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ABUEL@ LOVE:
A Look into the Lives of Resilient Grandparent Raising Grandchildren
Insights through Pláticas/Conversations with Latin@ Families

Ryan S. Santos
San Diego State University & Claremont Graduate University

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for
Professor Alberto M. Ochoa
San Diego State University

Study Abstract

The prevalence of grandparent raising grandchildren is growing in American schools. While research exploring the complex and dynamic needs of both grandparents and grandchildren is emerging, there continues to be a lack of research focused on the experience of grandparents who raise grandchildren from a resilience perspective. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine factors that promote resilience for abuelo/grandparent – headed families. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in resilience theory, ecological systems theory, and relational-cultural theory. Through in-depth pláticas/conversations with two Latin@ families, this study also explored: 1) How abuelos and their grandchildren source strength and resilience, 2) how abuelos negotiate and made meaning of their new parenting roles, 3) how abuelos navigate and negotiate resources for support, 4) how abuelo-headed families made meaning of their unique family arrangement, and 5) how educators can support abuelo-headed families. Implications and suggestions for educational research and practice are discussed.

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN ON THE RISE

The prevalence of grandparent raising grandchildren is increasing dramatically in America. In 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 4.5 million of children under the age of 18 lived in grandparent-headed homes. Among these grandparent-headed homes, 2.4 million were grandparents raising grandchildren and 17.7% of these custodial-grandparents reported being of Latino or Hispanic decent (Thomson & Minkler, 2005). According more recent data, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) currently indicates that 7 million of the nation's children were living in grandparent-headed homes. Among these grandparent-headed homes, 2.7 million grandparents were raising grandchildren and 20.3% of these custodial-grandparents reported being of Latino or Hispanic decent. Goodman & Rao (2007) report that “since 1990 there as been a 30 percent increase in number of children (half of whom are under the age of six) living in grandparent-headed homes” (p.1117).

Specifically within the state of California, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 1.2 million children under the age of 18 live in grandparent-headed homes, with the highest concentrations of these families residing in the Los Angeles and San Diego regions. A decade ago, a little more than 10,000 grandparents reported that they stepped in as caregivers in San Diego (U.S. Census, 2000). Now ranked 7th among the top ten cities with the highest numbers of grandparents raising grandchildren, nearly 30,000 grandparents are raising their grandchildren within San Diego in (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of San Diego grandparents raising their grandchildren, the majority of these families identify as being African-American or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Unfortunately data on a national, state, and city level do not account for number of grandparents who step in and fulfill the role of absent parents, but are not legally designated as guardians or caregivers. Clearly, the rise of grandparents

raising school-aged grandchildren has significant implications for educators. In order to more fully support grandparent-headed households, it is important for educators to have a context for how grandparents come to take care of their grandchildren.

Research indicates that the reasons for the increase of grandparents who step in to raise their grandchildren are both complex and diverse (Hayslip & Kaminiski, 2005). Minkler and Roe (1999) explain that factors including parent incarceration, unemployment, divorce or death, mental illness, abuse and neglect, child abandonment, teenage pregnancies, and substance abuse often account for the reasons why grandparents step into a custodial or caregiver role. A report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that incarcerated parents of school-aged children increased 79% between 1991 and 2007 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Data indicate that in the event that another parent was unable to care for the child of an incarcerated parent, grandparents (more likely grandmothers) were likely to step in to care for the child (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Research also shows that grandparents become caregivers well over half of the time for children of incarcerated mothers (Minkler & Roe, 1999). Minkler and Roe (1999) also explain that grandparents often provide support for both grandchildren and adult children during times of unemployment. More specifically, both share, “Being that being single, living in poverty, and being African-American do substantially increase the odds of becoming a caregiver to one’s grandchildren” (p. x). With regards to situations of child abuse and/or neglect specifically, child welfare policy requires that if parent cannot take care of a child, kinship care (care with relatives or individuals with whom a child has emotional ties) be the first option for placement of children (Goldberg-Glen, et. al., 1998). These policy shifts have lead to increased placement of grandchildren with their grandparents (Goodman & Rao, 2007). The conditions leading to the placement of

grandchildren under the care of their grandparents are as diverse and complex as the processes grandparents experience when deciding to become caregivers to their grandchildren. Hayslip and Kaminiski (2005) explain:

Grandparents to who provide primary care for their grandchildren do so for various reasons. Many do not want to see their grandchildren placed in foster homes, while others perceive themselves as the only ones who can raise a child. Some desire to nurture a grandchild, believe they can provide better care than a parent, or both. Others simply offer to care for their grandchildren in order to help their own adult children in times of crisis (p. 153).

In addition to have a clear understanding of the conditions contributing to the formation of grandparent-headed homes, educators must be aware of the impacts that this change has on both grandparents and grandchildren.

IMPACTS ON GRANDPARENTS: Risk and Protective Factors

Research concerning the risk factors associated with grandparents who raise their grandchildren is well documented. When compared to noncustodial grandparents, custodial grandparents reported more health problems (Musil & Ahmad, 2002). Similarly, researchers suggest grandparents raising grandchildren have poorer health in general when their counterparts (Grinstead, Leder, Jensen, & Bond, 2003). Further complicating issues related to physical health, grandparent caregivers report having less access to health care (Minkler & Roe, 1999). Musil and Ahmad (2002) add that grandparents also report adverse physical and mental health effects as a result of caregiving. While Waldrop and Webber (2001) assert that grandparents experience substantial stressors and obstacles in their new custodial role. Grinstead and her colleagues (2003) reported that grandparents experienced above-average

levels of depression upon taking on the new caregiver role. Pinson-Millburn and her colleagues (1996) add that while a grandparent may be gaining a grandchild, he or she may be losing a child. They write, “grandparents are facing a double jeopardy as they question their own sense of adequacy: What have I done wrong to have children who cannot care for their own children, and are they competent enough to deal with raising children again?” (549). In addition to managing the physical these physical and emotional risk factors, grandparent caregivers often give up working outside of the home, losing income and the less tangible benefits of employment such as better health and less parenting stress (Hayslip & Kaminiski, 2005, p. 263). Meanwhile U.S. Census (2010) data indicates that nearly 2/3 of custodial grandparents live at or near the poverty level. Needless to say, these risk factors are abysmal at best.

Still, in spite of these risk factors, studies depict positive experiences of grandparents who raise their grandchildren. More specifically, studies indicate that grandparents stepping into the role of caregiver of their grandchildren experienced an increased sense of purpose (Burton, 1999; Jendrek, 1993). While initially challenging when they took on a parental role for a second time, grandparents still reported that their grandchildren brought them more joy and love and less worry knowing that their grandchildren were no longer in the care of neglectful biological parents (Grinstead et al., 2003). In a study of African-American grandmothers, 28% reported excellent mental health and greater self-esteem attributed to helping their grandchildren (Baird, John & Hayslip, 2000). This study also reported that custodial grandparents expressed an unbreakable sense of devotion to their grandchildren and self-efficacy related to raising their grandchildren well (Baird, John, Hayslip, 2000). With regards to physical health, researchers report that positive correlations were found when

grandparents accessed social supports (Leder, Grinstead, & Torres, 2007). In spite of the challenges of raising their grandchildren, grandparents report that their new found role can be inherently rewarding (Hayslip & Kaminiski, 2005) and facilitate a grandparent's feelings of maintaining their family's identity and well-being (Giarrusso, Silverstein & Feng, 2000). As the prevalence of grandparents raising grandchildren continues to rise, it is important for educators to understand the circumstances leading to increase of these new family arrangements. Clearly, these data indicate that there are many factors impacting grandparents who take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren. The following section contextualizes research concerning the risks and protective factors for grandchildren being raised by grandparents.

IMPACTS ON GRANDCHILDREN: Risk and Protective Factors

While the conditions and arrangements leading to the care of grandchildren under their grandparents vary from family to family, the separation of children and their parents can be traumatic (Bowlby, 1980 in Scarcella et al., 2003). Goodman and Rao (2007) explain:

What is known is that while the separation from a parent may be traumatic, research also indicates that children living with a relative such as a grandparent experiences less trauma than if they were in nonrelatives or institutional care, primarily because of an increased sense of stability and family support (p.1118).

Oftentimes due the trauma of being separated from a parent, and/or experience of neglect or abuse, these grandchildren may experience emotional, behavioral, or school problems (Scarcella et al., 2003). More specifically approximately, one in ten school-aged children demonstrated extreme emotional or behavioral needs. With regards to physical health, children under custodial care of their grandparents are more likely to experience significant

health problems related to children exposed to abuse or prenatally exposed drugs or alcohol – more specifically high rates of asthma and other respiratory problems, weakened immune systems, poor eating, poor eating and sleeping patterns, physical disabilities, and hyperactivity (Dowdell, 1995; & Minkler & Roe, 1996). Additionally, children under the custodial care of grandparents are far more likely to live in poverty and with grandparents with poor health (Scarcella et al., 2003, p. 2). Specifically, Scarcella, Ehrle, and Geen (2003) explain that more than half of these grandparents have a health condition. Given their health status, grandparents may find it especially difficult to attend school activities, lessons, or outings, or provide supervision after school hours (Scarcella et al., 2003). Of these all children being raised by their grandparents 26% report low levels of school engagement (Scarcella et al., 2003). Further complicating these risk factors, grandchildren who are raised by their grandparent rarely receive the services that they need (Scarcella et al., 2003). While there is a growing body of research examining the experience of these grandparents, there is a lack of research focused on the experiences of grandchildren being raised by grandparents (Jefferson, Smith & Beltran, 2000). Similar to the body of research focused on the grandchildren in these homes, there also continues to be a paucity of research focused on the experiences of Latin@ families where grandparents fill in as caregivers for their grandchildren. This next sections describes the body of literature relevant to *abuelo* or *grandparent* headed homes.

LATIN@ GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Grandparent caregivers are represented across all ethnic and racial groups, levels of socioeconomic status, and geographic areas of the United States (U.S. Census, 2010). However, Goodman and Silverstein (2002) explain that because the prevalence of custodial grandparents ranges across ethnic groups culturally relevant pathways to caregivers roles,

shaped by different family composition and values and unique role expectations must be considered. Historically, Latinos grandparents have filled an extensive caregiving role for their grandchildren (Toledo, Hayslip, Emick, Toledo, & Henderson, 2000). Goodman and Silverstein (2002) explain that it is not uncommon for three generations of Latino families to live together and that within these homes grandmothers, specifically, play a significant role in the upbringing of grandchildren. These researchers also found that while fewer Latino children are being raised in grandparent-headed homes than their African American counterparts, Latino parents and grandparents co-parent at significantly higher rates.

Latino families are frequently grounded in values that reflect expectations of mutual aid within the family unit; this concept is called familismo (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005). Familismo extends well beyond the nuclear family and believed to promote the access and use of social support (Rothman, Gant, & Hnat, 1985). Lim and her colleagues (1996) add that “interdependence, rather than independence, is valued because it strengthens the family and provides reciprocal exchange of services and supports.” A specific example of this support is evident in the shared responsibility of providing care for children in the home (Frevert & Miranda, 1998). Goodman & Silverstein (2002) explain that familismo and interdependence function to improve the emotional well-being and quality of family relationships in grandparent-headed homes.

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Fuller-Thomson and Minkler (2007) found that significant increase in the Mexican American population and care of Latino grandparents for their grandchildren from the 1980’s to 2000. Findings from the 2000 American Community Survey indicate that approximately 177,000 Mexican American grandparents age 45 and over reported that they were raising their

grandchildren. Fuller and Minkler (2007) reported that one in twenty Mexican Americans were raising a grandchild, a proportion four times higher when compared to non-Whites. When compared to noncustodial grandparents peers, Mexican American grandparents raising grandchildren reported higher rates of poverty and overcrowding (Fuller & Minkler, 2007). Further contributing to these risks, very few grandparents living in poverty received public assistance or food stamps (Fuller & Minkler, 2007). Fuller and Minkler (2007) also found that more than a third of these custodial grandparents were raising two or more grandchildren and a higher percentage of these grandparents, when compared to noncustodial grandparents, provided care for their grandchildren for five years or more. Additionally, Fuller and Minkler (2007) report Mexican American grandparents were more likely to care for their grandchildren due to substance abuse and mental illness. Fuller and Minkler (2007) explain, “The number of Hispanic children being raised by grandparents will undoubtedly rise in parallel with the rate of growth of the Hispanic population” (p. 567). As the number of abuelo-headed homes increases, there will be stronger need for future research focused on the experiences of these families. Findings from studies focused on the experiences of abuelo-headed homes can provide insights into both educational research and practice. This study seeks to contribute to the body of research that is focused on abuelo-headed homes from a resilience perspective. The following section describes the lens through which this study will be explored and examined.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Grounded in the belief that the future of Latin@ students, including those who are being raised by their grandparents, is deeply connected to the future of our country, this study intends contribute to the body of knowledge that acknowledges our interconnectedness.

Grounded in the belief that successful schools validate and empower the students they are intended to serve (Walker, 2002), the study also aims to highlight how educational transformation can occur when educators validate and honor the various experiences that these students and their grandparents bring into the classroom. This study calls upon resiliency theory (Rutter, 1997; Ungar, 2005), relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1976; Miller & Stiver, 1997; & Walker, 2002), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to explore the underpinnings of abuelo-headed family resilience. Utilizing resilience, ecological systems, and relational-cultural theories to frame this study, this exploratory study seeks to document how grandchildren and the grandparents who care for them thrive in the face of adversity.

Resiliency Theory

As resilience theory and research emerged, scholars tended to regard and label individuals who transcended their adverse circumstances as “hardy,” “invulnerable,” or “invincible” (Werner & Smith, 1982). Such labels implied that these individuals were in possession of a rare and remarkable set of qualities that enabled them to rebound from whatever adversity came their way – almost as if these fortunate individuals possessed a sort of magical force field that protected them from all harm. Increasingly, however, researchers have arrived at the consensus that resilience is not some remarkable, innate quality but rather a developmental process that incorporates the normative self-righting tendencies of individuals (Masten, 2001). In fact, Garmezy (1993) cautioned against the use of the term invulnerable because it implies that people are incapable of being wounded or injured. Masten (2001) referred to the resilience process as “ordinary magic,” simply because a majority of individuals who undergo serious adversity “remarkably” manage to achieve

normative developmental outcomes. Research in resiliency concludes that each person has an innate capacity for resiliency, *a self-righting tendency* that operates best when people have resiliency-building conditions in their lives (Benard, 1995). Resilience is grounded in the belief that all humans possess an inborn developmental wisdom and seeks to better contextualize how teachers can tap this wisdom (Benard, 1995). In her book, *Fostering Resiliency in Children*, Bonnie Benard (1995) claimed that: “we are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose” (p. 17). Researchers increasingly view resilience not as a fixed attribute but as an alterable set of processes that can be fostered and cultivated (Masten, 2001; Pardon, Waxman & Huang, 1999). Researchers emphasize the interactive processes – between the individual and environment and between risk and protective factors – as the crucial underpinnings of developing resilience.

This study specifically employs Ungar’s (2005) definition to frame the research.

Ungar (2005) defines resilience as:

1. The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being;
2. The capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
3. The capacity of individuals, their families and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared” (p. 3 from CYRM-28 Handbook).

While this study focuses on the individual and the interactions among her or his immediate surroundings, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory will provide an understanding of how larger ecological systems influence an individual's development.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory, articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1989), Garabino (1995), and Garmezy (1991), functions as a way to examine the interplay between individuals and their environments and the resulting impact upon the individual's development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), an adolescent's world consists of five systems of interactions that include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2004).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the microsystem is immediate system that the adolescent lives in; it includes the day-to-day interactions between the adolescent and other individuals and organizations. Systems that affect adolescents include family functioning, peer relationships, school environments, and the community and its resources (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003). The adolescent intimately knows the various components of the microsystem. The next level, the mesosystem, describes how the various parts of an adolescent's microsystem interact with one another. While this level does not include the adolescent, the quality of interactions among the adolescents' microsystem also affects her or him directly. The exosystem relates to the larger context in which the adolescent lives in. This system includes extended family networks, neighbors, mass media, social welfare, and legal services. While the adolescent may not directly interact with some of these institutions she or he is very much impacted by them. The largest and outer most system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem relates to the overarching attitudes, ideologies, values, laws,

and customs of the adolescents' world. With the individual at the center, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that as the interactions of these systems becomes increasingly complex over time. While interactions among these systems influence the individual's development, the individual also influence her or his surroundings. The individual is not seen as a passive nor empty vessel to be filled (Freire, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the positive interactions within an adolescent's systems – both internal and external – will result successful development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that the:

Interconnections can be decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting. A child's ability to learn to read in primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of the ties between home and school (p. 3).

Ecological systems theory is also grounded in the belief that nothing is static. Serving as a base for the model, the chronosystem takes life events and transitions and sociohistorical conditions into account when understanding healthy human development. Whereas ecological systems articulates the role of interactions among the individual and her or his larger systems, this study uses relational-cultural theory as a contributing framework for understanding the quality of communication across these systems.

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT)

The notion that people grow in relationship and connection with others is central to relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1976). In response and in opposition to pejorative psychological theories that overvalued power over others, competition, and hyper-individuation, Miller (1976) and her colleagues sought to develop a theory that offered an alternative view of women's psychological development. Relational-cultural theory is

grounded in the notion that healthy development occurs by *being in* and *action in* rather than *having* or *possessing* relationships and connections throughout the life span (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 6). Miller (1986) claims that growth-enhancing relationships create:

1. A sense for zest,
2. Clarity about oneself, the other, and the relationship,
3. A sense of personal worth,
4. The capacity to be productive and creative,
5. The desire for more connection which is characterized by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment

Mutual empathy as described by Walker (2002) is two-way process which one person listens and is responsive to another, making her feel like she matters which in turn helps her more effective and achieve. Conversely, where one person responds with invalidation and humiliation the other may experience person feelings self-blame, fear, shame, believing that she is defective and resulting in possible isolation and disempowerment and disconnect in the relationship. Miller and Stiver (1997) assert that mutual empowerment springs form mutual empathy and acknowledges differences in power dynamics. Furthermore, mutual empowerment occurs through the conscious efforts of being empowered and empowering while in relationship with others (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The use of relational-cultural theory can be especially helpful in exploring the resilience of Latin@ children (Ruiz, 2005). Relational-cultural theory is also relevant in studies with Latin@ communities in that both are oriented towards collectivism and interdependence (Ruiz, 2005). The subsequent section outlines the limitations for this study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings from the study are limited to study sample from which data will be gathered. Data will be drawn Abuelo-headed families from one research site. The results from this study will be limited to geography and will make it difficult to ascertain generalizeability to the larger community of Latino grandparents raising their grandchildren. The research process and design used for the study, however, may provide a framework for understanding, exploring, and fostering resilience in other school settings. Another limitation to the study is that data gathered from this study also include a limited amount of variables. However, in selecting a limited number of variables the researcher aims to obtain data that is reflective of the richness and depth of Latin@ resilience. In addition to the limited scope of data, data collection and analysis will occur during a specified timeframe. Limitations related to time mean that data collected during this study will provide a snapshot of how resilience was examined and understood. Lastly, researcher bias may serve as a limitation to the study. As a school counselor at the participating research site, the researcher has been influenced by the values and attitudes of the research site and students and families who attend. To avoid bias during the qualitative portions of the study, procedures to verify trustworthiness and authenticity will be employed.

SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

While research exploring the complex and dynamic needs of both grandparents and grandchildren is emerging, there continues to be a lack of research focused on the experience of grandparents who raise grandchildren from a resilience perspective. Data collected may offer insight and understanding on the complexities faced by Latino students, specifically those being raised by a grandparent, as they successfully maneuver through the U.S. educational pipeline. Findings from the study may reveal an alternative means of ensuring

equitable and equal educational outcomes for Latin@ students and their counterparts. Furthermore, the study is significant in its contribution to the body research focused on the roles that schools can play in facilitating resilience (Krovetz, 1999). Understanding how Latin@ students are able to thrive in spite, rather than because of the existing educational pipeline may offer insight into educational transformation that is informed by the experiences of students being served. Ungar (2008) urges that future research in the field of resilience seek to document and analyze resilience through the lens of resilient individuals. He writes:

The better documented one's own constructions of resilience, the more likely it will be that those intervening identify specific aspects of resilience most relevant to health outcomes as defined by a particular population" (p. 234).

The study is designed to further understand how schools can facilitate resilience in culturally meaningful and relevant ways. Data gathered might inform a model for fostering resilience that is inclusive of abuelo-headed families' experiences. Lastly, this study aims to contribute to the lacking body of resilience research, specifically focused on the experiences of abuelo-headed homes within the school setting. Through the use of in-depth pláticas within the home of abuelo-headed families, this study intends to deepen our understanding of Latino resilience.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine factors that promote resilience for *abuelo/grandparent* – headed families where abuelos are the sole care providers. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in resilience theory, ecological systems theory, and relational-cultural theory. Through in-depth pláticas/conversations with two Latin@ families, this study aims to bring voice to the experiences of abuelos and their grandchildren. Research questions framing this study were:

- 1) How abuelos and their grandchildren source strength and resilience,
- 2) How abuelos negotiate and made meaning of their new parenting roles,
- 3) How abuelos navigate and negotiate resources for support,
- 4) How abuelo-headed families made meaning of their unique family arrangement,
and
- 5) How educators can support abuelo-headed families.

Implications and suggestions for future educational research and practice are discussed.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

LEVELS OF RESEACH STUDY:

Transformative Emancipatory Paradigm



Resilience/Relational-Cultural/ Ecological Systems Model Lens



Qualitative Exploratory Study Design Guided by Confianza, Respeto, Familismo, Personalismo, & Humilidad



Purposefully Selected Abuelos
Using In-depth Pláticas

Research Site

The research site for this exploratory study was located at a K-8 school bordering Chula Vista and South Bay San Diego. The site was selected because it is situated within an area of San Diego that possesses one of the highest numbers of custodial grandparents (Health and Human Services Demographic Breakdown of GRG in San Diego Map). Located less than 7 miles from the U.S./Mexico Border, this research site was also serves a student body that is well over 90% Latino. The researcher for this study is currently a school counselor at the site and has worked at the school for over 12 years. Through the school site's school-wide screening process, called the Resiliency Quadrant System, collaboration with office staff

members responsible for enrolling students, and relationships developed with families and students, over 60 grandparent-headed homes were identified at the school site.

Sampling & Recruitment

The data for this study was gathered from two abuelo-headed families where abuelos served as caregivers to their grandchildren for more than 3 years. The first family purposefully selected for this is headed by a grandfather (age 48) who raises his two granddaughters (ages 12 and 10) and the second family selected is headed by a grandmother (age 51) who is raising her grandsons (ages 9 and 12). Interestingly, both grandparents also live with one of their own parents (of the opposite sex), who also help care for these grandchildren. Both families reside in the same city and attend school at the research site. All grandchildren who participated in this research study attended school at the same site since kindergarten. For purposes of this study, families were selected based on the levels of resilience demonstrated by grandchildren academically and/or socio-emotionally based on the site's Resiliency Quadrant System. Their classroom teachers identify students as resilient if they bode well both academically and socio-emotionally. These particular families were selected because at prior moments during their schooling process, their grandchildren displayed difficulties academically and socio-emotionally, but were somehow able to later demonstrate resilience. These criteria were used for the study because the researcher was interested in studying the factors that contribute to the resilience of abuelos and the grandchildren under their care. Purposeful sampling was used for this study because the researcher sought to elicit data and that reflected the richness and depth of these families' lived experiences that demonstrated resilience. Patton (2002) describes benefits of purposeful sampling, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases*

for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful sampling*” (p. 230). The primary method used for this study was the plática method. The following section describes cultural considerations relevant to the use of pláticas in research.

Cultural Considerations Grounding the Pláticas

Researchers should continually develop cultural competencies about the communities they study as research can function to both support or harm communities, (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011, p. 185). The integration of Latino cultural values, beliefs, customs, and traditions in qualitative research is critical in conducting culturally competent work with Latinos (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011, p. 194). Furthermore, awareness of the complexities of a participant’s culture and one’s own biases towards this culture is essential in culturally competent qualitative research. Several important cultural considerations grounded and informed the research conducted for this study, these included *confianza* (trust, confidence in), *personalismo* (interpersonal connections), *respeto* (respect for elders), *familismo* (familism, interdependence), and *humildad* (humility).

The concept of *confianza* and *personalismo* are relevant to the interpersonal exchange between individuals and are essential in reducing hierarchy and power differentials (Hausmann-Stabile, Zayas, Abenis-Cintron, & Calzada, 2011). Addressing and reducing power differentials and hierarchy can function to help participants feel more at ease and tell their stories more freely. More specifically, *personalismo* implies the creation and maintenance of warm, friendly, and respectful interactions (Bachrach & Mawr, 1958). In other instances, *personalismo* refers the self-disclosure on the researcher’s behalf as participants may ask the researcher personal questions (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales,

2011). Hausmann and her colleagues explain (2011), “Confianza grow as a result of a reciprocity born of the repetition of positive personal interactions in which genuine respeto is conveyed. Through confianza, individuals feel a mutuality within which they extend favorable treatment to one another.” Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinmen (1994) explain that confianza leads to interactions with a “special quality of openness” (p. 64). As with many collectivist cultures, respeto, “unconditional respect and deference to elders and authority figures,” is a cultural value among Latinos (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011). Ojeda and her colleagues (2011) suggest:

Respeto may come into play during the interview process from the moment a researcher interacts with a participant. Simply by identifying oneself as a researcher may automatically give oneself power over a participant because the researcher is viewed as a figure of authority based on educational level and career (p. 195).

As mentioned earlier, familismo is a significant cultural consideration when studying abuelo-headed homes. Latino families are frequently grounded in values that reflect expectations of mutual aid within the family unit; this concept is called familismo (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005). Lim and her colleagues (1996) add that “interdependence, rather than independence, is valued because it strengthens the family and provides reciprocal exchange of services and supports” (p. x). As a collectivist culture that values familismo, when one is viewed negatively it is oftentimes deemed as a reflection of not only the individual, but is seen a reflection of the family. Ojeda and her colleagues (2011) explain:

A participant may not want *avergonzar* (to bring shame) to the family by revealing what she or he deems as shameful. Given the potential negative influence of vergüenza (shame) on the quality of data and comfort of the participants during the

interview, researchers should assure participants that their experiences are unique and their responses will not be judged as right or wrong, good or bad (p. 196-197)

Lastly, *humildad* serves as an important cultural consideration during the research process. As Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (as cited in Minkler, 2005, p. 10) explain, “although we can never truly become competent in another’s culture, we can demonstrate cultural humility in our outsider status and an openness to learning and trying our best cross-race or ethnic group interactions.” Cultural humility keeps the researcher open to learning more from culturally different individuals. While *confianza*, *personalismo*, *respeto*, *familismo*, and *humildad* all inform the research approach used in this study, it is important to note that these cultural considerations are not encompassing of all Latino family values. In other words, just because a family identifies as Latino does not mean that they place high value on the same cultural considerations that frame this study. Furthermore, it is essential that researchers acknowledge they too are cultural beings within their research roles and must be conscious of the attitudes and biases that they have about their own cultural group and those culturally different (Lyons & Bike, 2010). If remained unchecked, these attitudes and biases will influence the researcher’s interactions with participants and their interpretation of data (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011). The following section contextualizes how the *plática* method will be employed during this study.

Plática: A Culturally Relevant Method to Understanding Abuelo-Headed Families

Plática (*conversation or dialogue*) is part and parcel to Latino culture (Chavez-Arteaga, 2012) and is commonly a “behavior many Latinos engage in when meeting someone formally or informally, regardless if it’s the initial contact or if they have known the person for an extended period of time” (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011, p. 194). Guajardo and

Guajardo (2008) suggest that a plática is collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging of multiple realities and vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, González and Portillos (2012) add that the plática “plática is useful and necessary to unbury and advance Chicana/o intellectual knowledge on theory and methods, cultural knowledge, civic participation, and the effects of the schooling process” (p. 18).

For this study, pláticas are defined as intimate conversations that facilitate self-discovery in relationship to oneself and while in relationship with others (Ayala et al., 2006; De La Torre in Chavez-Arteaga, 2012, p. 35). The pláticas in this study occurred within the homes of these abuelo-headed families. One of the pláticas for this study occurred in the living room, while the other occurred in the family’s kitchen as the great-grandmother prepared dinner. Non-formal yet profound, powerful, and meaningful, these pláticas facilitated stories that would’ve been more difficult to access using traditional Western qualitative methods. Pláticas serve as a culturally relevant method to understanding the resilience of abuelo-headed families because it transforms the interaction between the researcher and the participant from one that is one-directional to one that is collaborative. Heartfelt pláticas require both confianza and respeto if they are to manifest themselves in the research process.

Data Making and Data Analysis

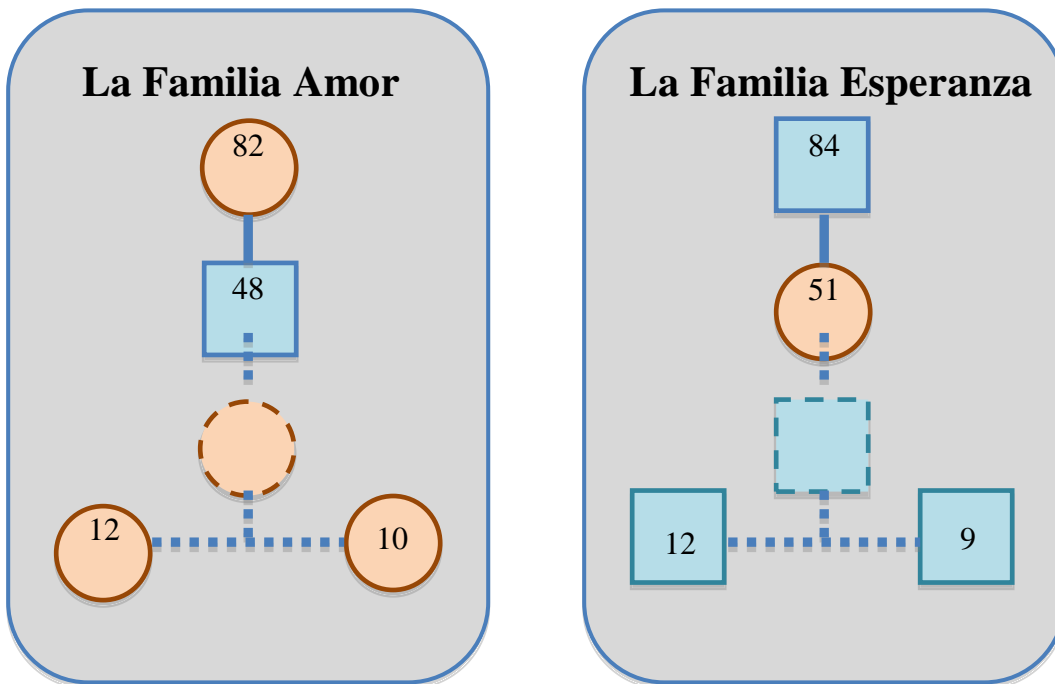
The two families selected for this study were recruited by the researcher via telephone call and in person. Participants self-identified as having at least one grandchild in their custodial care, having a grandchild between the ages of 9 and 13, and being able to speak English or Spanish. The researcher informed the participants of the goals of the study and asked if they would like to continue in the exploratory study. After consent was verbally

obtained, semi-structured interviews with custodial grandparents occurred at the research site (averaging 45 minutes). After interviews with grandparents were transcribed and analyzed, follow up family pláticas were set up with each family. With the consent of each family, pláticas occurred within each family's home. Family pláticas ranged between 60 minutes to 90 minutes and took place in the living room or kitchen of each family residence. Following each plática, the grandchildren informally gave the researcher a tour of their home and outside community. A digital voice-recorder was used to record the participants' narratives to ensure accuracy during transcription. Pseudonyms are used in this study to maintain confidentiality for these families.

Once the pláticas were completed and transcribed, the researcher read the interview to highlight themes that emerged. Next, the researcher identified and marked meaningful portions of the plática by attaching labels to these portions that represented specific themes. After identifying these themes, the researcher follow up with each grandparent to conduct a member check to ensure that these participants felt their story was accurately conveyed during the plática. Follow up pláticas also functioned to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity. Thematic analysis with member checks seemed appropriate for this exploratory study, as both are congruent with the intention of understanding the complexities and commonalities of resilient abuelo-headed homes.

PLÁTICAS REVEALED: STUDY FINDINGS

Ongoing pláticas revealed that both grandparents had been caring for their grandchildren for over five years. Each grandparent raised two grandchildren of the opposite sex and lived with their own parent (also of the opposite sex). La Familia Amor resides in a two-bedroom apartment where the two granddaughters shared a room, the great-grandmother had her own room, and the custodial grandfather slept on the couch each night. La Familia Esperanza lives in a three-bedroom apartment, where the two grandsons shared their own room and the great-grandfather and custodial grandmother both had their own rooms respectively. Both families in this study shared that they often struggled to meet their basic financial needs each month and oftentimes relied on other family members or friends for assistance. Below is a genogram depicting the ages of great-grandparents, custodial grandparents, non-custodial parent, and grandchildren within each home.



Based on thematic analysis of the pláticas with these grandparents and grandchildren, the following themes emerged: (1) How abuelos their grandchildren source their strength and resilience, (2) How abuelos negotiated and made meaning of their new parenting roles, (3) How abuelos negotiate and navigate resources for support, (4) How abuelos-headed families made meaning of their new and unique family arrangement, and (5) How educators can support abuelo-headed families. The subsequent section describes how these abuelos came to provide custodial care for their grandchildren.

On Becoming a Custodial-Abuelo: Stories from Las Familias Amor y Esperanza

Grandparents who participated in this exploratory study assumed custodial caregiver role for similar reasons. The custodial grandfather of la familia Amor came to care for both of his granddaughters because the mother of his granddaughters (his biological daughter) struggled with drug addition to crystal meth. With two different biological fathers, both granddaughters lived with their mother prior to moving in with their grandfather and great-grandmother. The abuelo de la familia Amor recalls:

I hoped and prayed that their mother would get her life together, but she never did. It finally become was too hard for me leave my granddaughters with their mom knowing what I knew, so I took the girls home with me one night and they've been with me ever since.

Currently, the granddaughters have not had contact with their biological mother or respective biological fathers in over 4 years. Their grandfather explained that during the few times that the granddaughters visit their mother, the return home upset, creating more of disruption to the well-being of the girls. He explains:

The girls used to visit with their mom when they were younger, well only a couple times. But I could tell that while the girls wanted to see their mom, it was not good for them. When they came back with me, they would have an attitude and not listen to my, or my mother's directions. It was like they were different girls. They would also have really bad nightmares during their first nights back home...I just did not feel like visiting their mom was a good idea anymore, so I told their mom that she needed to clean up her life if she wanted to see the girls again...we haven't heard from her since.

During subsequent pláticas with this abuelo, he shared the sadness and shame that he feels knowing that his daughter was unable to care for her own daughters. This double jeopardy as articulated by the abuelo de la familia Amor is congruent with findings from Pinson-Millburn (1996). The custodial grandmother of la familia Esperanza explained that her grandsons lived with her off and on prior to assuming full caregiver role. The mother and father of her grandsons, also her biological son, had their first son at ages 15 and 17 respectively. Aware of their level of maturity and challenges with drug abuse, this grandmother shared that in many ways she felt like she fulfilled a parental role since births of both of her grandsons. She recalls the up and down process leading up her obtaining full custodial care of her grandsons and recalls the night that she knew that she would officially take on the sole caregiver role to her grandsons:

Yeah, so then my son was in jail and the boys' moms started doing her own thing and neglecting her boys. Then she left (the oldest grandson) with me and took (the youngest grandson) with her cause (the oldest grandson) was in school and she couldn't take him back and forth. So then, eventually that continued and finally she took both of the boys for about 6 months. The boys lived with her in San Marcos.

And then one day, she asked me, “Can you take care of the boys?” So she asked me if I could take care of the boys and so I thought that it would be a weekend kind of thing, you know, so I said, “Sure,” cause I would watch them for her. So she dropped them off on a Friday and she never came back. She never asked, “Could you keep them,” or “Could you help me out,” she just didn’t show up. And then, now she visits, but she’s never once asked me, “What do I need to do to get my boys back? What do you want of me,” so their my boys now.

An instinct to step in and care for their grandchildren was expressed by both grandparents during these pláticas. During the plática, the researcher asked la abuela de la familia Esperanza when she realized that the biological mother of her grandsons would not be returning for her sons. She responded by saying:

Well I’ll be honest with you, in the beginning, I thought (pause) well, during this time I knew that she wasn’t doing that well. Because in the middle of the night, around 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning, I would call me and tell me that they were left alone – him and his brother. And I guess he would wake up and find himself alone in the apartment, so I would have to get up and go pick them up in San Marcos and bring them back and have my dad, who was at that time 79, watch them for me so I could go to work the following day – and this was constant. So, I was upset, confused. You know, I knew she wasn’t able to take care of them. But when she actually left them and didn’t pick them up, even though I knew she wasn’t doing well, I thought, “Oh my God, something happened to her. She must’ve died.” Because not even a phone call or anything, so I was taken her for dead. And I told my mom and my mom was saying, “Well let’s just pray that nothing’s wrong with her,” but in my heart I felt, to

be able to drop off your boys, and really not even a phone call, and just literally abandon them I thought something happened to her. That was my feeling originally. Then I think, I forgot how long it took for her to call, after so many calls that I just left on her voice mail and never got an answer - I cried then, I was angry at her, hated her and hated my son because I just couldn't see how you could abandon you sons – the most precious things in your life, just walk out on them, even though they were with me, it's not the same.

Pláticas with all grandchildren revealed that all grandchildren know why they were in the custodial care of their grandparents. When asked if they knew why they were living with their grandparents, one grandchild put it very simply: “He wants me...We say that he's my dad and she's my mom (great-great grandmother) because when I'm with my dad I feel like he loves me more. And he's the best. I just want to be with him and give him some more kisses.” Despite their awareness of the circumstances that led to the change of homes, these grandchildren displayed discomfort or sadness when talking about the absence of their biological parent. One grandchild's comment embodies the ambivalence felt by grandchildren who are raised by their grandparents, “I'm happy that I live with my grandma, because I don't wanna go where they take kids who's parents can't take care of 'em...I still feel sad sometimes though cause my mom is on drogas and my dad's in jail.” Clearly these experiences speak to the challenges and difficulties that both grandparents and grandchildren face when transitioning into a new family arrangement without either one of their biological parents. This next section brings voice to the ways in which abuelos, in their own words, find strength and resilience.

ON SOURCES OF STRENGTH & RESILIENCE

One of the main research questions of this exploratory study was how abuelo-headed families sourced strength and resilience. Prior to family pláticas, the researcher met with each abuelo to explain the purpose of the study. The researcher explained the construct of resilience and asked if they defined themselves as resilient. Both sets of abuelos expressed that they deemed themselves resilient due to their challenging role as custodial grandparent. Grandparents were asked, “When times are difficult, what keeps you going?” During one plática, before the researcher could finish this question, the abuela de la familia Esperanza simply said, “Love...Love for them. Yeah, it really is because I just love them and I see them and I just want the best for them.” Across these pláticas, it was evident that their love for their grandchildren and children played a significant role in how grandparents found strength and resilience. During pláticas with both abuelos, the researcher noted that as both abuelos’ eyes lit up as they spoke to how their grandchildren as sources of strength. In describing how great a grandparents’ love is for her or his grandchildren, this grandmother explains, “ I think a grandparent gives more love to their grandchildren, than they would to their own child. For whatever reason, you feel even more love for your grandchild and maybe that gives you more strength.” However upon further analysis additional themes emerged.

On Renewed Purpose and Joys of (Re)Parenting

A newfound sense of purpose emerged as a source of strength for grandparents raising their grandchildren. The 48-year-old abuelo from la familia Amor explained that before taking full care of his two granddaughters, he lived alone and had no other obligations or commitments other than the ones that he had for himself. He candidly shares:

Before them I was not responsible for anyone except myself, I lived alone. And I worked to pay for my own room, and bought my own food. Then when I took them

under my care, I began to realize that I needed to care for something more than myself. And that's why I think that they are my strength because everything that I do is for them... Keeping my girls happy and well is what gives me strength.

A renewed sense of purpose oftentimes functions as a protective factor for custodial grandparents (Burton, 1999) and is evident within the body of resiliency research (Bernard, 1995). Yet even with this newfound purpose, the challenge of raising two granddaughters at the age of 48 is evident as abuelo de la familia Amor described his dream of being able to see his granddaughters grow up. This same abuelo went on to continue:

I hope that I am alive to see them become happy women, I always pray to God and ask that I don't get sick, I pray the he keeps me healthy and well so that I be here for the girls and provide them what ever they need. I want to see them grow up...I can tell you that my life has changed because of them. I am much happier having them in my life.

This abuelo's poignant reflections of the fulfillment and worry attributed to his new role as the custodial grandparent are congruent with research concerning grandparents raising grandchildren (Musil & Ahmad, 2002). When asked how she sources strength, the 51-year-old abuela quickly explained that thinking about her two grandsons is what kept her going.

She says:

Thinking about them. Well, they're my inspiration. And I know sometimes it gets hard for me because my friends will invite me out, but I think, you know what friends come and go. Not them, they're there forever and ever in my life. So they're my motivation and my inspiration, so if I don't do it I think, "Who's gonna do it for them?" Someone has to do it, and that someone is me. I have the privilege of having

them. Like I tell my grandsons, “I’ve been blessed to have you in my life. You know, if I didn’t have you,” I always tell them, “I’d be so lonely.” I guess I’d be over your house all the time because I would be missing them. But no, they’re my inspiration. They’re the ones that keep me going and they’re my motivation to get up in the morning and go to work, bring money to feed them, and when I buy something for them, and I always think they look soooo good, they look sooo handsome. Or when I see them eat or take their vitamins, I get a thrill knowing at least someone is there care for them.

The reflections of the abuela from la familia Esperanza embodies the sense of joy that some custodial grandparents experience knowing that they were able to intervene and take care of their grandchildren. In addition to their unwavering sense of purpose and feelings of joy knowing that they were able to step into these caregiver roles, these abuelos also cited that a sense of faith, commitment, and love for their grandchildren additionally served as protective factors for these abuelo caregivers. The next section describes the second set of themes that emerged during the pláticas were related to the ways in which abuelos adjusted into their new caregiving roles.

ON NEGOTIATING & MAKING MEANING OF NEW PARENTING ROLES

The ways in which custodial grandparents negotiated and made meaning of their new parenting roles also emerged during the pláticas of this exploratory study. Abuelos were asked, “How is raising your grandchildren/children different than raising your child?” Consistent during both pláticas, grandparents noted that they raised their grandchildren as if they were their own children. The grandfather of the Amor family explained:

Well, I raise them as if I were their father. In raising them, I am teaching them right from wrong. It's my favorite part, but hardest part too. In my experiences I have seen that when kids get to the age of 13 or 14, they start wanting to make their own decisions. And at that age, kids don't like to be told what to do. They want to make their own decisions...I feel that with grandchildren, with children, we need to respect them if we want them to respect us, that's what I've always said.

Throughout the pláticas that occurred during this study, several themes emerged regarding the ways in which abuelos negotiated and made meaning of their new parental roles. These themes included being present in their grandchildren's lives, teaching and modeling respeto, developing independence for the future, and the challenge of filling in a role of a missing parent and balancing their individual needs.

On Being Present

During one of our initial pláticas, the abuelo de la familia Amor reflected on lack of parental presence both in and outside of school due to parents' work responsibilities. He explained:

There are also a lot of homeless people around our neighborhood. So you never know what will happen. There are some kids, ages 6, 7, who walk to and from school because their parents work during the day.

Conscious of the tension between providing financially for the family and wanting to be present in the lives of their children, this abuelo explained that he is fortunate to have a work schedule where he can make sure that his girls are ready for bed, go to work, then arrive home in the early morning to help get the girls ready for the next day of school. In addition to being present each day to bring the girls to school and pick them up at dismissal, this abuelo

explained that it was especially important to attend school assemblies when his granddaughters are receiving some sort of recognition. He shares:

I've seen in the assemblies, kids will be receiving an award, looking for someone from their family, and now one's there. Part of the reason why I work at night is so I can be available during the day if anything. Sometimes it means that I don't sleep, but I want to be there for the girls.

The abuela de la familia Esperanza expressed the same commitment to being present in the lives of her grandsons. Below she describe a typical day in the home of the Esperanzas:

I first get up, shower and get ready. And then wake up the boys and get breakfast ready for them because in reality, it's (describing Fridays, her only day off) the only day that I have to give them a good solid breakfast cause we're always running around. So, I make their breakfast, get them up, they dress themselves of course cause they're older (laughs), but get them ready drop them off, head back home and start picking up. Then wait, cause there are so many cars picking kids up they want me to get there early so they don't have to walk far. So I come 11:30 and park cause if I park waaaay out there, they feel like by the time they walk to the car, they're almost home. So, I sit down and read, at 11:30 out there, I'm sitting down and reading and then sometimes I let them walk, but they don't really like that cause they feel like it's the only day that they can be picked up. At night I read with them. So, we pick them up, bring them home and then we feed them. Or sometimes on Friday, when it's payday, I take them out to eat. And then at 2 o'clock (the youngest grandson) had a tutor. We go to the library, that's where he gets tutored. And uh, (the oldest grandson) does too. But right now he's on a break. And so I sit there and thumb through books

or check out new books or drop off the old ones. (The oldest grandson) and I are there together waiting for his brother. When he finishes, we come home and they do whatever they need to do and then it's a free Friday. And then like in the evenings we usually walk – regularly. Like from Monday through Thursday, I don't get them breakfast cause I have to leave too. But I go to work and get home at 6. I get home, am cooking, and they're usually doing their homework around me while I'm cooking. As I'm dicing onions or tomatoes, I'm checking to see what they're doing and trying to what they're saying at the same time. And then I feed them, they shower, and then they do their homework, still do their homework, cause I has a lot now and then it's bed time. (Abuela laughs) You know, I'm exhausted just telling you about our typical day.

Like clockwork, these two abuelos are present in the lives of their children at each moment of the day.

On Respeto

In addition to articulating the importance of being present in the lives of their grandchildren, these abuelos expressed their desire to teach their grandchildren the importance of respecting others, especially their elders. The abuelo de la familia Amor spoke specifically spoke about the modeling respectful parenting:

There are times that I talk to them with a firm voice, without yelling. I feel that one should start parenting their kids from an early age because they will get to an age when they have to make decisions on their own. I have seen other families yell at their children in stores, in the streets, and that kind of parenting never works. The kids feel sad and embarrassed and the parents lose their children's respect... We always tell

our children to respect us, but how can we ask our children to respect us when we don't respect them. Respecting another person, when you truly respect someone, is a very difficult thing to do...If they choose to be mothers, I hope they remember how I treated them. I want them to know that you can raise children with out raising your voice or your hand.

During an in home plática, the abuela de la familia Esperanza also stressed her desire to teach her grandsons the importance of respeto. More specifically, the abuela spoke about the importance of respecting one's elders. In an effort to more clearly describe how she models and teaches respect to her grandsons, she offered this story:

So, my mom has diabetes and when she comes over to my house, I have this cream that I get for her, especially for her it's like a vasoline, and I rub her legs and her feet and get her circulation going. And (the youngest grandson) helps me every now and then when he sees me. So anyway, I went for a walk and I have these tennis shoes and for the first time in my life, my feet were bothering me, they hurt and I said, "You know (the youngest grandson), these shoes are really bothering me, and for the first time in my life, I think my feet are bothering me since I walk so much," so all of the sudden he went and got the lotion and started massaging my feet. And I felt like tears were coming out of my eyes because he knew that I was tired and didn't get grossed out by my dirty and sweaty feet. I was the one that didn't want him to rub them cause they were dirty, I had just finished walking, but I didn't want to stop him. But when he finished, I told him, "Wash your hands very well" (Abuela laughs). But they do, they do learn by what they see. And he sees me doing that to my mom. So I thought that was so sweet.

In addition to teaching and modeling the value of respeto, the abuelos from this study expressed the importance of developing a sense of independence for the future. Conscious of his mortality and possessing less time to raise his grandchildren when compared to raising his own children, the abuelo de la familia Amor shared:

Well...(pause)...the hardest is making sure that my granddaughters grow up and become their own person. I try to raise them on the right path, and hope that they one day learn how to walk this path without me.

Also conscious of the limited amount of time that she has to raise her grandsons, the abuela de la familia Esperanza wants for her grandsons to go to college so that they can experience more financial resources and fulfillment ways that that she wishes for herself. She explains:

Like I tell (the oldest grandson) and (youngest grandson), I don't have a lot of school. As a matter of fact I married young. And I tell them, "See that's why I can't buy this because I didn't go to college. So I need you to go to college, so you can buy whatever you want." I have a lot of limitations, not that people who go to college don't, we all have limitations. But I tell them that their life can be more, more, God how can I say it, more fulfilled if they go to college and they do things right, the proper way. What they have first is college, and then family. Not like me, I jumped into marriage and looked what happened. Now I'm paying for it - I tell them, there's always consequences for every decision they make.

On Filling in for a Absent Parent

While both abuelos expressed that they were raising their grandchildren as if they were their own, the abuela de la familia Esperanza expressed that it even while she provides as much love, and in her own words "sometimes more love," to her grandsons, she struggles knowing

that her grandsons still miss their mother. When asked to speak about the most difficult part in negotiating this awareness, she said:

Wow, it's coping with the fact that they were abandoned. And trying to make sure that it won't affect them. I want them to live a life as normal as they can, but I know it's impossible because I know that no matter what I cannot fill their mother's shoes. Even if they had one parent, let's say my son was not in the picture, let's say the mom, it's a vital factor in their life, it's the most important thing, a mother. Not that the father isn't, don't get me wrong, but their mom (pause) love from a mother is fundamental.

Pláticas indicate that negotiating and making sense of their new parental roles is both rewarding and challenging. Custodial abuelos explain that being present is critical to the well-being of their grandchildren. Additionally, abuelos assert that teaching and modeling respeto is an important value that they hoped to instill in their granddaughters and grandsons. Pláticas with custodial abuelos revealed that they developing a sense of independence for the future is important and significant as they consider the age difference between their grandchildren and themselves. Lastly, abuelos expressed that difficulties they faced knowing that while they were able to be present to step into a caregiver role, their grandchildren still longed for their own parents.

On the Challenges of Finding A Balance: Love for Their Grandchildren and Love for Oneself

During an impromptu plática outside the researcher's car, the abuelo de la familia Amor shared that while he loved his granddaughters immensely, he also desires to one day have a wife one day. However, given how busy he is raising the girls, he explained that he did not know how finding a girlfriend would even work out. He also shared that while having

his mom in the home provided a balance to the girls because of her experiences as a woman, he knows that she is getting older and expressed wanting to have a “good woman” to be in relationship with and help care for his granddaughters. The tension between caring for one’s own needs and those of one’s grandparents was also evident during the pláticas with the abuela de la familia Esperanza. She shared:

For example me, I’m by myself, and a lot of my friends have a social life. I don’t have a social life. My social life is with the boys. It would be nice to be able to know how to handle both situations, I can’t, but I think that if you choose a social life, the children suffer. If you choose the children, then your social life suffers. So that’s why I’m saying that it’s a commitment. Once you give yourself, well with me, my life belongs to them. So if you are not going to make it a priority, then don’t even get involved, let someone else that will be willing and able to give up their life, to a certain degree, I’m saying, you gotta take care of yourself too for them too, but don’t even get involved. They (the children) are not balls that you can bounce back and forth.

These abuelos’ words point to the challenges that some grandparents face when having to balance their social lives with their new role as caregiving grandparents. Despite past and present challenges related to being a custodial grandparent, these abuelos were able to both navigate and negotiate support for their families. This next section explores how abuelos accessed support in and outside of the school setting.

HOW ABUELOES NAVIGATED AND NEGOTIATED SUPPORT

Throughout the pláticas during this exploratory study, several themes emerged regarding the ways in which participating abuelos navigated and negotiated support. The

abuelos from both familias explained that while the transitions into their custodial roles was difficult, they were able to access support through the relationships that they created both on and off school campuses. As articulated by both participating abuelos, the initial contact that they had when registering their oldest grandchildren into school proved to be both helpful and critical.

On Enrolling Their Grandchildren for the First Day of School

The abuelo de la familia Amor vividly recalls the first day he registered his oldest granddaughter for school:

I remember that day as if it were yesterday because I had never registered my own children into school so I didn't know what to do, before, the mother of my children was the one who handled these things.

Reflecting back on this day, this abuelo expressed that he felt more anxious about answering regarding the whereabouts of his oldest granddaughter's parents than actually having the proper paperwork to enroll his granddaughter. He said:

I didn't want to have to explain why I had custody to (the oldest granddaughter). I had her with me that day, and I felt like that was for me and my family to know, but I thought, "Well, they are probably going to ask me why I have the girls with me since my name wasn't on the birth certificate."

To his surprise, this participating grandfather explained that while the front office staff did in fact ask about the oldest granddaughter's parents' whereabouts, they asked him in a way that felt "professional" and "non-nosey." This abuelo shared that the registration process served as the first steps for him to obtain official custody of his granddaughters. Similarly, the

abuela de la familia Esperanza recalled feelings of discomfort as she registered her oldest grandson into Kindergarten:

When it came time to register (oldest grandson) for school, I thought that his mom, (biological mom's name), would be there with me to help sign him up, but she didn't show up...So finally I couldn't wait for her anymore because school it was a Friday and school was on Monday...I just remember thinking, "They are not going to let me register (oldest grandson) for school, I'm not his mom."

Both of these grandparents expressed feelings of gratitude towards the school official who helped register their grandchildren into school. When describing this initial contact with a school official responsible for enrolling her grandson into school, this participating abuela described her as "warm" and "helpful." As both grandparents did not possess legal custody of their grandchildren, the school official served as a contact leading to kinship resources. After registering their grandchildren into school, both grandparents were referred to the school site's school counselor who served as a liaison to community resources related to kinship and counseling services.

On Teacher-Grandparent Relationships

Pláticas with both grandparents revealed that the relationships that were built with each grandchild's teacher served as a significant protective factor for abuelo-headed families. Similar to their feelings towards the school official responsible for enrolling children into school, these abuelos expressed feelings of appreciation towards the teachers of each of their grandchildren. When describing what he appreciated most about his granddaughters' teachers, the participating abuelo shared:

The teachers are always there to provide guidance. Very kind people, very involved. If there is a meeting they will offer advice and tell us exactly what we can do to help the girls.

While recalling her struggles related to behavioral issues that the oldest grandson had at school, the participating abuela shared that her grandson's teacher helped her reshape her grandson's behavior. While in relationship with this teacher, the grandmother explained that she realized that her feelings of guilt led to her "overprotecting" and oftentimes "enabling" her grandsons when they had behavioral difficulties at the school site. This abuela recalled a critical conversation that she had with a teacher regarding her oldest grandson:

I remember when I had a teacher's conference with (oldest grandson's teacher) and I will never forget words and I always keep them in my mind, she said, "Mrs. Amor, don't make them handicap because their parents are missing. There are other kids in that situation and there always will be. Help them, but don't use that as a handicap" and it's true. I thought, "Oh my God," then I was not excusing their behavior. Because their mom is not here, feeling sorry for them and their situation. But deep inside I still feel sorry, but I try not to have that influence me and my decisions with them. If I have to be firm because of what they did, I am going to be firm, even if there mom is not here or their dad, I can't handicap them cause one day I'm not gonna be there. Right now I think it's like, "Oh it's okay they're little, poor kids, poor little (name of oldest grandson), poor little (name of youngest grandson)" But when they're adults, no one is going to say, "Poor little (name of oldest grandson) or poor little (name of youngest grandson)." They are going to expect them to be like any other

adult. They are not going to feel sorry for them. The sorry-ness stops when they stop being children and it's not a long time that they are children.

Both participated abuelos expressed that teachers not only offered academic advice, but often functioned as a confidant who they could turn to when they were having difficulties related to re-parenting. These grandparents also expressed that on-site counseling services functioned as a form of support for their grandchildren and themselves. The abuelo de la familia Amor simply and candidly shared, "I don't think that I girls would be in counseling if it were not at the school. Me and my mom don't have a license so I honestly don't think we'd be able to take the girls to see another counselor." When asked how educators were able to form these relationships with these abuelos, the participating abuela expressed that a home visit from the oldest grandson's teacher set the foundation for a strong teacher-grandparent relationship. In contrast to the abuela's response, the participating abuelo shared that the foundation for his relationships with teachers was knowing how loved both of his granddaughters felt within the classroom walls. He explained, "I realized that I could really trust (oldest granddaughter's teacher) and that she was a good person because of how happy (oldest granddaughter) was coming to school each day."

On Relationships Outside of the Classroom Walls

Pláticas with both abuelos indicate that while they did not have a large network of social support, these grandparents felt like the few individuals played critical roles in helping them care for their grandchildren. More specifically, both abuelos explained that their own parent (the great-grandparents living in these homes) provided the additional support they needed. The abuelo de la familia Amor explained, "There are times when I'm really tired and I ask my mom to walk the girls to the corner because I'm so tired. But I still worry and my

mom tells me, “Don’t worry, nothing is going to happen!” The abuela de la familia Esperanza also described the support that her own father provided in helping raise her grandsons, “I think he [great-grandfather] is able to talk to the boys in a way that I can’t cause I’m a woman...sometimes boys need someone, well a man, to talk to about things.” In addition to these supporting relationships, pláticas with abuelos revealed that they each possessed a strong relationship with another parent from the research site. The abuela describes her relationship with another parent who has children attending the same school as her grandsons:

Honestly, I would say she’s more a comadre than a neighbor to me. We talk about life, taking care of the boys, and things that I think I would talk about with boyfriend if I had one...Sometimes she’ll pick up the boys for me and watch them and vice versa.

During an in home plática with the Amor family, the great-grandmother of the home very simply shared, “Well, we like our neighbors, they are like family so they help out a lot.” When asked specifically asking how they helped out like family, the great-grandmother described how their neighbors helped provide supervision after school hours while the girls played outside. Additionally, she mentioned how she watches the other kids as if they were her own. The grandfather of this home chimed in to say, “It’s like they are all our kids, so we watch them like they are our own.” According to these abuelos, these relationships provided the “little bit extra” support they needed to raise their grandchildren. How these grandparents make meaning of their unique family arrangement is the described in the next section.

MAKING MEANING OF THEIR UNIQUE FAMILY ARRANGEMENT

On Dreams for the Future and Being Remembered

Overall, grandchildren who participated in the pláticas indicated their understanding of caring for their grandparents in terms of the emotional connection that they felt and experienced. All participating grandchildren felt a deep, emotional connection toward their grandparent. One grandson shared, “she loves me because she kisses me every day and says, ‘I love you mijo,’ and I like it a lot when she does that to me.” When asked about what makes her happy, the oldest granddaughter of the familia Amor said, “I tell my friends that he’s my Dad because he’s always been there for me...I think he takes care of me and (younger sibling) better than some of my friends’.” While participating abuelos explained that stressful conditions lead to this new family arrangement, they expressed that they believed they more than any other family member could help their grandchildren become successful in the future. When asked, “What are your dreams for your grandchildren,” the abuelo de la familiar Amor said:

Well, for them, that they grow up and become good people. That in the future, they treat their own children the way that I treated them. All that I do for them, is to make sure that they have a good future.

The abuela de la familia Esperanza replied:

My dream for them would be for both of them to go to college. And to really complete their college. I, to be honest with you, I know it’s Bachelors and Doctors and Masters, I don’t know which one goes first, but I want them to be able to complete their college...I want them to have more than I did growing up.

While the abuela responded to this question with a distinct and specific dream in mind, both abuelos hoped not only hoped for a better future than for their grandchildren, they also hoped

to impart a sense of respeto, independence, knowing right from wrong, and compassion for others. One great-grandmother, who had dreams of becoming a teacher, contributed:

All we ask of the girls is for them to listen to us and study. I know that (the youngest granddaughter) wants to be a teacher, I did once, and I always tell them they have to listen to the advice that their grandfather has for them...I think they need, that they [granddaughters] need to do their part. We can't always be behind them saying, "C'mon do you work!"

During the closing pláticas with custodial abuelos, the researcher asked, "When your grandchildren are your age, what would you like for them to say about you?" Initially surprised by the question, the 48-year-old abuelo de la familia Amor took a moment before responding. He said:

I hope that they continue love me when they grow up – and that we remain together. I hope that they never forget me. I know that one day they will grow up and leave the house, but they will always be my little girls. Both my mother and older brother both tell me that even though I am older, they still see me like a little boy. I think I will feel the same way thing about my girls when they are adults...But when I think about them in the future, I hope that they choose a good person to marry. Someone who really loves them, because if not, I would be worried about them and would need to do something about that (laughs softly).

Also surprised by the question, the 51-year-old abuela de la familia Esperanza took a deep breath before responding to say:

Oh, I want them to remember that their grandma loved them. If they are ever going to talk to their children about me, I want them to say, "Wow, my grandma loved me a

lot.” So I hope that they learn that they have to love their own children as well and make it their own priority cause they’re my priority.

The following section reveals what abuelos have to say when asked how educators can explicitly support other abuelo-headed families.

HOW EDUCATORS CAN SUPPORT ABUELO-HEADED FAMILIES:

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

While pláticas with these two abuelo-headed home were largely unstructured, the researcher asked two specific questions to understand how educators could be better informed to provide support to the increasing numbers of abuelo-headed families; these questions were, “What would you like for educators to know about your experience as a grandparent who is raising her/his grandchildren” and “What kind of advise or wisdom can you offer to educators as they work with other families like yours?”

Abuelos Dual-role: Grandparent & Parent

In responding to the first questions, the participating abuelo thoughtfully articulated the importance of acknowledging “abuelos” as “parents”:

I would like others to know that I love them as if they are my own daughters. And that the experiences that we’ve had...how can I say this (pause) ...well, I want others to know that even though I am their grandfather, I am also their father.

He continued in by conveying the value of modeling respect in words and in actions:

I feel that kids want to be respected, and if they are respected, they will not only follow what you say, but what you do. I see a lot of kids in our neighborhood who are very rebellious toward their parents. They don’t listen to their parents, will sometimes even yell at their parents. I think we learn to how to be parents from our parents... We

learn both good and bad things, unfortunately. But what I believe kids want more than anything is to be treated respectfully...with love.

The participating abuela de la familia Esperanza had these words to share when asked what she'd like for educators to know about her experience raising her grandsons:

It's a commitment. Once you take on the responsibility, it's a commitment. You just can't give up on them. Once you're in it, you're in it for life, until you close your eyes forever. I guess I want educators to know that's how much I love my boys.

On Creating a Space for Love & Familia

When the researcher asked what kinds of advice or wisdom she could impart upon educators who are likely to work with abuelo-headed homes, this same abuela referred to the importance of facilitating a space for love for grandparents and grandchildren alike:

And the kids look up to you so much and so do I, honestly. I love the way you talk to them and something that I love about you is that you're so loveable. I love love, I love love. And I see that they're all just attached to you. And I've never heard you talk rough to them, you're always so sweet to them. And kids cling onto love. If you treat them good, they're gonna be hanging all over you cause that's what they want, that's what they need. And you nourish that.

When asked this same question, the participating abuelo also referenced the loving connections that his granddaughters experienced at the research site. Without any hesitation in his voice, he said:

I feel that the girls come home happy and love coming to school. They love the teachers, the love you, they love coming to school. They are always asking to stop by

their teachers' classrooms, wanting to visit your office, so I can't really think of anything. I think that it is a great thing that my kids to feel loved here at school.

During this same in home plática, this abuelo's mother, the great-grandmother to his girls, chimed in by adding:

I feel that everyone there [at the school] loves us as a family. In the way that you greet us in the morning, I like to see you and everyone each morning, even (the other counselor). And almost everyone there knows us, all the teachers, from the ladies who work in the office to those who clean the school. Everyone there knows us. We've been there since (the oldest granddaughter) was 5, in kinder. We've been there for many years now. More than anything, I like the way that the school has treated us. And the school is so clean. I don't know if we are more fortunate than other schools, but maybe I haven't paid attention it's a nice school. We feel loved there and the girls feel loved there too.

DISCUSSION

Implications for the Use of Pláticas as a Method for Working with Abuelos

Plática (*conversation or dialogue*) is part and parcel to Latino culture (Chavez-Arteaga, 2012). This exploratory study defined pláticas as intimate conversations that facilitate self-discovery in relationship to oneself and while in relationship with others (Ayala et al., 2006; De La Torre in Chavez-Arteaga, 2012, p. 35). The pláticas in this study took place within the homes of these abuelo-headed families, at the school site where their grandchildren attended school, and throughout different parts of surrounding the community. Non-formal yet profound, powerful, and meaningful, these pláticas facilitated stories that would've been more difficult to access using traditional Western qualitative methods. Upon reflecting upon our pláticas during this study, the abuela de la familia Esperanza simply and eloquently shared, "I'm just opening my heart to you telling you what's in my heart to be honest with you." Such heartfelt pláticas require both *confianza* and *respeto* if they are to manifest themselves in the research process. For this study, having already developed both *confianza* and *respeto* with these amazingly resilient families created the foundation for rich pláticas to take place. Those unfamiliar or new to the community being studied would greatly benefit from partnering with key community leaders who have already established *confianza* within the community (Ojeda et al, 2007).

Findings from this study indicate that pláticas proved to serve a culturally relevant and transformative method to understanding the resilience of abuelo-headed families. Unrestrained by Western notions of time and place, pláticas provided a fluidity that seemed conducive for the extremely busy lives of abuelo-headed homes. While this poses some challenges for researchers with a limited amount of time to conduct research, the depth and

quality of stories often shared with the researcher outweigh many costs attributed to time. The plática method can be applied in studies that are grounded in transformative education because the interaction between the researcher and the participant changes from one that is one-directional to one that is collaborative. Rather than operating like a traditional structured interview where the researcher reads from a set list of predetermined questions to ask her/his participants, the pláticas during this study were much more open-ended. In contrast to semi-structured interviews where researchers use less structured interview formats, pláticas often resulted in the self-disclosure on behalf of the researcher. One of the first times that the researcher was asked to disclose information about his personal life occurred during a plática that took place in the home of the Amor familia. The abuelo from this home asked, “What kind of relationship do you have your grandparents?” Answering this question honestly and authentically allowed for the researcher to not only disclose a part of himself that he would not have using more Western methods, it provided him a space to reflect on importance of this research relative to his own lived experiences. Throughout the study, participating abuelos both expressed interest in learning more about the researcher. At these various junctures during the study, the researcher had to assess how much he would disclose regarding parts of his life outside of the scope of this study. As he continued to fully engage in each plática, he learned that abuelos felt more confianza and were more open to articulating stories that they may have not otherwise. In contrast these moments of personalismo, the researcher also learned that as he became more interested or invested in obtaining a specific answer to a question participants became less engaged in the plática. In reflecting upon the plática method used during this study, the researcher found that some of the most personal and intimate stories emerged when he allowed himself to be fully present in each moment. When

conducting pláticas as a research method, it is important for researchers to consciously let go of a desired outcome or product, and allow themselves to fully delve into the process.

Implications for Future Research with Abuelo-Headed Homes

In this exploratory research study, pláticas were used to explore factors that promote resilience for two abuelo-headed homes living in a region of San Diego with a higher number of abuelo-headed homes. Despite the study limitations, including small sample size (6 participants) this study provided preliminary insights into this growing family arrangement, especially in terms of: 1) How abuelos and their grandchildren source strength and resilience, 2) how abuelos negotiate and made meaning of their new parenting roles, 3) how abuelos navigate and negotiate resources for support, 4) how abuelo-headed families made meaning of their unique family arrangement, and 5) how educators can support abuelo-headed families. The use of purposeful sampling, thematic analysis, and member checks provided a deeper understanding into the complexities and wide breadth of experiences inclusive of abuelo-headed homes.

The number of grandparents raising their grandchildren continues to rise across the nation and within the state of California. The U.S. Census Bureau (2003) reports that 3.7 million school-aged children live with grandparents and 2.4 million children lived under the direct care of a custodial grandparent. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that within the state of California, 1.2 million children under the age of 18 live in grandparent-headed homes, with the highest concentrations of these families residing in the Los Angeles and San Diego regions. A decade ago, a little more than 10,000 grandparents reported that they stepped in as caregivers in San Diego (U.S. Census, 2000). Currently ranked 7th among the top ten cities with the highest numbers of grandparents raising grandchildren, nearly 30,000 grandparents

are raising their grandchildren within San Diego in (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Despite these statistics, there continues to be a paucity of research concerning the conditions leading to the transfer of care to these grandparents, let alone research exploring and examining of factors that lead to the resilience of these grandparents. Moreover, there has been limited research focused on the experiences of Latino abuelos raising their grandchildren. Findings from this exploratory study may contribute to research focused on closing this gap regarding research focused on custodial abuelos.

Abuelos in this study assumed custodial care due to issues related to incarceration, substance abuse, and neglect. Similar to reasons documented by previous research (Minkler & Roe, 1993). Current research reveals that custodial grandparenting is not specific to any one race, ethnic group, or socioeconomic class, but can be more prevalent in some cultures over other (Harper & Hardestry, 2001). Custodial grandparenting is often accompanied with unfavorable physical and mental health effects for grandparents as they face considerable barriers and stressor in this new caregiving role (Waldrop & Weber, 2001; Musil & Ahmad, 2002). Additionally, research indicates that children under grandparental care are more likely to live in poverty, and with an abuelo in poor health, and are more likely to have healthy, emotional, and behavioral challenges in school (Scarcella, et al., 2003). Despite these data, abuelos from this study reported a renewed sense of purpose and great sense of joy through their new involvement with their grandchildren in spite of living in poverty, suggesting cultural expectations might play a role in the ways that abuelos make meaning of this new family arrangement. Abuelos also underscored the value of being present with their grandchildren. As biological parents of these grandchildren were unable or unwilling to care for their children, both of these grandparents instantly stepped into the role to care for their

grandchildren. Findings from this study indicate that abuelos served as a “safety net” for their grandchildren when their biological parents could not care for their children (Goldberg-Glen et al, 1998). This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research dedicated to exploring and understanding the experiences of abuelo-headed families through their own voices.

Future studies designed to explore and understand the experiences of abuelo-headed homes would benefit from employing mixed methods approaches in order obtain data that are possess both generalizeability and depth. Doing such would further contribute to the body of research dedicated to facilitating the resilience of these families. Additionally, while there is evidence of few studies that describe the experiences of custodial grandparents of different ethnic groups, educational research focused on how to create culturally inclusive practices for grandparents spanning across different ethnic groups would greatly add to the field. Lastly, this study represented the voices of a small number grandchildren (4 participant) being raised by their abuelos. The inclusion of voices of more grandchildren living with custodial grandparents could enhance further research on this growing family arrangement.

Implications for Educational Practices

Findings from this exploratory study also indicate that abuelos experienced critical relationships that played a significant role in facilitating resilience for their families. Citing their initial contacts with school officials while registering their grandchildren into school for the first time, heart-to-heart conversations with educators, and supporting relationships with community members and their own parents, participating abuelos experiences are congruent with resilience researcher pointing to the protective qualities of caring and supportive relationships (Benard, 1995). Creating a warm and inviting experience for caregivers as they

first enter school grounds creates the foundation for relationships to develop, especially for custodial grandparents. As articulated during pláticas with these abuelos, many grandparents already feel anxious when enrolling their grandchildren into school and oftentimes worry that school officials will cast judgment on them. It is critical for staff members to be mindful that every family enters their school with a distinct story and should make every effort to welcome every guardian with open arms. Upon reflecting on relationships developed with other staff members, abuelos from this study reported that school staff members facilitated an environment where both their grandchildren and themselves felt a sense of “familia.” In fact, abuelos from both families reported that they experienced a feeling of “familia” with staff members throughout the entire school (i.e. front office staff, counselors, custodians, lunch providers, etc.). Relationships with teachers and counselors specifically, played a critical role in emboldening resilience for abuelo-headed families. In describing one her favorite teachers, a 10-year old granddaughter from the Amor shared, “I like to be with (favorite teacher’s name) and last time me and (older sister) thought that why she’s not our mom – cause it’ be cool if she was our mom.” While this granddaughter and her caregiving abuelo later expressed that they are both aware of the limited role that teachers play in the lives of grandchildren being raised by grandparents, it is important for educators to be mindful of the roles that can be projected onto them. Findings from pláticas indicated that grandchildren from these abuelo-headed homes experienced relationships with school officials that promoted a sense of belonging and love; indicating that schools possess the capacity to facilitate resilience (Krovetz, 1999). While this study is but one of the preliminary studies exploring the experience of abuelo-headed homes from a resilience perspective, this study seeks to provide initial insights on ways for schools facilitate resilience for this growing segment of our

community. Having endured the trauma, loss, instability, and emotional pain associated with becoming custodial grandparents, these abuelos, their grandchildren, and great-grandparents living in these homes offer a powerful and significant perspective on resilience.

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