describe it.

Jose S.: There's no by "themselves." Our persistence in our family is that we help each other with what we needed. Even our *comadres* and *compadres* help out just as everyone else.

Leo: Your family persisted. Can you describe it?

Jose S.: Persistence is like the whole village. We had a *quinciera*. My friends would say, "Who are all these people? Your family?" No, it is part of them. There was the *corridos*. That is how the tales [of the family] started. My parents made a living; a hard, honest living. For example, my uncle chose to work in the fields. But he still shows care, love, and respect. It pays off in the end. That is persistency to do that.

With Jose S., the approach, the open-ended questions, and "acquiring data" through an informal conversation was indigenous to the two of us from the very start. His second question pertained to "Family Persistence in Keeping Me in College." When I read and heard the question, in my mind, I fell into a natural tendency, trained in 26 years of American schooling, and I asked myself "What is this about? Where he is he going with this?" The meaning and direction of wanting to know about persistence through this first *diálogo* of the study was slowly but engagingly revealed ... through another story!

When all of us graduated from high school at the *baile*, I told my father I was going to UCLA. He said, "You can't afford that!" Yes, I can. It is the University of Chemeketa at Lancaster Avenue. He laughed. He remembered that. I didn't go to community college for two years. When I told him I was going to enroll in school, it was August getting ready for the harvest, and it was 4:30 in the afternoon, and I told him that I had to register. Aren't you going to UCLA? My father and brothers said, "We'll do whatever it will take to get you through school. You go to school full time. No need to work." I felt pretty bad. They would give me \$900 a term, \$300 for each month for rent, food, clothes, and spending money. They said, "Enjoy the college. No need to worry." Have the time to study. I want you to be on the same playing field as the white students.

My parents were so proud of me. My father would say to his friends that I was going to the university. I would say "Why?" He said, "Hey, I have seen the movies!" He changed through time. My brothers would give \$100 apiece. They always made sure to get me as close to the other students [clothes, shoes] as possible. They worked all summer. He spent all his money on my school shopping. Every term he would give \$100. I

never asked. He would say, "Make sure you get through this, you don't have to worry." They were so proud of me. My uncle, if the car would break down, he would fix it. My aunts would always keep feeding me. They said, "You need home food."

Many emotions were felt right after that as we both sat in the office. Jose S., through his story, began the revelation that persistence, from a cultural perspective, was already encouraged, shown, and taught informally by the family.

On Spirituality.

If I were to summarize an experiential description and understanding of spirituality from the participants' responses, there would be a range of words and phrases from "It is an inner force" and "It's a quiet working" (Charlotte) to a "push" (Jose G.) to "a driving force and desire" (Rita). These images are reminiscent of the concepts noted by Beck (1986). Jacob from external Group Two wrote a poem on "Who Am I?" in the Chicano Studies course that addressed spirituality and cultural identity. The following is the last stanza of the poem.

I am a powerful force that no one can discourage again.
I want to live long and prosper with my next of kin.
A person whose history is no longer a mystery.
And when the day comes and my heart beats no more
I know I will help others by opening many doors.

That all these responses seem to be connected (later to be discovered as central) was captured by the responses from Jose S. "I get it from my whole family. It is remembering all that: family members."

To expand on this seeming connection between spirituality and family, I cite some other responses in more length. Rita expressed herself through a unique range of phenomenological descriptions. For her spirituality is:

Kind of faith, the hope. It is not strength, it is a desire. They are surges of emotion and energy. Spirituality is more like underlying feelings and beliefs that get you through experiences or what gets you to your experiences. Spirituality gets you through an experience.

Beck (1986) also mentions "hope" as one of the characteristics of a spiritual person. In the succeeding *diálogo*, Rita reaches a more simple yet powerful meaning of spirituality. On the other hand, Jose G. describes it by what he feels about the phenomena.

I feel it is like a force. It is just a push that motivates you. It pushes you to your limits. That is how I feel spirituality is, like push, motivation to see how far you can go. When I started attending college, I wasn't sure ... the language. It was hard. I had the push from my family and my daughter ... that I was able to give her a better living ... knowing that I was able to do it. That is the push ... a feeling ... I can't explain it.

As the participants began to articulate on spirituality as an experience, it was expressed as a force, as energy. I wondered, as they continued on the journey through the following *diálogos*, would spirituality be expressed in terms of "person" or "religious belief" as noted by Stanard, Sandhu, and Painter (2000)?

In the conversations with the participants regarding the possible connection of spirituality with practices (S4), Jesus' responses were the most distinctive. To a follow-up question about the absence of images, artifacts, or practices in his upbringing, I asked "Would you have hoped that your parents gave you a religious background?"

I don't consider myself a religious. I wish I were a religious person. My life would be easier. At least I would have a belief system. I have so many doubts that there is a god. To me religion is not ... [he stops and thinks for a moment and then says the following] It is an important part of my life because I doubt it so much.

In answering the question by his unique manner, Jesus seemed to analyze his relationship with the spiritual and the elements of transcendence as noted by Smith (1995) and Hefner (1998), such as a "deity," the "need of a belief system," and the "meaning of existence." Later on, Jesus spoke of his dad, "who never pushed religion on us." Jesus,

underneath the tone of apparently dismissing religion, seemed to be a person in search of spirituality.

Thus the journey began. The first movement of this concert established the motifs of wonder and feelings. The opera began lightly with a diversity of voices.

Introduction to *Diálogo Two*

The journey, the concert, the opera continued now with the participants expressing renditions or interpretations of their lived experiences of persistence and spirituality that had been brought to consciousness by the conversations in the first *diálogo*. Barriers to and reasons for persisting were highlighted as the participants continued the dialogue on persistence. With regards to spirituality, the focus accented the participants' responses to a list of characteristics of Mexican American Chicana (o) spirituality as well as their interpretations of their cultural and spirituality background.

It was with *diálogo two* that my findings and discussions shifted from the voice of reporting the information of survey responses and participants' comments to a voice based on my cultural intuition and a growing empathy and solidarity with participants. They were now emerging as co-investigators of their own lived experiences and ways of knowing and also designers of new knowledge on persistence. Table 4.14 shows the prepared questions and those which the participants chose to discuss.

Table 4.14
Interpretive Questions for *Diálogo Two*

DIÁLOGO TWO PERSONAL INTERPRETIVE (On Your Experiences and Feelings)
<p align="center">On persistence</p> <p>Comments on Diálogo One or about the Transcription. Clarifying question on Persistence: Is your persistence, as you described in the first dialogue, connected in some way to your cultural heritage?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Let's talk about the reasons many Mexican American Chicana (o) students are not finishing community college or the university. Rita, Jose G., Jesus, Jose S. On the other hand why are some Mexican American Chicana (o) students are finishing community college and the university Jesus, Jose S., Charlotte, Rita What is the main reason you persisted at the community college? Was it because of intelligence? Was it because of hard work only? Was it because of spiritual belief? Nicole What is the main reason you are persisting at Western? Is it because of intelligence? Is it because of hard work only? (11) Is it because of spiritual beliefs? Rita, Jose G. Nicole
<p align="center">Participants' Prepared Questions/Issues:</p> <p>Jose S. What does the community offer students? What does the college offer?</p>
<p align="center">On spirituality</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do see the development of your particular spirituality? Was your cultural upbringing connected to that development? Jose G, Jesus, Charlotte What would you attribute to your spiritual development? Knowledge, feelings, example from parents? Relatives? Other persons? Oral histories from family's members or extended family members about ancestral gods, S piritual/religious practices or sayings? Jose G., Nicole, Jose S. How has spirituality influenced your persistence in college? Is spirituality the same as or different from religion? How would you describe each of the understandings Jesus, Charlotte, Jose S. Do you bring a religious background with you? Involvement in an organized religion? Nicole, Rita, Jose S.
<p align="center">Participants' Prepared Questions/Issues:</p> <p>Jose S. How my family was brought to college?</p>

Responses from *Diálogo* Two

On Persistence.

To a follow-up question on question number one , “What are some big barriers that made it difficult to persist?” Jose G. interpreted his experiences at the community college as he focused on an element of culture. “Language. I have that problem. Getting to understand another culture, customs, and beliefs. Another is acceptance of or learning from that culture. Some people don’t feel comfortable in a particular setting.” Though he struggled his first year, his second became easier at the community college.

For many of the new majority of students, the barriers to persisting in college are addressed by involvement in so-called clubs for “minority students.” In contrast to that position, I heard Jesus commenting that “maybe being involved with organizations will help those kind of students. I know I was solicited several times to join several diversity groups.” However, he added, “But I wasn’t interested ... I have never been interested in groups like that. I don’t pay attention to them just because I figured I don’t want to be involved with any of that [Raza] stuff.” His voice spoke for those Mexican American (more American than Mexican) community college and university students who have a different perspective on persistence, spirituality, and culture.

During this stage of the journey, in this second movement, the various responses regarding the persistence question, in particular question number two , captured the sentiment of a portion of the participants regarding the “popular reasons” for persisting in higher education. What mattered in this perspective was the belief in oneself and personal drive. Jose G. said he believed he could do it. “I know I can do it. I put myself to it, even though I don’t have close connections with teachers as in the past, I know now what I want. I can still keep going.” However, Jose G. began to reflect more when he asked himself, “I believe I can do that plus ‘I believe in myself.’ What does that mean, ‘I believe

in myself?'" And the answer he gave represents the dominant way of thinking among college and university students. "If I put my goal, I will get there." Upon further reflection such an interpretation of belief in oneself can also be spiritual.

Nicole went down a similar path and sung a comparable line: "I don't live in my past. I stay in my present, and I look forward to my future. I want to progress in the system. This is an investment I'm making at [this university] although I am completely unsatisfied." In spite of her critique, she said, "I am dedicated, committed." This drive within Nicole underlined her comments during the first *círculo de cultura* when she then combined her reason for persisting with her spirituality as "mission." Jose G. and Nicole's interpretations of their reasons for persisting in college during this stage of the *diálogos* were more affiliated with drive and a hard work ethic than with spiritual beliefs.

On Spirituality.

The general findings on spirituality in *diálogo* two were precipitated during the session with Jose G. During this interpretive dialogue, I did something that was not part of the planned procedures. In response to an open-ended question, I shared a chart of "Mexican American Spirituality and Its Characteristics" by Eldin Villafráñe (1992) to ascertain if any of Villafráñe's points related to the discussion on Jose G.'s cultural upbringing, spirituality question number one (S1). Jose smiled and said, "They certainly do!" But he ranked only four of them: passion, family, community, and music. As a result of that revealing interchange between the two of us, I decided that it would be valuable to have the other five participants share their reactions and interpretations to the eight characteristics. In the Figure 4.1 below, to the left are Villafráñe's characteristics with the explanations for each one at the right.

Figure 4.1
Mexican American Chicana (o) Spirituality

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passtion • Personalism • Paradox of the Soul • Community • Pilgrimages • Music Élan • Fiesta • Family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resonates Deeply • Value of Relationships • Realism – Idealism • Quest for <i>El Pueblo</i> • Journeys: Holy Places • Depth of Liberation • Affirm and Celebrate • <i>Compadrazco, La Virgen</i>
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Eldin Villafrañe, (1992) "Mexican American Spirituality and Its Characteristics."

In sharing the above during the *diálogo* with Jesus (who sees a great difference between religion and spirituality), his first reaction was to laugh. He then became animated and circled the first three characteristics on the list and said, "These I see as part of spirituality. That other group belongs to religion!" Remarkably, the rest of the participants commented on the same three characteristics. In particular, Nicole was very demonstrative as she pondered the list. "Resonate deeply? Passion? Personalism? Yeah! Paradox of soul? Yeah! [louder]." Nicole then went on to reflect and express that there is "uniqueness in our culture." Lilia and Dora from Group One also highlighted passion. Respectively, each said the following: "I like the one that says that passion is at the heart of the Mexican American and in our spiritual expressions." "I believe we are very passionate people." The characteristics of Mexican American spirituality as espoused by Villafrañe resonated so much with her that she saw them strong enough to "withstand the acculturation and assimilation process that our people undergo."

Then the extraordinary began to occur. Except for Jesus, the participants went down the remainder of the list, and invariably in each of the five conversations, the

participants began speaking on "family" as central and natural to their understanding of spirituality.

As a result of this discovery, the participants' ensuing comments on the questions on the development of their spirituality (S2) began to take on greater significance. The experience was like walking on the path that goes off in a slightly different direction. In an opera, it became the transition from a *largo* motif to an *allegro* pattern. Jose G., reflecting at a deeper level, now uttered the following with overlapping tones:

I think much of spirituality comes from my culture, from what I learned from my parents, my dad. The action of my father to his parents ... what he was doing. In our culture that is encouragement. My confidence comes from what I have learned from my experiences.

It resonated so much with her that she saw them strong enough to "withstand the acculturation and assimilation process that our people undergo."

While we talked about his spiritual development from a cultural aspect, Jose G. referred to the help from others in living as a Mexican. "Yeah! In my case it's been mostly my family and the culture. I'm sure they have been shaping my values." I responded with "Todavía tienes el alma! [You still have your (Mexican) soul]." And he said, "Yeah!" This was a prime example of another one of Beck's (1986) characteristic of a spiritual person: integration. Jose G.'s inner power was constantly involved in his total life.

Five of the participants spoke of family members. In particular, Rita, Charlotte, Jose S. and Nicole mentioned their grandmothers. They had a special influence on their *nietos* (grandchildren), which was embodied in Nicole's remark, "So I just ask my grandmother." Rita recounted "going to church with my grandmother, who lived next door, when I was little." Charlotte shared and remembered during the second *diálogo* the sayings, proverbs, and spiritual allusions from grandma. Jose G. captured these familial influences on the participants' spiritual development and upbringing. "It is not just in my head. It is in my heart. It carries me. I have that inside me, not just in my head." From

such short testimonies from Rita, Charlotte, Jose S., Nicole, and Jose G. sang out Anzaldúa's (1996) ode that spirituality is an aspect that is engrained in the consciousness of the Mexican American Chicana (o) people.

For Jesus, on the other hand, his family experience was different. But even in the following words, he made the allusion that spirituality somehow stemmed out of family. "If they would have done their part to say, 'We want to bring our children this way,' then my development of spirituality may be different from what it is today." One can hear both his yearning for another upbringing and wondering how he would be different today. "Here I am criticizing it so much. But I don't know what to do with it. Because it is a representation of [what could have been]. It could be really good."

In answering question four, "Do you bring a religious background with you?", Rita shared how she was born Catholic, then became a "Christian." Rather than referring to involvement in an organized religion, one heard in Rita's words what Mirandé (1985) called "Folk Mexicanism." It is a mixture of the indigenous and Catholicism. Gonzalez-Berry (2001) sees it as "Folk Catholicism." "Folk Mexicanism" derived from the ancestors who incorporated two belief systems: strong elements of pre-Columbian religions with a mixture of their culture and the conquerors' ideas and practices of Christianity. Instead of taking the strangers' ideologies of what "had to be," the ancestors incorporated their indigenous beliefs with elements of Christianity. By adapting and modifying both perspectives, they created their own *Cristianismo*, also termed as "Mexican Christianity" and "Folk Mexicanism." Within this context, Rita's words were better understood.

Do I bring my religious background? I would say, ahemm, not necessarily. I was baptized Catholic, going to church with my grandmother when I was young. It was a Spanish Catholic Church. So I remember going to church when I was little. And then when I was seven, I went to a Christian church. So I was introduced to Christian religion when I was older. They were all white. We were the only *Mexicanos* in the church. But for some reason, I connected with that church. So we became Christian. We were no longer practicing

Catholics. I would tag along when my grandmother would go. My family became Christian. They were baptized. I was not baptized; I refused. No [laughs] I do not need to be baptized. My sister is Christian. My brother and I are in the middle. I feel that I don't have a place in either Catholicism or Christianity (Protestantism).

In contrast, Nicole shared her religious background. "Yes, very much so! We are very Catholic! From fundamental on some levels to prayer meetings in the home." With a background similar to Charlotte's, she went on to elaborate on the area that caused Rita and Jesus, who have an aversion to such an expression of organized religion, to react. Nicole said: "Yes. My parents were strict Catholics. Mom ran prayer meetings and religious education. Because of my religious Catholic upbringing you open the door ... like the bells of justice."

In her following short commentary, Nicole voiced what Jose S., Rita, and Charlotte had also experienced in their religious backgrounds, especially as they observed their parents and grandparents. "I would light my *vela*, pray to God and intercede to *La Virgen* for protection and healing of family members, and doing good in school." Her grandmother's spirituality, which had a greater influence on Nicole, must have been less strict and broader than her parents' type of Catholicism. This has often been the case as older generations who address a more indigenous worldview. The younger generations (i.e. the parents), at least in the United States, seem adhere more to formal Catholicism who have been here for several generations. In turn, Nicole voiced that she is very conscious of the interconnection of spirituality with other aspects of her life, in this case, education. Beck (1986, p. 25) called this an holistic outlook in which a person is aware of the interconnections of things of patterns within the whole.

Summary

Comments among the participants validated the responses of the survey items highlighted in the previous section. Specifically, in the first two *diálogos*, the co-investigators in their own ways affirmed:

- The source of their persistence emanates from an internal strength (Items 3, 9) or power of divine guidance associated with a religious upbringing and beliefs (Item 13).
- Spirituality is, in how each participant described it, of value (Item 4)
- Spirituality, rooted in the cultural backgrounds and family upbringings of these participants, has influenced them to persist. (Items 5, 6, 7, 8).
- Spirituality wrapped in culture has been the source of their persistence (Item 20).

The participants also voiced their descriptions and interpretations based on experiences connected to family and shared in imagery and through a form of storytelling.

Preliminary Findings Part III: *Círculo de Cultura* One

Introduction

The third stage of data collection was generated through the *círculo de cultura*: meetings of all the participants. As noted in Chapter Three, the *círculo de cultura* served as a catalyst for deeper and critical insights on the phenomenological and critical science view of persistence and spirituality.

Process

Given the above remarks, the first *círculo de cultura* took place after completing *Diálogo* Two with each of the participants. The time together was spent in the following manner:

- Each participant introduced herself/himself and shared their views of the first two *diálogos* and understandings of persistence and spirituality.
- Participants, seeing themselves as a "*comunidad*" of former community college and current university students, considered the bigger picture of persistence and spirituality of Mexican American Chicanas (os)
- Participants shared and commented on descriptions and meanings of persistence and spirituality.
- Each participant wrote and shared her/his own preliminary themes.
- Individual preliminary themes were grouped into patterns reflective of the co-investigators' understandings.
- Co-investigators' preliminary analysis of the themes developed.

As the co-investigators introduced themselves, it was amazing how they were open with each other. Charlotte began by recounting her reflections on *Diálogo* Two.

Last week I wonder if I fit in [in the research study]. When I left I felt, "Yeah! OK, I guess I do." And I was thinking about it afterwards. One of the things gone through is feeling like "Oh! I don't belong." Then, realizing there is a awful lot of people like me who feel a little isolated because of assimilation, which means we're not really not alone. So that's one thing I've learned here at school.

Nicole continued her candidness by stating her experiences at the university.

I'm Nicole Parada. This is my senior year. Here at Western, I kinda of manage to go through WOU more or less getting to know a lot of people, and I stuck to myself. I did it myself. For me, this [research study] is great because I thought no one really gave a rip. I'm engaged, I have two children, divorced, and from Minnesota.

Jose G. he chose to share life experiences that, for students in other forums, would be embarrassing. He succinctly expressed the context of the how and why of his journey before and through post secondary education.

I've been here two and a half years. I was born and raised in Mexico until I was fifteen. Came to the states; been in four states: California, Texas, Washington, and been in Oregon for the last six years. As far as my experience with school, I started going to college, community college four years ago. I didn't go to high school here. I didn't speak English so it was very hard for me the first year. Taking classes at Clatsop was different from Mexico. It was hard: language, different culture. When I transferred to this school, it was different. I feel more isolated even though more Hispanics are here. Leo helped me a lot. But I didn't feel the same attachment as I felt in community college.

Rita, who graduated in sociology right before the study began, also shared her context of persisting in the university. Note how she expressed the importance of home, persons, and cultural networks in her journey.

I also went to a community college. Started school when I was 21, then transferred here because my brother was here. So I decided to stay. It also helped having staff like you, Rebecca, Anna, David, the Multicultural Student Union. Made a lot of friends the first year. Lived close to campus. I was close to home.

Jose S., who graduated with a criminal justice degree the spring prior to the beginning of study, also voiced the value of relationships in going to college.

The first year I was at Linn-Benton and the last four years at Western. For me when I came to Western, one of the reasons I came from Dayton was because my fiancée was here; I knew some people. I connected with some of the staff. I had a support group here.

With this degree of openness and listening to each other, they wrote themes (using words, phrases, and sentences, not limiting themselves to acceptable grammatical structures as they had shared among themselves) for persistence and spirituality on separate sheets of paper. Participants then grouped sheets as they continued ongoing

conversations among themselves. They were challenged to rename themes as a result of grouping the themes from the sheets of paper.

As the co-investigators began the process of generating preliminary themes from a community and cultural perspectives, a higher yet unique level of analysis emerged among them. They were encouraged to use their cultural intuition and understanding to further explain the particular themes. Below are some extended excerpts of those conversations, first on persistence and second on spirituality.

On Persistence

In regards to persistence, the lived experiences of encouragement and a source of responsibility in a Mexican American Chicana (o) family were echoed again and again among the five co-investigators. The extended portion below captures that sharing:

Nicole: For me it's family, in particular my sister, my mom, and for the bigger picture about who I am, my grandmother.

Jose G: It's been my family. I'm the first in my family to get this far with education. I'm the first to start community college, so I want to serve as an example to my family, for my parents. I feel I have the responsibility to help them. In our culture we all share that.

Rita: Basically, it's my grandparents, parents, and cousins. Just knowing that ... My persistence was knowing that I can do more for my family, for the Latino people in general because I have an education. I feel that I need to represent them, to be an advocate. So that was my persistence. But the way I got done was through my grandparents.

Charlotte: I feel a lot like that. Started out with family, being encouraged; knowing you can do what you want to. And then because I took breaks and went back, I had to do something the hard way. My persistence grew with it. Like you [looking at Rita] said about helping our people. Showing my nephews and nieces they can, no matter what's going on. And then branching out, being a teacher showing all kids can succeed. So, my persistence is to show that. It is something that carries me forward.

Jose S: For me, I would say that the main part of my persistence is my family. The only comfort we have, the way they see me and the way I see ... like where I'm going and knowing I'm the first of my entire family to go to college and get a degree and be an example to my family. And they appreciate it. That's one of things that kept me here. And also branching out to the community. And knowing I need to go out there and try and help as much as I can.

The focus on family went beyond mere psychological and emotional reasons. Doing for family is tied to the people's history of struggles and lack of opportunity to access crucial institutions such as education. They noted that the Mexican American Chicana (o) people were not expected to have access to such benefits. Charlotte quietly noted, "Beating the odds. I was saying last week with Leo, that's part of it: beating the odds." Jose S. immediately responded with an energetic, "Said that!"

In their conversations among themselves, they shared their statuses of being first-generation college students. From my experiences in TRIO, program participants rarely expressed such statuses with pride. As for the co-investigators, Charlotte, Nicole, and Jose S. almost simultaneously disclosed that going to college was "something longtime coming for our people." Again, there was a strong consciousness for each of them that the college experience was not afforded to past generations of their people. Jose G. summarizes that sentiment.

I want to add something to my background. I didn't finish school in Mexico. I quit when I was 14. It took me 7 years to come back to school in this country. It was hard for me to do it but I had the support of my family. They would help me. They were there to support me. They had always been there for me; to encourage me to stay in school.

As a result of the discussion, the themes/patterns, articulated in phrases, related to their persistence were: **past family experiences**, **family support**, and an **encouragement to continue**. It would be easy to claim that such themes are common among all college students. However, it is only when such concepts are connected to spirituality from a cultural perspective that unique revelations emerged. The following excerpts expressed the

co-investigators' cultural ways of knowing as well as their way of articulating that knowledge. Rather than communicating on persistence in a linear and abstract manner and distinct from spirituality (as noted by Hall, [1985] regarding Cultural Context), they voiced the connections of the two from a knowledge perspective that was intuitive. The following affirmed Mirandé's (1985) assertion that, from a Chicano perspective, spirituality is interconnected with societal realities such as politics, labor/economics, church, and education.

Jose S: [Spirituality is] within a person, what you bring from your family; what you take with you.

Charlotte: We [Leo and I] talked about connections with everything. And in reflecting, I think that is the part of the upbringing of my spirituality, my, my religious beliefs that I got from my family, from when I was a kid, things like that. I know that I talked a lot about connections.

Rita: My spirituality was more of a passion ... The reason I have this passion is because my grandparents were migrant workers so ... and because we have a really tight family. I lived next door to my grandparents. I have always been with them ... I've seen the kind of injustice and the discrimination since I was young. So that's one of the reasons I tired hard to make sure everybody has the opportunity that I had. Just because you're migrant doesn't mean that they can't have the opportunity. That's my passion.

Nicole: And that's my mission. My passion too. Injustice. I always felt like the circle that didn't fit in the square. Always been straight, stuck: "Do it like it is." or "Do it like that because this is the way we do it." And I didn't think so [says words slowly]. Injustice, I don't know. I think there should be a more level playing field. My goal also is to serve my people, to empower them somehow through whatever, whenever my dream takes me because it's always back to who I am, what I am about. And that's spirituality for me.

On Spirituality

Nicole was one of the few co-investigators who related and expressed her spirituality in terms of beliefs and practices of an institutionalized church. "For me I guess

Our Lady of Guadalupe, she is really important to me. She always has been. I don't know because without that strength. It takes a lot of prayer."

The rest of the co-investigators responded by giving their insights. Five of the participants were raised as Catholics yet moved out to a "Christian Mexicanism", to a spirituality that encompassed a mixture of internal sentiments (Smith, 1995, p. 26). One participant was nominally raised as a Catholic as noted earlier. In response to the questions regarding "if the Lady helps," the following interchange ensued:

Nicole: For me, the Lady is my protector, my patron saint, my ... my guide. When I need something I give it to her. If I can't do ... I take it to her. She is with me all the time. I always have my *vela* [candle] going when I'm studying. It it's a really big test, I'll be praying. Before I start I ground myself somehow. And I have a Catholic background, very ritualistic.

Charlotte: My background in my spirituality is different. It's not about going to Church. My children are baptized; they have their first communion.

Jose S: Growing up as a real Catholic family, it's part of our history, part of our spirituality. We remember it.

Charlotte: When talking with Leo, I mentioned my Catholic upbringing: go to church every Sunday; what happen to me when I made my first confession and the father scaring me [laughs]. I decided I was never going back in there because I didn't think God had to be scary and so I would kneel down and talk to God and get my praying and get my communion and everything was OK.

That's when I started moving farther away from Catholicism and yet ... Well, for instance, losing a family member; going to mass is calming. And does bring you peace, and have the whole mass when you are going through something like that. And so it is a big part of me. Even though I go away from it, I know it is a strong part of me

Jose G: Spirituality is connected with my family. Same as with you [referring to Charlotte]. I was brought up Catholic. I don't go to Church every Sunday. I saw spirituality connected with actions that I saw my dad doing as far as caring for his parents. He always made sure what they needed: food, medicine. I always went with him when he did these things [care for them when they were ill, buy them food]. I took from that I need to do the same for my daughter. And my family values are tied to being Catholic.

Rita: I'm different in that I don't really see religion as my spirituality. I remember we weren't really religious as a family until later. I remember going to Catholic Church with my grandma. For me religion has always been Spanish and not English. So when my parents recognized religion they recognized ... Oh! I was baptized Catholic and then went to a Christian church. Religion is not my spirituality. It is part of my family's history. I'm Catholic but I don't feel that part strong in me.

Nicole: I feel that too.

Jose S: For me the way I look at it, it is part of my history but it is also what you learn and doing what is right. That is part of my spirituality. That's why I do what I do for a living, giving people the same opportunity. That is part of my spirituality.

Charlotte: And spirituality to me is also the feeling when things are rough, you can get strength from somewhere else. Things are great you can say, "Thank you." That there is more than the physical world that we see. And some of that are family values. [Silence]

As a result of sharing among themselves, they continued the dialogue by expressing more insights of awareness and holistic outlook, which were other characteristics of spiritual persons according to Beck (1986, p. 25). As they tried to group the themes, the comments inevitably were centered on "family." Jose S. emphasized that the "well being of our entire family" is more important "than having a role model." It is not only one or the other. He said, "It is you providing for them and supporting what you are doing." Charlotte responded what was then an understatement: "I think it's interconnected." Nicole followed up with "Maybe it's more all-inclusive."

Another insight that was mentioned revolved around "memories." Jose S. noted that because of family, "We'll always have those memories." For Charlotte, being in the very presence of the other four participants rekindled fire of her memories of family. "We talked about that ... that it's important to have people around you who still have the same kind of memories. Strange! I know I just feel I belong." After moments of silence, Jose S. remarked that "It's in our family and our history." Nicole, in a pensive manner, agreed. "It was burned in there for me." The co-investigators indeed practiced their cultural intuition

and the little phrase that resonated was "*La familia*." The family, through which wisdom is passed from generation to generation and finds roots in one's being, is the source of strength through out one's life (Bennally, 1992, p. 26).

Nicole continued by bridging the group's understanding of family with the staying power within them as university students. "I have a lot of self-motivation but I think it comes from home." At this point Charlotte interjected that: "I don't think we can put a simple theme." Yet, as she continued, "*Sí Se Puede*" (a popular phrase denoting confidence in the midst of personal and community struggles) "was mentioned." Jose S. and Nicole both agreed that the phrase covered the discussions. Charlotte connected both the individual and collective dimensions of "*Sí Se Puede*." She said, "I think that does stand from our culture because we are people who are involved with the whole community. We're not just involved with our own family." Rita, Jose G. and Nicole voiced a cascade of harmony: "I think that's the difference. The other students do it for self gratification" (Rita). "We're more community oriented" (Nicole). "That's more to the values of the culture that push us toward the goal" (Jose G). Jose S., Rita, and Nicole, almost as if in one voice, expressed that they have stayed connected to their families. They didn't separate from *la gente* (the people) and do their own thing when they went off to college. They were very conscious that they had not become so individualistic that they were selfish in the way of getting a degree and moving on from one's family. On the contrary, the co-investigators possessed the mind to help "their families, our class." They have bettered themselves to better others. They want to give back to their families and their communities. At this phase of the first circle, each one of them experienced, though differently, both a connection with the others and a common grounding. Rita manifested her sense of solidarity with the others: "Yeah! This is more like my cultural background."

Jose S. then naturally led his "*hermanas y hermanos*" (sisters and brothers) further along the path of discovering (or maybe finally voicing to others) the interconnection of

their persistence in the university with the energy, memories, and spirituality of family. Jose S. said, "That goes with family, culture, where we come from; how we got here but I also have [another] part of my history. Religion is part of our history. Spirituality is part of the entire history. It gives life. [It's] how you were raised." Jose's comments reflected Hefner's (1998) "organization of consciousness" and the notion that "self reflection of one's culture is facilitated through sayings and stories" (p. 27). Once again, the struggles of a shared cultural background were recognized, announced, and affirmed by the circle. Nicole poignantly declared, "We came from someone else's struggles." Her admission of the legacy that is theirs becomes the signal for another proclamation and chorus of voices.

Charlotte began with: "That's a common bond." Nicole added a reciprocal note, "I think they're tied to the struggles, too," and went on to add another harmonic notation, "Why are we so passionate in advocating for our people?" Charlotte vocalized: "Because the heritage of the struggles, [they] have been passed on. I think, ultimately in our spirituality, we have one main theme going." Rita sang the refrain with: "The struggles of our background." And Jose S. intoned: "The never-ending struggles." Nicole softly repeated some of the words as a chant: "The struggle from our culture." Nicole then shifted to a new melody: "And then we can now see some kind of connectedness to our spirituality." Her words reverberated with Chardin's (1995) and Freire's (1973) views of humankind as a process of moving toward a spiritual end (p. 29).

Their analyses as co-investigators had become less linear. Rather, it was interconnected, "a cultural thing," putting it altogether. The benefits of the first *círculo* were that they expressed themselves consistently with the aforementioned focus. Let the students share what they have in theirs hearts at this particular time!

"I am not by myself. Somehow we are connected. I feel connected to others who are persisting" (Jose G). "It makes it much more easier. Much weight is lifted off the shoulders" (Jose S). "[It has been an] opportunity to talk about it. It is a struggle. How

education affects you; changes you" (Rita). "It helped me with feelings of not belonging I always knew what I felt inside. No one ever bothered to get to know [me]. I have the same background feelings" (Charlotte).

Thus another part of the road had been walked. One more movement was accomplished in revealing the voices of six Mexican American Chicana (o) students.

The participants articulated persistence in non-technical language. In higher education, persistence is connected to products of a system. Persistence is attributed when students' efforts are expressed as outcomes and in numbers, namely, the grade point average. Traditional persisters come from families whose parents have earned academic degrees and have passed on an academic preparedness to their sons and daughters.

In contrast, the co-investigators spoke of persistence in humane and visceral motifs. Persistence was expressed in terms of their humanity: self, passion, family. From such a pulsating level of conversation emerged a level of consciousness of responsibility to one's family. But the context is one of social, economic, and cultural struggles experienced over many generations.

Conversations resulted in a preliminary analysis, yet four unique groups of themes, two on persistence and two on spirituality, were addressed. Below is a chart of the thoughts, sentiments, and beliefs (Table 4.15) that were shared during the culture circle.

Table 4.15
Preliminary Generation of Themes and Informal Analysis

<i>Círculo de Cultura One</i>	
Preliminary Themes	Consensus of Preliminary Themes
Persistence I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family (M) • Prove ourselves to others • Proving one's self (F) • Self motivation (M) • Passion for our people against injustice (F) • Belief in self (M) • Connection to school 	Persistence I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sí se puede • Social • Community [connections]
Persistence II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family obligation important (F) • Responsibility to help parents/family/others (M) • Familia and struggles • For my family – Family support (M) 	Persistence II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycles (s) • Life continuum • Family ... La Raza
Spirituality I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/Catholic background (F) • Strength from within (F) • Rooted in family (F) • Family values (M) • Family examples (M) • Religion/beliefs/values (M) • Values and family history (F) • Individual yet connected (F) 	Spirituality I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultura/tradiciones (Culture and traditions) • Belief system
Spirituality II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion to be advocate for our Raza (F) • Passion as spirituality (F) 	Spirituality II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles from our family background • Cultural connections • Background of injustice

F- Responses from the female participants

M - Responses from the male participants

Preliminary Findings Part IV: *Diálogos* Three and Four

Introduction to *Diálogo* Three

After the first *círculo de cultura*, each of the participants then continued the study with their third *diálogo*. In terms of the imagery (concert and journey) that had been applied, the *círculo de cultura* one was the second movement, the *adante*, a cacophony of other sounds. As a journey of experiences, the first circle can be likened to going from a solo trek along the path and into a more spacious terrain looking at different vistas. With *Diálogo* Three, we left the meadow-like environment and embarked upon a course of critical reflection. As an opera for each of the participants, the next *largo* began a set of deliberations over still waters. Within this context of critical reflection, each of the participants engaged in coming to know themselves more deeply as a Mexican American Chicana (o) university student in relation to their experiences and perceptions of recognition, internal strength, power, and justice making.

They came to the third *diálogo* with a greater sense of solidarity experienced from the interactions with the other four participants. From that personalized impetus, each participant came and advanced to a deeper level of conversation, sharing, and knowing and was more focused and aware of the research in which they were immersed. A new development also occurred. In Chapter Three, the "Methodology" had indicated that two *círculos de cultura* would be conducted. However, while conversing about the first *círculo* at the beginning of *Diálogo* Three, the participants noted that one more culture circle together would not be enough for analysis. As Nicole said, "Circle one was just a warm up." A third *círculo de cultura* was then added to the study. During the third *diálogo*, they would critically reflect on how the university recognized them. Each participant would consider the "how" and the "why" they needed to call upon their internal strength in the

university setting. They would think about and ponder how the university's response to students' cultural needs is a matter of justice (see Table 4.16 below).

Table 4.16
Critical Reflective For Questions *Diálogo Three*

DIALOGO THREE CRITICAL REFLECTIVE (Issues of recognition, learning process, power, internal strength, and justice)	
Follow up Discussion on Theme Generation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss informal themes identified in conversations 1 & 2 and your response to the interpretations as well as additional insights to them. • Your reflections on the first <i>Círculo de Cultura</i>: personal dynamics, dialogue on preliminary themes, and reflections on the preliminary themes constructed by the círculo. 	
On persistence	
1.	What does it mean to be a university female/male student of Mexican American Chicana (o) descent? Jesus, Charlotte, Rita, and Jose S.
2.	What of the university (faculty, instruction, staff, services, programs, campus climate) has discouraged you from completing your college education? Jose G. Nicole and Jose S.
3.	What of the university (faculty, instruction, staff, services, programs, campus climate) has encouraged you in completing your college education? Nicole and Jose G.
4.	What are some cultural ways in which you understand persistence which connect to your ways of knowing?
5.	What has been missing for you, as a Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer student, in your education that you experienced at home? Nicole, Jesus, Jose G., Charlotte, and Rita.
On spirituality	
1.	How has your spirituality influenced your persistence in college? Has it been a faith that has sustained, motivated, or challenged you? Nicole, Jesus, Charlotte, and Jose S.
2.	To what extent has there been a conflict between your academic and cultural roles? What has been the emotional impact? What has been the spiritual impact? Nicole and Rita
3.	How is spirituality connected to: Your ethnicity - What meaning does it have for you? Jesus, Charlotte, and Jose G. Your gender - What meaning does it have for you? Rita Your social class - What meaning does it have for you? Jose S.

Responses From *Diálogo Three*

Open Conversation.

The more salient findings in the third *diálogo* emanated from the open conversation regarding the participants' first *círculo de cultura* experiences. Charlotte and Rita's comments summarized the feelings of the five participants who were present for the first circle. Charlotte shared that:

The meeting we had with everybody, it was the first time I had been with a group of Chicanos other than my own family. So I felt really comfortable. Felt I was a part of it. And finding we are similar like Jose said.

Rita also felt really comfortable with each participant but for another reason. She expressed it in the following manner:

Yeah. I felt good to hear other college student's stories in a way. Where they came from, how they ended up here. But I thought it was pretty motivating to see people like myself that have so much education. It's nice, good to know they're doing well in their school, and it can be done.

For the five participants (Nicole, Charlotte, Jose G., Rita, and Jose S.) present, this was the first forum where they, as Mexican American Chicana (o) students, were able to discuss their college experiences within a cultural context. They had never, on this campus, been together with other Chicanas (os) to talk as they were. This was the first time. The appreciation went to a deeper level in that several participants commented later on their gratefulness in "listening to similar stories" (Rita) and "knowing that we have similar goals" (Charlotte).

Because of the interaction and interchange, Charlotte was stimulated to speak of her feelings of solidarity with fellow students from similar cultural backgrounds.

For myself, just how much alike we are. Like I said, I was different from the other Chicanos in the barrio. I let myself think that I wasn't Mexican enough. And it felt good to realize that I had different experiences. I always felt proud of my heritage, really strong in it but I have felt not Mexican enough. That's a big deal!

Tomás, from Group Three, cited similar thoughts as he found himself in a community college course in which the majority of the students are Mexican American Chicanas (os). His reflections included the following: "The girl said her family had a *posada* (a Christmas tradition). I did not know what that meant. I am personally not very involved in the Hispanic culture. I hope this class will help me gain that back." Charlotte,

listening and seeing others like herself, also pushed her to query deeper on the whole issue of cultural identity.

I guess what I left [with] was realizing the more in touch I became with my culture, with things inside of me that I haven't thought about, probably the more confident I will be. But like I mentioned, like feeling like an outsider among my own people.

What she said was the concern of Rhoads, Shaw, and Valadez (1999). Students of color are expected to succeed in higher education without the "social capital" that the traditional majority students possess. Having that social capital lends to the confidence of which Charlotte spoke. In addition, the socialization process to achieve and persist in community colleges and universities was based upon psychological and functional models of identity of the dominant culture. Development and recognition of the particular dimensions of persons' of color cultural identity were not even considered. Realizing a person's of color participation and overall effects of the assimilation process opens a whole area of unresolved experiences. What was noted as considerations over still waters now becomes looking into deep waters. To advance educationally, even though a person of Sbecomes assimilated, became a significant realization for Charlotte.

On a lighter note, Jose G.'s comment below showed another dimension that was revealed about the collective voice of the participants. It complemented the individual voice in the *diálogos*. "I share a lot of values they were expressing ... where my spirituality comes from, from my family. In that, we have a little difference ... spirituality versus religion. They all mentioned family."

In addition to the reflections stimulated by the experiences of community college during the open conversations of the third *diálogo*, I found the participants communicating at a more serious level. Highlighted are some comments from Nicole, Jose G., and Jesus. As Nicole talked of the connection of persisting as a Chicana, she gave credit to her family.

Actually the point about "self motivation" or to prove yourself ... I have a lot of self-motivation but I think it comes from home. I watch other women, other men, other people, family members move along. And in that cycle they brought me along which gave me power! And I use the power.

Jose G. went back to amplify his discussion of persistence and the sense of maturity. Previously, he had mentioned that achieving an education for himself alone was his primary goal. He then voiced that his talking about maturity "is a good example both of learning from others in the *círculo* as well thinking at a deeper level. In the first conversations we had, Jose G. didn't say anything about helping people." At the start of the third *diálogo*, he went on to say, "As Latinos, we want to help people, especially our family ... these are things that are very strong in all of us."

Jesus, who could not attend the *círculo de cultura*, talked at length at the beginning of the third dialogue. He returned to his wrestling over religion and spirituality in his life. "And maybe that is what religion is about [with emphasis]. But spirituality shouldn't be involved as an organization to keep the company going." Later, he admitted reflecting at a more intense level.

Yeah! I like to think that I think deeply about spirituality and religion. I'm the first to admit that I don't know everything, but yeah, I don't think that it's not just going through the motions. And by not being brought up religious, I think that allows me to criticize spirituality and religion, and hopefully later on in life, I'll come to a conclusion.

In closing, Jesus agreed that spirituality was within each person. He had yet to discover his spirituality.

As they entered third *diálogo*, the participants began to deepen and/or reconsider reflections that they had voiced during the first two *diálogos*. There emerged the realization that there was a connection among family, spirituality, and motivation. The exchange with the other participants gave them a sense of family at the university. Such an

opportunity to discourse helped them realize the sources of their motivations to persist were inextricably intertwined with the spirituality that is within each person.

On Persistence.

In responding to the question "What does it mean to be a university female/male student of Mexican American Chicana (o) descent?" both Rita and Jose S. responded by saying it meant "I am a minority," that "I stand out."

To quote Rita more extensively: "I mean that I'm a minority on this campus because we're not the majority here. So it makes me feel proud when I'm here persisting. I represent the rest of everybody that are out there."

Jose S. spoke of "standing out" in relation to campus climate. For him, there was a lack of [real] programs for students of color, and the lack of Mexican American Chicana (o) students "given where the place is." He also mentioned how he "felt really nervous going to classes that dealt with issues relating to culture, diversity, profiling. When the issue first comes up you're really nervous but then you can only take so much before you got to say, 'Wait a minute!'" Charlotte shared the following:

I have had a couple of professors that have said, that have encouraged me because they recognize the need for Chicana teachers. Very specifically they have, very specifically they have ... one, in particular, said that the 'Education Program should be treating me like gold because we need more of you, more people out there that can give to the kids. Because they don't know what they have, they should be treating you like gold.'

Charlotte understood that she was looked upon as a minority. She recounted what she has perceived from others.

In contrast, Jesus remarked that: "I chose that one because [laughs] I thought it would be easier. Ah! I really don't know what it means to be Mexican American."

However, Jesus' later comments were connected to those of Rita and Jose S., but from a

whole other angle! He goes on to declare: "I don't have an accent. I am also not dark skinned like some people. And I sort of related it to ... I have heard some black people say that light-skinned blacks have it easier than darker skinned blacks." He had had it easier than the more dark-skinned Mexican Americans. According to Sonia Nieto (1998), he was "unmarked." Jesus didn't speak Spanish; therefore he had no accent, and as he said above, "I am also not dark skinned like some people." Jesus had not experienced discrimination in any form "while I was in college." I haven't felt what other people have felt." For Rita and Jose S., who are marked by darker skin, stares had been cast their way.

The next series of responses on persistence centered on question five. The participants, except for Jesus' reply noted on the next page, seemed to indicate that a lack of persistence was somehow connected to what is missing in the university but readily present in the home. One issue is a lack of high expectations for all first-generation students and students of color on the part of the university. Even though Nicole was persisting through the entire college scene and in her classes, she quietly told the story of a "falling out" with one of her writing teachers. As she put it, "We saw differently ... perspective differences. However, expectations [from the professor] were higher" but according to his worldview. It was akin to "write it my way or suffer the consequences." This was different from the home pedagogy of Mexican American Chicanas (os) addressed by Dolores Bernal (1998), in which expectations mean "encouragement to accomplish a task with respect to your way of knowing" (p. 186). Even though Nicole still felt the devastation of the experience, she has remained resilient.

Jose G. spoke of expectations based on some of his experiences. "They're there to help you" whether at home, on the job, or in the college. At the community college, the expectation was met. For Jose, however, it was lacking at the university. Even without the support, he was resilient as he went it alone.

And while the lack of expectations within the institution were glaring, sometimes they are not present in the family either, as acknowledged by Jesus:

It was like, 'You had your chance to go to college. Why don't you get an occupation, a trade, and you can start your own business from that.' And, to me, it felt like he was saying, 'You had enough opportunity to go to school. Get on with your life.' And I didn't like when he said that. I didn't

Even without the voice of encouragement, Jesus had continued to be resilient. He graduated at the end of winter term 2001.

A second indicator of the lack of persistence among Mexican American Chicanas (os) is connected to what is missing in the university but readily present in the home: the simple point of recognition of the other. When that recognition is not experienced by the student nor planned for by the administrators, faculty, and staff, attrition rates will continue to have their heyday. Nicole clearly explained the parts that discouraged her. They were the services, programs, and places where she was reaching out. "There were a few Chicanos. But nobody reached out to me. I WAS THERE!" The participants' remarks reveal that what discouraged them is wrapped up in the lived experiences of being seen, and subtly treated, as a minority. With this, at least, subtle stigma comes a lack of recognition and high expectations.

On Spirituality.

One of the key questions of the study was directly asked during this third *diálogo*: "How has your spirituality influenced your persistence in college? Has it been a faith that has sustained, motivated, or challenged you?"

The most direct response came from Nicole. In reference to her doing well in her studies, devotion to the Lady was core. "That's my rock. [Laughs] I went into the store

the other day to get some *velas* (candles)." She relies on her Guadalupe spirituality to get her through the pressures and struggles, even when she "falls apart."

I fall apart too. When it goes past 48 hours I've got to give it over [to the Lady] ... Total faith to her. Totally! [She] takes these things from me ... "*Que Diós me ayuda!*" (That the Lord will help me!) But you know, "*Me estoy haciendo mis estudios.*" (I am doing my studies.) And I pray for myself not to be lingering ... because if I have to take it on to get better, I will fall so far behind I won't come back. I won't be able to. So Yeah! I look at all my stuff and I said, "Uh! No! No way! I just can't do it. It is humanly impossible!" And I say, "Come on, girl let's go. Get moving, like it or not!" And I got going. [Laughs]

But almost immediately her reliance on the transcendent gets intertwined directly to the mission she feels she has toward her people. "But because of them, I AM, or I DID. And it's irrelevant. They're always going to be there." Charlotte saw her spirituality as sustaining her because "that goes along with giving you that strength and that confidence."

For every one of the participants present during the first circle, the influence of spirituality was automatically interconnected to various aspects of their lives, which had inextricably impacted their persistence. There was Nicole's battle against the traditional role of a woman in her culture. What was heard from Jose S. was that he relied on the faith of his family to persist in bringing about a real program for students like himself: a Chicano Studies minor. He also noted, "I can be down and talk to my mother and she says to 'Mira, mi hijo, keep on doing this'. (Look, my son!) Stuff like that rekindles the fire.' " For Jose G., his faith, the push, was what motivated him to stay in school even though it was difficult, and he felt isolated as an immigrant former fieldworker. For Charlotte, it was getting through "generic support" as noted previously in her persisting in the College of Education. Even though she was one of a handful of minority students, her inner strength calms her when she incessantly heard the rhetoric, "They should treat you like gold!" These various comments expressed that student development perspectives need to

change dramatically to include issues of spirituality as the student population changes

(Leach, 1989). In contrast to the participant's responses above, Jesus said:

I have attended school. I don't think it has anything to do with spirituality. It is just something that I think I'm capable of. I know I'm going to benefit from it, intellectually and economically. And that's what's driving me. I guess the perception that I like to give people, 'Look, I finished college.'

Spirituality was also voiced and connected to the areas of ethnicity, gender, and class among the six participants. Charlotte spoke of adversity in being seen as a minority but beating the odds. "So that's why I feel like, as a people, we have a quiet strength. And I think the strength is embedded in our culture." Jose G. noted that he was raised Catholic and remembered that "spirituality is tied to our culture ... a big part of our culture. And ethnicity is part of our spirituality." Jesus responded as he thought about the gender studies courses he had taken. He recalled growing up in the U.S. with his dad, who was a very traditional Mexican.

He was the ruler of the house. You know, the woman did the dishes, they took care of the household. And I grew up that way but growing up, even growing up in grade school, I realized that life in the U.S. wasn't going to be that way for me. And it wasn't necessarily the right way of living in my eyes.

But more telling was the question he posed to himself: "How spirituality affects me with my gender?" He responded "I, I don't know. I mean, gender is separate to me from spirituality. But I don't think it has anything to do with my spirituality."

In the foregoing responses, I found the participants weaving their explanations regarding persistence and spirituality in a more integrating fashion during the third *diálogo*. As they reasoned, I discovered that instead of articulating in a linear mode, their contemplating and pondering the various issues were more in intuitive and spiraling fashions. As a result, the data were indeed becoming thick, complex, and very rich!

Introduction to *Diálogo* Four

The intent of the last *diálogo* was to speak to issues arising from a critical consciousness perspective as well as leading the participants to some type of action (Comstock, 1989). Instead, the fourth *diálogo* became both a forum to recapitulate all that was discussed previously as well as a crescendo depicting each participant's declaration, avowal, and affirmation of two crucial points. The first of these points was whether their cultural spirituality had been forgotten or lost during their educational experiences. The second key point was, in fact, whether spirituality had influenced their persistence in college. Responses from all of co-investigators during this last *diálogo* were much more succinct but substantive! By the end of their fourth *diálogo* with me, the participants' expressions of the description and interpretation, new meanings and level of criticality regarding persistence and spirituality, had become more focused. Table 4.17 below shows which questions were addressed by them.

Table 4.17
Critical Consciousness Questions For *Diálogo* Four

DIÁLOGO FOUR ACTION (Issues arising from a critical consciousness leading to action)	
On Persistence	
1.	Some people would like to see some type of change in community colleges and universities regarding a more affective approach to learning. What do you say? Rita, Jesus
2.	How can the university support and validate your persistence style that is interconnected with your cultural upbringing? Charlotte, Rita, Jose S.
3.	How can Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students support and validate each other in persisting to degree completion? Rita, Jose G., Jesus
On Spirituality	
1.	Has your level of consciousness, regarding the influence of spirituality on your persistence, risen? If so, what concerns do you have now?
2.	What are the primary needs of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students, whose inner strength for persistence is interconnected with one's cultural heritage of spirituality that the university is to provide? Charlotte, Rita, Jose G.
3.	How can Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students nurture each other in cultural spirituality to influence greater persistence to degree completion? Rita, Jose G., Jesus, Jose S.
Closing Questions	
1.	What have you discovered about the nature and meaning of: Persistence or, Spirituality or the interrelationship of persistence and spirituality. Charlotte
2.	In what ways have the diálogos impacted a critical consciousness on an aspect of your culture, namely spirituality, with your persistence through community college and university?
3.	In what ways might this critical consciousness lead to personal, educational, and social responsibility? Charlotte
4.	Upon critical reflection of cultural spirituality on persistence, do you see your cultural spirituality as having been forgotten or lost during your educational experiences? Charlotte, Rita, Jose G., Jesus, Nicole, Jose S.
5.	In terms of how you described and interpreted spirituality in your cultural upbringing, do you now see it as having influenced your persistence in college? Charlotte, Rita, Jose G., Jose S., Nicole
Revised: 12/11/2000 12/30/2000 01/03/2001	

Responses from Diálogo Four

On Persistence.

In reference to persistence, some of the responses that highlighted the fourth *diálogo* pertained to critical expressions regarding the validation and support (or a lack of it) toward Mexican American Chicana (o) students by the university and validation among themselves. Rita addressed the hard question regarding the university: “How badly does the university really want them here. They can send announcements out but that can be their justification that [they] have attempted to [recruit them].” But her own experiences during her four years revealed to her that a large number of those recruits, “They don’t want to stay.” On the other hand, Charlotte, using a recurring phrase since the beginning of the *diálogo*, conveyed her understanding of the university’s validation of minorities. She expressed her sense of that reality over her two years at the university.

I think [validation] is important because it makes us feel ... like we really count and that’s what gives us strength ... When you feel you count, then you feel strong. You left your family and your family has been your strength ... It has given the strength to persistence ...

Jose S. simply viewed the validation, that occurs among the students themselves, in the context as one who had felt alone as a new transfer student even though there were social clubs for students of color. What was more important for Jose S. was that “some people need guidance.” Students need “someone who knows how to navigate the university culture, who can refer them to the few available staff, and who can encourage them” in the midst of a new environment that is a pre-dominantly white campus. Arturo from Group Three also cited the feeling of experiencing a lack of guidance at the community college. “ Sometimes I just feel like ‘dropping the ball.’ Why do I think that way? It is because I don’t have anybody telling me one time, then another time again that I

can do it." Jesus agreed that students need to be "in a group if that's what it takes ... In my case I didn't need that." With these responses, I gathered a range of sentiments from the stark position that validating students was mere rhetoric to the importance of being affirmed, and finally, to the need of having staff with power who understood them.

On Spirituality.

In the validation of students' needs regarding the inclusion of their spirituality with intellectual inquiry in the university, Rita noted that what was necessary was not just professors who know their content areas but were also persons who could relate on a personal level because they had been there. Rita went on to comment: "Like Rebecca was doing and yourself in the College Enrichment Program. So definitely, there needs to be support in student services, but with students of color, an emphasis on students of color [by having] bicultural people." In Chapter Two I spoke of the need of such a support system Leach (1989).

Responses to the big question of whether spirituality has been forgotten or lost, five of the participants voiced resounding comments such as:

- "No way has my spirituality been forgotten! It is more intense." (Rita)
- "Spirituality is very connected to Mexican culture. Holiness is part of the people's lives." (Jose G.)
- "Definitely no!" (Charlotte)
- "It's always been there!" (Nicole)
- "No, I have my family influence." (Jose S.).
- "Never had it" (Jesus)

These comments, after three *diálogos* and one *círculo de cultura*, pointed out that **there was not a loss of soul** as I had thought prior to the study. More importantly, cultural **spirituality had not been forgotten**. Rather, for five of the six participants in this study, spirituality had been central to their persistence in the university.

Finally, the last question on spirituality was asked to each participant. "In terms of how you described and interpreted spirituality in your cultural upbringing, do you now see it having influenced your persistence in college?" I heard a similar resounding chorus of responses:

- "Definitely" (Rita)
- "I think it has played a big role in my persistence in staying in school." (Jose G.)
- "Yeah! Because of my family and Catholicism. Just as family was much a part of our spirituality." (Charlotte)
- "My quest is to find some spirituality that is still alive." (Jesus)
- "I don't think it was ever in doubt in my mind." (Jose S.)
- "Yes! [nods head] It has always been there. It's been growing? It's been unconsciousness? More conscious? Always been in the forefront? I think it's become more conscious." (Nicole).

As noted by Schipani (1981), the co-investigators' comments expressed how they were working out the meaning and implications of her/his own spirituality in relation to education. Significant to the chorus of the six voices was a comment Charlotte made: "The strength of all that is going back to family, who is the transmitter of the spirituality: hope, courage, and persistence."

So completed another part of the journey. A pilgrimage through the highways and byways of images dancing from the heart and the exhilaration of discovering anew the meaning of the old. One more beat to the drama of human music expressed in the pulse and cadence of words and phrases from six persons who had been seen but not heard. We

went on to travel around the turning points toward the mountain pinnacle of a new consciousness of learning and teaching one another (Freire and Horton, 1990). We were ready to travel the stage of melodic talking circles, to the beats of each other's hearts, and the souls of the people from whom we come as a generation proclaiming loudly yet gently who we are and what we are. Let us enter the dance!

Preliminary Findings Part V: *Círculos de Cultura* Two and Three

On *Círculo de Cultura* Two

The second *círculo de cultura* began with an overview of the phenomenological and critical consciousness dimensions of the study. Once again, it was emphasized to each participant that completion of the four *diálogos* was a journey of reflecting on lived experiences regarding persistence and spirituality. Almost immediately, through their voicing in descriptive and interpretative ways of knowing, came forth the discovery of new insights. Through their growing awareness as they had made the path and critical reflection with each succeeding movement, each of the participants had ventured into a higher level of critical consciousness. The intent of the *círculo de cultura* was to apply their current level of critical consciousness to developing thematic statements representative of their key understandings and insights of the research focus.

At the outset of the second *círculo*, charts were distributed showing how the participants had identified two sets of preliminary themes for both persistence and spirituality during the first culture circle. The chart below (Table 4.18) represented the discussions of persistence that led to two groups of preliminary themes as well as from conversations on spirituality that also resulted in two sets of themes.

Table 4.18
Preliminary Themes on Persistence and Spirituality from *Círculo One*

Persistence I	Persistence II
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sí Se Puede</i> • Social • Community [connections] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycles (s) • Life continuum from Family to <i>La Raza</i>
Spirituality I	Spirituality II
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultura/tradiciones • Belief system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles from our family background • Cultural connections • Background of injustice

Of the two sets on persistence that were identified in the first *círculo*, the participants decided to continue their discussions on Persistence I. As for spirituality, the continuing dialogue centered on Spirituality II.

As the co-investigators attempted to create a thematic statement for Persistence I, the first concept stated was naturally equated with the popular saying among the Mexican American people and coined by Caesar Chavez during the Farmworkers' labor struggles of the 1960s: "*Sí Se Puede*" (Yes, it can be done!). Nicole noted at a deeper level that to persist was related to "being who you are." From that understatement, a unique way of reasoning among the participants was articulated in discussions that ensued. The participants saw within themselves a "strength and a spiritual bond" (Jose S.) in which "we don't give up" (Charlotte). The most significant reason, as stated by Rita and Charlotte on behalf of the five participants present, that drove this resistance to quitting was that, as a historically oppressed people, "we have something to bring" that must be recognized and respected by the dominant society. This affirmation among the co-investigators was reminiscent of Mouunier's (Elias, 1994) ideas cited in Chapter Two, regarding to an inherently progressive and optimistic view of human history: "radical humanization of man" and "the ability of individuals to shape history and progress" (p. 29). In the midst of their own struggles to persist in the university, they possessed the resiliency to "be proud" for, as Charlotte noted emphatically, "We have the ability to succeed even feeling the

space of assimilation. We're needed. They need us." Charlotte's experience of assimilation was so real that it was like the very air she breathed.

The freewheeling discussion that began with "*Si Se Puede*" came to a natural conclusion when Charlotte shared what she had recounted during one of her *diálogos*. In her experiences in the College of Education, an instructor had made the comment to her since she was one of the few minorities in the Teacher Education Program. The person told her, "They better treat you like gold." Charlotte simply and quietly said to the circle, "We *are* gold!"

The discussion on Persistence I addressed the three thematic cocepts: (1) "*Si Se Puede*"; (2) social; and (3) community connections. The result was the addition of sub-themes. The co-investigators expanded the original set with the following overlapping concepts and insights.

1. "*Si Se Puede*"
2. Being who you are; strength/spiritual bond; don't give up; we have something to bring.
3. Be proud.
4. We *have* the ability to succeed.
5. Feeling space of assimilation.
6. *We're* needed.
7. *They* need us.
8. Realized that persistence does not come system.
9. We're gold.

However, in the next ensuing discussion, the co-investigators began to merge these three themes with concepts from Spirituality II. The co-investigators revealed that the cultural connections of spirituality are with "our *tradiciones* (traditions) passed down to us by our aunts and uncles, our *abuelitos* (loved and respected grandparents)" (Rita and Jose S.). They commented that traditions in their respective families have had the "most impact" on their spirituality. Charlotte called these *tradiciones*: "fibers and threads." Almost in the same breath, she uttered a way of thinking that touched directly on the

sentiment of all present. "The core, the bond is family. My background ... It is through the family which instills strength ... courage because our ancestors, grandparents, and parents have struggled all the time." Jose G. likened family as a "special strength." Nicole made the insightful comment that the special strength was "interwoven with spirituality." From among the five co-investigators, there was a sound as of a chorus singing in unison. Nicole shared her insight: "It is a beauty ... an inner strength. Holding it together ... power."

It is important to note that what the co-investigators brought up in the discussions were living practices within the family rather than beliefs and religious practices. There was no mention of any such habits that would be associated with any particular religious tradition.

From this discussion of the seemingly interconnectedness of persistence and spirituality, the five co-investigators began to perceive, as embedded within themselves personally and among the circle, the collective dynamics of their own Mexican American Chicana (o) family backgrounds. This understanding was also voiced by students from the four external groups. "Spirituality is part of culture, it is part of community, it is part of music. It is natural to us to think of it that way" (Linda, Group One). "My faith and the most important things to me are all combined (Blanca, Group Three). "I thought family was more important, but everything is important. This is what I learned about this section of our class" (Gloria, Group Three). "One thing as a Chicano is that sometimes and because of my culture they are meshed together" (Ricardo, Group Four).

The comments cascading from the mouths of all in the room generated, clarified, expanded, and deepened as interconnections to a level beyond the preliminary themes. At that moment in the circle, one could hear the ebb and flow of the refrains: "struggle's from one's family background" and "cultural connections." And quietly in the background could be caught, as a clashing cymbal, the third preliminary theme: "a background of

injustice.” From this hymn that began with a melody on persistence I heard the blend of harmony with the lyrics of Spirituality II. Thus, the circle began speaking of the combination of the preliminary themes on Persistence I (“*Sí Se Puede*,” social, and community [connections]) with the ones from Spirituality II (struggles from our family background, cultural connections, and background of injustice). The circle ended with dancing lyrics, yielding the following long list of phrases reflecting in-depth connections with the original themes of both persistence and spirituality:

1. *Tradiciones* ... aunt, *abuelitos* ... They are the most impact on us.
2. Fibers, threads.
3. Core, the bond ... is family.
4. My background.
5. Instill strength ... courage
6. Struggled all the time.
7. Special strength.
8. Interwoven with spirituality.
9. A beauty ... inner strength.
10. Holding it together ... power.
11. Turn it over.
12. Fight against oppression ... in the family and outside.
13. Sense of providing for family: parents, daughter, myself.
14. Interwoven.
15. Sense of responsibility to my family ... [I am] proud ... to provide.

My initial analysis of the culture circle as an educational researcher was that there was a greater comfort and facility of sharing among them. As in the first *círculo*, the co-investigators, in trying to address thematic statements, continued the discussions by bringing up responses that were shared in their personal *diálogos*.

As a listener, I noted that all of their comments focused on unique insights particular to their culture, history, and cultural understanding of spirituality. The discussion on “*Sí Se Puede*” signaled to us all both the need for encouragement and the confidence from our cultural perspective that we have persisted in life’s struggles, including education. What I discerned from the conversations during the second circle was that family undoubtedly has had a long lasting conscious and direct impact on the

participants' persistence during their years at the community college and now at the university. Their mention of "our background" was an underlying source of memories regarding struggle, lack of opportunity, and the present need to rise above the historical legacies of limitations placed upon them as a colonized yet resistant people of the Southwest, formerly Northern Mexico (Acuña, 2000, pp. 49-121). The "inner strength" that the co-investigators discussed was "caught" through the experiences of being brought up in their families. It derived from and was interconnected with the past and current economic, social, religious, educational, and political realities of a colonized, oppressed, and discriminated history of a people indigenous to the Americas. The co-investigators spoke of "connections" as being culturally based, both as support sources and reminders of a people's journey from a life of poverty to an emerging experience of educational opportunity of a now bicultural generation of Mexican American Chicanas (os). There seemed to be among the co-investigators a semi-conscious sense of "overcoming generations of internal and external oppression." Finally, there was among all the participants a very strong and passionate sense of expected provision to one's family as well as a vision for a more concrete support from the university.

Even though the intent of the second *círculo* was to pinpoint and then produce clear thematic statements, the most crucial finding among the participants was a natural tendency to further and embellish their original insights. During the second *círculo*, I noticed and experienced uniqueness in their reasoning as a group of Mexican American Chicanas (os). Rather than focusing on constructing succinct and declarative thematic statements as I had envisioned, the participants' innate propensity was to revisit concepts during prior conversations, expand on already articulated comments, and then connect the new and overlapping perceptions to the previous thematic words and phrases. This type of thinking was what Hall (1985) described as reasoning that is "spiraling" among high context cultures (p. 87). The co-investigators' attempts at arriving at specific and succinct

thematic statements were instead articulated in a spiraling mode. What had transpired by the end of the second *círculo de cultura* was the expansion and elaboration of insights on words or phrases of the preliminary themes rather than narrowing and condensing them. What was more alarming was my reaction to the way they had reasoned. Because of my education in the dominant culture, my assumption was that the co-investigators' would automatically re-write themes in a linear fashion; it was a surprise to me that the thematic statements were not produced. Instead, the co-investigators' growing list of words and phrases, to use their words, expressed the "interconnection," the "intertwining" of spirituality with persistence.

We had not reached the mountaintop. There was still a road ahead of us that needed to be made and walked through (Horton and Frerie, 1990). An another movement of music and lyrics would be forthcoming.

On *Círculo de Cultura* Three

At the outset of the third *círculo de cultura* (this circle was added to the study after feedback from the first *círculo*), I shared my reflections as to the manner in which the co-investigators had focused and elaborated on one of the two sets of themes for both spirituality and persistence during the second *círculo de cultura*. I shared the perceptions that the co-investigators had greatly amplified on the preliminary themes that were first identified in *círculo* one. In lieu of these reflections, another strategy was suggested.

I indicated that *círculo de cultura* three would be a time for reflection, sharing among themselves, and for synthesis. The intent was to help the participants see "where we have been; the journey we have taken" and the "opera we have created among ourselves." Through the use of three-by-five index cards as prompts, each of the co-investigators would reflect and synthesize the information from the *diálogos* as well as the

shared insights from the previous two culture circles. It would be an opportunity for each of them to synthesize their critical reflections at this point in time.

The note cards each contained various big ideas (concepts, insights, and actual quotations from the participants themselves) that were picked up along the footpath of our journey. Included in the prompts were some of their own lyrics voiced during the *diálogos* and the previous two *círculos de cultura*. They were examples of how they “announced and denounced” (Freire, 1997, p. 27) their experiences, interpretations, and new awareness of persistence and spirituality in the community college and university settings. The co-investigators were to arrange the cards in some pictorial fashion to demonstrate their rich articulation of their own experiences, understandings, and realizations pertaining to the research focus.

The reflection period would itself be an experience to see for themselves how the quotations, questions, concepts, processes, and products fit together at this particular time in their lives. Each of their designs would reflect their own synthesis of “what makes sense to me now.” A list of the concepts, insights, and actual quotations from which they could choose are found in Appendix F.

Once the patterns were constructed, each person explained her/his design. All co-investigators shared how they understood the relationships of words, quotations, and concepts they had chosen. The approach reflected an example of critical pedagogy. The co-investigators constructed understandings and interpretations of how they saw the relationships of persistence and spirituality not only in words but in real life in their world at the university. In addition, extra blank cards were given so that the co-investigators could add other ideas of their own. This strategy went beyond engaging the co-investigators to merely recall what was said, felt, heard, shared, and reflected upon during the last four months. The focus was to critically analyze and construct their new meanings and knowledge of spirituality influencing their persistence.

This non-linear approach was in keeping with the manner in which the co-investigators had reasoned and communicated in the previous *círculo de cultura*. It was a reasoning pattern that is “spiraling and intuitive,” noted previously by Hall (1985) as being unique among people from high-context cultures. The co-investigators did not have to use all of the prompt cards. The cards that they did use became very rich evidence for the research study along with the data from the survey, the *diálogos*, and *círculos de cultura*. Their designs evidenced their critical consciousness of what was significant to them in their journey at this point of their university lives.

The participants discussed and agreed upon the following process for the critical reflection:

- Reflect and construct a synthesis with the use of prompts: questions, responses, and terms.
- View each other’s design and its flow of understandings.
- Give brief explanation of constructed design to the circle of co-investigators.
- Participate in an open discussion among the co-investigators and the researcher

In reflecting on the above process, I discovered that the procedure was more in line with the indigenous reasoning pattern of the participants. As an educational researcher trained in the dominant way of reasoning, I had made the assumption and expected that the co-investigators would produce a formal, abstract, and linear articulation of individual discreet themes. However, the use of another mode of analysis indigenous to the participants’ way of knowing was more natural to arriving at synthesis of this significant study. From this process emerged the study’s six themes.

In summary, the research participants were to look critically at the themes they had identified in the first *círculo de cultura*. Realizing the participants’ intuitive and visual way of knowing ushered, an alternative strategy for the co-investigators to reflect, see, and voice the inter-linking patterns and multi- dimensional movements of their own spirituality

in their journeyed experiences through the halls, classrooms, offices, and grounds of higher education.

Summary of Findings

The first finding was that persistence in college for five of the participants is connected in multidimensional ways with this understanding of spirituality. Second, spirituality is an important lived experience among five of the six participants. The power of these experiences stemmed from, ingrained in, and have been communicated in various ways through the family. Thus, spirituality is a family-centered phenomenon, which the student carried within her or his consciousness as they enter the community college and transfer to the university.

Survey

The group survey indicated a majority of the participants responded that matters of the spirit were of importance and significant to them. This was validated using four external groups of students who ranged from older instructional aides in the K-12 community college, traditional-aged students at a university, and a mixed age group of students. Responses to all the survey terms showed a range of various perspectives from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” on the topics of persistence and spirituality. Some survey responses among the six participants revealed a possible dissonance of their current understanding of the connection between spirituality and persistence in the university. This was noted by the “unsure” responses to items 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 19, 20, 22, 28, 29, 41, and 42. Survey responses that indicated a lack of consistency were later verified or clarified

during the 24 *diálogos* in which the participants described, interpreted, understood, and critically reflected on questions, issues, and related topics of persistence and spirituality.

Diálogos

The rapport between each of the participants and myself as well as our similar cultural backgrounds enhanced the sharing of in-depth insights and the expression of feelings during individual *diálogos*. The *diálogos* provided the participants with the opportunity to articulate and develop insights that indeed spirituality was an influence in motivating five of the six Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transferred from a community college to a small liberal arts university to persist.

In addition, each of the participants expressed a variety of descriptions, interpretations, critiques through modes of language, and styles of communication regarding the influences of spirituality on persistence. Their responses ranged from a traditional religious perspective, to an experiential outlook, to a critical awareness approach, and to an unconvinced viewpoint. Throughout the *diálogos*, spirituality was expressed through various images as a dynamic and culturally related phenomena that sustained, motivated, and challenged most of the participants to persist in the university.

The atmosphere of trust between the participants and myself was also present to the extent that each expressed a range of emotions from engaging laughter, empathy through moments of tears, to feeling secure in moments of silence. As a result, the participants' levels of focus, communication, and critical consciousness as they progressed through the *diálogos* were heightened and deepened to the point that they increasingly expressed themselves biculturally.

The 24 *diálogos* of in-depth conversations allowed for the generation of new knowledge and understanding from a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective that the

participants have persisted in higher education through the cultural influence of a family-centered spirituality.

Círculos de Cultura

The six community college transfer students were filled with a presence of solidarity. Trust among the participants and with the researcher was evident by the interactions, non-verbal communications, personalization of comments, and use of Spanish colloquialisms.

Participation and engagement in the *círculos de cultura* with persons of similar cultural backgrounds who shared thoughts, feelings, experiences, and critiques on matters of their current education, was a first for all of the participants. The *círculos de cultura* became a living testimony, events appreciation, and validation of each participants' own persistence in the university as well as a newly discovered culturally based support for each to continue to be resilient.

The development of new understandings regarding persistence, a family-centered spirituality, their educational goals, and responsibility to the Mexican American Chicana (o) community emerged out of the sharing and expansion of each other's ways of reasoning and expressing thoughts, sayings, and experiences.

What followed is what had emerged as the core to this study: giving voice to six Mexican American Chicana (o) university students to two crucial experiences in their lives. The first was their spirituality according to their upbringing. The second was their current persistence in higher education. Each case consisted of an interpretation of her/his growth regarding both phenomenological understanding and critical reflection of spirituality with the participants' persistence in the university (Chapter 3, p. 50).

Section Two

Introduction to Participant Cases

The findings and discussions presented up to this point of the study have made known the participants' responses to the various questions and topics gleaned from the survey, the *diálogos*, and the *círculos de cultura* over a four-month period. Up until now I had reported and reflected somewhat (using the imagery of journey and opera) on the cohort of six Mexican American Chicana (o) participants who discussed issues and shared some insights on persistence and spirituality. However, what I also found during these five months, which began in September, was their depth of phenomenological understanding and growth in critical consciousness. I witnessed a change as each of the participants ventured through each of the four *diálogos*. I saw a gradual transformation as they carried their descriptions and understandings from the first and second *diálogos* into the first *círculo de cultura* which took place in mid-November. What they shared and heard from fellow co-investigators was carried from that *círculo de cultura* into *diálogos* three and four during the months of December and January. The duration of time spent in critical reflection, including the last two culture circles, held during the second half in January, permitted for the growth of each participant in terms of her/his own rising level of consciousness as he/she journeyed through the study.

I will now, on a deeper level, focus on what each of the participants had said and as I came to interpret their reflections in terms of phenomenological understanding and growth in critical consciousness. Each individual case, based on sharing her/his community college experiences, transitional, and current occurrences to the university, tells a story of how I understood them in their becoming critically consciousness of persistence and the influence of spirituality.

The structure of each case included the participants' phenomenological articulations as a weave of descriptions and interpretations shared during the four *diálogos*. This first part of each case shows a journey of discovery and insights that may not be new but rather were unvoiced until now. The second part of each case, with a focus on *diálogos* three and four, looked at their growth in critical reflection. The case for each participant was my attempt to capture their understanding that led them to deeper levels and heightened degrees of consciousness regarding influences of spirituality on their persistence.

One of the insights garnered from Rhoads and Valadez's study of Community Colleges as Cultural Contexts (1999) was that the Mexican American Chicana (o) experience of spirituality and persistence is a multidimensional phenomena. To capture the richness, several motifs were continued to be used: journey, concert, and opera. You will hear their voices as I interpreted them. However, I edited their words so as give an interpretation of my understanding of their growing awareness and raised level of critical reflection over the five-month period of the study. Listen to both her/his indirect and elaborate language, rich with nuances. Listen to each voice as unique yet complementary as in an opera regarding first, their *dolores y alegrías* (pains and joys) and second, their *pensamientos de esperanzas* (thoughts of hope).

Hear them sing, in personal tones and pitches, of their journeys and insights gained as they observed, felt, and absorbed the undulating terrain along the path. In the following pages, hear them as they vocalized their experiences and intuitions of persistence from their cultural lens using their own words and ways of expression in their cultural variations (Bogden and Biklen, 1998, pp. 28-29). Each of the cases culminated with the participant's visual presentation expressing her or his current understanding or synthesis of the research focus in their lives as of January 27, 2001. As noted previously, the order of the case presentations were according to the order when I met and began the first round of *diálogos*.

2001. As noted previously, the order of the case presentations were according to the order when I met and began the first round of *diálogos*.

Charlotte

Phenomenological Understanding

From a phenomenological point of view, Charlotte began to describe her experiences of persistence by focusing on her challenges in a community college math course, namely, as feelings of frustration and confusion. But also the other voice kept her going when she took some time and re-grouped. Charlotte used terminology associated with transcendence: "the voice." She went on to articulate how she would experientially brought herself back to mentally focusing on her studies. "I would try to find something that would get my mind off. I'd re-group. I would find something. I'd garden. That is soothing to me. It would allow me to shut the student part down. I would pray." Charlotte voiced a turning to nature for quiet and, in that ambiance, an opportunity for self-reflection.

Such times were like a wellspring that she described as a sense of cleansing that rejuvenated, made new, and affirmed her. She closed her thoughts with: "Now, it is like a peace that washes through you. When I need it, it's like 'Don't worry. Everything will be fine.' It came during a quiet time. It was just a feeling that for her "it will be OK." As stated earlier, she described these feelings in visceral terms as "warm but powerful." It seemed as if she was giving new meaning to her experiences by the comment, "I don't know if that is making sense."

During the first *diálogo*, Charlotte continued to describe herself by telling a story that had shaped and expressed her spirituality. "I have all kinds of feelings. It is a comforting feeling that there is a reason for being. In the accident I prayed, 'Please don't let it be a bad one' and then I started praying and it calmed me." She showed a

relationship with the transcendent (Pate and Bondi, 1992; Kelly, 1994). Such encounters seemed to have a quieting and soothing effect on her consciousness.

While conversing over the eight characteristics of Mexican American Spirituality (Villafr  e, 1992), Charlotte used very descriptive words to pinpoint her current perception of spirituality as a phenomena in her life. While she spoke on the characteristic of community, Charlotte made a unique distinction.

Charlotte: To me, community is not just a location. It's a heart. [Silence].

Leo: So, it's with you?

Charlotte: [In a soft voice]: Yeah.

Leo: It's not necessarily a place?

This was when the richness of conveying her own interpretation of a very important characteristic for her Mexican American spirituality was revealed:

Charlotte: Yeah. It's definitely a place. You know that you belong there
It is a lot wherever you are. You carry it with you, a feeling of
belonging.

Charlotte's reasoning was expressed more in an intuitive manner than in an abstract way.

After the first *c  rculo de cultura*, we met for *Di  logo* Three. She talked at length on her reflections of conversing with the other participants. In a pensive manner, she shared more ways of her understanding of the phenomena persistence and spirituality.

So, um, being involved in this has made me even think deeper. You know, the spirituality part of it; the way I was brought up. As far as, like we talked about Catholicism, and how that was so deep within me. I mean, so much a part of me. And last night when I was making notes. I was thinking about ... Oh! I want to show you something. I found this last week [pulling out a medal on a chain from around her neck]. I was looking at my stuff, and I don't know when I got this, but I know I have had it since I was a little girl.

Her reflections on her cultural spirituality were punctuated with a religious artifact particular to her heritage and upbringing. Her mode and manner of her sharing revealed to me that she had entered more deeply into the research experience. In addition, Charlotte had begun to know anew. She decided now to voice, in her own expressive ways, that knowing over the past couple of months did not only had to be with words describing events and recalling memories but also with concrete objects of that experienced reality.

It was in the last *diálogo*, while she was responding to the second question on spirituality what were the primary needs of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students, whose inner strength for persistence was interconnected with one's cultural heritage of spirituality, that the university was to provide, that Charlotte again expressed herself from a phenomenological point of view. First, she communicated how she was supported in her family upbringing and that the roots for her strength were already present, developed, and lived out before returning to college. Her hope had been that the university could provide similar experiences that resonated with her upbringing. She said:

Little voice comes from going to Church when I was a little girl, hearing my mom, "You can do it." [Laughs] Um, knowing it's important to my family ... Wish I had the nerve to do what you are doing! "We're proud of you." Basically, I guess it's, uh. I can't pinpoint it. It-is-just-a-part-of-me.

Again, Charlotte referred to the voice within her. It was not only the transcendent voice she experienced by going to church in her youth during those times of frustrations, confusion, tragedy, and in the garden. It was also the voice of loved ones who had encouraged her all through life. From that encouragement came the family members' unique expressions as well as her way of interpreting those words. She recalled, "They had faith in me. My parents kept encouraging me when I was young." Charlotte also pointed out her family's influence, which was centered on her grandmother. Recounting these

types of experiences was her way of expressing that the university should be about the business of providing similar experiences where she can listen to similar voices.

As the *diálogos* unfolded, Charlotte moved away from speaking in experiential terms and began to express herself in a more determined way. She shared a glimpse of her understanding of her people's history as a minority group in the United States. It was then that she expressed herself as a Chicana in higher education. Boldly and soberly she said, "When we try to beat the odds by ourselves, then we're beating our heads against a big wall." Charlotte immediately followed with an uncomplicated yet heartening and uplifting insight into meeting the challenge when one is not fully recognized and respected as a Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer student persisting in the university: "[With] a lot of us giving it the same energy, we give it a tap [and it falls]!" As she spoke and laughed in describing and interpreting the experiences of persistence and spirituality, the language of her heart and soul spoke with ease and of wisdom to me.

Growth in Critical Consciousness

I now turn to Charlotte's growth of her critical consciousness as she journeyed through the four *diálogos*. In one of her first comments on the sources of her persistence, rather than responding in the language of images as she did in the *diálogos* one and two, Charlotte began to speak in a more cerebral manner. "Spirituality is belief in a higher being and a real purpose." But then she went back to high school days in California during which time she attended prayer meetings. She attributed her re-grouping times of quiet in the garden and short prayers to those charismatic, speaking-in tongues, and "being in the hot seat" experiences. In her consciousness, she remembered and connected back to those feelings when college became overwhelming in her adult life.

When she reflected on the reasons Mexican American Chicana (o) students were not persisting, she went right to the heart of the schooling experience. Cogently she

remarked, "We didn't get the support in school. I don't remember being directed in that way. For us it was an extra wall, an extra mountain." Her consciousness of that lack of support in those days was corroborated by Group Four. In a discussion on Mirandé's chapter of the Chicanos Experience in Education, many of the Mexican American students in the class recounted that even though they earned good grades and were involved in extracurricular activities, they received no help or encouragement from teachers and counselors to consider college. A few had, but the majority attested not having received direction from teachers nor counselors.

Charlotte reasoned that persistence, even in high school, was tantamount to the encouragement one gets or doesn't get.

[It is] helpful to have a teacher who you can relate to ...they "get you." You don't need to blame yourself. Rather, [you] need someone to encourage, to explain.... How little things have changed ... They [students] don't recognize, they don't see the reality of things. Young people need to be more aware of the hidden agenda [that schools have toward minorities].

Marisol from Group Four had put it in a similar way. "I was never recognized for doing any of this nor was I praised. In fact I felt as though they thought of me as a burden."

Charlotte also intimated her awareness that one of the sinister reasons for Mexican American Chicana (o) students not finishing on any level of schooling lies in the institution and not solely on the alleged deficits of a Chicanas' culture or her family upbringing.

Charlotte had a family upbringing in which matters of spirit and religion were presented, such as, "I do remember my mom saying things like 'Gracias a Dios.' And "So it was part of my upbringing, part of our lives." Charlotte was now at the stage where she had matured and grown out of childhood and adolescent understanding of religiousness in people's lives. She said at that moment that "My spirituality is belief that things will work out in everything. And that is how I feel I am a spiritual person." In reflecting on the

shaping of her spirituality through the years, Charlotte chose to speak about how she had integrated all those early experiences with those in her adult life.

I do believe that you can get strength from prayer. I do believed in something that cares ... I have ... It seems that I have gotten older, I have grabbed a little bit from this belief and that belief, from my old Catholicism ... like saying the "Our Father" is natural. But I have things that don't fit in doctrine but fit into me like I believe in the Trinity ... others don't. For me it just does! It is all part of the faith thing.

Beginning in *diálogo* two, Charlotte began to reflect more critically about when she tried to make sense of her upbringing with her experiences in middle school and the significant impact of the assimilation process on her own cultural identity.

I am not really sure where I fit into all of this. I feel that as Anglicized that I have become, maybe I don't fit. Thinking about spirituality, trying to remember about symbols, it is like I have this blank. But as I have grown old, I have gotten so much farther away. I feel so removed from that part of my heritage. I guess I don't know how I can contribute to this. You know?

In reassuring herself that she did fit in, Charlotte continued: "As assimilated as I have become and that I am aware of being, '[I] can't tell that [I'm] really like them.' I AM, I AM, I am Mexican ... I have learned something." During *diálogo* three, the assimilation process became more evident and more conscious. Late in the *diálogo*, Charlotte shared that there was a time when she hadn't realize that the assimilation process had moved her farther away from her heritage. It was only through the passage of time that it became conscious to her.

But I think the more in time, I become with, uh, with, with my beliefs, value system and everything from my culture that I have inside of me that I haven't thought about it, the more I will realize, uh, I, I kind of isolated myself.

The teacher assistants from Group One had shared similar concerns. Maria had noted that "the third generation has assimilated even more than we have, with language

and traditions and leaving behind their heritage.” Gloria also agreed and went one step further to say, “You can really see a lot of assimilation in Hispanics around here. I think they are just trying to fit in and wanted to be accepted by others and also they have been here for a long time.” Another Maria said in a stronger way, “There are so many people today that it scares me.”

Yet, later in our conversation in *diálogo* three as she referred to the interactions at the first *círculo de cultura*, I began to detect what I interpreted as her liberation from the haunting shadow of her assimilation. With a sense of wonder and joy, Charlotte voiced the following:

There are things that I’m starting to recognize ... Just how much alike we were. I let myself believe I wasn’t Mexican enough. I have always felt proud of my heritage, really strong in it, but I have not felt Mexican enough. The meeting we had with everybody, it was the first time I had been with a group of Chicanos other than my own family. So I felt really comfortable. Felt I was a part of it.

I responded that she had just put into words what may have been inside each one of the other participants. But there hadn’t been a forum. Charlotte elaborated:

Right! For people like me, that allowed outside influences to make them feel like an outsider anyway... My own people! um, having that kind of a forum, it felt really good. It really meant something. I think when we are all done, I plan on reading the transcripts more and thinking about things and um, quiet feelings that I feeling now growing more so that I’m not dependent on something like this to get rid of all that garbage that I have inside me.

Asked what that garbage was, she merely laughed and smiled as I detected tears welling up in her eyes. Silence filled that study room on the second floor of the university’s library. When the silence melted away in a calm and peaceful manner, we directed our attention to another area that revealed Charlotte’s rising critical insights.

While having a conversation on the university’s role in helping students tap into the source that is their strength, Charlotte eloquently spoke of a university’s teaching

process. She said that the university should somehow relate learning to what students are feeling or create a learning atmosphere where adult learners could hear someone voice the content through the affective domain or how an affective way of learning relates to them.

She punctuated her new understanding and knowledge with these words:

Then it has more relevance in humanity. And it has more relevance in yourself. And then you start growing with the information. But when you learn about ... about the ways of humans and everything, involved in that, you grow! And that's the kind of classes that lead us to grow. And that's what college is supposed to be all about. Not just getting and memorizing information. So I think college, um, needs to focus more on, uh, having students understand that place isn't just a place to get information and memorize stuff. This place is to find out "Who you are." And uh, how you can grow inside, intelligently.

So that's why I feel like, as a people, we have a quiet strength. And I think that strength is embedded in our culture. I do agree, that if they can tap into that, if they realize that that's part of who we are as a people ... Uh, And you said it! As another source of strength. It is helpful. Take whatever you can to help you.

Her critical discourse revealed her position that the school is not a place for someone to tap into the source of their strength. She minced no words when she declared, "I mean, [you're in the university] to succeed, you do have to play the game. And playing the game means assimilating." To the follow-up question "Well, what about here? Have you been able to tap into your Mexican-ness?" Charlotte's reply gave an indication of her awareness of the status of her cultural identity with her education. "I don't think I've thought about it. It hasn't been until this that I've been thinking about that. I haven't been [doing it] consciously."

As for her succeeding remarks, Charlotte was open that the university's effort to create a campus climate along these lines of thinking and reasoning would go a long way to validating students' persistence. More serious attempts by the university, according to Charlotte, would "make us feel like we really count and that's what gives us strength.

When you feel you count, then you feel strong. You left your family, and your family has been your strength.”

Her words stimulated me to reflect: Can the university give that strength to persist in ways other than mere functional and social-oriented programs for “minority students”? Currently, students of color must try to survive in a strange land without the educators and staff as cultural transmitters to remind them to tap into the inner strength they brought with them to the Academy but, for some reason, remains unconscious. During the last *diálogo*, however, Charlotte thought back on our conversations and remembered that:

It was faith that if things would work out and that gave me strength. And that goes back to the way I was brought up. The religion part of my life and my family strength ... And I realize that now. Anytime I have come across hard times, like there's a little voice that says, 'You can do it.'

She noted that the source of strength was a cultural one. Charlotte was very conscious that the cultural strength “goes back to knowing that we have had to fight for our position in society. Yeah, when I think back of our people, as a people we had to fight to get anything.” She admitted that she didn't know where it comes from and began to reflect out loud.

It's the spirituality part of ... it's the Catholicism ... that we have faith in a higher being and things will be OK. We recognize that we have a strength ... like in community. Can't do it on our own. Have to have your community Being a part of the community is like that ... that's part of the persistence, it is the spirituality ... our connections with our family, community. It just gives us the strength ... I don't have the physical bonds here in that I don't have my family [here]. But I have it within.

By the end of the *diálogos*, she had raised her consciousness in recognizing how much her background had influenced her ability to keep going in spite of her degree of assimilation. She realized clearly the strength in knowing where she came from. This

inner strength was definitely connected to persistence when one takes the time to look within one's heritage.

In a dramatic way, she began to tie together what she had been reflecting on over the past five months:

People who don't have cultural identity seem to be really confused about their place in the world. Having grown up, moving away from my cultural identity, uh, and now getting closer, going back, turning around, going the other way [Laughs] going back towards it, it feels good. You feel a strength ... When there are feelings of not being good enough, in a white society, if you feel strong in your own background, it doesn't matter. Someone else's prejudice doesn't matter.

In answering the final question as to whether spirituality had influenced her persistence, Charlotte expressed herself within a collective consciousness.

In the circle we talked about how our spirituality was interconnected: Catholicism and family. Family is just as much a part of our spirituality. I think that we are so connected to our family whether we are near them in miles or not. It makes succeeding in college doubly important ... that my parents can be proud, my niece can say, "Aunt Charlotte did it" ... We're getting there, ... bigger step for each generation, the farther then the next generation can go.

Ricardo from Group Four also had the same motivation. "I am continuing my education so I can help my brothers and sisters break the cycle, and become somebody."

Horton and Freire (1990) have a book titled We Make the Road By Walking.

Charlotte has also been on the road learning more about herself. From a Chicana (o) perspective, she expressed feelings for others through the richness, nuance, and complexity of language.

I have grown a lot getting back to my roots. I didn't think it was the university. I think it was the time of my life and a few people in the university. I know it's a few people: Dr. Dolan, you, and Espie. And I want to tell you that that you guys had an extremely strong influence on my life.

With this interpretation of Charlotte's individual conversations with me and her interaction in the three culture circles, Figure 4.2 on the next page shows Charlotte's depiction of her understanding of spirituality connected to her persistence. What immediately follows is a transcription of how she explained the design.

Figure 4.2
Charlotte - Synthesis Design

Left Side

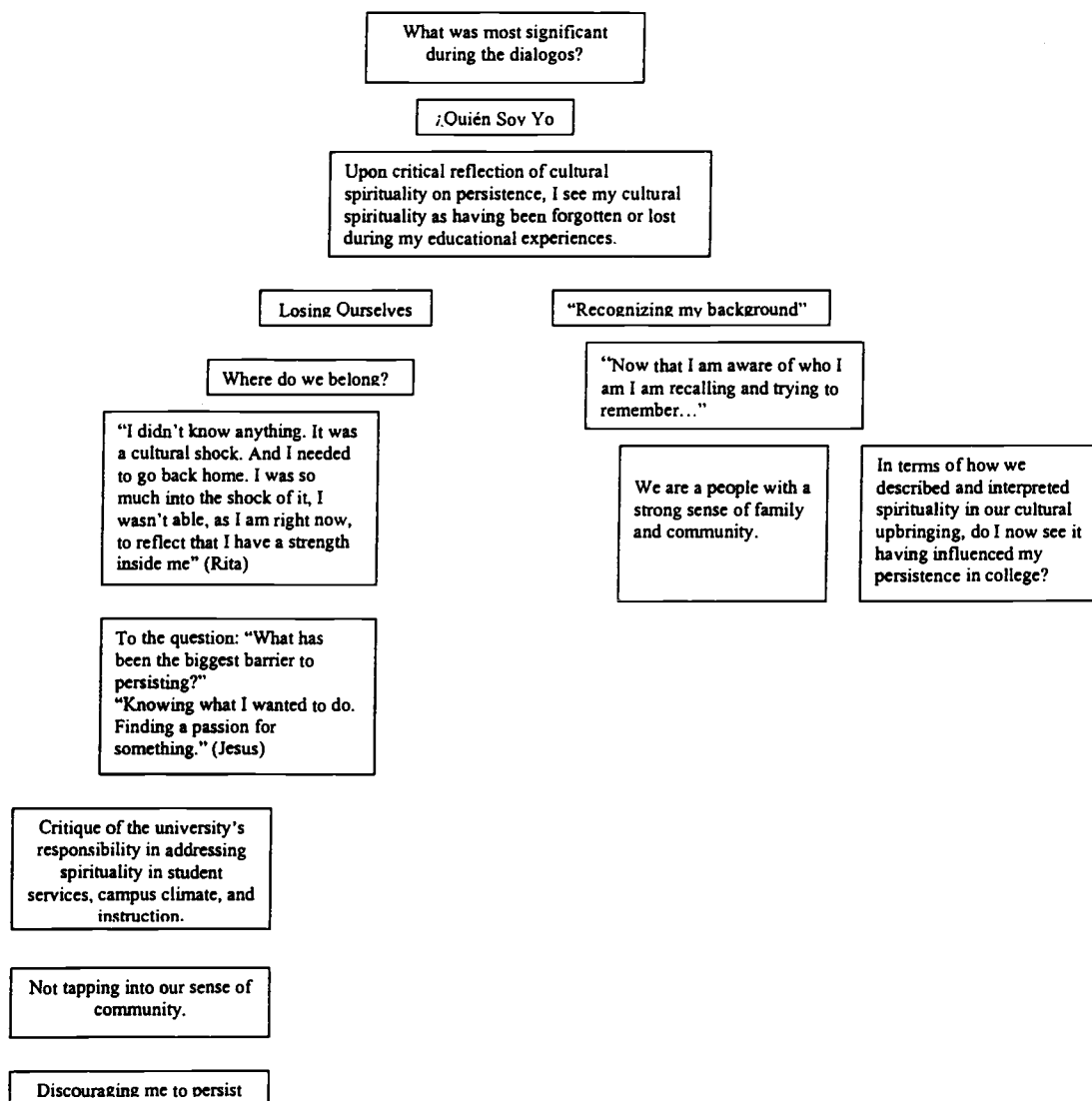
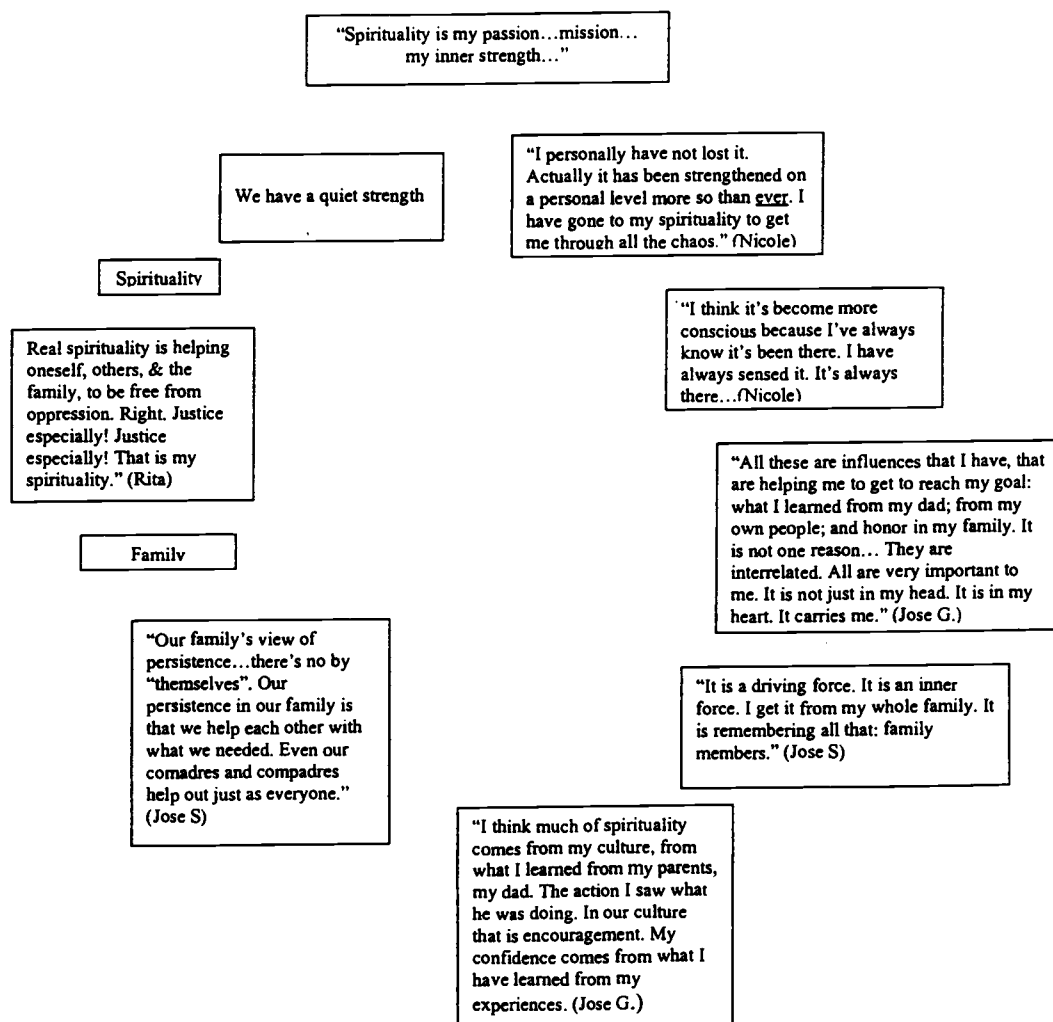


Figure 4.2 (Continued)
Charlotte - Synthesis Design

Right Side



Charlotte - Synthesis Statement.

I started with what was most significant, and of course for me too it was “Quién Soy Yo?” I branched off to who I felt I was and who I recognized myself to be. Upon critical reflection I see my cultural spirituality “as having been forgotten or lost during my educational experiences” in that for myself not only the university but throughout all my educational experiences, my assimilation and everything. I went off to “losing myself: a feeling of not belonging.” Rita had mentioned the cultural shock. For me it wasn’t so much a cultural shock but that it was not connected to belonging. And so when you don’t know where you fit in, where you belong, it is hard to know what you want. So I feel like I could have lost my way. The university didn’t help me to find who I was and what I needed to succeed.

But to recognizing my background, going off in the other direction, and seeing how connected I am to my family, to my community; how Chicanos are a community based people. I added we have a strong sense of family and community. And that gives us our strength and spirituality.

I put this as a circle because I felt real spirituality is helping oneself, others, family be free from oppression. We come from a background of being an oppressed people in one form or another. The strength that we have comes from beating the odds. The strength comes from our spirituality. And our family keeps that going. And so it’s like a circle.

Jose G.

Phenomenological Understanding.

Jose G. centered his phenomenological understanding of persistence in the context of family. Even though he shared that he was the oldest in the family and his family was expecting him to finish, thus having “pressure on me,” Jose G. made it clear that “There is

more motivation than pressure. They are proud of me. They are encouraging me.” He described the source of his motivation as “the push [that] is from my family.” His family’s pride in him was an incentive even in challenging times. He said, “When I get desperate, when I don’t have money ... I think of my parents.” In the first *diálogo*, he shared the paradox of feelings he experienced in the midst of going to classes while thinking of the money needed for the next month’s rent: “A feeling inside. Feeling of joy. But I am not really sure how to explain it. But it helps me. When I need money, the rent, I get the feeling of knowing that they are proud of me.”

Another aspect of family influence for Jose G. was a combination of the type of work he had done with his father and his new responsibility as a parent himself. “What changed my way of thinking about coming back to school was my daughter: I want to be able to give her the best. As a farm worker I wasn’t able to give her much. That was one of the events, the big push of my life.”

Jose communicated that what made him persist were the lived experiences from working in the fields and his first child, who lives with the mother in Mexico. He described at length his feelings being away from his family.

[The] obstacle is that I have been away from my family ... I worked with my parents, with my dad, yearlong. We always worked together. When I made the decision of going to school, I separated from him and the rest of my family. At first, it was hard for me to be by myself in another place. That was a big obstacle. It was hard.

His life experiences to persist, through life’s struggles, were captured through his use of the words “hard” and “tough.” His choice of words aptly expressed the thickness of the barriers that he had to go through. As an immigrant, one of those haunting, gut-wrenching, and constant experiences was that of being in another country marked not only with a different way of living but also of communicating.

The next way he described his persistence experiences was related to the phenomenon of the culture of the school and that of the learner. Jose went on to state, "school culture is different from Mexican culture." He was comfortable in his having to live another culture's customs and beliefs. For Jose, it had been a matter of the acceptance of or learning from that culture. He was open to that experience.

However, Jose's most clear and repeated way of describing and interpreting persistence, as a bilingual person, was with the English word of a "push." Throughout the *diálogos*, he came back, using this word, to speak about different facets of persistence as well as his understanding of spirituality. In speaking of the good connections he had with teachers and advisors at the community college, he commented, "They were always pushing me and checking on me. That is what I needed." He unfolded an understanding of his spirituality in the second *diálogo*. He described his development as mentioned in *diálogo* one: the force, the push, and the motivation. As he reflected on spirituality connected to his upbringing, Jose spoke as if almost thinking out loud, all the while becoming stronger and definite in voicing his thoughts.

I think much of spirituality comes from my culture, from what I learned from my parents, my dad. The action I do is what he was doing. In our culture that is encouragement. My confidence comes from what I have learned from my experiences.

Note the weave of family members, actions, messages communicated from those deeds, and the development of his personhood. Jose's "push" was experienced from within himself and within his family. He also explained his understanding in the following manner:

There are members outside the family who push me, giving me positive encouragement. Lately, I had not seen him in five years. He was glad I was in college. He encouraged me to keep going. There are little things from friends, but it gives you assurance. Everything helps.

For Jose, all of the influences that had come from his background had made the difference in his persistence. He said, "All these influences that I have are keeping me to get to reach my goal: what I have learned from my dad, my own people, and honor to my family." Jose's experience of spirituality was passed on by example, more so than knowledge of beliefs. To be compassionate meant to be "responsible in taking care of our old ... and also my daughter." He recounted his seasonal returns to Mexico with his father in which his dad's first action upon arriving was going to his parents' home and attending to their needs. As a young father, Jose, during his breaks between terms, visits his daughter in Mexico.

Away from home (the source of experiencing and seeing the push), Jose balanced the internal experience of the "push" with new experiences at the community college, that of human contact. "I made connections with my major teacher." As a transfer student, however, he had experienced a lack of encounters with persons who were supportive. Jose's hope was for persons who would give a similar kind of push as that of his family and at the community college. "At the university, it is trying to fit into the group and not having a relationship with the instructor. Here you are just another number. It is not that personal."

Growth in Critical Consciousness.

In *Diálogo* One, Jose's consciousness of persistence was connected to maturity. Jose thought it played an important role in students finishing college. He held the position based on his own life experiences of growing up. Jose said:

"I didn't go to school for seven years. I worked in the farms. That made me grow. I thought what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, not to work on the farms."

From those very same experiences that he mentioned about his father, he remembered and reflected on the conversations with his dad. As a result, Jose decided on a course of action "that [kept] pushing me to finish [school]."

Now that he was two terms from graduating, the sentiment of the intellectual life and the university experience became connected to the issue of maturity. Far from being affected by the assimilation process as in the case of Charlotte, Jose had maintained the best of two worlds. "It is my intelligence and spiritual beliefs that I have confidence in me." To the follow-up question of "And you have the belief you can do it? Is not anything religious: God, prayer, or teachings," Jose's remark was indicative of the type of spirituality that he understood. It was not connected to his persistence. He answered by saying, "Well, I am not really close to the church. But I think persistence is more realized in my maturity." His spirituality was lived more so as a phenomena within the cultural structure called family than an adherence to doctrinal truths and religious rituals. Jose's interpretation of persisting in college was a unique blend of a family push grounded in a cultural spirituality that called for respect and compassion for family. In addition, his understanding of persistence consisted of the newly acquired conviction of success in an academic world, so different from the environment of stoop labor. Through it all, faithful to the push, his persistence had produced the fruit of maturity which Jose highly values.

In regards to his growing consciousness of spirituality, Jose echoed what was highlighted in the survey: spirituality is family-centered. He said, "I think it is influenced by the family, the parents, the uncles, the cousins, and the aunts. Family plays a role in influencing these values." In the same vein, Jose connected spirituality to the issue that one's cultural identity could be lost through the assimilation process. Martha, from Group One, was grateful that "the course helped me find my roots and it was clear enough for us to find our lost soul." Also from Group One was Alvaro, who viewed "the loss of cultural identity as the result of the total immersion into the melting pot ideal." Karla (Group Two)

had said, "A great percentage of kids who come to the U.S. and start school at a younger age will have the risk of losing their cultural identity and learn a new one, and become assimilated." In the first part of his words that follow, Jose first affirmed the development to family and, second, went on to comment on a growing reality:

I think so. Growing up and having these influences shaped my attitude. Passion ... I am proud to be Mexican. Not all Mexicans are. Some come. After three to four years later, then they consider themselves American, Mexican American or something else. I don't need to change. Yeah! You know many people grew up here, so they learned probably the values of this country. And somehow for some reason they don't want to be called "Mexican." I don't know!

At the very same moment, he noted that the *diálogo* had been beneficial for him. I sensed in the following the welling up of new insights, and Jose becoming cognizant of other frontiers in which to look: "It is really helping. Questions made me really think, put things together. It triggered my mind."

In *Diálogo* Three, Jose began to clearly articulate his recently uncovered thoughts about spirituality and persistence. "I have faith, push ... that was motivating me to stay in school even though it was difficult, hard, and feeling isolated." Jose's faith, concretized as a push through people, had given him the power, the energy to continue, and the confidence. "So I started getting confidence that I could do well in school ... instructors pushing me, and I responded." In responding to a question of how spirituality influenced him to persist in college, Jose insightfully commented that it was confidence gained from family experiences that took the place of a lack of encouragement from instructors.

Based on his experiences and critical reflections, he also had a distinct insight between the community college and the university. "At the community college, instructors knew my name. They were more concerned. But there's a lot more indifference from the staff to the students [here at the university]." He explained the "indifference" by saying, "Not being as caring or 'How are you?' or 'How's school going?'"

Jose's critical discourse of the university grew dramatically. He reflected on his personal treatment at the university by saying, "I think it is discouraging. It's negative. Faculty is not what is keeping me here." To his way of thinking, Jose was open to the possibility that he, too, was at fault. Once he had considered that he continued reasoning as he had done so previously.

Don't think it's just me. I think it's the way they work ... they just teach ... what they have to do ... I don't see many professors going out of their way. This is probably my perception of what a teacher should do ... but they also need to connect somehow for students to know they care ... [about] their needs.

Jose's reflections were consistent with the need minority students have in what Rendon (1999) called "cultural transmitters" and what Terenzini (1994) in Educating for Citizenship: Freeing the Mind and Elevating the Spirit said was most vital in the academy: "quality interaction among faculty and students" (p. 15).

Most significant of all was Jose's thinking on how his cultural background had to become an alternative source to the lack of encouragement experienced at the university. The push for persisting through life's struggles began with his family. And that push came from the family spirituality so interwoven with his cultural heritage. The "push" had given him confidence. He found a similar family push at the community college in the instructors who encouraged him. But this was not so at the university. In his way of perceiving persistence, Jose had to make the adjustments or follow the well-beaten path of attrition walked by so many others from similar backgrounds. He spoke as if standing in front of the monolith of educational apathy and simply resisted that option. Listen to his cadence:

I had to replace the encouragement that I had, that motivation from the instructors [at the community college]. It didn't happen here. After three years in the school, I have to think "Why am I really doing it?" So I realize that my family is very important to me. That's what took the place, as you say, "not having the encouragement of the instructors."

Jose had done a lot of reflection in what he experienced at the community college and what had transpired at the university. In the former, he flourished. In the latter, he had persisted from a cultural aspect that resided within him.

Having interpreted what Jose G. had shared in the individual *diálogos* and his interaction in the three culture circles, Figure 4.3 on the next page shows how Jose G. understood the connections of persistence with his spirituality. A transcription of what he said in explaining the design to the other co-investigators follows immediately.

Figure 4.3
Jose G. - Synthesis Design

Left Side

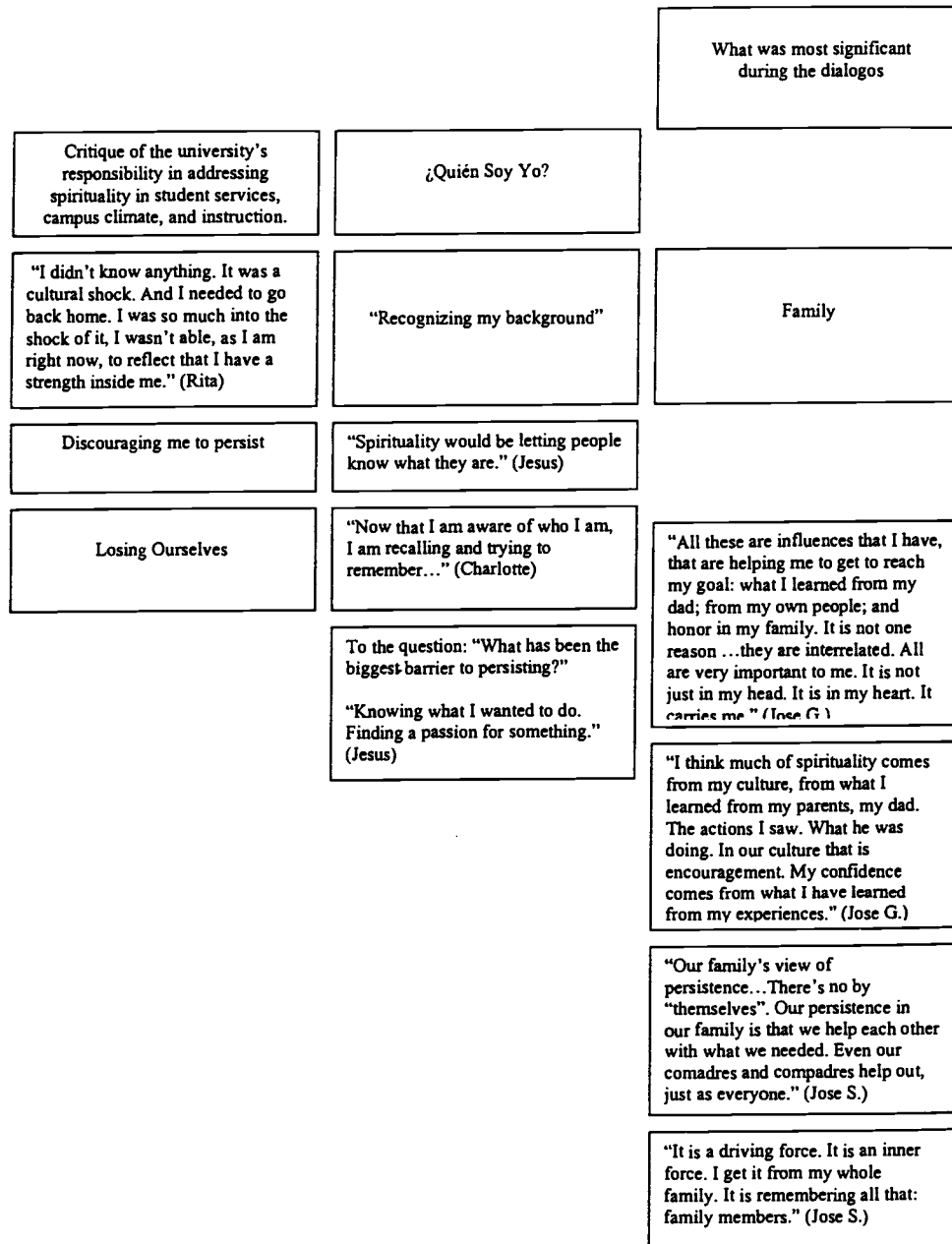
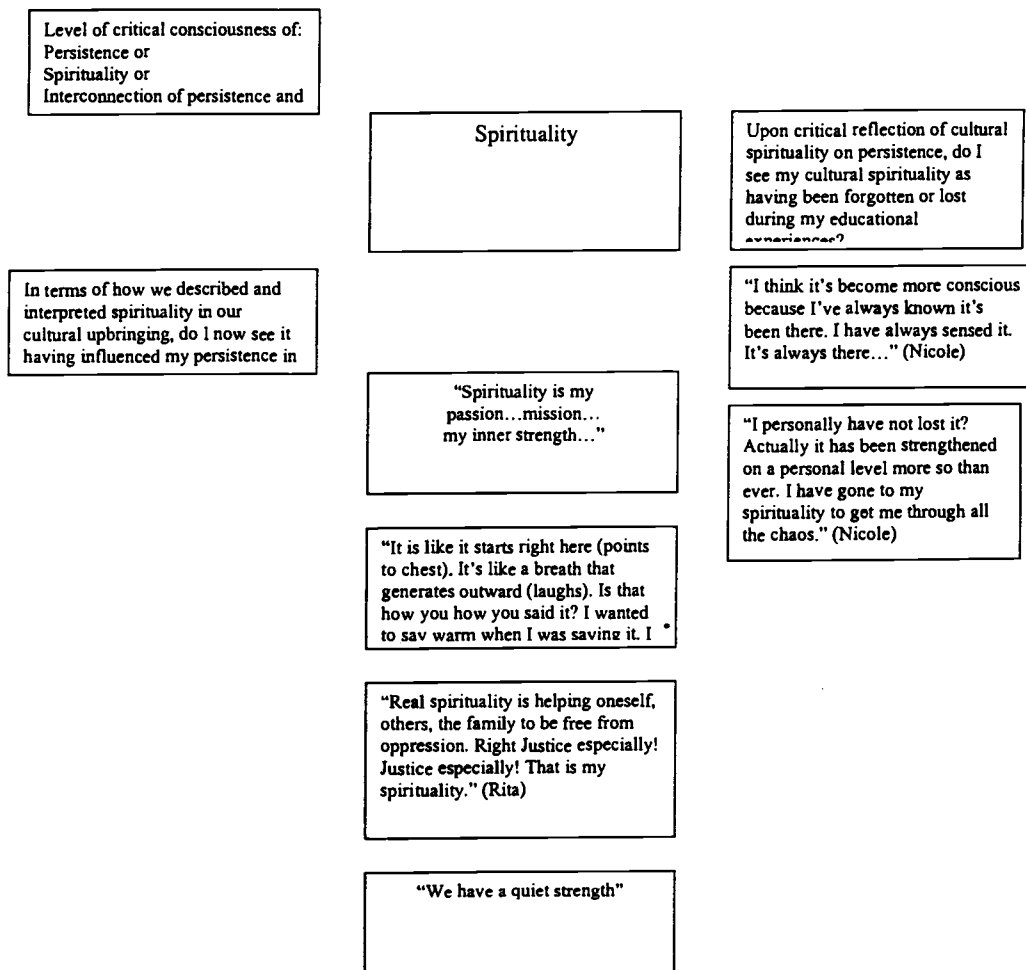


Figure 4.3 (Continued)
Jose G. - Synthesis Design

Right Side



Jose G. - Synthesis Statement.

What was most significant were four areas. First I would start by critiquing the school. Rita mentioned that she didn't know anything. She was in shock. I felt sort of the same thing. The system in Mexico and here is very different. In different ways that is what I felt. That's discouraging and can lose yourself; lose your vision in certain ways.

Then I go to "Who Am I?" Recognizing our background, where we come from, who we are. What is spirituality? I put that as the same condition as who I am. It just felt right. It's being who you are, then people know who you are.

I am going to jump to this side. I have here levels of critical consciousness of "Persistence or Spirituality or interconnection of persistence or spirituality." I put family first. Most of the influences I have come from my family, my persistence. I learn my values from my family and my culture which I will mention later on.

I have spirituality and family together as the influences in my persistence in college. That's who I am.

Then I went to this side under family. My spirituality comes from my family but also my family is a very big source of encouragement for me to stay in school. As Jose mentioned "our family's persistence, there's no one by themselves." So that's like a "driving force."

And then from our spirituality, I have the passion, inner strength. I'm not sure if I mentioned this but inner strength, I felt, from spirituality is "God Willing." It is hard to express it. Like Rita said, "Helping one self and family and others; and fighting for justice." And that's how I ended up by having that as a quiet strength, as a quiet strength.

The last row I have a reflection over persistence. I felt all the way that I have had it in there. It's always been there. I have never doubted that if I had lost it and is it still there. It is as strong as when I came. That's how I am. That's how I interpret it.

Rita

Phenomenological Understanding.

To Rita family, her parents, brother and sister are very important. Her grandparents lived next door to her family as she grew up. Being brought up as the oldest girl, "I was the first to experience a lot of things, school was one of them." She had a supportive family who helped her a lot in what they knew. But college was different. They had no knowledge of the college experience. Rita attended a small private college. She recounted that she "was not ready" for college and that "it was really hard." During the first *diálogo*, Rita softly admitted, "I don't like talking about it," and remained silent for a few moments. Rita went on to share that:

I was in a place where I did not fit in ... it was my first failure ... I can't talk about it. I just couldn't do it ... I was lost ... I was completely lost. The first indication was that I didn't know how to make my schedule. I had nothing. It was hard to find my way. That's what I was missing. At first my parents couldn't help me. They knew nothing about it.

She repeated several times that "it was my first failure." She returned home and worked full time. Four years after that initial cultural shock at a predominantly white private college, Rita tried the local community college where the type of students were different than the students at the previous college: "They were like myself or were in need of an education. They weren't *Mexicano* or diverse but at the same time they were people who were there for a reason. For us there was a need to go."

She spoke of college in more assuring terms different from her first experience. Yet, she was still basically scared when she first went to the community college. As she did the work, "I got confidence." This was coupled with the fact that the community college "was close to home" and "It was a small environment ... we were in a small setting." Rita also liked the human element during this second try in post secondary education. As she said, the

"instructors knew students on a first-name basis, on a personal level ... I was more comfortable." With the experiences of achievement and her need for encouragement in this world of academics, Rita "figured out [how]to do it ... as long as [I] focused." Rita was able to focus on her studies since the community college was close to home where she could experience the emotional support from her parents.

Through these successive layers of experiences on the journey in higher education, Rita became conscious that: "I knew that I wanted to finish college." With the encouragement from her brother and the constant emotional support from her parents, Rita transferred to the university.

I was basically scared. It was a small school. He made me feel at home. I didn't choose Western. I came because my brother was here. My brother was a life-saver. I would not have come here if it wasn't for my brother.

The cultural shock of her first experience was greatly lessened with her brother connecting her with "people like me, students of color" and renting a room just off campus from one of her mother's close friends. Family, represented in her brother, was so important to Rita.

The continued journey through the university was not simple but naturally complex for Rita. She "was nervous but excited" because "David [the minority recruiter and advisor] encouraged me. He was very warm. I could relate to him." Yet, she had feelings from "I was still lonely at Western? I had my brother at least" to "I was comfortable there." To counteract the recurring spiraling of emotions emanating from both current experiences and memories of the past, Rita tentatively made the adjustments. "I tried to fill up my days so I wouldn't feel alone. I met people through Rogelio but I didn't have good friends here." However, she experienced confidence on that road of Academia. Rita was proud to share that "after that term is when things really changed! I wasn't scared anymore because I got good grades and did 15 credits!"

During the second *diálogo*, Rita once again emphasized the importance of family as she commented on why only some Mexican American Chicana (o) students are finishing community college and the university. "They finish for all kinds of reasons. But for me it was more connected with family and closeness to home." She persisted at the community college while taking a few night classes and working full time because she was only a half an hour away from home. She went on to say, "I had independence but also comfort of going home. My desire was to finish for the Raza, for my family."

Later in *Diálogo Three*, Rita began to reflect on the meaning of being a Mexican American Chicana at the university. In addition to the encouragement from family, Rita revealed the quiet inner strength she had gained through family experiences. She said, "I see a predominantly white student body, and then you have the few colored students." With the inner strength to get through the memories of cultural shock plus the confidence gained from academic achievement, Rita experienced the benefits of persisting and getting an education. As a minority, education had "given strength like a leadership role, power, a role model. They can see that I did. [I] have influence over my little cousin. I have an education. Having more opportunities gives me more strength." Almost in the very same breath Rita went back to family. "But I am still dependent on them in order to succeed." When asked what had been missing for her as a Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer student in her education as compared to what she had experienced at home, she simply said, "College, like it was different. My parents had nothing, they had no knowledge. [But] they encouraged me!"

As Rita began to reflect on the possibility of spirituality influencing her persistence at the university, she started an inward journey of sharing and understanding her own identity. First, she gave her description and understanding of spirituality as "surges of emotion and energy. Spirituality was more like underlying feelings and beliefs that get you through experiences." She went on to express spirituality as a "kind of the faith, hope. It is desire." Rita equated spirituality with the experience of positive feelings. Her perspective was rather

unique. For Rita, the reference point of positive energy of spirituality, and its relation to persistence, was knowing and seeing friends from high school who graduate from the university. She said, "It strengthened me because I saw myself in them." Prior to these experiences, Rita could only refer to what happened at the private college. Her spirit, at that time, was in a different place. "The spirituality part of it was that I wasn't happy, I was uncomfortable, I didn't belong. Things suppressed my persistence until ... Do you see what I mean? It suppressed [my drive]."

She contrasted this viewpoint with her observances at the university with others like herself.

My drive until [I saw my friends graduating]. Spirituality has to be positive. I am continuing because I am happy; I am comfortable and not struggling. Spirituality is more inner, inner strength. I think seeing persons like myself. Seeing persons of color who had graduated, who have done it, gave me a sense of hope.

Seeing others like herself not only affected her spirituality but also caused her reflect on her own identity. She returned again to her first experiences in college that she had shared in *Diálogo One*.

I was very emotional in that it was my first failure. I was depressed. I had a total cultural shock ... not one other Mexican. I didn't connect. It was a time that I questioned my identity. Do I assimilate to be like these students? Definitely a cultural conflict. It was an identity crisis. Why don't I fit in?

As Rita reflected on who she was, her spirituality became intermingled in her thought processes as noted in the following:

If I wasn't happy, my spirituality would be gone ... the drive ... not feeling well ... For instance, the Linfield experience. I had the persistence to be there, I am going to go. But I didn't feel that I belonged there. Spirituality has to be positive.

Truth for Rita was manifested in feelings. "Spirituality is a way to feel yourself—how you feel deeply—and the liberty to express that." Another example was when she

recounted how she felt about her participation in the first *circulo de cultura*. Note how her comments began to shift from identity as a person to an identity with others. "I felt really comfortable. Yeah. I felt good to hear other college students' stories in a way. But I thought it was pretty motivating to see others like myself discussing about persistence from our viewpoint."

Growth in Critical Consciousness.

At the beginning of the study, Rita had reasoned that the "community college was the good way to go for all the practical reasons, it was closer to home." She looked back at her short time at the private college and simply said, "It was just that I wasn't ready." Later on as Rita reflected on her schooling at the community college, she shared that: "Once I figured out to do it ... as long as I focused ... I knew that I wanted to finish college." Rita also became conscious of her parents' limitations while she was at the first college. "In a sense they couldn't support you with matters of college. I remember them not being able to help me in that type of way. But they supported me with encouragement." She voiced her cultural understanding of her parents' ways support which were different from the dominant way.

As Comstock (1992) and Friere (1997) attested, a heightened level of consciousness leads to some form of liberating action. This was true in Rita's case, as she remarked early in the study, "I basically made up my mind." Almost methodically Rita was quite conscious of the elements that contributed to her success on her second try. Note the recurring reference of family in that process.

I know that one of the reasons I made it at Western is that I had family here. That made it easy. First step was becoming familiar, taking one class, having an instructor who understood me, going to a campus and living at home still. It was a jump. This was a process ... step by step ...

Her follow-up remark, "I did fine basically because I didn't want to fail" took us to another realm of her critical reflection.

One of Rita's significant domains of raised consciousness was tied along the lines of traditional roles of gender that she observed in her family upbringing. Her comments were precipitated by a question during the first *diálogo*: "What are the sources of your persistence?" One of Rita's sources was remembering how her mother depended on her dad. Rita noted that "being a woman in our culture, you're stuck." Rita shared the following account of her remembrances:

Basically, the real reason I came to school ... Well, because I see my mom depending on my dad a lot! I didn't want to be stuck one day, not being able to depend on myself. I wanted to be independent of somebody or knowing that I can do it on my own. My grandmother to this day has not driven a car. She is dependent on my grandfather for everything for the groceries ... He would be the one to give her money to get groceries, everything. And my mom depended basically on my dad.

The underlying reason for going to school was that "I don't have to depend on anyone later." She needed to be independent, unlike her mother and grandmother. Rita critically reflected that "I think of the role of women in the Mexican culture is to be submissive, to be ... basically oppressed. Do what your husband says." Contrary to an absolute individualistic position, Rita also balanced her thoughts with the following viewpoint: "Persistence is connected to home. Home meant not only family, *tías* (aunts), *tíos* (uncles) but also encouragement, memories of mom and dad, opportunity that I have, and doing it for my people."

What was also interesting to Rita, as mentioned earlier, was that she realized that her parents and grandparents all played a role in her persistence to continue in school. And for that sudden insight of her parents and grandparents (in spite of the traditional roles of gender in the family), Rita still felt some type of sense of responsibility to them. The responsibility that she owes them was a "thank you or some type of gratefulness for what they have provided to us. So we have to give back. My family helped me in everything; that got me through school. So definitely, they are part of the reason why I completed." She then tied this

understanding with what it meant for her to be a Chicana female and the impact of the conflict between her academic and cultural roles. In the following excerpt from *Diálogo Three*, Rita expressed her understanding of the dynamics between obtaining an education that would make her independent and different from the women in her family, and a cultural perspective of gender.

I feel sometimes that people are intimidated because I am female [and educated] ... but I feel more intimidated by them because they have more knowledge than I do: "How do you make that *menudo*?" "How do you raise your kids to be so respectful?" I still definitely value cultural and traditional roles.

In *Diálogo Four*, Rita continued her critical reflection as she responded to the following question: "How can the university support and validate your persistence style that is interconnected with your cultural upbringing?" Almost in a matter-of-fact way, Rita told it like it is.

This is a predominantly white campus. We're here but nothing pertaining to our culture ... There is nothing here to represent us ... nothing visible at all that we can identify with other than a handful of professors. We have been here six years. It's segregated. Independence is where the *Mexicanos* live, Monmouth is for whites. [We need] a monument, a hall dedicated that's connected to our cultural upbringing.

Rita was quick to point out that recognition of her culture can be validated by having more people like herself in the university: "We need mentors." Her more critical position was revealed when she went on to say:

[We need] Somebody in that position who has power ... we have members like yourself, Rebecca, Anna ... they're in the middle. We have no administrators. We have to join forces to convince them. But we're on the way. How badly does the university really want them here?

Rita, during *Diálogo Three*, began to synthesize her reflections on persistence. She voiced in a simple yet remarkable way her delight in having a chance to discuss her college experience in terms of matters of spirit.

I finally look back and reflect on what my college experiences have been because it just kind of happened. I was never able to talk about it. Where do you ever have the opportunity to talk about your personal experiences and how you felt especially about your education. Where do we discuss it? Where is the first outlet, first way of expressing who you are and where you came from and why you are here? How hard has it been for you? What have you had to sacrifice? How you sacrificed anything? What is different? How has it made you different? What are you going to do now that you have this?

Persistence was not a list of attitudes to possess and a series of tasks to be checked off when accomplished. Rita saw persistence in a more complex manner, which included practicality, life lessons from family members, and cultural perspectives of self, gender, and responsibility to the community.

During the first *diálogo*, Rita stated that “after the first year I never questioned that I would transfer, that I wouldn’t finish.” And for Rita it was “spirituality [that] gets you through an experience. Basically, it gave me the confidence.” She gradually expressed her understanding of spirituality more in terms of social commitment and action. Before reaching that level, Rita had to wrestle with her understanding of religion and spirituality.

She began by stating that “I don’t know [the difference].” But she was quick to point out that spirituality “is not religion.” She went back and forth several times, “Actually, I am not sure.” She couldn’t take them apart. But during *Diálogo Two*, a change of understanding could be heard. “Now I can; I can see!” In discussing the characteristics of a Mexican American spirituality, Rita noted that “passion, music, same as fiesta, and family are definitely related to spirituality.” On the other hand, she went on to say:

Religion to me is control, rules, do this or that. Spirituality is having a belief in a higher God; not that you have to have rules. To me if you believe in God, then there is a God. Spirituality is a way to feel yourself; how you feel deeply; and liberty to express that. Spirituality is a bit more open, a window to express yourself.

But then she became more definite in her critical reflection, "Spirituality is more." She noted that "I can never be a traditional *Mexicana*," that is to say, be religious, go to church, and practice all the devotions. Rita simply stated that: "spirituality was my passion." When I paraphrased what she had been sharing, Rita responded: "Right! Exactly! My spirituality is passion to the social. My passion has always been to help people, better themselves and their families. Right! Justice especially! Justice especially! That is my spirituality." Rita recalled her own family's struggles; how they were migrant, poor, and didn't have resources.

It was also during *Diálogo* Two that Rita expressed that the word "spirituality" had more meaning for her. As a result of her vocal sharing interspersed with short comments and feedback, Rita came to a resolution of her own way of thinking.

Yes! Definitely so. I understand it now. It does, now. But now that I can see what ... I needed to see in a context what spirituality you were referring to. And now that I see ... Oh well, I have all these elements and I am a spiritual person but not in a religious way. I am more this way, in music, passion, family, and community. That's spirituality. Then I'm definitely spiritual!

It was at this moment in the *diálogos* that Rita, after quickly saying "I believe in God and that is enough for me," uttered a phrase that became central to her consciousness:

"Spirituality is more inner, inner strength."

By the fourth *diálogo*, she had journeyed to another level of consciousness as noted by Comstock (1989) and Husserl (1973). To the final *diálogo* question pertaining to the "loss of soul," Rita concluded with:

No way has mine been forgotten. It is like more intense. If anything it is stronger now that I have an education. But there was a time when I questioned my culture because an education makes you different in that you can never go back. I have learned a lot about myself. You're learning from me but I think I'm also learning just talking about the experiences that I have had or gone through. It's a realization of our accomplishments, not mine, but of the group's because I see where we

all come from different places. We had family support. But basically we've done it. Some type of realization that we did it!

With this interpretation of Rita's phenomenological understanding and her growth in critical consciousness during the individual *diálogos* and the three *círculos de cultura*, Figure 4.4 on the following page shows Rita's visual rendering of the connections of persistence with her spirituality. A transcription of her explanation of the design follows immediately.

Figure 4.4
Rita - Synthesis Design

Left Side

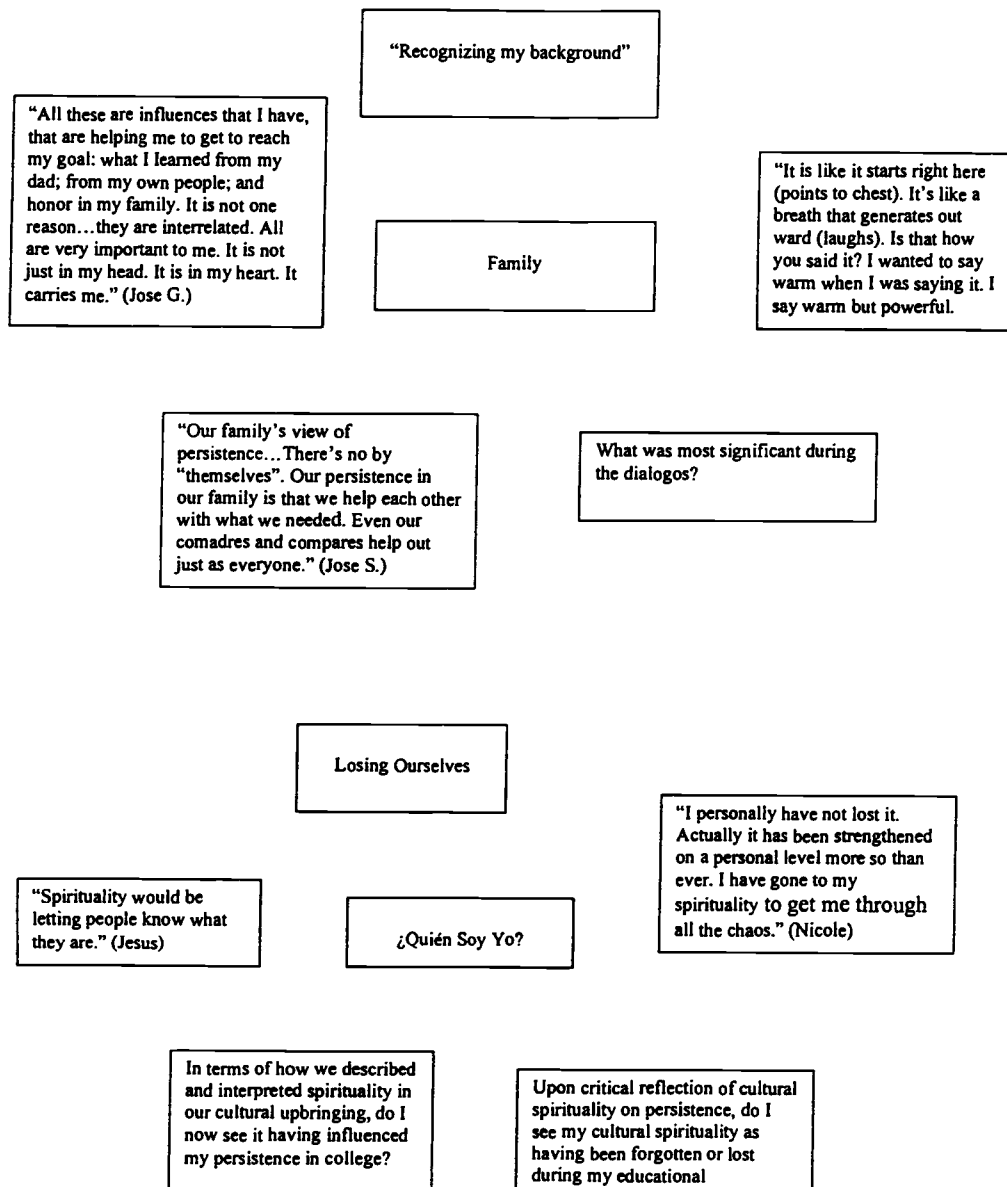
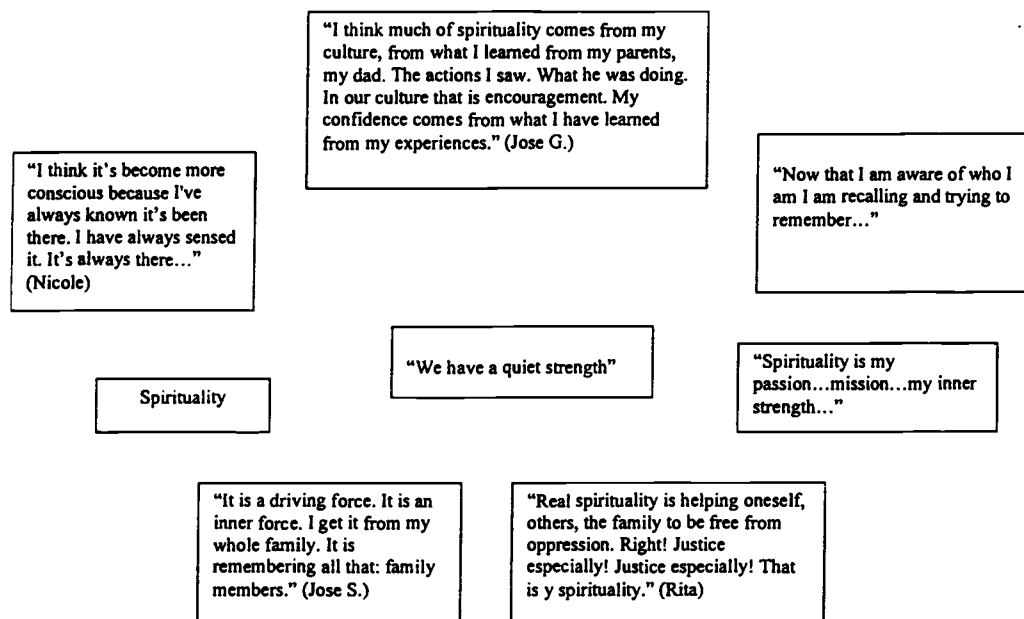


Figure 4.4 (Continued)
Rita - Synthesis Design

Right Side



Rita - Synthesis Statement.

I think much of spirituality from my culture from what I have learned from my parents, that's strength to me! I think it's become conscious because I always know it's been there. I have always sensed it. It is always there. What's always there? Your inner strength. Ok?

And then the third thing throughout the diálogos was questioning your identity; who are you? Did you lose something? Did you gain something? And I know when I was in school questioning who you were and what you were going to do with yourself and your education. And what road you were going to take. That's what I was questioning. But at the same time it's questioning who you really are. And so you question yourself, "Are you losing yourself or are you gaining" throughout my education.?

I had three themes. The backbone of my education, I felt, was my family. The different comments that people touched on and what was most significant was "family" to me. That is the most thing I got from our discussions to me graduating. Then I noticed that we have an "inner quiet strength." And that's what I put in the middle here because my spirituality is around that. It's a "driving force." It's helping oneself; justice, fighting oppression. Spirituality is my passion, my inner strength.

Now that I am aware of who I am, recalling and trying to remember. Recalling is also part of your quiet strength. It's like your inner self remembering [refer to Bolan and Deal below] knowing your background. To me that's a quiet inner strength, the knowledge you have of your family, your background, your history, you people. That's what's within you. So that's quiet but that's strength.

The question I had, "Was I giving up something in order to be here or was I learning something to give more?" Here was my initial reaction:

Cultural shock. What have you lost? Yourself? My educational experiences having been forgotten? No! No! It's even more there. I embrace more, I think. Persistence in college, a lot of time I think, more about yourself and defining who you are, shaping yourself.

These are the three themes from the cards that you gave me. I didn't know what "discouraging me to me to persist" because I didn't have discouragement. Discouragement was the initial cultural shock. That was a huge discouragement but I overcame that.

Jesus

Phenomenological Understanding.

Jesus' feelings to persist in college came from his observation of working people, especially his dad. "I saw my dad doing manual labor. It was something I didn't want to do my entire life. He was an ironworker. He worked in the mill. I didn't want to be in that situation." It was the mere experience of seeing his father doing hard labor, rather than any internal source, that made Jesus persist in the university. "There is nothing inside me; a spiritual side like says, 'You have to keep going.'" Jesus spoke of another feeling related to his persistence in that he really enjoyed the study of geography.

Jesus went back to considering why he had persisted. In addition to his images of his father and the realization of his father's efforts to provide for the family, Jesus was of the mind of a promise he made to himself that he would not continue the cycle. These sentiments are captured below.

I wouldn't be fine without it because I told myself long time ago I had to be in a better position than my dad is. When I think of my dad with a fourth grade education. I have seen what he has gone through, the struggles to come to the United States. If I weren't to persist I would be letting him down. He persisted in getting us over here ... that would be letting him down.

Continuing the conversation on the lack of persistence among Mexican American Chicana (o) students (question one on persistence in the first *diálogo*), Jesus clearly communicated his level of awareness and involvement with matters and persons related to culture. "That is interesting. I honestly can't say that I ever gone to school, a college with very many Mexican Americans." In addition, Jesus noted that he didn't care that he was seen as "Jesus the Mexican." He preferred to be known simply as "Jesus Mendez." He said:

And that's it. And, uh, instead of me, I never looked at it as [silence]. I know there is a meaning to it but I have never been able to find it. I never really wanted that to be part of me. [Silence].

Jesus' conversations about persistence were solely from his own experiences, which are unlike other Mexican American Chicanas (os). His experiences were different as when he talked about his relationships with instructors and students connected to his academic interests:

It made it really easy. When I started here last year, I told my wife I was really having a good time because I was making good friends and I know my professors. I think that is a big part of it. And I guess its feeling comfortable in your surroundings.

Turning to the questions on spirituality that he had chosen (questions one and three on spirituality in *Diálogo Two*), Jesus conveyed, phenomenologically, his cultural upbringing as "confusing and a 'kinda' of wishing I was religious." It would be easy to interpret Jesus' words as a denial of the transcendent. Quite the contrary: "And I am not saying I totally doubt the existence of spirituality, of God, or Jesus. But I question it every day." His current position became understandable when I heard that his religious training was sporadic during his teenage years. It was "more of a social thing." Jesus said, "There was never any talk about the significance of the Last Supper that was above our table. It was just there. There was no discussion on what it meant." He admitted that his

spirituality was very little. Regarding this lack of spiritual upbringing, Jesus made the comment, "It always bothered me."

Also in responding to the questions (question four in *Diálogo One*) of images or artifacts that were central to his family's spiritual/religious practices as well as memories of experiences in his upbringing, Jesus described the following: "My mom's pictures of *La Virgen* and the Christchild were on occasion around the house. My parents never pushed religion on us. We really didn't know what it was about." From that short response Jesus, began to reflect seriously on his situation.

I wish I were a religious person. My life would be easier. Yes, I do wish my parents had brought me up in a religious background. But at the same time, I am glad they didn't. I see people brought up in a religious background but never say there is something out there. I wish I was born religious so that way I can say this is my religion. But at the same time, I don't. I question it.

In Jesus' past, spirituality "was never there." There were some glimpses of spirituality from what he said from his previous comments, but there was nothing consistent. He grew up without religion. He went on to say that he had other aspects of his life to draw upon to make him to persist.

During the research study, Jesus was the only participant who did not have spirituality as he was growing up. The complexity of his present outlook was revealed in this short comment: "Hopefully, one day, I will choose my spirituality if I come to be spiritual." Jesus is an adult learner who at the present moment seemed to be without a reference point from which life's big questions are addressed: "I wish I knew more religion, that I had a religion. I like to fight off those fears too. It was hard growing up as a kid without a religion."

At the very same moment, he knew that spirituality "is something within, what I feel. It is a process. It is another level of consciousness. I haven't found any religion I wanted to be that is like that." Jesus made a distinction between religion and spirituality.

However, when I refrained from the use of the term “religion” and instead asked if faith or spirituality was a sustaining influence to his college persistence, he clearly responded: “It is not the driving factor.” To his way of thinking, spirituality and persistence were two different things in college. He had the second but not the first. In total candor, Jesus shared his present situation and hope. “I am searching for some type of spirituality. I thought this might help. It helped me validate that I don’t have a spirituality.” During the Third *Diálogo*, he revealed that he is in process of a search of a reality that he has but it is not crystal clear to his mind. “I said it was something within me that, I guess, I’m still working on.” For Jesus, spirituality seemed to be more of a learning process, a coming to know about it rather than to experience and live it. Later, in that *diálogo*, he became very animated and expressed his life-long project.

Aha! Aha! I said it was something within me that, I guess, I’m still working on. It’s going to develop one way or another. I am going to be spiritual or I’m not or I’ll be having conflicting things the rest of my life trying to sort it out.

Instead of persistence from a spiritual aspect, Jesus seemed to connect his resiliency to the notion of encouragement. But that, too, was missing while he was going to college. He said: “And what is missing for me from college that I had at home is that I didn’t have the encouragement or them checking up on me, “How’s it going in college?” He did experience encouragement, though it was another type.

I want to say encouragement but the *demanding* that I finish high school; that I grew up a certain way came from my father. And when I went on to college, it wasn’t there anymore. In fact, [voice cracking], you know when I ... I went to college for one year, and then I dropped out. And I worked for about a year.

Jesus did return to school. He persisted, not because of spirituality or encouragement from family, but from his personal drive and his love to learn.

Growth in Critical Consciousness.

During *Diálogo* One, he was asked to share what had been his feelings in persisting at the community college and the university. He simply responded: "Something I have to do. I am 32 years old." I then asked him, "What has been the biggest barrier to persisting?" This was the start of understanding Jesus as a deeply reflective person. From his wellspring of life experiences, he stated, "Knowing what I wanted to do. Finding a passion for something." As we continued in the *diálogo*, he expressed his unique perspective:

I want that degree under my belt. I could have easily given up earlier. I wouldn't be fine without it because I told myself long time ago I had to be in a better position than my dad is. When I think of my dad with a fourth grade education.

Jesus was aware of his need to persist from several overlapping levels. Intertwined with his own personal drive for the degree is his memory of his father's lack of an education. And at the same moment, he spoke of his respect for his father's efforts in trying to better his family's situation. From these sentiments, experiences, and memories, Jesus defined persistence as "trying to finish what you set out to do."

In the process of reflecting on the reasons why Mexican American Chicana (o) students persist or don't persist in college, Jesus articulated his views based on his family upbringing and educational experiences. Over several *diálogos*, Jesus had voiced his unique understanding. When he reflected on the dropout issue among Mexican American Chicana (o) students, Jesus had this to say:

If Mexican American persons went to school full time at the community college for two years, they would have an easier time to make the relationships. It might contribute more to their finishing their two years.

Jesus was very astute in seeing that relationships during college are crucial to persisting. He also mentioned involvement in organizations in general. He then related his

own experiences of getting connected to the university, but it wasn't through diversity groups. He explained his position when he said, I never want to go through life as 'Hey, Jesus, the Mexican.' I rather go through life saying, 'I'm Jesus Mendez. Period.' And, sometimes I see these groups; there's a particular group, La Raza. These people are trying to promote diversity and they're going ahead calling themselves 'the race.' And I think that is just negative.

The above was a telling part on his perspective, yet it must be understood within his own context and upbringing. The following clarified his position on matters of diversity: "As I was growing up, my dad, his whole intention, wasn't to keep us separate but to blend in." Aimee, from external Group Three, noted a similar perspective in her "Who am I?" poem: "My great grandfather entered this country from Germany. My grandmother was forced to speak English. I know no German. Their families assimilated." There was also Linda from Group One, who said the following in her poem:

I always questioned, 'What do I call myself?'
Or 'What nationality am I?' Am I American or
Mexican-American or Heinz 57? My family
Would say 'You are an American, and that is it.'

Though Jesus and I didn't converse using such terms, we reflected on the issue of cultural identity. When the discussion shifted to why Mexican American Chicana (o) students don't persist in college, I shared what it was like for me to be a minority in college. This stimulated Jesus to remember and think at a deeper level. When I asked if my sharing helped, Jesus went on to reflect on his own experiences given the manner he was raised:

It does! I guess, I had a thought in my head. See if I can come back to it. When you were talking about the experience you had in college, you were called names and so forth. I guess, I never was in college, never experienced anything like that. But I've never experienced any type of discrimination while I've been in college. Something did happen to me when I was a little kid. And it wasn't in school. I remember once my

brother and I were walking home and this girl, who was several years older, she was in high school, and we were little kids. Well, her and her friends came up behind us. "Why don't you go back where you come from!" and so forth. We just ... It was kind of a sad event. But when it comes to academics, I am trying to think back to grade school.

It was at this point as he spoke that there seemed to emerge a greater awareness of his identity from a cultural perspective:

I don't think I ever experienced an occasion like that. And I think part of it has to do because my. I hate to say this because, um, but actually several people have mentioned this. I don't have an accent. I am also not dark-skinned like some people. And I sort of related it to. I have heard some black people say that light-skinned blacks have it easier than darker skinned blacks. There's more discrimination for those with darker skin.

Identity was revisited in *Diálogo* Three with the following question: "What does it mean to be a university female/male student of Mexican American Chicana (o) descent?"

He went on again to say that he didn't have an accent. Focusing on persistence had led Jesus to the question, "Who am I?" Sometimes this is overlooked when one is intent on the degree. When we revisited his persistence at a more critical level, Jesus did voice that his persistence was internal yet also connected to external sources. "I guess, for me, it's still within. It is still something that I feel I have to do."

Jesus had begun his critical reflection on spirituality by noting that "They always told me there was a god, but they never educated me." He never experienced that education. Jesus made the distinction between knowing about spirituality and organized religion. He went on to explain what spirituality represents:

Spirituality, I think, is something more of what I am looking for. I like to believe that there is ... Spirituality would be letting people know what they are. I guess spirituality is something within you. It is not just something that is organized. It is something within, what I feel. I haven't found any religion I wanted to be that is like that.

Jesus' insights into spirituality, his questioning of the superficiality of institutional religion, and his longing for a spirituality indicated his current level of consciousness and maybe a point of transition for him. Having heard these words, I directly asked him, "At this point, do you have some kind of spirituality?" He said, "If it is, it is barely beginning. I don't know what it is. With college coming to an end, I'll devote time to research to what I really believe."

The conversation continued. Jesus worked again on the meaning of his upbringing. He shared his developing thoughts in the following manner:

The way I was brought up and all the questions I have had, there wasn't nothing ever there really to help me develop a religion. Spirituality is much more. And I am not saying I totally doubt the existence of spirituality, of God, or Jesus.

If they would have done their part to say, 'We want to bring our children this way,' then my development of spirituality may be different from what it is today.

He kept returning to the notion that spirituality was something within a person. But he then moved forward when he said, "If I ever do say ... 'Hey! I have come to a new understanding of my spirituality,' it is going to be something within me."

At this point we discussed characteristics of a Mexican American spirituality. Looking at the list, Jesus thought that only thing that would fit into spirituality would be passion, personalism, and paradox of soul. He then made a comment that was an example of his movement forward: "This is what I want to get out of spirituality [circles characteristics 1, 2, and 3 with a pencil]. If a person can just be within themselves to live a spiritual life, then that's the essence I'd like to take out of a religion."

It was in *Diálogo* Three that Jesus moved from deep reflection to language touching on decision:

It's going to develop one way or another. I am going to be spiritual or I'm not or I'll be having conflict the rest of my life trying to sort it out. Yeah! I like to think that I think deeply about spirituality and religion. I'm the first to admit that I don't know everything. By not being brought up religious, I think that allows me to criticize spirituality and religion, and hopefully later on in life, I'll come to a conclusion.

In spite of all this reflection during the last dialogs, Jesus maintained that spirituality did not influenced his persistence in college. He qualified his thinking by saying, "No, not regarding persistence. Like I said, I'm still working on the spirituality for myself but, uh, is it keeping me going in college? No."

He attended the university. He didn't think it had anything to do with spirituality. He knew he was going to benefit by having persisted with his education, both intellectually and economically. And that's what drove him.

At the end of *Diálogo* Two, I reminded him the first culture circle. He shared that he would not be able to make the meeting since he and his wife would be out of town. I responded that I would mail him a transcription of the first culture circle. As stated earlier, Jesus commented during *Diálogo* Three that he had read the transcription of the first culture circle. From what he had read of the participants' comments, he noted that he preferred not to participate in the other culture circle. He voiced that he would not want to discuss matters of Mexican and Raza heritage. I honored his request based on the responses he had made during the first two dialogues. He did say that he would complete the remaining individual dialogues. Since both the synthesis design and statement were the result from the second and third culture circles, I only have a case interpretation of his understanding of spirituality and persistence.

Nicole

Phenomenological Understanding.

In listening openly to Nicole, I entered the world of someone who had endured a system that treated her as an invisible adult learner. To the academic scribes and priests of the academy, Nicole was seen as indeed a non-traditional student entering their courts. Coming without the cultural capital needed in the august chambers of academia, Nicole chose to recount the following experience:

Well ... the professor says I am out of control. [Since then] I have done it on my own. I am trying to get through this, but it's very disillusioning to get this far [silence] far [whisper], and then nothing. So yeah! I need a lot of spiritual help and large spiritual support.

I asked a follow-up question, "Spiritual support?" She answered with "A must because I endure these battles on a regular basis!"

Recounting her battles to persist and the manifestation of her resiliency continued in the third *diálogo*. The following experiences were used to answer two questions concurrently: "What has been discouraging at the university?" and "What has been missing in your education that you had experienced at home?". Nicole first shared what was valuable to her:

What was missing was the community that I didn't have here on campus. When I came as a freshman and when I was looking for a community, like through Multicultural Student Union (MSU) or the non-trad group [older students]. And then I tried all kinds of groups on campus.

She yearned for community and a sense of belonging. She went on to tell how she and her daughter went to a club function: "So we sat alone and no one talked to us [laughs]. So there was nobody in the group that I, uh, I thought I could relate to." When I asked her about the (MSU), she responded with a most surprising account:

MSU. I went and I didn't like it because I felt it was very cliquey; I didn't feel welcome. I actually remember me meeting you, four and a half years ago during the spring fling? And David introduced us. You looked at me! And you said [I sensed inside you], "Forget it."

As I sat there, dumbfounded and in disbelief, I became filled with embarrassment. With my trembling apologies, she communicated with her eyes as if to say "It's all right. But I still remember." In our authentic encounter during that particular dialogue, an entirely new realization filled me of a person's yearning for connection and acceptance from presumably someone who knows "how you feel" and "how you got here." Through Nicole's story, I sensed the heavy burden and grave responsibility that I have in serving all students from all backgrounds to the best of my "humanity" (and my spirituality). Obviously, that day I didn't share it with Nicole. The indictment of my and our own lack of readiness, especially as student services professionals, indeed became a wake-up call to always be present to recognize and respect all students into whose presence we enter or who enter our presence. As educators we need to pay heed to the students around us. Aimee from Group Three had this to say when she experienced educators that do listen: "It sounds kind of silly to recognize that someone listened to an answer for a question they asked, but it is so rare among instructors. Thank you, Maestro."

Somehow we both manifested resiliency as we continued. It was heart-rendering yet hopeful to hear of her continuing her experiences at the university. "And, uh, I just couldn't find the right place to fit in. Do you know what I mean? So that was discouraging, but it didn't stop me from getting my education."

Retention and persistence issues are said to be addressed by campus services and the programs. For Nicole, these very entities were challenging for her: "That's the part that discouraged me, the services, the programs and me and the places I was reaching out. Nobody reached to me. I went to the things. So I never went back."

Nicole's frank comments spoke volumes to the quality of campus climate. She expressed the impact of both verbal and non-verbal experiences in the *melieu* itself. Listening to her demonstrated to me the urgent need to approach each student where they stand. Indeed students are a diverse group! As a representative of the institution, I tried to salvage some positive points by asking her of being recognized as a learner with all her cultural richness. Matter-of-factly, Nicole responded, "Ah! That was a definite 'No, no!'" That was a real "ouch" for me. She went on at length to tell of an experience that was her greatest challenge in persisting:

We saw differently ... perspective differences. I mean, different opinion. On the first article I aced it. That first article, I aced that baby! "She can write." Right? Right! Expectations [from the professor] were higher because I wrote well. And then ... I bet you he didn't know what he did to me.

I asked her what he had done to her? Nicole, crying and a half-yell, exclaimed,

Devastated me! He took away [wiping tears away, sobbing] Ah! Sorry! He took away my voice! So what had happened to me then was ... really happened [crying] every time I saw him because he doesn't even remember me!

In trying to find words for a response, I fumbled with "[Did] the experience during that term sort of depressed your spirit?" "Oh! Yeah! Big time! And then my grandma died the next term." This was the arena in which Nicole reflected on the experiences connected to the issue of persistence.

During *Diálogo* Two, Nicole spoke of God when she said, "I think my God's power was much stronger than that." From there she focused on her devotion to the Lady and her spiritual connection to her loved ones and persisting at the university. "I would light my *vela*, pray to God and *La Virgen* to protect him." In our conversations about spirituality, Nicole connected gender into the dialogue.

In addition to school responsibilities, there were also those of a mother: she had experienced the conflict of roles. She recounted, "And so I, I mean, it would have taken my traditional role [cooking, washing the clothes] that day, but I didn't [She had assignments to complete]." There was a constant juggling of roles: mom, student, friend, and daughter. "And sometimes it's a big struggle." It was in these circumstances that Nicole called upon her spirituality to persist not only as a student, but also as a woman and a mother. This was when her faith in the Lady was there to sustain her.

That's my rock. [Laughs] I went into the store the other day to get some *velas* [candles]. I fall apart too. When it goes past 48 hours I've got to give it over [to the Lady] because if I have to take it on to get better, I will fall so far behind I won't come back.

Her "spirituality" impacted all these responsibilities. And with that faith she had trust and was at peace.

I give them to the Lady. Yeah! Yeah! And so I give it to her. [I] Never. Never [her]. [I have] total faith to her. Totally! [She] takes these things from me. When Jaime went to bed mad without dinner, "*Que dios me ayuda!*" But you know, "*Me estoy haciendo mis estudios.*" [Chuckles] And I pray for myself not to be lingering, and to pray for him [Jaime] so that he can have an understanding that this is what I have to do to make it.

Growth in Critical Consciousness.

Nicole expressed her admiration for both her grandmother and mom. She spoke of "Grandma" in the following manner:

My grandmother. I always felt that she was there as a true example [long silence] of unconditional love. The persistence was not to get somewhere. She loved all the way through it. So always around her I felt loved!

Her consciousness had changed with her life experiences and with time. Nicole's reflection of those experiences expressed her understandings as they evolved and became

clearer over the years. When she spoke of her mother as an example of a person who persisted, that was a good example of her growth in critical consciousness.

And with my mom, oh! Rebellion and retaliation [laughs]. Her persistence was always worn. With her persistence with all the things she had, made her who she is. She walked a path that is honorable, which somehow, to a greater goal. I understand her better now.

Nicole described her experiences at the university also from a critical perspective. Her responses expressed that she had already done a lot of reflecting on her experiences at both the community college and the university. During the study Nicole was not just recalling the past. She looked at those past events from where she stood during that particular *diálogo* and with an eye in the direction that she is headed. "I don't live in my past. I stay in my presence, and I look forward to my future. I want to progress in the system."

But unfortunately she wasn't able to connect with anybody who would understand until now. When asked about the institution, she retorted with: "The institution?" In the midst of telling of her discouraging experiences at the university and what was missing in her education that she experienced at home, Nicole cited an exception among the few who were there to serve the new students: "It doesn't offer nothing to me, I mean except for Rebecca from the Student Enrichment Program. You know what? If you needed something she would probably find it for me. And she would help me." She reflected back to the incident with her writing professor:

And it was hard for me because I, I love grammar, and I like to write a lot. And I wanted to enjoy the class. He actually asked me to leave class. I went into his office, and we talked about it. "Based on our different points of view, I'm going to have to ask you if you want to leave the class?"

From Group Three, Jose echoed similar experiences as a Mexican American Chicano community college student: "I experienced the feeling of inferiority from some of

my teachers, being stereotyped as a lazy Mexican gangbanger up to no good. The educators must acknowledge the cultural differences in students and be able to change their methods of teaching.”

Nicole, from that experience, kept on going. She didn't know of anything that made her persist. Then, in *Diálogo Three*, she said the following:

I was not conscious of until today. At that point in time, I mean, I didn't know. Ah! Ok! So, anyway, I didn't know that until now. At this point in my life, I am here because I'm working on trying to develop my voice. So I didn't know it had that big effect on me.

Her power to express herself now is where the *Lady* comes in. Nicole voiced that she was very conscious of the interconnection of spirituality with other aspects of her life, in this case, education, and her persistence in it.

During *Diálogo Two*, the lengthy conversation on the characteristics of Mexican American spirituality was most intriguing. Nicole related to the first three characteristics. “Resonate deeply? Mexican Americans don't, haven't assimilated to the dominant power completely. It is because of passion and personalism. Yeah! Paradox of soul? Yeah!” Nicole expressed the uniqueness in the culture. These characteristics of Mexican American spirituality, as espoused by Villafrañe (1992), resonated so much with her that she sees them strong enough to withstand what she called the acculturation and assimilation process. The dimensions of a Mexican American spirituality, picked up informally during her upbringing, were what motivated and gave her that quiet inner strength:

I have a lot of self-motivation but I think it comes from home. I watch other women, other men, other people, family members move along. And in that cycle they brought me along which gave me power! And I use the power.

Nicole had begun to reflect more critically when she spoke of her “devastating” experience with a professor. By *Diálogo* Three, she expressed her growth of consciousness:

I had expectations of a college professor, about being a minority, about all [kinds of stuff]. These [expectations] were mine. And, uh, I did point them out because I actually demanded it. So when I wore them, they got squelched, but so, you know? So why did I expect him to think as me?

We conversed that her expectations came from her heart. Those of the professor originated more than likely from his head. She was excited about her new realization: “Exactly! He didn’t know me from any other student. I know it is important. I know it has to have a place. But people who don’t have the same faith that I do or don’t have the same whatever, don’t fall through the cracks.” However, Nicole maintained her critique of the institution in relation to spirituality and persistence. “No! It hasn’t been supported by the university.”

As for whether she had forgotten or lost her spirituality, Nicole was very clear on her position:

I personally have not lost it. Actually it has been strengthened on a personal level more so than ever. I have gone to my spirituality to get me through all the chaos. But for the university, there has been no group [other] than this. Doing this has allowed me a voice!

When I asked Nicole if spirituality had always been there, if had been growing, if spirituality was more unconsciousness or conscious, or if it has always been in the forefront of her going to college, she responded in the following manner: “I think it’s become more conscious because I’ve always known it’s been there. I have always sensed it. It’s always there because of stress, especially in my senior year.”

At the end of the fourth *diálogo*, Nicole shared some significant comments not only of the process of the study, but more importantly, the very nature of the research focus.

Aha! In the beginning when I read the proposal ... I better because the guy doesn't know what he is talking about. [Laughs] What spirituality, what is he talking about? I wasn't sure if it even fit. So I decided to work with you because I wanted to be sure if you were headed in the direction. And for so long a time you're not asked to, uh! ... personal things of who you are. It seems that it doesn't have a place in one's life. But ... I have for me. But I want what you were getting at when I read the [proposal].

But now I know totally ... a new awareness. It is the way I conduct my business and the way I will be ... and also professionally. And it's the reason I'm drawn ... the reason I do things. Yeah! It's very important so far as spirituality is concerned. Yeah! Spirituality is in front of my persistence.

The above is my interpretation of Nicole's phenomenological understanding and her growth in critical consciousness during our time together in the individual four *diálogos* and in the three *círculos de cultura*. Figure 4.5 on the following page is Nicole's visual illustration of she made sense of the connections between persistence with her family-centered spirituality. The written transcription of how she explained her design follows immediately.

Figure 4.5
Nicole - Synthesis Design

Left Side

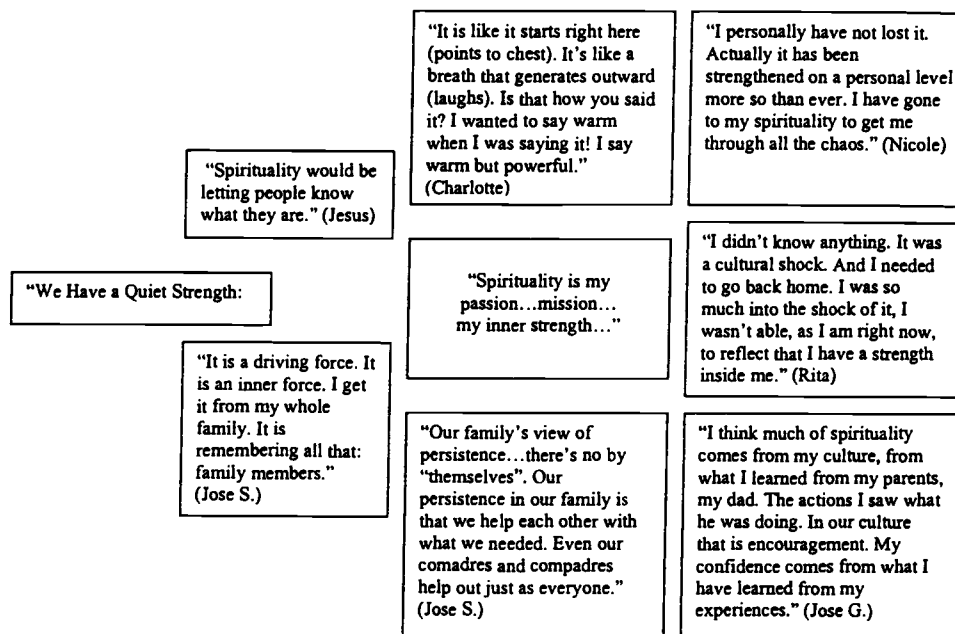
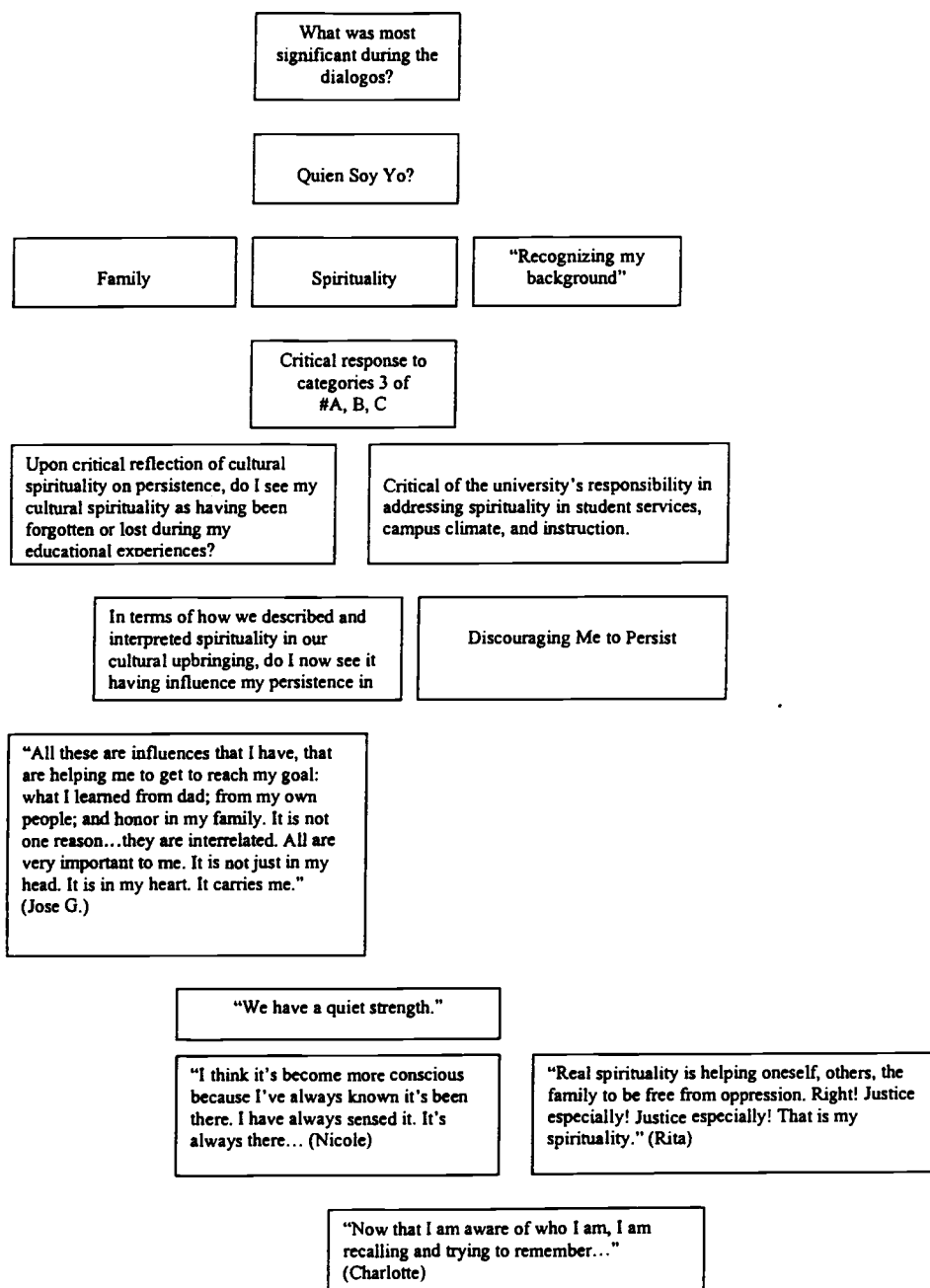


Figure 4.5 (Continued)
Nicole - Synthesis Design

Right Side



Nicole - Synthesis Statement.

I started with what was significant during the *diálogos* to me: “Quién Soy Yo?,” (Who I am?). The categories that fall under it include “family,” “spirituality,” and “recognizing my background.” The critical reflection, the categories of the university come out if they discouraged me to persist or if they had anything to do with my persistence in college.

And so I went from there. And then I started over here to “Who I am?” It has to do with my “quiet strength.” That ‘driving force’ makes us what we are created out of that quiet strength. Those are connected for me. Then there is the family, that inner strength, all connecting back to the quiet strength. The strength inside me has always been there. Sometimes it’s not always noticed. It flows for me; all flowing back to that quiet strength, all of the quiet.

Jose S.

Phenomenological Understanding

Jose’s experience of persistence originated long before he entered higher education. That persistence had come from his family. He expressed it as “There’s no one by ‘themselves.’ Our persistence in our family is that we help each other with what we needed. Even our *comadres* and *compadres* help out just as everyone else.” During the first *diálogo*, Jose spoke of family persistence as what kept him in college. He described the richness of his family. His family’s persistence in keeping Jose in college stemmed from the family’s life as migrant workers across the United States until they settled in Oregon. Out of those experiences family members did what they could do for each other. Jose recounted the following story:

When all of us graduated from high school at the *baile* (dance), I told my father I was going to UCLA He said, "You can't afford that!" Yes, I can. It is the University of Chemeketa at Lancaster Avenue. He laughed. He remembered that. I didn't go to community college for two years. When I told him I was going to enroll in school, it was August getting ready for the harvest and it was 4:30 and I told him that I had to register. "Aren't you going to UCLA?" my father and brothers said, "We'll do whatever it will take to get you through school."

Jose went on to share how his father and his uncles worked summers in the fields. In a humbling tone of voice Jose, noted that

he spent all his money on my school shopping. Every term he would give me \$100. I never asked. He would say, "Make sure you get through this, you don't have to worry." They were so proud of me. My uncle, if the car would break down he would fix it. My aunts would always keep feeding me. They said, "You need home food."

Jose's feelings of persisting in higher education happened more at the university than at the community college. "It was at WOU that persistence really kicked in." This was precipitated from the excitement from his family. He noted how his mother went to the family members and neighborhood friends saying that her *hijo* (son) was going to a university. With pride he said to me, "They started telling my aunts and uncles, everyone. That is when persistence came into play."

Jose then recounted some of his experiences at the university. For the first few months he didn't feel good. He felt out of place since "everyone was white. "There were no people of color. Wow!" He knew he had to persist, that it had to be done even though campus was bland. During the conversation he blurted out, "My first experience was culture shock!" Jose went back to the community college experiences in which he felt he really stood out because there was hardly any Latinos at that school. He reflected:

I felt, I really didn't have connection with any of the few of them. But I could actually see. And reason I saw is because we stood out. And now that I go back there, there a lot more Latino population. I think then at the university, it is obvious. In coming to Western it was the same thing.

Within the context of the support from his family, he “had to make a difference” in spite of these cultural challenges. At first Jose felt really nervous going to classes that dealt with issues relating to culture, diversity, profiling. When the issue first came up he was really nervous but then he said, “You can only take so much before you got to say, ‘Wait a minute!’ ” He found himself starting to get more involved, but from a cultural perspective. In having to face those challenges, Jose summarized, “That is persistence.”

After sharing these initial perceptions, Jose spoke of the special connections he had made with others like himself who gave him the support he needed.

Student network; they all have the same problems, same issues. ‘I don’t know what to do!’ But when I had a question [I thought]: ‘This is the end of me being here!’ [But] this person said, ‘No, this is what you need to do. Here are the resources. *You’re finishing!*’

Another experience of persistence was when he remembered his second year. People would show up everyday at the house, watch TV and have a fiesta. He noted that people said, “It’s good to have a place to go and be with each other.” Jose’s house was always open to “*Mexicanos* and our white neighbors.” With a big smile, he said that the house “was always full with people like us. You would feel like home ... making that connection!”

Jose recounted the relation to the Mexican American community around the university and what it offered students. Just having a community close by was an incentive for Jose to be motivated to stay in college. “When we do stuff for the community, we know, we have been there; we need to! It’s the driving force. There isn’t anything like it!”

As we discussed the Mexican American spirituality, Jose focused on the characteristics of passion. He said that it needed translation in his language. He said, “It’s

between *ganas* (desire) and love. Mom is the counselor of the family. We have a passion for each other. Religion is always with us, and we put a connection.”

Jose chose to describe his experiences of spirituality as he focused on religious artifacts and *La Virgen*:

I can tell you that my cousins and me carry her all the time. We always keep *velas* (candles), rosaries. Things like that mean a lot to us. We have that connection. We were raised close to the church. We all remember *La Virgen*, the *velas*. They are tangible for us to connect with. Seeing them stirs all those memories and it rekindles the fire. Has always been strong.

He wanted to discuss the following question: “Where is my family with spirituality?” To his own question, he responded: “My parents are really religious. They are from *Tejas* and were taught by the nuns deep down. When they moved to Oregon, to Dayton, they really got involved in the church. They have all that.”

Jose’s experiences, as he grew up, were rich with examples of persistence and simple spirituality.

Growth in Critical Consciousness.

From the outset of the *diálogos*, Jose was very astute about the value of having the *ganas* (desire) and networking with others to his continued persistence. Quite seriously he made the following point: “And that persistence is saying, ‘No,’ until I get that degree. Persistency is what I learned here in college.” He told himself that he had to stay. As he revisited his family’s view of persistence, Jose expressed more passion in his critical reflections:

They have lived through it. We came from a migrant experience. That is persistence in that. They had to make a living. If you are willing to pack up your family halfway across the U.S. with *casi nada* (almost nothing, meaning material things) and in extreme conditions and be proud of it.

When I asked for more reflections on persisting at Western, he methodically conveyed the following:

I learned it. It was not giving in to you [the whites]. I persisted. I do belong. I had to get better grades than you [white people]. We had to prove ourselves. It is a one-upmanship. We were being watched closely by the white community, checking our faults.

During the second *diálogo*, Jose began his critique of the university. In talking about the recruitment of minorities and his concerns, he noted that once "you get a kid here":

maybe he is fine with leaving home and is able to do the work. But who's going to *keep him* here. One thing we have always said is we need some type of role model or mentor who can relate to us culturally at the university. And if it is not there, which isn't for the most part for a lot of students, then they won't be there.

For Jose, what keeps the student here was obvious:

We know what we need. We have been fighting for more faculty of color. And if you have that, a student can connect; then they can go and 'I have a question about.' I go to my professor's office and see what he thinks about it. There is not the cultural barrier. If you have Latino professors and Latino students, the students will say, 'I am interested in going into the career you teach.' And [their] visibility is important.

This led to the conversation about why some Mexican American Chicana (o) students are finishing community college and the university. He tied the following critique to those persons who can relate to minorities:

We went, we searched out and sought the few Latino faculty of color who were willing to do that. But coming here there wasn't 'Here are all the people who are going to help you.' You came here, took classes and talked to people: 'What can I do [with my concerns]?' [People would say]: 'Go see this professor, he's a really a nice guy.' 'Go see this person. He knows what you are going through.' So [through] the networking of other students of color, you found a very few.

For Jose, spirituality "is a driving force. It is an inner force." He got it from his whole family. He connected spirituality with the following thought, "It is remembering all that: family members." His family was close to the church. He shared how they knew "a lot of *padres* (priests) who are close to us. I would have a tough test coming up and I'd ask them to say a prayer. He and all the monks would pray for me. Things like that, that is spirituality."

In the *diálogos*, he told the story of his grandma. She would make albums for each of the grandchildren filled with mementos of religious events in their lives. Such gifts expressed his family's spirituality.

It is a driving force. Looking at the pictures makes me reflect. That is part of my spirituality. Seeing the pictures of Dayton, seeing the Church. Our driving force is our history, our past, and that keeps the fire lit.

Jose spoke and reflected on other experiences of spirituality from his upbringing. His "mom" made:

this big poster board with my catechism certificates from my *Bautismo* (Baptism) and First Communion. It stirs up the feelings inside that make me cry. I am not religious. My *tías* are religious. I am more into serving others.

Toward the end of the third *diálogo*, he emphasized the following:

My grandma helped the church by stapling hymn books. It means so much for us. We're not in church, but it is religion to us. It is the memories, the remembering. It is how we see it. That is spirituality for us. We don't have to go [to] Church to believe in God.

Jose proceeded to go from a family-centered spirituality to what the college offers in this area. Jose understood the connection between spirituality and persistence for Mexican American Chicana (o) students.

If you want to keep them here, if you want them [to] graduate ... If they really, really want to recruit students of color, they need to offer ... At OSU ... like a cultural house ... a sweat. With a sweat you'll have so

many Native Americans. Spirituality-wise that is part of what they need. They need the resources [cultural] to continue their education.

An example of providing for the cultural needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, Jose talked about a conference he attended. "We had a sweat, we did the rituals. The *Indio* is in the *Mexicano*."

Jose also attributed his spiritual development to his family traditions that communicated knowledge and feelings, about ancestral gods, and spiritual/religious practices or sayings. He pondered for awhile and reasoned by saying:

If your family is traditional, still have some traditional values, I think you are going to be raised with spirituality. Some don't even want to acknowledge it. A lot of people don't have that spirituality within them because they want to go mainstream, white America. Inside them they don't know how good it feels to have this. Spirituality that's what your grandparents raised you with the tales, the stories ... the grandparents, the great grandparents. On my father's side, my great grandmother was *pura india* (pure Indian). I remember. It triggers all those emotions. If you have that connection, that's spirituality. If you are not raised with it, you're bland. You're missing out on a lot. You're not whole, I don't think. You run out on a big part that you need to be.

I have concluded the final interpretation in the case Jose S.'s regarding his phenomenological understanding and his growth in critical consciousness during the four times that we met and my listening to his insights in the three *circulos de cultura*. Figure 4.6, on the following page, will illustrate how Jose S. made meaning of the connections between his experiences of persistence with his family-centered spirituality. The written transcription of how he articulated his design follows immediately.

Figure 4.6
Jose S. - Synthesis Design

Left Side

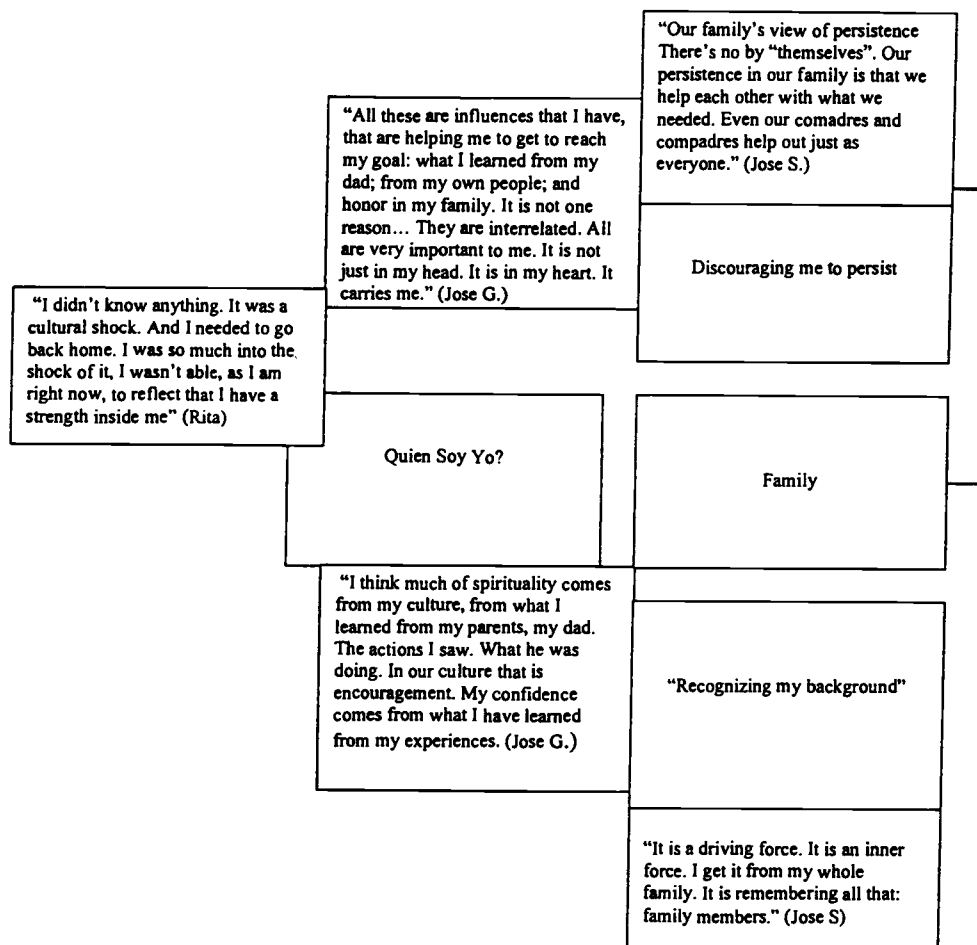
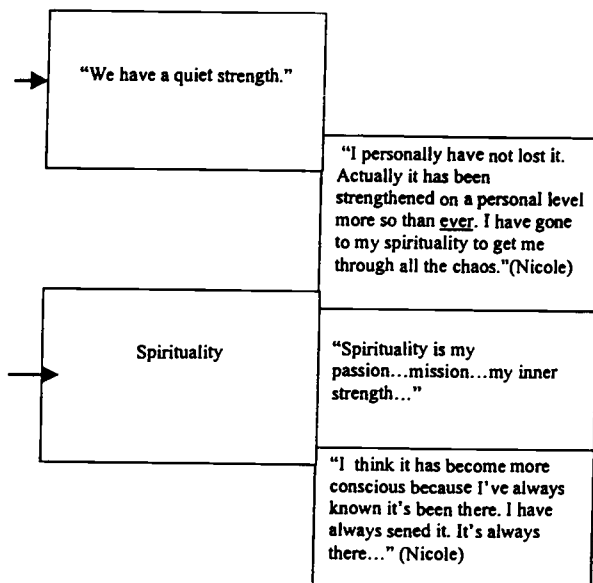


Figure 4.6 (Continued)
Jose S. - Synthesis Design

Right Side



Jose S. - Synthesis Statement.

I read them all. Thought about which one. Then I looked at them. I separated them in two different categories, which ones I feel relate to me the most in my college experience that directly related to how my college experience went. How do each of these have in connection to me graduating from the university. I picked out the ones I could personally relate to through experiences throughout my university career.

I came up with these. These all affected me in some way. It took all these things to come out with one outcome: graduating from college. In their own separate ways they were all connected to each other. Without one you don't have the other and you won't come out with your final product: a degree.

The most important one of the entire thing which is right in the middle is "family." Without them I wouldn't have anything. Without family I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have the values, the morals I have. I would have my brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles.

Then going from my family ... in which direction do I want to go? And how has my family impacted me and how I have learned. And so I am going off in four different ways. I went up, north, south, east, and west.

Above my family I put ... my family encourage me to persist, so I changed the card "discouraging ..." to "encouraging me to persist". My family has always been there for me. You can do better: "You can do this. We worked our butts off so you can have better. We will do whatever it takes to make sure that happens." So I went up north.

Underneath my family I put "recognizing my background." My family always says through the *corridos*, picture, poems my grandparents had written. They made me realize my background, where we came from, who we are ... These are your *tíos* from Minnesota. This is your *abuela*, she was Native American. Family made sure we recognized who we were and where we can from. I put that underneath family.

To my left, which would be west, “Quién Soy Yo?” Who am I? Part of my family with my own identity. But without my family I won’t have that identity. So, I get my name from my family. I get my history from my family. I get my culture from my family. This is who I am. And I am connected to my family. I am not going to say I am Jose Salas. I am Jose Salas and this is who I am. I am from Juanito García. I am a García, Tapia, I’m a Salas. That’s that section.

To the east, I put my spirituality. Without my family, I would never I have learned spirituality. Being a part of our family, you’re born into spirituality. It is the part of who we are. That’s part of our family. So I came out with a cross.

When I get there I start taking these other phrases and connecting these to categories: east, north, south, west. As we go up north, I add our family view of persistence ... There’s “no by ourselves.” In our family we help each other out. When we need it we can count on each other. In that counting on each other, that connection, that network, is always part of encouraging each other to go on. If you need something you can count on the other person. Kept encouraging me. That’s the top one.

To the south of it, “recognizing my background” another phrase connecting to it, “It’s a driving force.” My background, my heritage is a driving force for me. It relates back to my family. They are all overlapping. Without the other you can’t have the other.

To the east I have family spirituality. To the right of spirituality, “My passion, mission, and inner strength.” That’s part of my definition of what spirituality is. They’re connected. Without that one you don’t have family.

You can see that they’re all connected. Without one you’ll have a gap; you be strong and a weak link. So off of that I went. Spirituality, I have always sensed, it’s always there. It’s the same thing me and Nicole had in train of thought that clicked. It relates to me.

As you go from spirituality and “passion, mission” it starts to move up and around. Between “encouraging spirituality” there is a bridge that connects the two. As a “quiet strength our families have, it’s the *ganas*, the persistence. It’s like a non-spoken thing that you’re here to learn. It’s your culture, heritage, and upbringing. It’s an implied thing too. You just know. It’s like a respect thing too. My parents never had to tell me “respect.” No, through observation, through hearing, through bible study. It’s something that you have absorbed. It comes natural to you. It’s a quiet inner thing. And that goes back to spirituality. That’s something that’s been in our religion ... that’s been there. A quiet strength. When you pray, your quiet, your thinking, you’re asking, praying for someone else, it connects to my personal spirituality.

I have never lost it throughout my entire college experience. I never lost my spirituality. I felt sometimes mad. I felt bad but I could always go back to it. Oh! There is a reason for this through my spirituality. What is the reason for me being here. God wants me to be here or he wouldn’t have given me the chance.

Section Three

Emergent Themes

As noted by Van Manen (1990), a theme speaks of a fundamental archetype of human existence. For these six Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students, the common human existence explored in the study was that of their experiences at the community college and then on to the university. In that reality, the particular common experience was one of persisting through some degree of influence of spirituality whether at an unconscious or conscious level. How was that influence experienced? In what unique ways were the experiences of persistence perceived? How was their persistence associated to spirituality as expressed in terms of feelings, images, insights, or concepts?

Now that I have interpreted the voices in each of the forgoing cases, let us look at what was common and what has emerged through the long process conversations and reflection. The journey involved listening to the depth of each participant's voice in the 24 individual *diálogos*, their unique sharing in three *círculos de cultura*, and the six individual cases as well as reflecting on each co-investigator's design and written synthesis.

The six themes that emerged reflected the co-investigators' description and meaning of how, why, and for what purpose spirituality has influenced their persistence in higher education. What follows is my interpretive understanding of co-investigators' apparent consciousness at the time of the last *círculo de cultura*. These concepts, insights, and quotations, analyzed in *círculo de cultura* three, were common and held a place of prominence in each of the participants' visual designs. Each participant's way of constructing and articulating these themes or patterns of thought varied due to the heterogeneity of the group. The participants' differing views were influenced by their

geographical origin and length in the country and/or the state, their particular class, age, urban/rural experiences, and degree of acculturation or assimilation.

In addition, the emerging themes, slowly manifesting themselves over a period of four months, embodied issues such as inner strength, struggle, providing for one's family, and support from the university, which were voiced during the study. I heard the rich articulation of persistence as "*ganas*" (desire), a "push," a "quiet strength," and "encouragement coming from my family." I heard the emotional recounts of "shock of being at a predominantly white college campus," of "failure," of "being devastated" by an instructor "who took away my voice." I heard adult learners share the memories of "migrating across the country," of going "to Church with my grandmother," of what aunts and uncles said and did to "encourage me and keep me in school." I heard the women co-investigators declare spirituality as "my passion," "my mission," and that "warmth that comes from inside [my heart]." I heard them talk of the "many roles I have to juggle while I go to school." I heard the men co-investigators speak of "hard work in the fields," "not by ourselves," and "I am searching for some type of spirituality."

Understanding of the current emergent themes and outcomes of personal and spiraling conversations with persons like themselves, was expressed by one of the co-investigators as "fibers and threads" within and among themselves. These fibers and threads were visible in each of their designs. Many overlapped among the five designs. The themes that emerged were:

- Family
- Quién Soy Yo? (Who am I?)
- Quiet Inner Strength
- Recognizing My Background
- Encouraging Me to Persist
- Critical Consciousness of the Interrelationships of One's Culture

The journey toward an answer to the research question came by discovering, through spiraling dialogue and rising levels of consciousness, the depth, multi-dimensions, and interconnections of each theme to the other.

Family

Through the eyes of the research co-investigators, reflections on persistence and spirituality gravitated to and from family. At a basic level, the participants perceived family as the most important of all human experiences. Their families were right in the middle of their lives. As Jose S. said, “Without family I wouldn’t have anything. Without family I wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t have the values, the morals I have. I would not have my brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles.”

Family is the centerpiece. The following were examples from the co-investigators which have informed me at the present time. Some of the participants saw family as the center in which spirituality resides and is lived as “my passion” (Rita), “my mission” (Nicole), and is experienced as “my inner strength” (Charlotte, Jose S. and Jose G.). Among the research participants, it was from within the context of family that spirituality was articulated. Family was the wellspring that provided many sentiments to those who drink from its never-ending flow of living water. It refreshed, nourished, sustained, and enlivened those who drunk from its wells. Family was also likened as the backbone upon which much rested and was upheld. Family also emanated as power from the heart. It was be tapped, touched, or embraced as the source of encouragement. Family provided. It is experienced as a source of pride, joy, and responsibility among its members and to the others of the external community.

Quién Soy Yo?

The participants' experiences of engaging in the description, interpretation of persistence and spirituality took them to a journey within. This led them to a question of cultural identity as they ventured through (1) their in-depth conversations connected to feelings of persistence; (2) their sources of persistence; (3) their reasons for persisting; (4) their experiences of discouragement or encouragement to persist; and (5) their views of the university's role in the persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students. Reflecting their experiences of persistence and the influence of spirituality during the study brought them to ask: "Who am I?" The theme of "Quién Soy Yo?" was likewise intertwined with the influences of family, the experiences of being a minority, and the degrees of assimilation one has undergone. Embarking on a road of educational goals led one back to home and to the self.

The six research participants' reflections and conversations on persistence and spirituality as they related to their experiences in college, their consciousness and engagement in the culture, and their life's responsibilities inevitably led them to explore and define, at a deeper level, their identity. As they rediscovered the spirituality learned from their family, these Mexican American Chicana (o) students found themselves also unearthing a central question, "Who am I?" The journey of realization began in *círculo de cultura* one in which, at different times, Rita and Charlotte asked the question in the presence of all. Upon returning to the third round of individual *diálogos*, Nicole reiterated that her reflections during the research study of persistence and spirituality had led her to ask who she was. Charlotte also shared that through the research process: "I am learning who I am." At the end *diálogo* four with Rita, when asked what she had learned during the process she responded: "All this has caused me ask 'Who am I?' in the context of my education during college." All this was highlighted in the third culture circle when all the

co-investigators included the prompt card “Quien Soy Yo?” in each of their synthesis designs. Answers to the question were found rooted in their upbringing. By recalling and being given the opportunity to voice the memories of one’s family view of reality, sayings, and cultural practices, a dimension, a vision, a recognition, and a respect for “Quién Soy Yo?” (Who am I?) and “Quiénes Somos?” (What we are?) was rekindled and kept alive. I look back and remember their voices. Nicole shared of the great influence that her grandmother had on her. Jose G. recounted his father’s compassion toward the grandparents on his return from fieldwork in the United States. Charlotte shared her mother’s story of the family members with “no shoes.” In conversation with Jose S. he said: “This spirit of one’s cultural identity is anchored in family.”

According to Palmer (2000) our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation. Some of those clues were present in the study. Reflecting critically was a means of trying to interpret some of those profoundly and worthwhile clues, especially when we have experienced failure, devastation, alienation, assimilation, or been dragged, far away from our birthright gifts. And from our birth and family upbringing lies deepest vocational question. It is not “What I ought to do with my life?” It is more the simple and demanding question “Who am I? What is my nature?” The research study brought the participants to this level of inquiry, reflection, and contemplation.

Quiet Inner Strength

The strength from within, which the participants voiced, emanated from interconnecting dimensions. It came from family. In searching and defining “Who am I?” a power was discovered and realized at the core. It was simultaneously viewed and understood as the source of life and energy. The phenomenon, also be expressed as

spirituality, was described as “push,” “warmth,” “peace,” and “driving force.” This strength affected the persistence and the resiliency of the co-investigators.

Recognizing My Background

As the participants reflected on the influence of spirituality on their persistence in the *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* of this study, the co-investigators expressed that such a process also had become a catalyst in recalling their cultural backgrounds. It was not enough just to have participated in the more acceptable celebrations of the culture, to belong, and to realize the need to belong. It was more important to be reconnected to the roots of their culture by studying and reflecting critically, in a variety of ways, their people’s history of struggles, endurance, and resiliency in the dominant society.

By discerning these aspects of the people in general, and in one’s family history in particular, one will not likely become assimilated. There will be less of a tendency to not think, forget, or even deny one’s cultural roots if there is an opportunity to recognize anew. Jose S., in explaining his synthesis design, emphasized that his constant recognition of his heritage, memories of family practices, kept the “fire lit” as he journeyed through his university studies. Charlotte noted that her reflections of the four *diálogos*, made her recognized her cultural background. From such critical reflections each co-investigator became more committed to keep alive his/her heritage. What I learned from the six participants is that one does not need to abdicate nor downplay one’s background to be a successful student in higher education. At the same time, to persist and achieve at the university entails not just remembering one’s heritage (only at approved annual celebrations) but also being and acting through the very perceptions, values, and practices of the culture. To recognize one’s cultural background means to live as a Mexican American Chicana (o).

Encouraging Me to Persist

The participants in Longo's study (1998) "stated they believed that in order to persist, one must possess drive, dedication, and desire" (p. 60). Longo's participants believed opportunity and a better life motivated them. Ultimately, those participants collectively believed that their desire, dedication, and drive to persist in higher education grew from the deepest of motivations: family. All six participants in this study add to that knowledge base on persistence by voicing the complexity and the depth of their connections to that mosaic of a phenomena called family. In particular was the power of encouragement from family members, even though parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles do not have university experience to share with their daughters and sons, granddaughters and grandsons, nieces and nephews. The simple ways that family members communicate and express pride and support stirred in these participants that desire and responsibility to persist. One way encouragement was kept alive was through the concrete memories of how one's family has persisted in the life struggles with migration, labor camps, housing, and education.

Another form of encouragement was expressed in the phrase, "*Sí Se Puede*." It was a constant phrase, a mantra if you will, that connotes a passion, a mission to overcome internal and external oppression. As far as an internal form of oppression experienced by the three *mujeres* (women) in the study, "*Sí Se Puede*" manifested going beyond the traditional roles of *la mujer mexicana en la casa* (the woman staying in the house) to the Chicana who has an education to help her people. In terms of external oppression, "*Sí Se Puede*" stirred the persons to continue in spite of the paltry few "cultural transmitters" who recognized, respected, and encouraged their biculturality. "*Sí Se Puede*" was related to *confianza* (confidence) and *conocimiento* (knowledge and understanding). Both principles communicated by family members can affect in Mexican American Chicana (o) college

students this deeper realization of personal and collective solidarity. This has evolved out of a process of long-developed *comunidad* (being family and being community). Encouragement by instilling these concepts goes a long way toward helping Mexican American Chicana (o) community college and university students who need to feel *confianza* (confidence), *conocimiento* (knowledge and understanding), and the pulsating “*Si Se Puede*” in their *corazones* (heart). With such encouragement through such powerful phrases, the sons and daughters of poor parents can trust themselves in seeing the richness of persistence in their own cultural upbringing.

Critical Consciousness of the Interrelationships of One's Culture

The participants conveyed that their critical reflections made them realize that dimensions of their common cultural background were intertwined.

Their discovery was corroborated by Alfredo Mirandé's work, The Chicano Experience, An Alternative Perspective, (1985). He made the following strong points:

There is thus the need not only to examine these aspects of culture individually but also to look at the interrelationships among them along with the interaction of culture.

What, for example, is the relationship between the economy and spirituality? The tendency to view any aspect of culture in isolation is consistent with the Anglo worldview; Anglos tend to segmentalize life experiences, Chicanos to integrate them. Family, spirituality, and politics for Anglos are separate.

Within our Mexican heritage they are very much intertwined. *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, for instance, is at once a familial, religious, and political symbol (p. 206).

The six Mexican American Chicana (o) co-investigators critically viewed the cultural aspects of family, spirituality, losing oneself, and recognizing one's background from an integrated perspective.

In particular, family was the wellspring of encouragement and non-material support. These dynamics were also manifested from extended family members. At the same time, there was the constant awareness of the family's struggles and status in society. And from this wellspring that is family flowed the quiet strength of both security and resistance. The internal power was the spirituality of the family. Emanating from a religious base but not confined to it, spirituality was passed on as a faith that sustained and a zeal to better one's people in work, housing, health, and education. This source of energy was comprehended in a variety of ways such as internal force, a power, peace, as a person, the Other: *El Señor* (the Lord), *El Creador*, (The Creator).

By not remaining connected to family and spirituality, there is the very real potential of losing oneself. One's cultural identity becomes jeopardized as a consequence of assimilation or the Americanization process that usually happens in the societal institution called school. There can be in that socialization process—in very subtle ways—the distancing from family and cultural roots. That is why it is so crucial to have experiences of affirming one's own cultural background not only through celebrations but more importantly through its presence in the teaching content, the instructional process, and in the teachers, staff, and administrators. Only then can a person have a sense of history and pride in the struggles as well as the joys of one's cultural heritage. An absence or lack of recognition will take the first college generation Mexican American Chicana (o) down the road of losing herself/himself. The hope is that Mexican American Chicana (o) students are recognized, respected, and encouraged in the context of their culture. Arriving at this level of critical reflection, through deep dialogue on matters of spirit interwoven with one's experiences and reflections, calls for greater responsibility to self, family, the community, and future generations.

Summary

The genesis of the six themes was articulated in rich language and tones throughout the 24 *diálogos* and the first *círculo de cultura*. With the second culture circle, actual phrases uttered in the individual *diálogos* were once again announced and shared among the circle. In the process there was an expansion of understanding. Family was a central thread throughout the many conversations. As each co-investigator contributed to the *círculo de cultura*, the feelings and realizations of “Quién Soy Yo?” began to rise on the horizon of the circle’s consciousness. Through the atmosphere of solidarity experienced in the *círculos de cultura*, recognizing one’s cultural background was finally voiced for each to hear and appreciate. Time and time again there were countless echoes of family encouraging each participant to persist. There was finally a forum to voice what they knew. Reflecting visually and creatively in the third *círculo de cultura*, the co-investigators agreed that their current levels of critical consciousness gained through the study had made them aware of the richness, depth, and complexity of the interrelationships of their culture to their persistence in the university.

Chapter Summary

The findings reported, beginning with a survey, through 24 *diálogos*, and into three *círculos de cultura*, were expressed in two ways: as a journey undertaken by the participants and as movements in an opera in which the co-investigators sang their stories.

Persistence in the university was found to be influenced by a spirituality that was grounded in the cultural heritage of five of the six research participants.

Spirituality, as articulated by the participants, was a culturally and family-centered phenomenon as corroborated in both the survey (items 5, 7, and 20) and responses

throughout the *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* as well as comments of persons from the four external groups. Participants described the influence of spirituality on their persistence as an internal phenomenon. The participants went on to describe the spirituality passed on to them by their parents and grandparents in a variety of ways. The majority of the participants expressed that spirituality was manifested in unique ways in each of their families.

The themes that emerged through the three data collection activities came from diverse yet common perspectives of the six research participants. The emergence of the themes culminated from both a visual and a written synthesis from five of the participants. The common themes derived from this combined phenomenological and critical consciousness research study were:

- Family
- *Quién Soy Yo?* (Who am I?)
- Quiet Inner Strength
- Recognizing My Background
- Encouraging Me to Persist
- Critical Consciousness of the Interrelationships of One's Culture

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RELECTIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS

Introduction

Chapter Five consists of five parts: (a) a summary of the research study; (b) reflections as a researcher: what I have learned from the co-investigators and the posing of new knowledge on persistence and spirituality from a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective; (c) the co-investigators' proclamations of their understandings of persistence from a family-centered view to current and future community college and university Mexican American Chicana (o) students; (d) my proclamations to educators as well as to current and future Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students; and (e) closure to the study.

Research Summary

Conceptual Framework

Much of the previous study on Mexican American Chicano students in higher education has focused on the negative: the dropout phenomena, their low achievement, and their non-involvement. Often their lack of persistence has been attributed to the student's culture. Mexican American Chicana (o) students in higher education have had serious problems in U.S. schools since they began attending them (Pizzaro, 1993).

The present study did not merely analyze six Mexican American Chicana (o) students who had transferred from a community college to a four-year university. It was also a process for the participants to reflect on their reality of higher education. These three women and three men voiced their experiences and understandings of their

persistence in higher education through *diálogos* with the researcher and among themselves in *círculos de cultura*.

The purpose of the study was not to generalize about Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students. Rather, I wanted to enter into the lives of six students regarding an aspect within their culture. Each research participant was seen, not as a subject from which to glean information, but as “persons, [who] are incomparable, unclassifiable, uncountable, irreplaceable” (Auden, 1967).

With the research study serving as a catalyst, the participants were encouraged “to be” as they were raised. The participants became more aware, both as individuals and as a *círculo de cultura*, of the richness and influence of their cultural spirituality. In addition, the participants discoursed critically the university’s responsibility in addressing spirituality in such areas as campus climate, student interaction with faculty, necessary programs, and personnel who can effectively relate to them in a bicultural manner.

As a result of the 24 *diálogos* (four with each of the participants) and listening to the co-investigators during the three *círculos de cultura*, I came to a deeper understanding of spirituality from a cultural perspective and its impact on persistence. What I learned was not spirituality from a scholarly nor theological perspective. Rather, what they shared were lived experiences of the presence of faith and the holy nurtured and passed down by family members, events, and celebrations. Five of the six participants realized at a more critical level and identified with Mexican American Chicanas (os) as a minority and as an oppressed group in American society.

Using phenomenological and critical science conceptual frameworks within an indigenous methodological base, the research question explored, discussed, recognized, realized and named spirituality as influencing five of the participants’ persistence in higher education

On Spirituality

The responses on item one on the survey (It is important for me to create the time and space for self-reflection and self-renewal.) indicates that self-reflection is important to both the six participants and the students from all four external groups. Though the participants did not speak directly of how they practiced self reflection, their engagement in the *diálogos* and their passing remarks, such as, "I have been thinking about this since we last met," or "This has made me think more deeply about these matters," shows that, as a cohort of six, they are indeed reflective adult learners.

At the outset of the *diálogos*, religious words or phrases, such as, "God," the "Church," were not expressed. Rather, *transcendent presence*, as noted in Chapter Three (Pate & Bondi, 1992; Smith, 1995; Abalos, 1992), was expressed more in terms that I would call "indigenous" to the participants. The participants used the following: "push," "quiet strength," "driving force," "*ganas*" (desire), "*poder*" (power), "driving force," and "the Lady." Only toward the end of the data collection phase were there a few direct references to "God" and "Jesus." My interpretation of the participants voicing spirituality in such terms seems to express their natural "folk Mexicanism" or "folk Catholicism" understandings of the divine. Having had the opportunity to speak from their lived experiences, some of the participants also expounded in more formal and traditional terms.

Faith, used by Freire (1987, p. 134) as that which "sustains, motivates, and challenges," is viewed more as an unnamed influence but one that motivates them to persist. Faith as "trust" was indirectly articulated when the participants referred to being raised by their parents and grandparents with "these values" and how "they lived through tough times." Freire's (1987) faith, as quoted in Chapter Three: "I am mobilized and engaged in action" (p. 3) and what I understood as "zeal," from Kuhne's (1998,) reference to faith as "action toward freedom and emancipation of the people and society," (p. 151),

was expressed by the participants as “passion,” “mission,” and “desire” to help the Mexican American communities that need someone to show them the resources to live more fully in a society that still discriminates against the minority and marginalized.

On Persistence and Resiliency

Spirituality, as developed for five of the six participants in their family upbringing, is the source that gave them internal meaning, purpose, and direction as they went through college. Because of it, they are able to withstand the personal, social, academic, cultural, and financial barriers and challenges. It is the spirituality interconnected to their cultural background that made them resilient through their years in community college and the university.

These five students persisted more from the encouragement of their family rather than being deterred by the lack of quality of the learner and teacher/staff interaction that they experienced, especially in the university. The co-investigators noted that more important to their persistence than interaction with instructors was the presence of persons who understood, could relate, and help them navigate through the system. Having someone, a bicultural person, available especially in student services helped him or her persist.

On Assimilation and Acculturation

During *Diálogo* four the co-investigators noted that there had not been a “loss of soul” as I had thought prior to beginning this study. Rather, the responses ranged from “not forgotten” to “it has always been there.” However, the very process of the research study, for five of the co-investigators, did create a variation of my original position of

“reclaiming our soul.” Instead there is a renewal of a family-centered spirituality, when one has the opportunity for it to be called into consciousness and reflected upon. As Rita expressed it, “It is more intense.” The other voice among the participants shows that, for other persons, there is neither a “loss of soul” nor a “reclaiming of soul” because as the participant put it, “Never had it.” But he even had a yearning for it.

On Liberation Theology

As for the concepts noted in Chapter Three regarding Liberation Theology, two of the participants related to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as a source of guidance, sustenance, and protection. Five of the participants’ responses throughout the study contained critical thought as described by Freire (1985) and Gutierrez (1973). The participants did not use terms akin to authoritative terminology such as “humankind’s struggle for emancipation from the marginalized cultures from a spiritual perspective” (Freire, p. 32); “preferential for the poor” (Latin American Bishops, (1971, p. 32); or “freedom from the mechanisms of domination” (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 33). Instead, the co-investigators did speak in terms of persisting in higher education because their “passion” and “mission” (stemming from their internal quiet strength) to helping the poor in their struggles of injustice. Critical thought was not articulated with concepts of “salvation” and a “Christ-centered society” but rather they persisted in college in order “to be a resource to persons from migrant backgrounds” who have been treated unfairly in such areas as housing, human services agencies, and education.

Literature

My understanding of the literature demonstrates that much of the research provides only a general and, sad to say, deficient models of explaining why Mexican American Chicana (o) community college and university students do not persist. More specifically, previous research on Mexican American students in higher education blame the culture for dropout rates and low achievement is inaccurate (Bennett, 1996; Barhona, 1990; Pincus & Decamp, 1989; Astin & Burciaga, 1981). Other researchers found that the Hispanic culture does not hinder them but, in fact, positively influences this populations' academic success (Cardoza, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992). These researchers identified specific variables related to persistence that generally included academic commitment, social status, psychological well-being, and external obligations (Astin, 1984, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992). Researchers examining Hispanics in community colleges have concluded in a similar manner. Other researchers concluded that a students' perception of educational assistance and support experiences does relate to persistence (Hernandez, 1980; McCool, 1984). However, to my knowledge there has been no research conducted which focuses on the specific cultural aspect of spirituality influencing persistence among Mexican American Chicana (o) college students. A review of the literature in Chapter Two provided the basis for this new approach taken in this study.

Indigenous Methodology

The decision to incorporate an indigenous methodology to conduct a research study from within one's heritage increased the feeling of *carnalismo* (sisterhood and

brotherhood) among the participants. It also aided each one to freely articulate their experiences and critical reflections of the sources of their persistence and their perceptions of the university in that regard.

According to Hurtado (1985), having the in-sight or *emic* perspective on the data collected from the participants can be understood and interpreted at an even closer proximity to the participant's intent in their responses and the particular worldview from which the responses emerged. Yet, the traditional perspective of planning and designing of *diálogo* questions, the asking the questions as well as listening and responding to the participants, prevailed at the outset. Abandonment of a hegemonic view of conducting and participating in interviews led into Freire's dialogue of *conscientization*, an attitude of the awareness of a person as a knower, which is the result of teaching and learning that are dialogic in character, (Freire & Macedo, 1987). With each successive *diálogo*, there emerged the re-discovery of *carnalismo* with the six participants.

Endemic to a greater understanding of persistence and spirituality is in the very manner of communication: the gestures, the tones, and the vocal inflection. Openness of a process to a wide range of language patterns and deliveries for the participants to express their descriptions, interpretations, messages, and meanings engages the participant to the use of words and modes of their preference. How participants and researcher choose to respond to the questions or ask the questions through sayings, proverbs, a mixture of Spanish/English dialects, and spiritual allusions contributes to the richness of their understandings and critical reflections.

Recognition, respect, and engagement in the ways of one's home pedagogy further stimulates the awareness of oneself as knower. And that "coming to know" is precipitated by (a) the indigenous structure; (b) the phraseology of the questions and responses; (c) the flexibility on the knower's part to respond directly or indirectly; and (d) the responses which are naturally wrapped in the tones, emotions, and cultural allusions.

Courage to exercise an indigenous methodology sustains the opportunity of *conscientization* through this mode of communication that is ingrained in our spirits since the days of our family upbringing. As noted in Chapter Two, the discourse between the individual participant and the researcher as well as among the co-investigators themselves was characterized as a “coming to know” in a spiraling and intuitive manner (Hall, 1985). On many occasions, both in the *diálogos* and the *círculos de cultura*, each of the co-investigators revisited earlier comments with expanded insight and cultural language regarding persistence and spirituality.

The research question was: What does spirituality mean, from a cultural aspect, in the context of the persistence by Mexican American Chicana (o) students who transfer from a community college to a small liberal arts university?

The findings of the study revealed a reality within these six Mexican American Chicana (o) students persisting in higher education that has not been found in previous research. The study, through an indigenous methodology and Chicana (o) perspective of social science, provided the forum for each of the participants to speak for her/himself.

Responses in the initial survey, the *diálogos*, and *círculos de cultura* revealed that these six Mexican American Chicana (o) students who have persisted in higher education possess and are driven by an intangible trait that is culturally influenced. The *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* generated a wealth of phenomenological and critically based knowledge regarding their persistence in higher education as influenced by a family-centered spirituality.

The research participants as co-investigators voiced individually, critically reflected together, and concurred that their families, recognition of their cultural backgrounds, and their quiet inner strengths have been positive and integrating influences in their persistence towards a degree.

Ultimately, more research on Mexican American Chicana (o) students in community colleges and universities is needed because there is a lack of both awareness and understanding of cultural aspects of the fastest growing population in the United States to the tune of 35 million or 12 percent of the American population. It is crucial to gain a greater awareness and understanding of the people's strengths. Such new knowledge would benefit community colleges and universities in aiding more Mexican American Chicana (o) students to persist in higher education. Increasing the number of Mexican American Chicana (o) students in community colleges and universities would serve this society well.

My Reflections as a Researcher

General Reflections

In the present study, the six voices of Mexican American Chicana (o) community college transfer students revealed to me that their persistence in the academy was not solely because of their adherence to the linear and abstract standards of intellectual inquiry. Rather, their lived experiences of persistence were rooted in the very historical legacy of their ancestors: endurance, resistance, and persistence in the midst of struggles and joys interwoven in their lives related to labor, politics, church, and education. And the core of that multifaceted Mexican American Chicana (o) journey proceeds from and through a realm of spirituality. The six participants are the descendents of a spirituality which is representative and consists of a mixture of the indigenous, Catholic, and Christian Mexicanism spiritual perspectives alike as pulsating fibers and threads of an interior strength. For some of the participants it was passed on by parents, grandparents, and

extended family members. For others, life in the spirit emanated from the immersion of the cultural phenomena known as *La Virgen de Gaudalupe*.

Unfortunately, the cultural shock of higher education—campus climate, programs, interaction or lack of interaction with faculty, staff, and administrators, instructional content, and student services—did affect the journey of three Chicanas, one Mexican American, one Chicano, and one *Mexicano* male. To varying degrees, the influence of spirituality upon their persistence was somewhat overlooked as the cultural strength with which they came to the academy, until the study rekindled a renewed awareness of it.

The research has been completed. We have taken the opportunity to listen to the voices of six Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students. The motifs of journey and opera were used to bring out the details of the participants' understandings. It was simply my way to voice the best source of the data on persistence and spirituality where generalizations fail. Rather, truth may be found in the details (Palmer, 2000).

We have completed this part of the journey. The road, the path has brought us to a particular point in time. The journey together has led us to a mountaintop. We see clearly now and remember distinctly some of the steps on the path we have trodden. We are glad being on this path of our larger journey for we have had conversations along the way. It is now for us to continue our journey to the valley below and share with other Mexican American Chicana (o) college students and educators what we have come to realize about persistence from an indigenous, cultural and spiritual perspective.

We have completed the opera. We have sung our voices, both individually and in unison with others, of our experiences. Through the flow of words, we voiced the sentiment within our hearts. We are grateful for the opportunity to sing our *arias* and make music and rhyme for our own corridos with the same spirit.

Reflections on the Co-Investigators

From a phenomenological perspective, the five months spent in *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* with the co-investigators indeed was a lived experience that tied our present vocation in higher education to the home pedagogy with which we were brought up. As Van Manen (1990) said, "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). We, as a sisterhood and brotherhood of seven, entered in the study to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of our experiences in postsecondary education as representatives of a *mestizo* people who historically have been retained at the edges of American society. Phenomenologically, we asked "what is this or that kind of experience like?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Again he states that we "attempted to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world [of the academy] pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (p. 16). In gaining those insights I discovered the natural attitudes of six Mexican American Chicana (o) transfer students regarding their everyday life of persisting in postsecondary education.

The spirit of *carnalismo* and solidarity as Mexican American Chicana (o) adult learners resurrected again the spirituality among us central in each of our particular families and in our common culture. What occurred is akin to Freire's "touching the soul within each of us" as noted in Chapter Two. We recalled and reflected on our spirituality, which is "faith in who sustains and motivates us; mobilizes and engages us in to action; gives strength and courage to overcome injustice; shows power to struggle for a more people centered society" (Freire, 1987, p. 67). This was done through the power of the *dialogo*. How we are to listen to aspects of our lives becomes crucial. In our culture, we tend to gather information in ways that do not work very well when the source is the human soul (Palmer, 2000). Through the *dialogo*, indigenously compatible with the

cultural background of the participants, was the path through which the participants' spirits could speak their truth. This could have only taken place under quiet, inviting, and trustworthy conditions; the spirit of *carnalismo* and solidarity among seven Mexican American Chicana (o) adult learners.

As I look back on process of critical reflection which occurred, it was as if we sensed during those periods of silence and felt resonating within us a "voice" who was speaking to us. Below is an attempt to put into words what we had experienced during the *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura*.

I have revealed myself to you. I have placed the seven of you together for this time on the circle of life. You all have become more conscious of self, each other, and the spirit within you and among you. You have become conscious of presence, energy, and staying power through recalling, re-memembering your own family and all that comes to both your heart and mind.

The ensuing intertwined list of memories sang out in melodious voices by all present:

- The dining room and the picture of the Last Supper. (Jesus)
- Uncles in the fields. (Jose S.)
- Father's story of the one who had no shoes. (Charlotte)
- The whole family in the car coming across from Minnesota. (Jose S.)
- Working with dad in fields of Tejas, Washington, y Oregon. (Jose G.)
- Holy Communion, *las velas*, and all that. (Nicole)
- The Holy Communion medal I found last week. (Charlotte)
- Going to church with grandma when I was little. (Rita)
- The parties, the albums that grandma made for us. (Jose S.)
- *Tejano* music and dancing in the kitchen. (Rita)
- *Las tías* (the aunts) talking around the kitchen table. (Leo)
- Going to the prayer meetings and the hot seat. (Charlotte)
- The medal of the Lady from my cousin. (Jose S.)
- My mother who has persisted all her life. (Nicole)
- Parents encouraging me to finish high school. (Jesus)

All the living memories brought again to consciousness that "quiet inner strength," that pride, that "push." That encouragement from "*mi familia*." We had rediscovered the core of family. The spirituality of our upbringing revealed itself through struggles, joys,

isolation, confusion, and solidarity. According to one Villafr  e's spiritual characteristics, namely, pilgrimage, the participants had traveled through treacherous terrain, bad weather, taking a fall, and getting lost. We recall Charlotte's garbage of assimilation; Nicole's hardship of devastation; Rita's shock of failure; Jesus' dryness in searching for a spirituality; Jose S.'s struggles with the power structures; and Jose G.'s lack of support. Having had these experiences, the participants found themselves with the opportunity to find the sacred center. In their persistence she became conscious to find that the sacred center was here and now. It was present in every moment of this research journey, and deep within their hearts.

We had come to know anew through our unique way of knowing, which came from our cultural upbringing. Through it we gained a new understanding, insight, and ease of communicating the ground of our persistence. It was a re-discovery of soul and reclamation of their spirit anew.

Reflections on Growth in Critical Consciousness

Each of the cases at the end of Chapter Four showed the co-investigators' growth in critical consciousness. Yet, in the dialogic action, I, too, underwent *conscientization*. As I reflected, I recalled that lingering hunch, that knowledge, which I had slowly constructed in mind down through the years but had never voiced. Rather, it had remained silent all these years in my soul and in my memories. It was only during the past ten years in postsecondary education that I was challenged to speak as I had come to take notice of the very few of the current generation who are like me, who I have seen walking the college campuses. More so, "me di cuenta" (I took notice) as I have sat during graduation commencements of the even the smaller numbers of Mexican American Chicana (o) students who have walked across the stage to receive their diplomas. Seeing the paltry few

takes me back to my own personal memories causing me to sigh and feel heartache. What I have experienced these ten years have only been imagined realities by my Euroamerican colleagues. During the countless meetings I have sat through with them in higher education, we have discussed and tried to solve such issues of "the minority dropout," the "retention of students at risk," "students of color," and their mounting "attrition rates." I have heard these words voiced in functional ways: "How do we raise the retention rates of these people?" "How do we decrease the attrition rate?"

By going on the journey with six *hermanas y hermanos* (sisters and brothers), I have been challenged to see anew from their eyes. The participants have affirmed my learning process in a variety of ways. I now see my educational service as solidarity with the poor and dispossessed students who possess a soul yearning for compassion, justice, liberatory education, and critical consciousness.

There has been the realization that the manner in which I was informed by each of the participants was in concert with the way of knowing, observing, listening, wondering, empathizing, and intuiting that originated from a pedagogy of the home (Bernal, 2000). It was a way that was caught, learned, and lived in my own upbringing. And that is different and, in some cases, in stark contrast with the pedagogy of the system called schooling.

As I also reflected, I became still and listened. In that quiet inner silence there emerged a consciousness, and I came to know someone greater than myself. As this journey has come to a close, I have become more conscious of:

- Presence of the humanity and in particular the cultural richness of each of the six persons;
- The budding of openness between and among us;
- My being transformed between and among us;
- My being informed between and among us;

- Our journey between and among us; and
- My growing awareness of the presence of the Other.

Reflections on Being Poised for Action

According to Comstock's (1989) model, critical theory leads through phenomenological understanding, critical consciousness, and toward action. We began the study from a critical theory perspective and limited ourselves to the phenomenological understanding and critical consciousness phases. The study informed the participants and myself through those phases. With this newly acquired level of critical consciousness, my action is to complete my career more fully in the continuation of educating the poor (The Neglected Majority, Parnell, 1985) at a community college; to be available and seize the opportunities to speak to students and educators regarding what we seven rediscovered and acclaimed anew.

Reflections On New Knowledge

My evidence shows that the lived experiences of family, a sense of history, and status in society are related to one another and are also intertwined with spirituality. From a phenomenological perspective, the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture and history are permeated with spirituality. In fact, a family-centered spirituality is the invisible force of hope, trust, resilience, and quiet inner strength operative in the peoples' life struggles and challenges. Similarly, the participants in this study attest that spirituality has been the push and the desire to prevail in the midst of the academic, financial, social, cultural, emotional, and personal barriers and challenges experienced in higher education. Previous studies suggest that persistence is achieved by meeting the standards of the institution.

There has been the traditional thinking that poor students, especially students from diverse cultural backgrounds, do not persist because of deficits inherent in the student, one's family, and one's cultural heritage. This study, however, challenges traditional perspectives because there are positive dimensions of persistence that students bring because of their culture. If the cultural aspect of spirituality were to be recognized, respected, and utilized, there might be the reversal of attrition rates to an increase of persistence among this student population.

In short, this study provides the basis for the inclusion and creation of a Mexican American Chicana (o) perspective of persistence centered on the interconnecting dynamic of spirituality. Preliminary considerations for such a theory are explored below.

Persistence

According to Rhoads and Valadez (1999), when speaking of institutional cultures such as community colleges: "if there is the ignoring or negation of the lived experiences of students ... it will increase the chances that ... will maintain neither the desire or ability to persist" (p. 169). That negation occurs when there is that lack of recognition of a person's cultural background. Or as Jose S., one of the research co-investigators, so aptly articulated in his synthesis: "family which encouraged me to persist. Through our spirituality that caused me to constantly remember my background which, in turn, leads me to know who I am." If one's family and its influences of spirituality, cultural background, and cultural identity are not recognized, the persistence rates among Mexican American Chicana (o) students, as well as other students of color, will continue as they have been. There must be, on the part of administrators, faculty, and support staff, recognition of the students' richness that they bring to the campuses, classrooms, and offices in higher education. However, persistence policies, retention strategies, and programs that seriously

take into account an Mexican American Chicana (o) perspectives of education, will increase the chance that more Mexican American Chicana (o) students complete their education in K-12 and beyond into community colleges and universities.

Spirituality

Spirituality voiced as a family-centered by the participants, and corroborated by Mirandé's position that all is interconnected in the Mexican American Chicana (o) culture, must be therefore be understood in the historical context of the people. According to both Acuña (1988) and Mirandé (1985), the Mexican people of the Spanish conquest and the Mexican Americans experiencing life as an internal colony in the Southwest during the 1700s and 1800s have a history of oppression and marginalization within the greater society. With such an acute historical backdrop, Elizondo (1983), Freire (1971), Gutierrez (1973), and Villafrañe (1992) create a spirituality commensurate with the people's lived experiences.

Such an understanding of the lived experiences proclaim a radical spirituality of liberation and transformation. It is a way of living, of persisting in the midst of all that denies a person's journey to a fuller life in this society. The Mexican American Chicana (o) people have this legacy, however unconscious, rooted in Catholic and Christian upbringing and, to some degree, cultivated in their family. This spiritual promise is articulated in "La Fe" (the Faith) that "sustains, motivates, and challenges" the people (Freire, 1998). Similarly, the resounding "*Si Se Puede*" proclaims the overcoming of the struggles of labor, housing, access, and persistence in education. Such an emancipatory education, from a Chicana (o) perspective, similar to Gutierrez's "Theology of Liberation" and Freire's spirituality, resonates within the spirituality centered in the families of five of the six participants. With such a spirituality, they have been able to overcome the feeling

of isolation and “lack of fit” to preserve their voices in the midst of experiences that threaten to silence them.

Co-Investigators Proclamations

I chose to bring this section of the last chapter to a close in the same manner that has been operative throughout the work, namely, with an encore from each of the research participants. We will listen one last time to the power of their resilience and persistence during their years in higher education. What follows is their culminating testimony of their growth through the study via the survey, *diálogos*, *círculos de cultura* and synthesis charts.

The participants were asked to write their reflections in the context of those who will read their words in this study. They have words, messages for current and future Mexican American Chicana (o) community college and university students as well as for administrators, faculty, and student services professional who are hired to educate all students including the new majority of students (Rendon, 1996, p. 3).

Their truth, as each chose to express it, is co-mingled in the “eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion” (Palmer, 1998, p. 104). We hear from each co-investigator one final time.

Finally, the Chapter will close with my recommendations.

Charlotte

I’m not a churchgoer. Haven’t been for a long time. Still, I would say that I am a very spiritual person. Things have gotten a little hairy a couple of times in the last few years, but my strongest belief is that things will be all right. Whatever happens, I have faith in that, so when we started looking at spirituality and persistence, I thought this would be

easy. Boy, was I wrong. I realize now that there's a lot going on inside of us all, and our spirituality is interconnected with a whole lot of things, including our upbringing, our families and our culture. And since I've spent most of my life feeling like an outsider to the Latino community, I was really surprised when I recognized just how connected I really am to it all.

I was lucky as a kid in school; I liked it, except for maybe math. Still, it took me four different colleges and universities before I finally knew I was going to earn a degree. Now I know that part of the reason for that was that I had no focus and I really didn't know my place in the world. That's a big thing, knowing where you fit in. I recognize it now as a key to success. You figure out from where you can draw your strength. The experience of participating in these *diálogos* and *círculos* has given me a clearer look at myself, my strengths, and my weaknesses. And by recognizing these parts of myself, I am walking away with the ability to trust in myself more. That's a big thing, too. I believe that if I had discovered all this earlier I wouldn't have dropped out of school. I would have realized that there is a lot of support to be gained through family and community, and that we all have an inner strength connected with those other things.

I used to think that my sisters and I were not the norm. Being born in California, growing up outside of the barrio, and understanding but not speaking Spanish, really alienated me from other Chicanos in school. By the time I was going to college I had it in my head that I didn't really belong. I was proud of my heritage. I'd defend it, and it was part of my family life, but there I was, Chicana, but "not Mexican enough." What this meant in college is that I felt out of place. I thought I wouldn't be accepted among Chicanos, and I really didn't belong with the "rah-rah" white sorority girls. So there wasn't a "community" that I belonged to – what I did was, I went to classes and work and then outside of the whole college thing for socialization. Well, it didn't take to long for the

outside world to become more important. I found my community out there and dropped out of school.

It took me a long time to get back to school, and by the time I did, I knew what I wanted to do. And I knew that I would need to stay focused and take advantage of any support made available to me. Don't get me wrong, the first time through my family was there to encourage me, but I didn't really go to them. So this time, when challenges came along I used the support I got from family and friends, and from a belief in myself. Now whether it is through encouragement, or family and friends looking up to me, or the faith that what is meant to be will be, I found my place in the whole scheme of things, and I allowed myself to feel the support.

So here's the thing, through talking with the group I have come to realize that there's a strong connection between family, spirituality and persistence. I also have come to realize that I am like many other Chicanos, Latinos, or whatever you want to call us. There are a whole bunch of us out there, and we have more similarities than differences, and we *are* a community. And we are a part of a family continuum that is more than our own personal families. We are a part of a people that have endured many hardships. My grandma and grandpa came from Mexico and worked to make things better for their children. My parents were born in California and worked to make things better for us. And we work to make things better for those to come. This is our story and the story of so many others. That's the way it is. The way it's always been. We struggle, we persevere, and we conquer, for the love of our families – to make things better. And if you look at the past of our people and you can see where our strength lies. Our communities have always been centered around the church; the social gatherings, baptisms, first communions, weddings, etc. So, when things get tough it's natural for us to call on those things that gave us comfort and strength when we were young. Family, God, the Virgin Mary, these things are all a part of my support group. Yeah, I don't go to church any more, not for any deep

reason, just don't, and I live hundreds of miles away from my family, but I still get strength from all of these areas.

And to top it off, this feeling of belonging has made me stronger. As I recognize my place within the community, childhood memories have come back to life. I've even gained the confidence to work on my Spanish, and not care if I sound dumb because I didn't say it right. Spanglish is better than nothing. Heck, even *that* is part of our culture. And at this point, remembering where I came from has awoken a part of my spiritual self that I know will continue to help me grow, take chances, and work toward a better life for not only my family but for the community as well.

Jose G.
(English Translation Can Be Found In Appendix G)

De: JOSE J GONZALEZ

Para: ESTUDIANTES

Queridos estudiantes;

Hola! mi nombre es Jose, soy Mexicano y tengo 27 años de edad. Actualmente estoy atendiendo la escuela Western Oregon University localizada en Monmouth, OR.

Tengo viviendo en los Estados Unidos 12 . Yo vine a este país por primera vez en el año de 1988, a la edad de 15 años. Desde el '88 hasta el '95, trabajé en el campo en los estados de California, Texas, Washington, y Oregon. Yo deje de atender la escuela en México cuando iba en 2do grado de secundaria. La razón por la cual yo me vine a este país principalmente fue para poder ayudarle a mis padres económicamente. En los primeros años de mi estancia en este país me di cuenta de que era difícil ayudarse a uno mismo, y a nuestros padres, si no se tiene una educación. En el año del '94, las cosas se pusieron aún más difíciles para mí. En ese año me di cuenta de que muy pronto iba a ser padre de una niña. Antes de que mi hija naciera, yo sentía una responsabilidad muy grande por ayudarle

a mis padres, pero la ayuda que yo les proporcionaba era muy limitada a razón del trabajo y el sueldo que yo tenía. Además de sentirme frustrado por no poder ayudarle más a mis padres, muy pronto iba a tener la responsabilidad de proveer por mi hija. En ese año, sintiendo esas presiones, decidí regresar a la escuela y obtener una educación y un entrenamiento para así poder ayudar más a mi familia.

En el mes de junio del '95, me registré en una escuela de entrenamiento llamada JobCorps y en ese mismo mes regresé de nuevo a los salones de clase. Al principio me fue muy difícil adaptarme, principalmente por no saber inglés. Yo nunca había atendido una escuela en este país, a pesar de eso no me di por vencido. Ese era el primer obstáculo a vencer y yo no podía fallarme a mi mismo ni a mi familia. Yo atendí JobCorps por un total de 13 meses. La mitad de ese tiempo me la pase en el salón de clases, aprendiendo el idioma y preparándome para tomar el examen de G.D.E.. Los últimos meses estudié y trabajé en el área de carpintería.

Dos meses antes de mi graduación de JobCorps, una maestra y consejera académica me contactó para informarme de un programa gratuito para atender el colegio en el cual yo calificaba. Al principio la idea de seguir estudiando no me llamó la atención. Mis planes eran graduarme y empezar a trabajar para ayudarle a mi familia. Dos semanas después la maestra me volvió a llamar y me preguntó que había pensado sobre el programa. Yo le dije que no me interesaba, y además que mi inglés no era suficientemente bueno, y que yo no tenía la inteligencia para poder sobresalir en el colegio. La maestra respondió diciéndome que mis excusas no tenían fundación y que si no me superaba más era por que yo no quería, y no porque no pudiera. Al final de nuestra conversación, la maestra me convenció para que aplicara. Ella me dijo que no tenía nada que perder y que había mucho que podría ganar. Decidí experimentar con el colegio y después del primer tri-mestre, tome la decisión de atender clases hasta obtener mi Associates Degree. Cuando obtuve el certificado de dos años, yo quise mejorar más mi educación y decidí aplicar en la

universidad de Monmouth, Oregon. Gracias a dios me aceptaron, actualmente tengo dos años y medio tomando clases en la universidad, y espero graduarme en Junio, del presente año.

Mi jornada como estudiante en los ultimos 5 o 6 años no ha sido fácil. He encontrado muchos obstáculos en el camino. Muchas veces pensé en dejar de estudiar, y trataba de darme ánimo recordando todo el camino ya recorrido y comparándolo con lo que me quedaba por recorrer. Una influencia que todo el tiempo ha estado presente en mi mente es mi familia, espicialmente mis padres y mi hija, ella ya tiene 5 años de edad. Mi familia reside en México y para mí ha sido muy dificil estar lejos de mi familia, principalmente el no ver crecer a mi hija. El estar lejos de ellos me desanima y a la vez me da animo para seguir estudiando. El motivo por el cual yo decidí estudiar fue para poder ayudar a mi familia, y aunque ha sido dificil, el sacrificio vale la pena. Otras influencias que me an ayudado durante mis estudios son el apoyo de mi familia, por supuesto, pero ademas el apoyo de personas que he conocido durante este tiempo.

El propósito de darles a saber a ustedes un poco de mi vida y de los problemas por los que yo he pasado, y de lo que yo he logrado es principalmente con el deseo de darles ánimo a que sigan estudiando. Yo se, por experiencia propia, que es dificil y complicado el camino pero quiero decirles que hay luz y esperanza al final del tunel. Si yo pude sobresalir con los problemas que tuve y que aun tengo, también lo pueden haser ustedes. Todo depende de las metas que se propongan y de su deseo de superación. No permitan que una baja calificación o grado académico les impida raalizar sus suenos. El no pasar un examen simplemente significa eso, que no pasó uno el examen, pero no significa que no se pueda sobresalir. Esos son obstáculos por los cuales todos tenemos que pasar tarde o tempraño, pero no permitan que esos obstáculos los detengan. Miren esos problemas como una piedra en el camino a la cual se le tiene que brincar o sacar la vuelta para poder continuar asia la meta.

Sigan hacia su meta y no permitan que nada ni nadie los detenga. Asi como yo alcansare mi meta en junio, primero dios, también ustedes pueden lograr y alcansar sus propositos. **"Todos y cada uno de ustedes son especiales y pueden alcanzar su meta si en verdad se lo proponen, se los aseguro."**

La recompensa es más grande que el sacrificio ha hacer para etender la escuela.

Mientras haya vida, hay esperanza, **NO SE DEN POR VENCIDOS.**

Recurden las palabras que nos an unido a los MEXICAÑOS ultimamente; **"SI SE PUEDE, SI SE PUEDE, SI SE PUEDE"**, no lo olviden.

Les deseo la mejor suerte del mundo, y espero que mis palabras les ayuden en proponerse y conseguir sus metas.

Suerte,

Jose J. Gonzalez B.

PS.

Disculpen las faltas de ortografia.

Quiero darle las gracias a Leo Rasca-Hidalgo por haberme incluido en este proyecto, suerte hermaño.

Rita

I would first like to thank Dr. Leo Rasca-Hidalgo for giving me the opportunity to participate in this research study because it has made me realize what I have actually accomplished. Upon my first discussion with Leo I was struck with deep emotion and finally realized that obtaining my bachelor's wasn't as easy as I had made myself believe. I literally sobbed throughout the entire discussion because I had never had the opportunity to openly discuss what I had felt throughout my education. My emotions exploded, and I revealed my failures, frustrations, doubts, and guilt that I hadn't realized I had endured

during my years in college. When I look back now, I guess I never had the courage to face my feelings as I was so focused on reaching my goal. My goal was to get a degree in Sociology and return to the Latino community and fulfill *my passion* which is helping families who are in need, just like my grandparent's and parent's had been.

My parents and grandparents were migrant field workers who settled in Oregon in the late 1950's. I have always felt an overwhelming sense of pride for my family for what they've endured and overcome in their lives. In fact, I felt guilty for having the opportunities that they never had. I felt more guilty when my parents were burdened with college expenses and I failed at my first attempt at college. After that experience, I knew I could never ask my family to provide me with an education, it was something I would have to earn.

My first attempt at college was a complete failure. I realize now that I didn't fail as a student, but rather the particular institution failed to give me the sense of welcome and diversity. I didn't make it through the first semester because I was totally lost and I didn't feel like I belonged. I felt I had failed both my parents and myself. It took me almost four years to build up the courage to face school again. I began by attending community college part-time and eventually I shifted my priorities and decided to focus on school rather than work. My younger brother was a freshman at Western Oregon University, and he was enjoying school. He ultimately convinced me to apply, and when I was awarded a scholarship I transferred to WOU. I would not have attended WOU if my brother had not been there. He was my resource, the person who basically held my hand throughout my first year and who introduced me to everyone so that I felt a part of something. That was the most important thing for me, to feel that I belonged and to be surrounded by people like myself who were first generation college students and who had similar backgrounds. We became *familia* in a sense that we had a common understanding of the obstacles that we were each facing, whether it be personal, cultural, or academic.

There were a few faculty and staff members that I could sincerely relate too and realized that they were our only outlets. They were the only ones, besides our peers, who understood what we were experiencing and what we were learning in college, and that bonded us immediately. These faculty and staff members were living proof that someone like me could get their degree. It could be done...*¡si se puede!* They were Mexicanos/Chicanos just like me, who had conquered the barriers and who had proven that we could do it just like they did. These role models gave me *the ganas* to continue my education.

Although I had met all the right people at college and had a great social network, I was personally torn between what I was becoming. In essence, I felt I could never be what my mother or grandmother had been, I could never fulfill the ideological role of a *mujer mexicana* (whatever that is), and I felt as if I was missing something extremely important. My grandmother is what I consider the traditional Mexicana/mujer. She's raised in Mexico, Spanish speaking, uneducated, Catholic, controlled by her husband, and she raised a large family. My mom was born and raised in the US, is bilingual/bicultural, received a high school diploma, submissive to my dad, and yet she has more freedom and opportunities than my grandma ever had. As for me, I'm born and raised in Oregon, bilingual/bicultural, college educated, and independent. I realize now that I wasn't missing anything, rather I was trying to identify myself with them, and I didn't fit into their identities. I am a Chicana and can never share their lived experiences, or be what they have been. I am living a life of opportunity that they have only dreamt of... the dream of a better life for their children has become a reality! I have no regrets of receiving an education, but I feel that my parents and grandparents knowledge, and their rich culture and values will forever be apart of me, and what I've learned at the university doesn't compare to what they've given me.

To summarize, I'd like to emphasize that my persistence was knowing people who were just like me that had proven - *que sí se puede* - that they succeeded in receiving an education. These people were friends from similar backgrounds that made up the tight network and kept me safe and comfortable.

Mi familia was my strength and courage that gave me the *ganas* to further my education. I couldn't have done it without their continual support. *Mil gracias*.

My passion is giving back to the Latino community, sharing knowledge and assisting families in need. It's important to understand that once you have an education, nobody can ever take that away from you...it is forever yours. CHICANA POWER!!!

Nicole

Have you ever met someone that so deeply impacted your life that words can't express your gratitude or your new profound insight? The opportunity to experience a new perspective through another person's vision? Well, I have been graced, now twice in my life by just that type of person. The first was my grandmother, Pauline, and secondly, was by a researcher, Leo Rasca-Hidalgo. They both impacted my life in ways that make me a whole person. I wish that for you.

The area of persistence is often over looked by people. The word actualizes its definition while we continue to persist in our own daily lives. The questions raised by insightful scholars, such as Mr. Rasca-Hidalgo, have been life changing in a very beautiful way for me. I will reflect on three realizations regarding persistence including themes like connection of spirituality, cultural aspects and finally my personal account of persistence in higher education.

When I received a brief summary about the project and a request to participate in my mail, I remember thinking this guy is "nuts," spirituality and persistence in regards to

“our” culture and higher education? The idea was a complete non-thought for me. I have come to realize that I was mistaken. The reason for my reaction I believe came out of one, never being asked that question, and two, growing up believing that “you get what you put into it.” I know, now, that spirituality and persistence for me are tightly woven threads of my very existence. My deep admiration for Our Lady de Guadalupe has supported me my entire life. For example, when issues come up that I have no control over, I turn to her. I light my *vela* (candle) and beg for her blessing on my family, my studies, and me a long with my wants and desires for the future. Persistence in a world that dehumanizes, devalues and perpetrates injustices can weigh heavy on a person. It can also try to steal your joy and inhibit you from experiencing happiness. Spirituality and persistence are part of who I am and I am relieved to have it given its due respect.

As far as cultural aspects surrounding persistence I have realized that the Mexican culture embodies persistence. It is who we are as a people. Our ancestors’, our history is a perfect example of persistence against injustice and continues to live on within us. Sadly, I have also realized that we are not visible in American culture, like we need to be. The lack of support and encouragement to persist by the social constructs of our institutions do not allow for even small reminders of where and how we as a culture came to be here in America. One example is education. On all level of education starting early on as elementary students we see friends and even family members taken to special rooms for native Spanish speakers. Therefore, subjecting them to separate but equal standards that went out with “Jim Crow Laws”. In High School we are among the largest group for dropout and in Community college we are “corralled” into careers that stereotypically fit our societal expectations. As Mexican Americans we are only one of the few cultures that have not fully assimilated to the dominant culture.

I understand what its like to feel persistence. I use “feel” because I have plans and goals for myself and I’ve faced my share of roadblocks, but I have persisted. I look back

just three short years ago when I was denied admittance to Western Oregon University. Road block after roadblock, but I persisted and was granted a "special admit." I am now a senior and am anticipating law school next. I can't imagine where I'd be today without my persistence. I was also the lowest paid site-director at my workplace. I persisted and prayed, and I got the raise then, and now here I sit telling you my story, imagine that? You too can afford yourself persistence because everyone should at least have equal opportunity. It is guaranteed to you by law.

Now, turning to the man that so wisely has created a platform for giving voice to unanswered questions like spirituality and persistence regarding higher education, which beg to be answered (heard).

Thank you Leo Rasca-Hidalgo.

Jose S.

In the following few pages I will be discussing two ways in which as a society we can keep our Chicano/a students in higher education, how we can increase the Chicano/a population in higher education, and how we can make sure all of our Chicano/a students complete their education to the highest possible level. I will first start off by addressing the administration of higher education, and then I will address our Chicano/a students who are the challenge of higher education. Before I get started I would just like to clarify what I feel is the definition of a Chicano/a. In my eyes I feel that a Chicano/a is any person who is of indigenous blood. By this I mean any person who can look back and say, "Yes, I am of Mexican descent," or "Yes, I am of South American descent." If that person is willing to look back and accept who they are and where they came from with pride and dignity, in my eyes that person is Chicano/a.

Let me first start off by addressing the administrators of higher education. To these people, I would just like to start off by saying, I know what I am talking about because I have been there and done that. I have gone to bat with the administration over issues regarding Chicanos in higher education. I have won some battles, and I have lost a lot more. But yet I still continue the *lucha*. So when I say this is what we want, I mean, this is what we want! So if you are not LIKE me do not tell me it is not what we really want. I have been all over this country and I have asked Chicanos from all over the US what they want, and the answers are all the same. Give us what we need in order to SHINE and SUCCEED in LIFE.

TO ADMINISTRATORS

Administration, all we are asking for are a few simple conditions. Once these issues have been addressed, you will see how attendance in higher education, and graduation from higher education will increase by such numbers that you will be above and beyond the minimum standards, which are imposed upon your institution. You will be the model for which all others strive to be. These conditions are as simple as adding staff which students can relate to; providing students with a location which they can go to feel at home; providing students with resources to spiritual locations in which they can relate; giving the students the opportunity to help in the restructuring of the institution as it moves into the next generation of education; offer curriculum that educates our people in a way that has not been offered to them; provide a campus that reflects every culture not just the dominant one; and most importantly, do not be afraid to ask the students what they want, and please take the time to listen to them and understand where they are coming from. By offering these resources to the Chicano/a population you will be among the first to break the barriers between the two dominant cultures in our society.

A LOS ESTUDIANTES

To Students

As for my fellow *compañeros*, as you enter into higher education, you will have to face some of the hardest struggles that life has to offer. I say this because you are entering an institution that has always been structured around the *Americano*. But the only advice I can give to you is probably something you already know, but here it goes. As you start your educational process remember the following things: remember that you are there for a reason and that is to educate yourself, your family, and your community. Remember that without your family you cannot succeed, as they are a part of you. Remember who you are and where you come from (you can take the *vato* out of the *barrio* but you can't take the *barrio* out of the *vato*). Remember to be proud of who you are where you come from. Remember all of the values your family has passed on to you, as you can pass them on to others. Remember that our history has been full of struggles, yet we have always found the means to succeed. Remember no matter what happens our people are always proud of what you are trying to accomplish. Remember that when things get rough our spirituality is always with our people. Remember that when things get bad seek out the advice of people who can relate to you, people who share the same beliefs and values you were raised with. Remember that when you get college it is important to create a network of people who you can call on when things get bad. Remember that when you get to college seek out those resources, which can help you, succeed in life and in your education. But most importantly, remember that as you complete your education you are paving the way for the rest of our people, you are the story from which our next generation will be inspired.

Let me just leave you with my situation. As I went to college, I was called a "spic," a "wet back," and, yes, that shit pissed me off, but most of all it gave me even more *ganas* to show those white bigots out there that I was better than them. As I went to

college, yes, there were times when I knew the professors did not want to hear what I had to say, but I told them anyway, what were they going to do to me that hadn't already been tried on my other *compañeros*. As I went to college, I always sought sanctuary with my *gente* and my faith because, as I was raised, those were two most influential aspects of my life. So, if you get nothing else out of this brief write up please take this to heart, your family is what makes you whole, and as you strive to complete your education you will always have them within you at all time, the good and the bad, *siempre están contigo* (they will always be with you).

Researcher's Proclamations

I end this study, not with recommendations and conclusions. Rather, I conclude the study with proclamations to both transfer students and those who teach, advise, and lead them.

Transfer Students

I share the following reflections with all Mexican American Chicanas (os) who are in community colleges and who have transferred to a university as well as all first-generation college students. Yours is a remarkable journey. It is remarkable because of the context of your family's social-economical-political-educational-cultural lived experiences. It was in the early 1960s as a teenager that I witnessed the historic scene of a African-American youth entering the doors of a university in the South under the protection of the National Guard.

Since then I have heard the rhetoric that minorities have full access to education. The doors may be open, but persons not of the dominant culture, are still like strangers in another's land. Students, like yourselves and myself, have experienced the looks, the

remarks, the isolation, and the all-too-tempting voice, "What's the use? It's tough! I don't have to take any more of this stuff." Those of us who went to college in the 60s and 70s have been where you may be now. I say to you, not only "Hold on! Help is coming!" but more so, the strength you need to the fight daily battles and exorcise the demons of fear "*anxias*" (and anxieties) is within you. It is in your blood. It is in your heart. It is strongly rooted in that cultural background that you are probably forgetting, beginning to not remember, or that you have not learned at all in the place called school.

Ask and demand the things you need as you go to community college and then on to the university. Ask for a more welcoming campus climate. Ask for having older sisters and brothers who will walk the road with you as instructors, advisors, and student services personnel who understand you and are effective in bicultural ways. But in addition to these very important needs, remember that deep in your family is the source of persistence over the subtle and silent movement to "push you out" of a place that your ancestors wished for themselves and hoped and prayed for you. Get connected and in touch with the quiet inner strength to continue with your education, and then, return to serve your community.

To Educators

In both public and private institutions of higher learning, how do we integrate the concept of spirituality from the cultural perspective of the students? The necessity for educational leaders to consider and to focus on matters of spirit comes from the Wingspread Report (1993).

Educational institutions from elementary school through high school and beyond to colleges and universities must address the needs of Mexican American Chicana (o) students (as well as other students of color and first-generation students). The focus must

include the assurance, support, and practice to ensure cultural aspects of being and knowing at all levels of teaching, learning, and interaction between educators and the adult learners. Administrators need to become not only more sensitive, but also more knowledgeable and committed to the needs of those who enter the halls of the academy. Educators are to serve and educate effectively the new majority of students, including Mexican American Chicana (o) students.

As cited several times in this work, there must be serious consideration of Rendon's (1999) "A Spirituality Model for a Higher Education." Not only are the institutions of higher learning to provide and support such content but also to serve as, what she (1999) calls, "cultural transmitters" (p. 10). There is also the need to have a critical mass of educators who have been in the students' shoes and can relate effectively with the students. Or as Rita expressed it in one of the *diálogos*, "we need bicultural people who understand us." And as Jose S. so aptly put it: "Go see, she/he's been there. They will tell you."

A spirituality model of higher education includes a different type of learning and teaching process. A commitment to an "Academics of the Heart" incorporates many of the co-investigators insights based on their critical reflection.

Need for Cultural Transmitters

Crucial and critical for these generations of students to rediscover and to reclaim their souls are the cultural transmitters in the system called school and schooling. Through the spirit-filled leadership of teachers, counselors, and administrators, there can unfold an education for critical consciousness and an academics of the heart. The history of the Mexican American people only points to their persistence. At the very same time, knowing not only the joys and contributions of their heritage but also the struggles and persistence of their ancestors gives students a sense of pride that can lead them to the

source of persistence in community colleges and universities. With an understanding of their history and who they are, Mexican American Chicana (o) students, who are part of the 35 million Hispanics in the United States (according to the 2000 U.S. Census) will have a renewed pride. This, in turn, will activate their power to persist but from their own cultural perspectives.

Need for a Culturally Friendly Campus

According to Terenzini, Rendon, Jalomo, et al (1993) in Transition to College: Diverse Students Diverse Stories, faculty, staff, and family encouragement, motivation, and support affect low-income, first-generation students (p. 251). All students experience self doubts at the beginning of the collegiate experience. All the more so with students from different cultural backgrounds and most especially when their numbers are a fraction compared to the numbers of mainstreamed students. Such circumstances call for an ongoing series of in-classroom and-out-of-classroom experiences with peers, faculty, and staff. Students need to experience acceptance in this new living, social, and learning environment.

Incorporation of Home Pedagogy

Parental support, in its own unique way, and campus personnel hired from similar cultural backgrounds is another factor. Faculty teaching and staff communicating through pedagogies that resonate the learning styles of "high context" peoples of Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and Indigenous America (Hall, 1987) is a critical factor. The elder, the mentor, the friend, the wounded healer, and the teacher are the critical people who may influence low-income, first-generation students to persist.

Balance of Academics of the Mind and Heart

Intellectual inquiry, interwoven with humanity, must also be viewed and implemented by the teacher as interconnected with what the students bring to higher education: their cultural heritage. As we enter the 21st Century in a multicultural society, the purpose of the Academy cannot only be for intellectual growth. The times are such, that a spiritual core must be included. As Jose G., one of the six research participants, stated so firmly, "The university should provide for such activities, programs, and opportunities to discourse such matters of spirit" resulting in a "process I come to know who I am, where I come from, and what I am to be."

Only with new standards such as these can more Mexican American Chicanas (os) be retained and persist in higher education. A change in the academy must embrace a student's humanity expressed in (a) the inclusion of different knowledge bases; (b) the presence of new ways of teaching and learning; (c) the use of counseling and advising perspectives that respectfully and positively relate to Mexican American Chicanas (os) students; and (d) the search and identification of a most effective staff (Hurtado, 1985, p. 209).

Closing Remarks

Ten years ago I began my career in higher education. I coordinated a federally-funded project that served poor and first-generation college students from various culturally diverse backgrounds. After hiring teachers and tutors from similar backgrounds, I initiated a "Connections" seminar in which both instructors and students met to dialogue on the various courses to the students' learning experiences and application to their daily lives. Through this study, I have learned anew from the participants, from similarly poor backgrounds, that making connections, weaving the very fibers of our life's experiences to

learning, make us literate in reading the words of books as well as the world in which we live. Through the frightening yet revealing medium of dialogue with one another, we discovered in ourselves with a greater consciousness as we spoke words to express what is within us. And, and, and the world's actions that enter so imperceptibly to change the core of "Who I am?" and, "What we are?" The revelations of connections precipitated by this study are part of the journey of my education at this stage of time and space. My space, my movement, and my power of observation in the academy must become more balanced. My re-educated mind can not stand alone in the hallowed halls. Rather, my mind and heart must be sustained, motivated, and challenged in *diálogo* and *círculos de cultura* with those with whom we interact: the students, our colleagues in instruction and student services, and our educational leaders.

I have learned in a new way that all is interconnected. One's intellect, creativity, social capital, aesthetic musings, and passion for educational action are intertwined with the center of who I am, the "Quién Soy Yo?" shaped by the upbringing in my family. And once again the words of Mirandé pulsate through my consciousness:

The tendency to view institutions in isolation is consistent with an Anglo worldview; Anglos tend to segmentalize life experiences, Chicanos to integrate. Family, religion, and education for Anglos are separate, whereas within our Mexican heritage they are very much intertwined (1985, p. 206).

By extension, our education is at once familial, spiritual, and political. This lived reality cannot be left to become the forgotten wellspring. The wellspring of our ancestors has been rediscovered. It has been in our consciousness all along but slowly eroding away in the maelstrom of traditional education. Yet the wellspring has been gently tapped these past few months. The refreshing taste of living waters of *diálogo* and *círculos de cultura* has renewed their energy through the very interpretations voiced in each of the cases and substantiated through their synthesis. By attaining a higher level of consciousness,

stimulated through the "*fuera y ánimo de los diálogos y los círculos de cultura*" (power and energy of the dialogues and circles), the participants' spiritualities from their cultural upbringing were realized and reclaimed anew. The re-discovery of its intertwined richness is indeed a source of influence. Community colleges and universities need to identify this richness that the students bring with them.

I have hope that more Mexican American Chicana (o) community college students will be encouraged, guided, and directed to completing their education. I have optimism that community colleges and universities will become invigorated with new life by a greater inclusion of administrators, teachers, and counselors from diverse cultural backgrounds who can effectively teach and lead. Higher education will become strengthened with life that all students and staff will bring with them (Combs, 1981) because of their many ways of being, perceiving, knowing, deciding, and interacting. I hope for a more interconnected education for the new majority of students. I hope that such experiences will be a sustaining force for students to communicate in their own unique ways. We continue the journey with hope and a trust expressed in the following words. *El espíritu, el creador del mundo que nos da animo en cada persona o viva en nuestros corazones para siempre!* (The Spirit, the creator of the world who gives spirit to each human being, live in our hearts forever!)

What do we in higher education do now? Because of a new level of critical consciousness stimulated by six community college transfer adult learners, what action must we engage in to help the new majority of students to persist? Preliminary suggestions can include the replication of this study with a larger number of Mexican American Chicana (o) students, especially in community colleges that are in close proximity to each other. A second possibility is to incorporate the *diálogos* and *círculos de cultura* as a freshmen seminar with the increasing numbers of students who are enrolling in community colleges. A third action can also be to capitalize on the use of the *diálogo* and *círculo de*

cultura methodology implemented in this study with Mexican American Chicana (o) students. It can be used during the first five terms at the four-year university as a culturally competent retention strategy and as well as assessment mechanism for graduating Mexican American Chicana (o) students.

Finally, there can be the active incorporation of these findings of this study in our educational policy making, our hiring practices, our provision of student services, our multicultural modes of instruction, and our daily recognition, respect, and interaction with all students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF "QUIEN SOY YOU?"

I am the son of Antonia Cleophas Hidalgo.
She is the oldest of six sisters and one brother.
The Hidalgo family (my grandfather) and the Cammaduran family (my grandmother) lived Las Vegas, New Mexico.

I am the son of Marcellano DeLeon Rasca!
He was born in the islands colonized and named after Philip of Spain.
Grandfather Cosme worked with water buffalo. He gave the few pesos he had and his machete to my dad when he left the Philippine Islands at age sixteen.

My mother only went grade ten. My father says he went up to grade three.
He worked Alaska's fish canneries, San Joaquin Valley's fields of cotton, asparagus, and tomatoes. He raised us on his best jobs: hotel busboy in LA LA land, and then as a janitor. Mom worked a 5 and 10 cent store.

My high school was made up mostly of Mexicans and Blacks. I applied to a school for future leadership training in the community. Returned letter said they didn't need anyone with a Spanish surname.

Teacher asked: What are you going to do after high school?". "I donna know". He got me to college. My mother cried when I left. My "Filipino father" in a heavy accent said "be a good boy" and cried proudly!

I was scared at the college! Five hundred miles from Los Angeles! The other students walking behind me would say: "Hey spic, what are you doing here?" "No gresers here!" Wanted special major. Advisor said, "Best you study Spanish". Forged his name from then on, and double majored.

Taught East LA teenage guys and girls. I had forgotten their beautiful olive skin. Reminded me of my beautiful sister. Coming home, like I forgot! I disliked and was embarrassed about the old neighborhood. My soul was lost! Inside I was screaming to reclaim it. Worked even weekends with the students. They took so much out of me,

Cup was getting empty. It was a miracle that I went to Grad school. Again, I had to read and read (Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Allan Figueroa) and write: "Rationale for a bilingual, bicultural high school education for Mexican Americans."

Then the strike for teacher rights. Lost my job. With my wife Nancy, Jeremiah Jesus and the twins (David y Jonathan Horacio) we went north of California. At San Joaquin middle school, the majority of the students were poor. Stockton was a great place in the San Joaquin Valley.

The principal, Lois Silva, asked me: Do you want to be a principal in school Where there are poor students? Again, I went to to Grad school. But the administrator of the school district exclaimed: "We don't like or want, nor need Mexican-Filipino school administrators."

Again, traveled north to Oregon! I am a principal, but Oh! The politics! Thanks to God, He placed me in the university.

I helped "Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, and poor white students" in Upward Bound, and other TRIO government programs. For what reason? To give them the desire to complete grades 6-12, go to the university, and persist (with the soul of their culture and with college persons who understand them!

La Virgen has been there all these years. My grandmother had all those candles in front of the picture. Only recently, am I seeing her, and I am also her son. He, too, was a teacher. The struggle goes on! And the Lady has been there since 1531! My son, I need teachers for the youth.

Great! I have friends who are mentors to me: George Cabrera, Alex Sanchez, Maureen Dolan Castro. They say: "Sí se puede! The colleges do not have Professors to teach y assist the few Hispanic, African American, Native American, and other poor students y return to community as leaders.

Who am I? I don't know! But, the Lord knows. Brother Leo teach women and men how to be teachers..... from the heart..... from the spirit that lives in the young and their parents. Be a teacher, not only for the money. But more importantly, for justice and compassion to serve the people.

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION, SURVEY, AND CONSENT FORM

Dear

I am a graduate student at Oregon State University working on my doctorate degree in Community College Leadership. I am particularly interested in the influence that spirituality has on Mexican American Transfer students persisting to degree completion.

There is a large body of research that describes why minority students do not persist in two-year and four-year colleges and universities, but very little about why those students who do graduate given particular influences of their cultural background. I suspect that spirituality, one of the dynamics of the Mexican American culture, is a factor. I have chosen to study and collaborate with Mexican American Chicana (o) Transfer students because of the educational importance of potential findings connected to the needed transformation of curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, and student support services for post secondary education. Attached is an abstract describing the proposed research study. I am seeking volunteers for the study.

I am writing to formally invite you to participate in the study on The Re-Discovery of Soul, Reclaiming One's Spirit Anew: The Influence of Spirituality on the Persistence of Mexican American Chicana (o) Transfer Students.

Participation in the study is voluntary. You can participate in the study in one of two ways.

- 1- Complete the enclosed forty-three-item survey.
- 2- Consent to be selected from a group of Mexican American transfer students here at Western.

If you choose to do only the first option, would you please highlight those items that impressed you the most in anyway way. And then return the Survey to me as soon as possible by using the attached self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you choose the second option, please return to me the Survey as well as the Consent to Participate form with your signature in the enclosed envelope. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the University.

You will be an equal partner in this research study and you will have the right to determine to have your name in the study or to remain anonymous. I will provide you with additional information regarding the various aspects of the study once you are selected as one of the six participants. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 503-838-8037 or my university major professor (Dr. Alex Sanchez, 541- 737-8202).

Leo Rasca-Hidalgo. M.A., M.A. Ed.
Community College Transfer Specialist

**Spirituality as A Cultural Aspect in the Persistence of Mexican American Chicana
(o)Community College Transfer Students
At A Small Liberal Arts University**

Please circle the response according to your best judgment or knowledge. There are no right or wrong responses. Your name will not be associated with your responses

SD:	Strongly Disagree	A:	Agree
D:	Disagree	SA	Strongly Agree
U:	Unsure		

I. Spiritual Orientation

1. It is important for me to create the time and space for self-reflection and self-renewal.
SD D U A SA
2. I often reflect on my past (las alegrías y los dolores).
SD D U A SA
3. The core of all who I am is in my soul.
SD D U A SA
4. My spirituality is important to me.
SD D U A SA
5. Depth of my spirituality is rooted in my cultural background.
SD D U A SA
6. My spirituality influences me as a Mexican American Chicana (o) person.
SD D U A SA
7. My Mexican American Chicana (o) spirituality is more family centered than one connected with an official church.
SD D U A SA
8. La Virgen de Guadalupe was important during my upbringing.
SD D U A SA
9. My strength comes from a force/person greater than myself.
SD D U A SA
10. I wonder about meaning and purpose in my life and its connections to my university education.
SD D U A SA
11. The answers to my life questions are in my culture and in my past as well as in my university education.
SD D U A SA
12. I fulfill my purpose as a university student with my own sense of meaning and purpose.
SD D U A SA

13. My strength to persist at Western is in the power of divine guidance
SD D U A SA

14. My persistence at Western is rooted in the spiritual influence of my ancestors.
SD D U A SA

II. Challenging Aspects To Persisting

15. To what extent have the following been challenging for you to persist in your college education:

<u>Challenge</u>	<u>No Challenge</u>				<u>Greatest</u>
1- Academically	1	2	3	4	5
2- Socially	1	2	3	4	5
3- Financially	1	2	3	4	5
4- Culturally	1	2	3	4	5
5- Personally	1	2	3	4	5

III. Influence of Spirituality on My University Education

16. It is because of my spirituality that I am able to persist here at Western:

1- Academically	SD	D	U	A
SA				
2- Socially	SD	D	U	A
SA				
3- Financially	SD	D	U	A
SA				
4- Culturally	SD	D	U	A
SA				
5- Personally	SD	D	U	A
SA				

It is because of my spirituality that I am able to persist even though:

17. It has been challenging to stay at Western.
SD D U A SA

18. It has been challenging to see myself graduating from Western.
SD D U A SA

19. Underneath my attainment of most of my educational goals, academic successes, and personal accomplishments at Western, it is my spirituality that is at the heart of these attainments.
SD D U A SA

20. As a Mexican American Chicana (o), it is my spiritual base which strengthens me in my challenges to persist at Western.
SD D U A SA

IV. University Responsiveness to My Cultural Needs

21. My university experience has emphasized the spiritual values learned in my family: justice, solidarity, love, caring, and compassion.

SD D U A SA

22. The university assists students to understand their unique culture and heritage.

SD D U A SA

23. Western provides faculty and staff who recognize and respect my cultural background in the teaching/learning process as well as in student services contexts.

SD D U A SA

24. Having professors or staff persons of the same cultural background on campus is significant for me.

SD D U A SA

25. Having a mentor of the same cultural background is significant for me.

SD D U A SA

26. Faculty and Staff are sensitive to people from all cultural backgrounds.

SD D U A SA

27. Western assists me in understanding the college's unique culture.

SD D U A SA

28. The college assists me to understand my unique culture and heritage.

SD D U A SA

29. I would experience a degree of cultural loss if Western's instructional process and student services did not take my culture into consideration.

SD D U A SA

30. Western provides moments for critical thought and self-reflection which I need in order to be a more engaged student as well as a more compassionate and caring human being.

SD D U A SA

V. Intellectual Inquiry Connected To My Humanity (Spirituality)

For all of us, different teachers are and do affect us differently, and make us feel differently. Please indicate how important these teacher characteristics are to you, in terms of:

31. Ethnicity of the professor

1	2	3	4	5
no	of very	important	very	most
influence	little influence		important	important

32. Spiritedness in teaching

1	2	3	4	5
no	of very	important	very	most
influence	little influence		important	important

33. Openness to different ways of knowing.

1	2	3	4	5
no	of very	important	very	most
influence	little influence		important	important

34. Administrator's expectations for Mexican American Chicana (o) students

1	2	3	4	5
no	of very	important	very	most
influence	little influence		important	important

35. Teachers show care by praising me.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

36. My classes have been exciting and touch my spirit.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

37. Majority of my instructors have been understandable to me and my way of learning".

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

38. Western's education is a relationship centered teaching and learning process.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

39. Western has helped me to honor diverse ways of knowing.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

40. Western has helped me engaged my heart with my intellect.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

41. Western has helped me honor differences and togetherness.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

42. Western has helped engage my spirituality with intellectual inquiry.

SD	D	U	A	SA
----	---	---	---	----

43. Because of your spirituality (however you define it to be) how do you see the university?

1. A place of acquiring factual knowledge.
2. A place of authenticity.
3. A place of truth.
4. A place of inquiry and discovery of self, others, the world, and life's meanings.
5. A place of intellectual inquiry that touches my humanity, my spirituality.

**The Re-Discovery of Soul, Reclaiming One's Spirit Anew:
The Influence of Spirituality on the Persistence of
Mexican American Chicana (o) Transfer Students**

Consent to Participate

I intend to participate in a study being conducted by Leo Rasca-Hidalgo, doctoral candidate Oregon State University. I understand that I will be entering into a process of dialogue and subsequent analysis on the description, meaning, and interpretation of spirituality as it has influenced my persistence in the university with five other co-investigators and Leo Rasca-Hidalgo. From this, I the participant, with the participants and Leo Rasca-Hidalgo will seek to generate knowledge that will illuminate answers to questions the study is designed to address. I understand that the "dialogos" y "circuitos de cultura" will be recorded, transcribed, reflected upon, and analyzed individually and collectively.

I understand that I have the right to allow my name to be used in full, elect to have an alias used in the place of my name, or remain entirely anonymous. I further understand that I have the right to terminate my participation in this study at any time in the research process.

I further understand the results of this study are being presented to the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment for the degree Doctor of Education.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: Work: _____

Home: _____

APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESPONSES FROM ALL TWENTY-TWO RESPONDENTS

4.	My spirituality important to me.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		1	2	1	5	13
		5%	9%	5%	23%	59%
5.	Depth of my spirituality is rooted in my cultural background.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		1	1	2	6	12
		5%	5%	9%	27%	55%
6.	My spirituality influences me as a Mexican American/Chicano(a) person.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		2	3	1	8	8
		9%	14%	5%	36%	36%
7.	My Mexican American/Chicano spirituality is more family centered than one connected with an official church	SD	D	U	A	SA
		1	2	3	7	9
		5%	9%	14%	32%	41%
8.	La Virgen de Guadalupe was important during my upbringing.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		4	5	0	3	10
		18%	23%	0%	14%	45%
20.	As a Mexican American Chicana (o), it is my spiritual base which strengthens me in my challenges to persist at Western.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		2	2	3	5	10
		9%	9%	14%	23%	45%
22.	The university assists students to understand their unique culture and heritage.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		7	8	3	5	0
		27%	36%	14%	23%	0%
28.	The college assists me to understand my unique culture and heritage.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		6	4	5	6	0
		2%	18%	23%	27%	0%
29.	I would experience a degree of cultural loss if Western's instructional process and student services did not take my culture into consideration.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		0	2	5	7	8
		0%	9%	23%	32%	36%
40.	Western has helped me engaged my heart with my intellect.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		4	5	6	6	1
		18%	23%	27%	27%	5%
42.	Western has helped engage my spirituality with intellectual inquiry.	SD	D	U	A	SA
		3	5	8	5	1
		14%	23%	36%	23%	5%
1.	Because of your spirituality (however you define it to be) how do you see the university?					
	1. A place of acquiring factual knowledge.				(10)	45%
	2. A place of authenticity.				(0)	0%
	3. A place of truth.				(2)	9%
	4. A place of inquiry and discovery of self, others, the world, and life's meanings.				(10)	45%
	5. A place of intellectual inquiry that touches my humanity, my spirituality.				(0)	0%

APPENDIX D: CONTRAST MATRIX **SIX PARTICIPANTS WITH ALL TWENTY-TWO RESPONDENTS**

ITEM	KEY WORD	CO-I 8-F	CO-I 19-F	CO-I 23-M	CO-I 29-F	CO-I 38-M	CO-I 11-M	CO-I TOT	CO-I AVE	RES TOT	RES AVE
1	TIME	4	2	4	4	4	4	22	3.6	82	3.7
2	PAST	5	4	4	2	5	5	25	4.2	93	4.2
3	SOUL	5	4	3	2	5	5	24	4	90	4.7
4	SPIRITUALITY	5	4	2	4	5	5	25	4.2	93	4.2
5	ROOTED	4	5	2	4	5	5	25	4.2	93	4.2
6	INFLUENCES	3	5	1	4	4	4	21	3.5	79	3.6
7	FAMILY	4	5	3	5	4	5	26	4.3	80	3.9
8	LA VIRGEN	5	2	2	5	5	5	24	4	79	3.6
9	GREATER	5	3	1	5	5	4	23	3.8	88	4
10	CONNECTIONS	4	4	1	4	4	1	18	3	69	3.1
11	QUESTIONS	4	3	1	2	5	3	18	3	73	3.3
12	PURPOSE	5	4	4	4	3	5	25	4.2	84	3.8
13	GUIDANCE	4	2	1	4	4	3	18	3	70	3.2
14	ANCESTORS	3	3	1	3	4	1	15	2.5	59	2.6
15	CHALLENGE	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT
16	BECAUSE	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT	NT
17	STAY	2	2	2	4	4	4	18	3	67	3.3
18	GRADUATING	1	2	1	1	4	1	10	1.6	60	2.7
19	ATTAINMENT	5	5	1	3	5	5	24	4	85	3.7
20	STRENGTHENS	5	5	1	3	5	5	24	4	85	3.8
21	VALUES	3	4	3	5	2	1	18	3	59	2.6
22	HERITAGE	2	2	2	4	1	1	12	2	51	2.3
23	RECOGNIZE	4	3	2	2	1	2	14	2.3	62	2.8
24	SAME PROFES	5	5	2	4	5	5	26	4.3	96	4.3
25	MENTOR	5	5	2	2	5	5	24	4	96	4.3
26	SENSITIVE	3	2	3	2	1	2	13	2.2	57	2.5
27	COLLEGE'S	3	3	3		1	2	12	2	60	2.7
28	MY UNIQUE	4	2	2	3	1	1	13	2.2	54	2.4
29	CULTURAL LOSS	5	5	3	4	5	3	25	4.2	87	4
30	COMPASSIONATE	3	3	3	5	3	3	20	3.3	66	3
31	ETHNICITY	4	3	2	2	5	4	20	3.3	67	3
32	SPIRITEDNESS	4	4	2	4	4	3	21	3.5	75	3.4
33	OPENNESS	5	4	4	3	4	4	24	4	92	4.2
34	ADMINISTRATORS	5	3	1	1	4	4	18	3	67	3
35	PRAISING ME	4	4	3	2	3	2	18	3	72	3.3
36	TOUCH MY SPIRIT	3	3	2	4	2	1	15	2.5	67	3
37	WAY OF LEARNING	4	4	4	4	1	1	18	3	77	3.5
38	CENTERED	2	4	3	3	2	2	16	2.6	76	3.5
39	HONOR DIVERSE	3	4	4	4	1	2	18	3	72	3.2
40	ENGAGED MY	3	3	2	2	1	1	12	2	61	2.8
41	DIFFERENCES	3	3	3	2	2	2	15	2.5	67	3
42	INTELLECTUAL	2	3	2	2	4	2	15	2.5	62	2.8
43	UNIVERSITY	1	1	1	4	3	1	11	1.8	59	2.7

Legend:

CO-I: Co Investigator

F: Female; M: Male

CO-I TOT Participants' Total Scores

RES TOT Respondents' Total Scores

NT: Not Tabulated

APPENDIX E: RESEARCHER'S PROTOCOLS FOR DIÁLOGOS AND CÍRCULOS DE CULTURA

Initial Contact With Research Participants		Phenomenological Phase	
Written Correspondence	Contact By Phone	<i>Diálogo # 1</i>	<i>Diálogo # 2</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation • Research Focus • Abstract • Copy of Survey • Letter of Consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief Introduction • Ask clarifying questions. • Ask about Concerns. • Assess students as potential sources of rich data. • Agree on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 <i>dialogos</i> • 2 <i>circulos de cultura</i> • Set first meeting. 	DESCRIPTIVE	INTERPRETIVE
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen loudly • Agree on short list of Issue-Oriented Questions • Stay with the experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique • Special stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen loudly • Allow participants their own perception & definition of • Themes from 1st <i>dialogo</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for experiences, feelings, and thoughts of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality • Persistence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning & Under-standing of: • Spirituality • Persistence
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for descriptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation of • Spirituality • Persistence
		Be open to. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moments of Silence. • Reflective feeling. • Connections with their experiences and the now. • What they know themselves. 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate Preliminary Themes • Transcribe notes into meaning ASAP 	

Critical Consciousness Phase			
Círculo de Cultura	Diálogo # 3	Diálogo # 4	Círculo de Cultura
	CRITICAL REFLECTIVE	[CRITICAL ACTION]	ANALYSIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fellowship • Listen loudly • Reflections • Listen loudly • Generation of themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen loudly • Themes from 2nd <i>dialogo</i> • Begin to reflect critically on experience of the holy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen loudly • Growing awareness and consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share written reflection: • Continue critical reflection of spirituality as • Forgotten • Lost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary Participatory analysis on themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith that: • Sustains • Motivates • Challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical re-flection of spirituality as • Forgotten? • Lost? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective connections of Spirituality on: • Persistence • Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share written pieces: • <i>Quien Soy Yo?</i> • <i>Un cuento.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to reflect critically on spirituality in terms of justice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implication of spirituality on: • persistence • my education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal participatory analysis • Talking circles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization • Silence to contemplate • Critical reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization • Silence to contemplate • Critical reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moments of Silence. • Reflective feeling. • Deep thinking, pondering • Making sense of influence of spirituality on persistence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants write to the reader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribe notes ASAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribe notes ASAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine Themes • Transcribe notes ASAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration • Transcribe ASAP

APPENDIX F: *CIRCULO DE CULTURA* THREE PROMPTS FOR SYNTHESIS

- What was most significant during the *diálogos*?
- Spirituality, Family
- “Discouraging Me to Persist.”
- “Real spirituality is helping oneself, others, the family to be free from oppression. Right! Justice especially! That is my spirituality.”
- “Losing Ourselves.”
- “Quien Soy Yo?”
- “We Have a Quiet Strength”
- “Recognizing my background”
- “I personally have not lost it? Actually it has been strengthened on a personal level more so than ever. I have gone to my spirituality to get me through all the chaos.”
- “Spirituality is my passion.... mission... my inner strength.”
- Critical consciousness of: interconnection of persistence and spirituality
- “I think it’s become more conscious because I’ve always known it’s been there. I have always sensed it. It’s always there....”
- Critique of the university’s responsibility in addressing spirituality in student services, campus climate, and instruction.
- Upon critical reflection of cultural spirituality on persistence, do I see my cultural spirituality as having been forgotten or lost during my educational experiences?
- “Our family’s view of persistence... ..There’s no by “themselves”. Our persistence in our family is that we help each other with what we needed. Even our *comadares* and *compadres* help out just as everyone.”
- “It is a driving force. It is an inner force. I get it from my whole family. It is remembering all that: family members.”
- “Spirituality would be letting people know what they are.”
- To the question: “What has been the biggest barrier to persisting?”
- “Knowing what I wanted to do. Finding a passion for something.” (Jesus)
- “It is like it starts right here [points to chest]. It’s like a breath that generates outward [laughs]. Is that how you said it? I wanted to say warm when I was saying it! I say warm but powerful.
- “Now that I am aware of who I am and am recalling and I am trying to remember....”
- “I didn’t know anything. It was a cultural shock. And I needed to back home. I was so much into the shock of it, I wasn’t able, as I am right now, to reflect that I have a strength inside me”
- All these are influences that I have, that are helping me to get to reach my goal: what I learned from my dad; from my own people; and honor in my family. It is not one reason..... They are interrelated. All are very important to me. It is not just in my head. It is in my heart. It carries me.”
- “I think much of spirituality comes from my culture, from what I learned from my parents, my dad. In our culture that is encouragement. My confidence comes from what I have learned from my experiences.”

**APPENDIX G: ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF JOSE G.'S TESTIMONY
(TRANSLATED BY DR. DOVIE TREVIÑO)**

From: Jose J. Gonzalez
To: Students

Dear Students,

Hello. My name is Jose, I am Mexican and I am 27 years old. Actually I am studying at Western Oregon University located in Monmouth, Oregon.

I have lived in the United States 12 years. I came to this country for the first time in 1988, at the age of 15. Since **1988 until 1995**, I worked in the fields in California, Texas, Washington and Oregon. I left school in Mexico when I was in the second grade. The principal reason I came to this country, was to be able to help my parents economically. The first few years of my stay in this country I found out it was difficult to help myself and my parents if I did not have an education. In 1994 things got much more difficult for me. I found out I was going to be a father to a daughter. Before my daughter was born I felt a great responsibility to help my parents, but the help I could proportion to them was very limited due to the work and the salary that I had. Besides feeling frustrated for not helping my parents more, very soon I was going to have the responsibility to provide for my daughter. That year, feeling those pressures, I decided to return to school to obtain an education and to get training to do something for my family.

In the month of June of 1995, I registered in a training school called Job Corps, that same month I returned to the classroom. In the beginning it was very difficult to adapt, principally because I did not know English. I had never attended a school in this country, despite that I did not give up. That was the primary obstacle to overcome and I could not fail myself or my family. I attended Job Corps for a total of 13 months. Half of that time I spent in classes, learning the language and preparing myself for the GED. The last few months I studied and worked in the specialty of carpentry.

Two months before graduating from Job Corps, a teacher advised me academically to get information on a free program to attend college in which I qualified. In the beginning the idea to continue studying did not call my attention. My plans were to graduate and start to work to help my family. Two weeks later the teacher called me to ask me what I thought about the program. I told her I was not interested, besides I did not know sufficient English, and I did not have the intelligence to excel in college. The teacher responded by telling me that my excuses did not have a foundation, and that if I did not advance it was because I didn't want to and not because I could not. At the end of our conversation, the teacher convinced me to apply. She told me I had nothing to lose and that there was much to gain. I decided to experiment in college and after the first trimester, I decided to attend classes to obtain my Associates Degree. When I obtained my two-year degree I wanted to better my education and I decided to apply to the University in Monmouth, Oregon. Thank God, I was accepted, actually I have two and a half years at the University, and I hope to graduate in June of this year.

My journey as a student in the last five or six years has not been easy. I have encountered many obstacles on my road. Many times I thought about leaving my studies and I tried to give myself hope remembering what I had been through and comparing it to what I had to go through. An influence that has always been on my mind has been my family, especially my parents and my daughter, she is already five years old. My family resides in Mexico and for me it has been very difficult to be far from my family, basically because they have not seen my daughter grow up. In being far from them I lose hope but at the same time I get hope to continue my studies. The reason I continued was to be able to help my family, and even though it has been difficult, the sacrifice has been worthwhile. Other influences that have helped me during my studies have been my family support and in addition the help of persons whom I have known during this time.

The reason for letting you know a little bit about my life and the problems I have been through, and what I have gained is my desire to give you hope to continue studying. I know, by personal experience, that it is a difficult and complicated road. But I want to tell you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. If I was able to overcome my problems that I had and that I have you can also. It all depends on the goals and your desire to excel. Don't allow a low grade or lower academic qualifications to impede you in your realizing your dreams. Not being able to pass an exam simply signifies that, that you did not pass the exam but it does not signify that you can not excel. Those are simply obstacles that we must all overcome sooner or later, but those obstacles should not detain us. Look at those problems like a rock on a road which we must jump over or go around in order to obtain our goal.

Continue towards your goal and do not permit anything or anyone to detain you. Just as will achieve my goal in June, first days of June, you can also reach your goals. In quotes and in bold, **"All and Each of You are Special and can obtain your goals if in reality you want to, I can assure you."**

The reward is greater than the sacrifice that is to understand school. As long as there is life, there is hope, **DO NOT GIVE UP.**

Remember the words that have united the Mexicans ultimately; "SI SE PUEDE, SI SE PUEDE, SI SE PUEDE", don't forget it. I wish you the best of luck in the world, and I hope that my words will help you obtain your goals.

Luck,

Jose J. Gonzalez B.

P.S. Please forgive the errors in my grammar.

I wish to thank Leo Rasca-Hidalgo for having included me in this project, good luck, brother.