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**ADULT FINANCIAL LITERACY EDUCATION AND LATINA LEARNERS:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY**

A Dissertation in
Adult Education
by
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study used a case study design to explore the teaching and learning that takes place in an adult Latino financial literacy education that was aimed specifically at Latina single mothers. The theoretical framework of the study was informed by a blend of critical and Latina feminist sociocultural adult learning perspectives, as well as the transtheoretical model of behavior change. The study focused on the experiences of the educators and learners within this program that targets these Latina learners and attempted to understand the influence of sociocultural factors on their education in financial matters. Of special interest was the pedagogical approach that was used, and the role that ethnicity, gender, and the Latino culture played in the teaching and learning process. Data consisted primarily of participant interviews with the program administrator, educators, and learners; class observations; and analysis of documents about the program or related to curriculum and pedagogy. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, both manually and using the qualitative software, NVivo 8.

The findings of the study are grouped into three primary areas. First, the program uses a holistic approach to financial education, which emphasizes community leadership and the creation of cultural community of support for the learners, including the provision of multiple resources for the learners. Second the pedagogy in use emphasizes both content and process making use of alternative techniques with an emphasis on learner needs and the use of personal stories that assists the educators in creating this community of support and in the delivery of financial content. Third, the promotion of financial behavior change motivates learners to set goals, make small changes, and demonstrate improvement in their savings, credit scores, and reduction in debt. The study ends with a consideration of the findings in light of the theory, and offers implications for adult education and financial education practice and further research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTON

This chapter will provide an overview of a study where the purpose was to explore the teaching and learning in financial literacy education classes targeted for Latina learners, particularly with respect to the sociocultural impact of the learners' life circumstances. It will provide some background on financial literacy education, the issues related to its implementation among adult Latino groups in the United States, and why this research was necessary to understanding the teaching and learning that is taking place in this setting. It will also briefly describe the theoretical framework that informed the research, as well as the study methodology, and the importance of this research to adult and financial education.

Background to the Problem

We live in troubled economic times. As of August 2010, the unemployment rate in the U.S. is at 9.6%, up from the 3.8% rate from 2000, which translates into nearly 15 million American adults out of work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Home foreclosures have risen 183% in the past three years, with one in every 381 housing units in the U.S. receiving a foreclosure notice in August 2010 (Memcott, 2010). These numbers accompany reports of historically low savings rates, high consumer debt, and rising bankruptcy rates, further indicating personal financial difficulties. While these difficulties might be due to the recent economic downturn, a survey of 1,001 Americans by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (2008) indicates that there is a lack of understanding of financial systems and the complexity of financial services and products. For example, 25% of those surveyed would not consider purchasing a home because of their lack of understanding of the home buying process. This report also indicated that, although "financial experts agree that having a household budget is

sound financial management” (p. 2), 40 million adult Americans do not track their expenses.

Solutions to this difficult economic situation has led to a call for increased financial education for adults and youth in America, as the apparent lack of preparedness for economic downturns suggests low financial literacy levels (Braunstein & Welch, 2002; Fox, Bartholomae, & Lee, 2005; Oehler & Werner, 2008). On April 10, 2009, then Bank of America Global Card Services President, Ric Struthers, stated “the current economic crisis could have been avoided if borrowers were more informed about the financial choices they make” (Mbugua, 2009, p. 1). Echoing this call for increased personal responsibility, Ben Bernanke, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, citing the large number of minorities without bank accounts, stated, “American minorities need to strengthen their financial literacy” (Ahrens, 2009, p. A16). These calls for financial education are not new, as there has been a movement in the last decade to increase awareness and opportunities for learning about financial education at all income levels. One such plan was the establishment of the Financial Literacy and Education Commission in 2003, with an objective of improving the financial literacy of all persons in the U.S. This commission, along with the Department of Agriculture, convened the 2008 National Research Symposium in Financial Literacy and Education in Washington, D.C., during which attendees attempted to determine the current situation of financial literacy education in the U.S. Attendees also attempted to determine the areas of research that are needed to further advance and strengthen financial education and research.

Basic Assumptions in Financial Literacy Education

Underlying this increase in the calls for and interest in financial literacy education (Willis, 2008a) are three primary assumptions, which must be considered in any discussion of financial literacy. The first assumption is exemplified by the deficit model, a concept in

educational theory that explains the assumption that individuals who do not do well “do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked...such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (Valencia, 1997, p. xi). When applied to financial literacy education, this model illustrates the assumption that those who are poor and/or do not participate in the mainstream banking systems are lacking some pieces of knowledge or skills that would help them survive financially in the world, in a more secure, stable way.

A second assumption appears to be that anyone with difficulties related to money must have a lack in financial knowledge, or the difficulties would not have occurred. The solution is to provide those people with the knowledge that is in deficit in the form of financial education, so they can then pull their lives together. Closely tied into this idea of a deficit of information, is the core concept of personal responsibility for one’s own successes and failures (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004), an essential part of American ideology (Loewen, 2007). As Valencia (1997) so clearly states, “deficit thinking is tantamount to the process of ‘blaming the victim’” (p. x), which in the financial education setting translates as the learner being responsible for his or her own financial situation.

A final assumption in financial literacy is the expectation that education in financial matters will not only increase individuals’ literacy, but also, by extension, improve their financial well-being. This assumption ignores the contradicting literature from the study of adult education about the teaching and learning of adults, the literature from psychology about behavior change processes, and the sociocultural factors that affect learners in every aspect of their lives, such as their race, gender, language, etc. Literature in these areas, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, indicates that myriad factors affect learning in general, let alone in financial

literacy specifically, that education does not necessarily lead to behavior change, and that other circumstances in individual lives often affect financial decisions that seem, at first glance, to be unrelated to the decision itself. Additionally, further complicating this issue is that there is also “little consistency” (Klein, 2007, p. 3) in the research with regard to how financial literacy itself is defined or what constitutes success in a financial literacy program.

Researchers at the previously mentioned 2008 Symposium in Financial Literacy and Education were unable to reach a consensus on the “personal finance principles” needed by every adult “to make informed decisions across topic areas and take appropriate actions in today’s complex financial marketplace” (Financial Literacy and Education Commission, 2008, p. 11). The literature on financial education utilizes two common approaches to defining financial literacy: the knowledge possession approach and the functional approach. The knowledge possession approach indicates that financial literacy is possession of the “basic knowledge needed to make good financial choices” (Mandell & Klein, 2007, p. 106), without explaining what the specific areas of knowledge might be. The second, and most common approach is functional, delineating specific skills and knowledge learners need to have acquired upon completion of the program, a traditional behaviorist approach to learning (Mandell, 2006). The distinction between the two definitions is perhaps merely “cosmetic” (O’Connell, 2008, p. 13), as the desired outcome from either definition is behavior change. However, neither of these definitions appears to take into account the variety of factors in an individual’s life and behavior, including the cultural context that can affect his or her apparent financial literacy. For example, Stone, Wier, and Bryant (2007) included beliefs about one’s financial competency, beliefs about personal choices, and attitudes about community and interpersonal relationships in their investigation into financial literacy and happiness. This study will be discussed in detail in

Chapter Two. Likewise, Vitt, Anderson, Kent, Lyter, Siegenthaler, and Ward (2000) suggest utilizing a confidence component when considering financial literacy education, to ensure that learners become more comfortable and confident in making their own financial decisions. Thus, taking a more holistic approach, one that takes into account the entirety of a learner's life, would allow for a more realistic and operational financial literacy definition.

Current Research and Literature in Financial Literacy Education

Research in financial literacy has explored a wide range of topics associated with this form of education. In looking at the work as a whole, the research has revealed the following: (a) data on outcomes of the financial education programs is problematic, in that it is difficult to measure and collect, in part due to the lack of agreement on what constitutes success and how financial literacy is defined (Lyons, 2005); (b) workplace financial education programs reach the largest number of participants, with more measurable results, such as increases in savings (Vitt et al., 2000); (c) attention to the needs of specific groups of learners is a prominent concern among educators (Toussaint-Comeau & Rhine, 2000), but has inadequate research support to promote educational change; and (d) there has been recent interest in studying ways to change the financial behavior of the learners but much more is needed (Hilgert & Hogarth, 2003).

One of the most extensive research studies in financial literacy education took place in 2000, nearly a decade ago, and still informs research and practice today. With a sample of 90 different financial education programs across the U.S., including programs designed for military personnel, African Americans, Latinos, retirement aged groups, and individuals at a variety of income levels, the Vitt et al. (2000) study identified many prominent issues in financial literacy education. A follow up study was completed in 2005, by Vitt, Reichbach, Kent, and Siegnethaler, which confirmed many of the findings from the first and demonstrated a

persistence of some of the same issues. For example, workplace programs were found to be most effective at reaching people, but conversely does not offer the level of comfort and hope that community based organizations often provide, according to the focus group discussions from the study. Additionally, confirming the necessity mentioned above with regard to meeting the needs of the learners, “language, family and community process issues, anxieties and fears, lifestyle issues and other human concerns must be approached more openly by educators within the context of financial decision-making” (p. xviii), and the need for curriculum created for learners that is “responsive to their present socio-economic situation and sensitive to their cultural background” (p. xvii).

Another study, a nationwide survey of financial educators, demonstrates that the educators largely attempt to be responsive to their learners specific needs by tailoring curricular materials, recognizing that learners attitudes are shaped by sociocultural factors, and attempt to provide culturally responsive teaching for their learners (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010). In other words, reflecting the life circumstances of the learners in the financial education setting is important, and this aspect has not been adequately considered in the literature.

There also has been an increase in research into the specific needs and positionality of learners in financial education as a reflection of their life circumstances in recent years. For example, Endres, Chowdhury, and Alam (2008) and Jarecke and Taylor (2008) have focused their attention on gender. Murphy (2005) explored African-American learners, while Watson (2006) studied race and ethnicity and their impact on financial knowledge and education. To date, however, there has been very little financial literacy research done which specifically addresses Latino learners and financial education. One study was found, (Spader, Ratcliffe, Montoya, & Skillern, 2009) that does address this reflection of the lives of the learners with their

utilization of a delivery method specifically tailored to the needs and customs of Latinos in order to promote financial behavior change. *Nuestro Barrio*, a culturally responsive *telenovela*, or serial soap opera, presented on television the financial education issues that were specific to this group, such as mistrust of financial institutions and issues related to mortgages and home purchases. While this study does not take place in the classroom setting used by most financial education programs, it does present encouraging results about the importance of appealing to the beliefs and attitudes about money within specific cultural groups to result in behavior change. Other than this research study, no others were found that specifically deals with Latino learners, or that attempts to deal with sociocultural issues that might affect teaching and learning in financial education.

Sociocultural and Adult Learning in Financial Literacy Education

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that there is a need for a holistic approach to financial literacy education that takes into account learners' overall life context including their cultural background. The adult education literature grounded in sociocultural perspectives can offer insight to financial literacy education and research. There are numerous studies and conceptual pieces in adult education in the areas of culturally responsive teaching that also inform this perspective, particularly those focusing on literacy and pedagogy (Choules, 2007; Friere, 1975; Friere & Macedo, 1995). Research and literature in adult education has also illuminated the importance of the cultural context on the teaching and learning of adults, with explorations into the beliefs, social relationships, and social environment of marginalized groups in educational settings (Alfred, 2003; Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 2001). A few studies have addressed Latino sociocultural issues and general literacy (Prins, 2005; Sparks, 1998). However, this sociocultural perspective has been applied to the financial education of adults on few occasions,

and on even fewer occasions among learners with Hispanic backgrounds.

As in the areas of difference and critical perspectives in education, there is a large body of literature exploring the learning experiences of Latinos in general education, which will be addressed fully in Chapter Two. This research and literature illustrate the importance of recognizing the context of the lives of the Latino individuals in which the education takes place (Larratta & Gainer, 2008; Maestro, Behn-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009) and placing value on these experiences, in order to combat the struggles for academic and economic achievement (Liu, Robles, Leondar-Wright, Brewer, & Adamson, 2006; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). There is also a lot of Latina feminist literature about the experiences of the Latina woman, including their feelings of living on the borders of life in the U.S. (Anzaldua, 1987, 1990; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Ortega, 2004), struggles for identity (Gonzalez, 2005), and the influence of the male-dominated culture that persists in some Latina families (Abalos, 2007).

As previously indicated, there is little research into Latinos and their experiences in the financial literacy educational environment. For example, a study by Marlowe and Atilas (2005) explores the consumer fraud to which Latino groups might be more vulnerable, due to low-level English skills and low-levels of financial literacy. Taking the experiences of Latinos into account during the development of a financial literacy program, Spader, et al. (2009) illustrate the possibilities of utilizing the media as a delivery method for financial education. This incredible lack of information on the experiences of Latino learners and teachers in financial education will be directly addressed by this study.

Purpose and Research Questions

In light of the gaps in the research into difference, cultural perspectives, and Latinos in adult education and financial education research, the purpose of this study was to explore the

teaching and learning in financial literacy education classes targeted for Latina learners, particularly with respect to the sociocultural impact of the learners' life circumstances. In order to understand the significance of cultural perspectives in the teaching and learning in this setting, the following research questions guided the process of exploration into these topics within financial literacy education:

- 1) In what ways does the cultural background of Latino learners and educators impact the teaching and learning that takes place in the financial education setting?
- 2) How do financial educators respond to the specific needs of their Latino learners in light of the learners' cultural background?
- 3) How do educators and learners perceive that their experience in financial education classes or programs has contributed to changing how they deal with financial issues?

Theoretical Framework in Light of Key Issues in Financial Education

As noted earlier, one of the issues in the financial education literature is that there is a lack of a clear definition of what is meant by financial literacy. Throughout the remainder of this discussion financial literacy will be defined using a combination of the three definition types utilized by other financial education researchers: knowledge possession, functional, and holistic (Stone, 2004; Vitt et al., 2000). Financial literacy, then, is defined as the ability to read, analyze, manage, and communicate about financial conditions that affect well being, including discerning financial choices, discussing money and financial issues without, or despite, discomfort, planning for the future, and responding competently to life events that affect everyday financial decisions.

Lyons and Neelakantan (2008) describe the benefits of applying theory from other disciplines to financial education in an effort to better understand the process of learning and to

ultimately benefit learners. This study exists within the framework of sociocultural perspectives of adult learning theory, including critical and feminist perspectives, which emphasize social change. Because critical and cultural perspectives do emphasize the importance of social change, but are not always specific in how change occurs, the study was also informed by the transtheoretical model of behavior change. This allowed the study to take a longer and more individualized view of the potential changes that might come out of the financial education under exploration.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Adult Learning

A sociocultural perspective on adult learning, which includes cultural, critical, and feminist perspectives, all of which influence each other, potentially offers a more holistic view of adult learning than is typically present in the financial literacy education literature. One of the most prominent theorists associated with sociocultural theory is Vygotsky, whose ideas, from the 1930s, took into account the context in which learning took place, later contributing to the development of constructivist theories in the education of children (Jaramillo, 1996). His Marxist bent, like his critical theorist peers in the Frankfurt School, led him to explore the influence of outside factors in the oppression and marginalization of groups of people. Specifically, Vygotsky argued that “social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world” (p. 135). Present day theorists and researchers in education and adult education continue these ideas with their acknowledgement of the importance of giving attention to outside factors in learning (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Choules, 2007; Freire & Macedo, 1995; Gay, 2000; Giroux, 2003, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Sparks, 1998), such as in the situated cognition and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) utilized in adult education (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). An example of sociocultural perspectives applied to adult education

research is Alfred's (2003) study of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women and their experiences in postsecondary education in the U.S. Alfred posits that this sociocultural perspective on learning and knowledge, while "intertwined with the context within which they occur...to include individual, cultural, social, institutional, and historical location" (p. 245), does not preclude cognitive or individual factors. Her research demonstrated the importance the empowering possibilities in recognizing and valuing the "raciocultural identities" of the learners (p. 256).

Applied to financial education, this perspective on the importance of culture and context on the teaching and learning process can have a great impact on understanding the worlds in which the learners live, as well as a more complete understanding of their needs, desires, and goals. In addition, sociocultural theory offers financial education a new way to comprehend the ways in which learners in the classroom make meaning of their financial experiences in and out of the classroom. Spader et al.'s (2009) study cited above utilized a sociocultural perspective in considering the needs of its recipients of the financial education program, although the researchers did not name it as such. His work illuminates the need to target Latinos specifically in consideration of their beliefs and values associated with financial learning.

Sociocultural perspectives do not always take race, gender, class, and sexual orientation into consideration, rather focusing more on social structures than on other marginalizing factors in society. Therefore, taking sociocultural theory an additional step further, this study is also informed by other critical and feminist perspectives in education. Seeing the world critically involves questioning political, economic, and social structures and institutions that exert power over the lives of the people within it. Nesbit (2006) points out that adult education can "provide the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for people to engage more fully in and shape their individual

and social worlds,” develop this way of thinking critically, and “counter hegemony by helping people understand how they might resist and challenge oppressive social structures and behaviors” (p. 173). Such a critical perspective is a way of seeing the world through eyes that are open to the social, political, and economic structures that make up the modern society in which we live, and the way in which these structures become part of our daily existence without our questioning of their benefit for us. Further, feminist perspectives, particularly those that are related to the life experiences of Latinos are also important sociocultural perspectives that inform this study. For example, Gloria Anzaldua’s (1987, 1990) concept of the “borderlands” contributes to an understanding Latino culture, as mentioned previously. She suggests that Latinos in the U.S. live in the borderlands between Latino culture and white Anglo culture, and Latinas have to further negotiate machismo culture, all of which affects their entire worldview, including their financial reality.

Banks and other financial institutions, in addition to the government, exert an enormous amount of power in our society. They make decisions that affect Americans’ lives on a daily basis, no matter what their cultural group. Financial institutions decide who is worthy of loans for cars, houses, and small businesses, who can cash a paycheck, who can open a savings account, the numbers for credit ratings, how much to charge for giving someone access to their own money, and which neighborhoods should have access to financial services or funding to promote economic development. From a critical perspective, these activities can be seen as possibly negative and detrimental to increasing the power of the individual, particularly since many negative decisions about neighborhoods and access to financial services occurs in low-income and racial/ethnic minority homogeneous communities (Lucey, 2004). At the same time, these actions are maintaining or increasing the financial institutions’ power (Williams, 2007;

Willis, 2008a). Knowledge or learning of critical perspectives, then, would allow individuals to explore what causes some of these oppressive properties of our society that can serve those in power and further marginalize those who might already be disadvantaged, and also contribute to educators' and learners' understanding of the factors that contribute to their learning about financial issues.

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change

While sociocultural, critical, and feminist perspectives on education all advocate social change, they are not always clear on how these social structures function at the individual level. However, since individual changes in financial behavior are the objective of most financial education programs, and in recognition of the fact that financial education without behavior change is of seen as having little value to learners, some researchers in financial education are beginning to utilize behavior change research to inform their work, such as the transtheoretical model (TTM) of behavior change to help understand learners' actions (Lyons & Neelakantan, 2008; Spader, et al., 2009). Originating in health behavior change, TTM offers a view into the processes individuals must go through in order to change. There are five stages in the process: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001; Spader, et al., 2009). Spader, et al. (2009) suggest that application of this theory to financial education has the potential to "improve financial education interventions" (p. 77), pinpointing the stage at which learners are most accepting of financial education concepts, reflecting their success in targeting learners in the pre-contemplation stage. Taking their assertion of the benefits to financial education one step further, the present study will reflect upon the learning processes informed by the stages, and attempt to incorporate this knowledge into Latino financial education programs.

Overview of Design and Methodology

This study used a qualitative design, whose purpose is to examine how people make meaning, and to gain information about their behavior and motivations (Kincheloe, 1991). More specifically, the design was a case study, which allowed for a large amount of data to be collected from the people involved in this financial education setting.

The setting for the case was a financial education program in a large Midwestern city designed for Latina single mothers. It is a program that combines the expertise of three community organizations together to create a financial education and community leadership program for Latinas: (a) a financial services organization, (b) a career development organization, and (c) a social services organization. The program, called *Mujeres Fuertes* and described in detail in Chapter Four, hopes to educate the Latinas so that they might later become community leaders. One part of that program is the financial education classes and counseling, the focus of this study.

Using a variety of data collection methods, classes were observed and field notes were recorded, interviews were conducted with the program administrator, educators, and some learners, and documents were collected. This wealth of information combined to create a picture of what was happening in this setting, including the cultural issues present in the educators' and learners' lives that influences what happens in the classroom. Because culture is recognized as a powerful factor in individuals' lives and therefore influences the teaching and learning in the financial education classroom, for this study, culture was defined as the "shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language use within a social group. These cultural values and beliefs and practices are at the core of group life and identity" (Guy, 1999, p. 7). As such, a case study design was used that was influenced by ethnographic case study research, which explores and

attempts to explain in depth using a cultural basis for the observed behaviors in the case study, emphasizing emerging thematic commonalities (Eisenhardt, 2002; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

All of these data, after transcribing and entering them into a qualitative software program, NVivo 8, were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach that attempted to organize and clarify what was happening in these classrooms and in this setting (Patton, 2002). Data and analysis were verified using member checks for confirming thematic interpretations, peer debriefing, and triangulation (Stake, 2006) that confirmed the presence of themes and ideas. Data was analyzed drawing on Miles and Huberman's (1994) principles of data analysis in qualitative research.

Assumptions

As with any research, there are assumptions that the researcher holds in approaching the study, as well as assumptions inherent in the research methodology employed. In addition, there are assumptions that exist in the literature and study of both adult education and financial literacy. The assumptions of this study include:

1. Learners attend financial education classes due to a perceived lack of knowledge about financial matters, as perceived by themselves or by an outside person or institution.
2. Financial educators perceive that their learners lack financial knowledge.
3. Financial educators and learners believe they can learn about financial matters in a formal education setting and then utilize this knowledge in their lives.
4. Financial educators can articulate the teaching and learning processes that take place in their classrooms and will be honest and accurate in sharing their perceptions of the process.

5. Learners can articulate the process that assisted them in learning and will be honest and accurate in sharing their perceptions of the process.
6. Perceptions from educators and learners, along with classroom observations and materials, can give a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning that takes place in financial education classes.
7. Social and economic institutions and structures in the U.S. serve to marginalize those with little social or economic capital.
8. Learning about dominant social and economic institutions and structures can lead to social action.
9. Latina learners have experiences in the financial literacy education setting that are unique to their life circumstances and experiences.
10. Latina life experiences influence what happens in the financial education classroom.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Like the existence of assumptions in every study, there are also limitations and strengths to every study. Some of the potential limitations of this study include:

1. This study is dependent upon voluntary participation of financial educators and administrators. As a result, there may be a degree of selection bias in that those who volunteer to participate may do so as a result of particularly positive experiences in their teaching.
2. The study is dependent upon voluntary participation of learners. As a result, the selection bias may again result from particularly positive experiences.

3. Definitions of what constitutes financial literacy is ambiguous, therefore, educators and learners may all have difficulty identifying equally those aspects of their teaching and learning that resulted in success.
4. Due to the specific nature of case study research design, limitations exist regarding generalizability to other financial education settings. The data collected was specific to this particular setting, and limited to the individuals interviewed and the classes observed. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the data will apply to other educators, other learners, and other settings.
5. Due to my status as a researcher from outside of the financial education classes, learners and educators may have felt hesitant to be open and honest about their experiences for fear that their information may be shared with others.
6. Aware of the role of positionality and power in society, in my role as a White outsider to their cultural group, it is also possible that the Latina learners and educators were not as open as they might be with someone from their same background.
7. The number of interviewed learners was limited in number and limited to learners from one cohort, as opposed to a larger number from a wider range of cohort within the program.
8. The classes were conducted entirely in Spanish, not my native language. It is possible that there were linguistic exchanges that I did not completely understand, therefore affected the amount and quality of data collected.
9. Finally, as an outsider to their community, both the community in the classroom and the local community, it is possible that there was nonverbal communication that went undetected and, therefore, was not noted.

Despite these limitations, this study has multiple strengths. First, the study was designed to take a much needed, in depth look at what is happening in the financial education classroom, particularly in light of the sociocultural perspectives that affect the teaching and learning taking place there. Through the class observations, the study offers insights regarding a variety of financial and adult education areas of concern, including pedagogy, curriculum, context, classroom interactions, and the learning environment. The case study design allowed for study of a variety of data types, and therefore strengthens findings and implications for further research. The study was also concerned specifically with Latina learners, enabling me to focus on sociocultural issues that are paramount for this group of learners. In addition, the study gave ample attention to the experiences of the learners, not merely the educators, therefore increasing my ability to understand the learning experiences from multiple perspectives.

Significance

As mentioned previously, there currently exists a scarcity of literature focusing on financial literacy and sociocultural and critical perspectives in adult education and financial literacy education literature, along with a need for more research informed by the transtheoretical model of change (TTM). This lack of research indicates the significance this study has for both adult education and financial education.

The findings of the study, fully discussed in Chapter Four, confirm what is known about the influence of sociocultural factors in the education setting and how learners and educators make meaning of the education and the educational process (Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005). This influence is seen in the holistic approach the program took in designing and targeting the needs of the learners, ensuring that the Latina learners were getting the most out of the program as possible. As mentioned previously, it was a combination program that attempted to help the

women become community leaders and so educated them in a variety of areas that are applicable to their lives as a whole. The financial education classes were a major part of the program, but it was the combination of the life skills classes, the career development classes, and the personal development classes that worked together to create a holistic approach.

In addition, the program offered the women support in the form of resources and access to resources, in the form of information, in the form of counseling services and guidance, and in the form of simple recognition of their value as Latina women in the community. This last was done partly through the use of Spanish for all classroom delivery. *Mujeres Fuertes* enhanced this programmatic support through the creation of a community of support within the cohort program, so that the women were helping each other along in the process of learning and making changes, offering each other advice and wisdom gained from their own experiences and the experiences of their friends and relatives. The women became for each other a supportive family.

Focusing more specifically on the financial education part of the program the findings reveal that this supportive system of *Mujeres Fuertes* was reflected in the pedagogical approach, an offshoot of the approach taken by the program as a whole. While the educators worked very hard to deliver the financial content for the learners, they also delivered it in a way that recognized the backgrounds of the learners, tailoring the content to fit their exact needs. The educators used stories from their own personal experiences, both as individuals and as Latinas, which then encouraged the learners to use their stories as well. As mentioned, these stories were a source of information for building connections between the learners (Gay, 2010; Tyler, 2009; Worthman, 2008), adding another layer of knowledge and support to their experiences. The program and educators appeared to utilize the sociocultural factors most effectively in this situation, emphasizing ways to handle the effects of the male-dominated society through

educational opportunities and tools the women could use to empower themselves. It is through these findings that evidence of some parts of critical pedagogy are demonstrated, discussed fully in Chapter Five.

This study also informs the work that has been done on behavior change and financial education (Spader et al., 2009; Xiao, et al; 2004a, 2004b), explored in detail in Chapter Two. The findings indicate that the changes the women are making are encouraged through the educational focus and support that is offered by the program and educators. The behavior change model used for this study, TTM, posits that the raising the awareness of learners about their feelings associated with emotions about money, self-esteem, and social responsibility are some of the ways to encourage the forward progress of learners through the stages of behavior change toward better financial management. Mujeres Fuertes accesses these same feelings in the learners, and therefore contributes to this knowledge about behavior change.

The use of the case study research design to explore and understand the financial education setting at Mujeres Fuertes provides a unique picture of what is happening in a financial education program. Class and pedagogical observations are largely unheard of in the financial education literature, so this study is especially informative. In addition, using case study allows for a full picture of the program, from the administration and development of the program to the classroom interactions, from the curriculum to the building and equipment, from the philosophy of the educators to the thoughts of the learners as communicated to me. In addition, the experiences of Latina learners in adult education have not been adequately explored, and this study informs our knowledge of education with this group and how their experiences as Latinas might affect their ways of making meaning. All of this informs our understanding of adult financial education and the experiences of these Latina learners.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, the background of the problems in financial education being addressed by the study, a purpose statement, an overview of the theoretical framework that guides the research, and an overview of the research methodology. This chapter also includes definition of key terms, assumptions underlying the research, limitations and strengths of the study, and a statement of the study's significance.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth discussion of the literature pertaining to the study. This discussion includes a review of the literature associated with the theoretical framework of sociocultural, critical, and Latina feminist perspectives, with attention to behavior change through the transtheoretical model. The chapter also reviews the relevant literature on Latino experiences in education, as well as the Latina perspective in the U.S. Also reviewed is the financial education research literature and the relevant literature from adult education that utilizes sociocultural perspectives as a framework.

Chapter Three explains the research methodology. This chapter includes the rationale for choosing qualitative research and, then, the reasons for the case study design. It includes information on my background, selection of the case and participants, data collection and analysis, and, finally, the verification procedures used.

Chapter Four is the presentation of the findings, including the class observations, interviews, and analysis of documents. Chapter Five comprises a brief review of the major issues under examination, followed by a discussion of the findings with respect to the theoretical framework and the current literature in financial and adult education. Implications for practice and further research are suggested. Final reflections on the research process are included.

Summary

This introductory chapter has served to introduce the concepts that were under examination in the study, and the topics that will be explored in detail in the remaining chapters. It included an overview of the background of the problem, a statement of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the study. Also included is a summary of the theoretical framework, an overview of the relevant literature, key definitions, assumptions, and strengths and limitations. Also included was a summary of the findings that indicate significance of the study. Chapter Two is a detailed summary of the literature relevant to this study.

Definitions of Terms

In order to fully understand the research at hand, it is important to be aware of the ways in which I conceived of some of the more important concepts and terms. For this reason, the following is a list of these terms with definitions that might be helpful for the reader.

1. **Financial literacy** is the ability to read, analyze, manage, and communicate about the personal financial conditions that affect material well-being. Financial literacy includes the ability to discern financial choices, discuss money and financial issues without (or despite) discomfort, plan for the future, and respond competently to life events that affect everyday financial decisions, including events in the general economy (Stone, 2004; Vitt, 2000)
2. **Financial education** or **financial literacy education** is education in financial issues. It is used interchangeably with financial literacy education throughout the study.
3. **A financial education program** is an organization that provides financial education. This can occur in a school, church, community center, work place, etc.
4. **A critical perspective** is the teaching perspective of the educator that involves exposure

for the learners to ideas that confront the power of social and economic institutions in American society.

5. **A case study** is “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 108), in this case a financial literacy program.
6. **Culture** is the “shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language use within a social group. These cultural values and beliefs and practices are at the core of group life and identity and are powerful factors that shape or influence individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” (Guy, 1999, p. 7).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the teaching and learning that takes place in an adult Latino financial literacy education setting specifically from the perspectives of the teachers and learners. This chapter will provide an in depth exploration of the theoretical framework of this study as well as a literature review of relevant research in adult and adult financial literacy education. It is divided into four main sections and will begin with the theoretical framework that highlights the importance of viewing learning and education using sociocultural perspectives, including critical, feminist, and Latino perspectives. The discussion of the theoretical framework also includes an explanation of the transtheoretical model of behavior change, typically used in health behavior literature, but also used with some success in financial education programs and for targeting potential changes in financial behaviors. The second section will then illustrate the current state of financial education in the U.S., by examining the assumptions and definitions of financial literacy underlying the creation of and practice in financial education programs, whereas the third section examines the research based literature on financial education. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of relevant research and literature in adult education related to culturally responsive education.

Theoretical Framework

The upcoming section will explain the theoretical framework for the study. This framework includes sociocultural, critical, feminist, and Latina feminist perspectives. In addition, the discussion will address the transtheoretical model of behavior change.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Learning and Behavior Change

This study exists within the framework of sociocultural perspectives that emphasize social change within adult learning theory, including critical, feminist, and Latino perspectives, as applied to behavior change. Sociocultural perspectives allow for exploration into the sociocultural factors that affect teaching and learning in any setting.

One of the most prominent theorists associated with sociocultural theory is Vygotsky, whose ideas, from the 1930s, although focusing on school aged children, took into account the context in which learning took place, later contributing to the development of constructivist theories in education (Jaramillo, 1996). His Marxist bent, like other critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, led him to explore the influence of outside factors in the oppression and marginalization of groups of people. Specifically, Vygotsky argued that “social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world” (p. 135). In addition, he (1962) posits that not only do social factors influence learning and the ways in which meaning is made, in fact, it is not possible to divorce one from the other. Interestingly, like other critical theorists of his time, Vygotsky (1978) uses the term “tools” to refer to those social factors that impact this cognitive processing, implying the usefulness of these factors. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005), writing more recently and from an educational perspective, argue that “these cultural tools and practices...are always implicated in how one thinks and develops” (p. 18). Today, this aspect of Vygotsky’s work translates into education through sociocultural perspectives on learning that consider the impact of a variety of factors on individuals’ lives. While not citing Vygotsky’s work, Tejeda and Gutierrez (2005) confirm his ideas in their article on decolonizing perspectives and pedagogies with Latino learners. They state, “sociocultural theory recognizes the fundamentally relational nature of teaching and learning, the microgenetic, sociohistorical,

and cultural planes of human activity, and the centrality of culture in human development” (p. 286). They also point out the advantages of “conceptualizing teaching and learning as fundamentally situated and socially mediated forces,” which assists educators in grounding their educational practice in the “present and past realities of teachers and students” (p. 287).

Within the field of adult education, these ideas about sociocultural influences on an individual’s life have developed into the areas of situated learning and cognition, context-based learning, and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), among others, specific areas of study that focus on different aspects of learning and meaning making. For example, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory focuses on the social aspects of language, relational interactions, and media and their impact on learning. Niewolny and Wilson (2009), in their critical review of two sociocultural theories in adult education, situated cognition and CHAT, confirm the utility of these theories, but question their lack of critical perspectives and the lack of acknowledgement of power as it plays out in the sociocultural environment of learning. In addition, sociocultural theories, because of the wide range of possible factors that can influence a person’s life as well as the interrelated nature of the sociocultural factors, are often specialized by the influencing factor itself, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, or sexual orientation. Other sociocultural theories include feminist theories, utilizing gender as a lens to view structural inequalities as it intersects with culture; queer theory, utilizing sexual orientation as a focus; and critical perspectives in education, utilizing a more economic and political lens to identify the same kinds of marginalizing inequalities.

This theoretical framework discussion of sociocultural learning and behavioral change will be divided into three primary areas. It will begin with a consideration of critical and feminist perspectives generally. The second section will review the theoretical literature that is most

related to Latinos in adult and higher education. These perspectives emphasize the importance of social change; however they are not always specific in how change occurs at the individual level. Thus, the study is also informed by the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska, 1996; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001), which constitutes the third section of this discussion of the theoretical framework. This addition of the model of behavior change will allow for analysis of the potential changes in the financial management behavior of the learners participating in the financial education programs in the study and how the financial educators might motivate and encourage the learners at the different stages of change.

Critical and Feminist Perspectives in Adult Education

Critical perspectives in adult education focus on issues related to power and privilege in the educational process. Such perspectives, grounded in critical and feminist theory and pedagogy, are appropriate to an exploration of financial literacy education due to their interest in power relations related to economic or class issues. Some critical and feminist perspectives also deal with gender, race, culture, or sexual orientation issues, as well. Critical perspectives, collectively, offer educators and researchers a frame of reference for identifying ways in which economic class, and other issues of social positionality of individuals, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, affect their learning. These perspectives see the structures created by economic interests in a society as having the power to oppress groups within society because of their economic value or lack thereof. However, there is also hope for change reflected in the writings of critical theorists such as Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1971), who was imprisoned and died in 1937, reflected on the role of intellectuals and organic intellectuals in society in his reflections from prison, later published. Gramsci (1971) writes:

Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a “philosopher”, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (p. 3)

Gramsci argues that everyone can be an intellectual, particularly by reflecting on hegemonic forces, and can contribute his or her own unique view on society to create something new, whether or not he or she holds a position of power. Elliot (2003) points out that Gramsci exposes a “concern to establish the reliance of progressive social movements on an intellectual cadre” (p. 414), which marginalizes the capacity of individuals who are not members of this traditionally conceived intellectual group.

Critical perspectives in education, then, ask educators to critique these kinds of social structures of society and include an awareness of them in their educational efforts. From a critical perspective, implicit in this argument is an understanding that being a good educator or citizen does not have to follow rules of “consensus, acceptance or conformity with majority or, rather, hegemonic ways of thinking and behaving” (Newman, 1994, p. 25). As Hart (1990) explains,

educators need to understand the social or nonindividual causes of the distortions they are attempting to correct, not only because they want to be successful, and because as members of society they are drawn into the very same force field of power as their students, but also because power enters the interactional structure of the educational situation itself. (p. 126)

It can, therefore, appear to be imperative that educators attempt to improve their own awareness of the powers in society and to expose their learners to those ideas. With this knowledge in hand, people can make informed judgments about their own lives and the forces that act upon them. More specifically, as Welton (1995) indicates,

in an unjust and unfree society, men, women, and children will be socialized across the life span to systematically misunderstand their identity, needs, what constitutes happiness, what is good and of value, how one should act in one's relations with others to achieve these things. (p. 12)

Critical perspectives in adult education emphasize that having knowledge or learning how social structures work, can potentially allow individuals not only to explore how they have been affected by oppressive social forces, but, potentially can encourage individuals to take action on their own or on others' behalf.

As a person becomes more aware of these social structures and social forces, he or she moves "towards self-knowledge, self-mastery and thus liberation" (Gramsci, 1988, p. 54), repeating the concept of the organic intellectual. Bell hooks (2003), in picking up on these ideas and in discussing their relevance to education suggests that educators who make these processes vivid are engaging in education as "the practice of freedom rather than the maintenance of existing structures of domination" (p. 46). Note that the words "liberation" and "freedom" are prevalent in these descriptions of learning under critical perspectives, implying a change or transformation in the way in which a person views the structures of the world around him or her and how they act to influence his or her life. Both words also imply some degree of claiming power gained through this understanding. Without a critical view of the world that makes apparent how social structures work, people can be stuck within the structures over which they

have little to no control, and which can have an immense amount of control over their lives. Not only does a critical lens help people to see the structures in society, but it also assists them in seeing ways in which they might counter those forces, or to take more control over their lives.

Newman (2006) explains that educators must “help learners achieve this kind of consciousness so that they can examine and, where they deem it necessary, change their assumptions and values and adopt new ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (p. 65). While some of the structures seem gigantic and so very ingrained into modern culture when compared to daily concerns, in fact, the only way to begin social action on any level is to become aware of the forces that act to create oppression. The first step lies in the ability to view individual lives within the larger structures, values, and beliefs of local, regional, national, and global institutions. Although critical perspectives have often been critiqued for their identification of problems without providing concrete solutions, critical perspectives have been applied in the classroom through critical pedagogies, which will be discussed in later sections.

Critical adult educators are interested in challenging the status quo as it relates to social structures and the dominant culture and institutions that oppress less advantaged groups, typically the working class and those living in poverty (Brookfield, 2005). And, this kind of work “can be deemed effective to the extent that it keeps alive the hope that the world can be changed to make it fairer and more compassionate” (p. 9). In addition, in a discussion of the racialization, adult education, and African American populations, Brookfield (2003) addresses the possibility of adult educators being conceived as organic intellectuals, “where they are grounded in the experiences and struggles” of the community, “while being informed by the wisdom of allies outside” (p. 162). Critical adult educators are also interested in social action to change the existing societal structures. In summarizing some of this work Elias and Merriam

(2005) note that while classic Marxists would critique the educational system for serving the interests of the dominant ideology, other educators and theorists within this tradition believe that it is possible to utilize education for enlightenment, for finding ways to “produce the free and autonomous person through a revolutionary change” (p. 149). On one end of the spectrum of activist educators are those who embody the anarchist tradition, such as Illich and Ohliger, who argue against any state-sponsored or generalized course of education. Others, like those discussed in the following sections, are considered more moderate in their views, seeing education as one possible road to freedom from some of the oppressive forces in society. As Newman (2006), known for his social activist, critical approach to education, states that

our job is to help people become truly conscious, understand the different worlds we live in, and develop a morality in the face of the evident amorality of our universe. It is to teach people how to make up their own minds, and how to take control of the moment. It is to teach choice. It is to help ourselves and others break free from our pasts, plan for the futures we want and resist the futures we do not want. (p. 10)

Newman sees that the educator has a responsibility to the learners in helping them develop, not just within the content area of a course, but within their lives, in broadening their views of the world. He expresses taking control of one’s own life in an emancipatory way, seeing the learners as freed from oppressive or marginalizing factors. Tisdell (1998), in discussing this from a more explicitly feminist perspective, also suggests that educators should implement a pedagogy that considers the intersectionality of all of the factors that might serve to marginalize individuals, such as race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. All of these factors are taken into account in the work of Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy and emancipatory education. Critical pedagogy as a concept encompasses “how teachers can help adult learners realize and confront the controlling power of dominant ideology” or galvanize learners’ “oppositional consciousness” resulting in social action (Brookfield, 2005, pp. 320-321). The most well known educator from this school of thought, known primarily as critical pedagogy, is Paulo Freire (1971), a Brazilian educator, interested in literacy issues. His life’s work began when his middle class family descended from its comfortable position into poverty. His own boyhood experience with hunger made him want to find ways to eradicate this painful occurrence for other Brazilians (Horton & Freire, 1990). He developed his literacy program to take advantage of the knowledge that the learners already possessed, to help them claim their own power, to find their own voices in the midst of the seemingly overwhelming din of power attempting to suppress them. For Freire, life was a process, a river flowing, whose direction could be changed by tossing a rock or two into the flow. His literacy program would serve as a boulder for his students.

There is a better world to be had in Freire’s educational theory, one of “cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis” through radical action (Lloyd, 1972, p. 7). Freire believed that people are unfinished and have a goal in life, which was to connect with their own humanness toward completeness. It was only possible to make this connection and move toward completion through understanding one’s life and the forces that act upon it. One must also have recognized one’s own power to act to change and/or fix it. Aside from these ideas, the main tenet of Freire’s work is that critical thinking is the key to human freedom, which is not given, but can be acquired. “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1971, p. 29).

Freire's (1971) critical perspective of education differs from more traditional ways of educating and is best illustrated using his own discussion. He compares his own problem-posing education to the traditional banking education, in which the teachers deposit information into the students' heads. Students have no autonomy and are not encouraged to gain it. Freire (1971) posits that "those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety...and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world...Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (p. 60). Relating the content to the real world in which the learners live is a hallmark of Freirian education. In fact, his literacy program is constructed only after the analysis of the students' world takes place. Only then does the educator have the tools to create the program. Returning to this idea of acts of cognition, it can be summed up in the Portuguese word, *conscientization*, which can be interpreted as a critical consciousness or awareness, obtained in social interaction and reflection. In this process of reflection and critique, "people become aware of the contradictions in the social structures and situations in which they live" (Lloyd, 1972, p. 5), thus leading to social change.

These ideas have echoed across the world in the field of adult education in the practical application of these emancipatory concepts. At the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, Myles Horton, another giant in adult education, and Friere, met to discuss their similar views on educating adults, two decades after the original publication of Freire's (1971) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. While the men grew up in different countries, their ideas come together "through their interaction with the social context and their involvement with broader popular struggles for participation and freedom" (Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990, p. xxiii). Like Freire's literacy program, Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee

determined the course of study only after analyzing the needs of the students in dialogue with them, and that is only for some programs, like literacy in the Citizenship Schools. For other gatherings of social activists, the learners determined the program of study. The educators became students, and everyone traveled together on the road of learning, hence the title of their talking book, *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990). There were no experts, although guidance was provided in the form of experienced speakers, but the process of learning involved problem identification and solving, all done by the students themselves. The educators at Highlander helped the learners see that they already knew things and, when working with other social activists, together they could solve their problems. Horton continues this idea: “you don’t need to know the answer. You can help people get the answers... You have to respect their knowledge, which they don’t respect, and help them to respect their knowledge” (p. 55).

So, two of the most influential adult educators of modern times, though both now deceased, were interested in talking to the students and helping them to solve their problems themselves, using the community of people around them as a resource. In the process, they found that learners came closer to connecting with other people and critically analyzing the political, economic, and social forces that have an impact on their lives, both locally and globally, in effect, making social change happen. Both Freire and Horton believe it is the responsibility as educators to create and support this kind of change or transformation.

Aside from the work at Highlander, many educational theorists in the U.S. have applied Freire’s work in an effort to translate this pedagogy into social change action. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003), McLaren and Lankshear (1994), Giroux (2003, 2004), Shor (1987, 1992), and Brookfield (2001, 2002, 2005) are all informed by Freire’s (1971) groundbreaking work. Brookfield (2005) gives voice to the concepts and application of critical theory and its

application to the classroom, which often occurs in the form of critical pedagogy. Concerns about giving voice to marginalized individuals, inclusiveness, problem-posing education, and democratic communication have all been addressed by these American educators (Brookfield, 2005). Welton (2002) discusses the importance of listening combined with critical reflection as a pedagogical key to teaching critical thinking about the world and thus improving citizenship. Foley (2001), in a conceptual article on radical education, makes recommendations to educators, such as “immersing themselves in the social reality and culture of learners” (p. 79) in an effort to understand how the learners make meaning and to develop the content around these understandings. In an article dealing with critical pedagogy, Kaufmann (2000) discusses the importance of voice in the process of creating a counter-hegemonic pedagogy. A later article by Kaufmann (2010) demonstrates this concept in action through her experiences as an educator utilizing dialogue in critical pedagogy, as described by Freire’s (1971) early work. Empirical studies demonstrating these recommendations in action will be discussed in the later adult education research section.

From reading the above discussion, it might be difficult to counter this kind of education, since, as educators, most would want to present themselves as assisting their learners to find their own power, helping them find their own solutions. In effect, this kind of education would, as Hart (1990) points out, address “forms of education which are liberating rather than merely adjusting, and which point to new possibilities for thought and action rather than fixate the learner to the status quo” (p. 125). However, there are, in fact, some limitations to this pedagogical practice. Brookfield (2005) delineates some of them and points out that it would be “naïveté” to assume that “teachers can work unproblematically for the emancipation of learners, particularly adult learners whom these teachers view as peers” (p. 320), particularly since the

traditional roles of teacher and student are not typically collegial. Ellsworth (1989) further points out that part of critical pedagogy involves raising awareness or consciousness of the marginalizing effects of social structures, but without questioning what is not previously known. She wonders at the possibility of an individual in one position in society ever understanding the position of another individual, and then what that means in the classroom as all learners negotiate meaning. As she addresses the constantly shifting understandings, she acknowledges that “this situation meant that individuals and affinity groups constantly had to change strategies and priorities of resistance against oppressive ways of knowing and being known” (p. 322). She further argues that

the classroom is a site for complex interactions of power in which relationships of privilege and oppression around race, gender, and class are formed in unpredictable ways and that these relationships cannot be understood through universal theories about structures of power and oppression. (Imel, 1999, p. 3)

A further consideration in this kind of teaching environment is the effect of the educator’s own positionality, including his or her own race, gender, class, and sexual orientation might have on the openness and security felt by the learners. In addition, there is an argument that this pedagogy can serve to alienate learners, most often by recognizing the marginalized groups, but not acknowledging the experiences of those in the dominant culture. As Choules (2007) argues, “when working with the dominant social group, or those who benefit from existing inequitable systems, the social change vision may well not be shared. Realization of the vision may well threaten students’ status, power, and wealth” (p. 161). Therefore, it would seem that critical pedagogy alone is perhaps not for every teacher in every situation, but that a critical perspective could benefit both the educators and learners.

Feminist and race based perspectives. Some sociocultural perspectives focus more on gender and race, and the ways they intersect, than critical pedagogy does. Like other critical perspectives, feminist perspectives, which focus on gender and its structural influences, while also encompassing race and class, contribute to the critical framework of this study. As with critical perspectives, feminist perspectives focus on addressing the inequalities that exist in society due to beliefs and structures that serve to marginalize or oppress groups of people. Feminist perspectives in education address issues of power inside and outside of the classroom. This perspective explores the ways in which the position of gender can affect learning and the ways in which gender interacts with other positionalities in the lives of learners (Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 1998). Just as with critical perspectives there is an underlying assumption that education or knowledge about socially constructed roles and positions in society, along with its oppressive power, will lead to a broader worldview and social action to resist or change them. Feminist perspectives will be explored more fully in later sections that deal specifically with Latina feminist issues.

Clearly, positionality figures heavily into the way this theory plays out in the classroom, as mentioned previously. Instead of focusing only on the positionality of the students, however, the educator's is also seen as affecting the learning process. This might seem like common sense, that the way the educator lives and learns is going to affect what happens in the classroom. However, it is not often considered from a perspective of positionality. Therefore, the educator using this pedagogy will find it necessary to reflect on how their positionality affects learning, beginning with the possible effects of gender on learning and experience. Emotions and affective learning can be recognized as valid, and as an important way to process and learn about the important issues being addressed in class. As Clover (2007) asserts, "paying attention to the

aesthetic dimension of politically-oriented pedagogies can add to knowledge and understandings of community development and social learning theory and practice” (p. 513) and allows for “making connections between oppression and culture” (p. 515). In this way, the educator is guiding these explorations, while the students come along for the journey, following their instructor, possibly to the edge of the cliff of critical awareness.

Another important contributory piece of the adult learning process that some feminists in adult education have addressed is the sense of community and interaction, particularly significant in critical adult education leading to social change. For example, English (2006) discusses the “relational view of learning that acknowledges the social and power dimensions of learning in community,” emphasizing the learning that is “embedded in the group’s collective history and its ongoing relationships” (p. 86). A look at early feminist consciousness-raising groups reinforces this idea of collective relationships and building community,

in which women discuss and search for similarities among personal experiences...then utilize this knowledge of commonalities to develop an understanding of power relations...and of the role structures and socialization processes which maintain these power relations. (Weitz, 1982, p. 231)

These ideas are especially consequential to sociocultural perspectives in adult education, which considers the background and experiences of the learners.

There are a number of critical discourses in adult education that focus more specifically on power relations based on race (Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 2005), including Africentrism (Colin & Guy, 1998), womanism and Black feminist thought which focus on the intersection of race with gender and class (Sheared, 1994, 1999), culturally relevant education (Guy, 1999), and critical race theory (Closson, 2010; Peterson, 1999). These race-based critical

perspectives developed from a need to question and critique the dominant themes about race in education and how education can be used to keep people of color in subordinate positions in society.

Accordingly, critical race theory, which has developed in more recent years, has five main tenets, beginning with a recognition of the ever-present existence and influence of race and racism in education and research in education, and including a commitment to social justice through challenging the dominant ideologies regarding culture, intelligence, language, and capability (Closson, 2010; Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002). Critical race theory also informs this study through its focus on the experiential knowledge of learners as marginalized individuals and as contributing these experiences to the critical learning process. As Closson (2010) points out, using critical race theory in education leads to educators and researchers seeing themselves as “involved in transformation of the current inequitable educational system to one that contributes to the success of all people of color” (p. 5). This community of learning, then, acknowledges the racial issues in education and society and utilizes them for greater learning.

Another significant aspect of critical race theory in adult education that is particularly relevant to this research is the use of experiential knowledge of the learners. The importance of the history of the learners and that of other members of their races brings in a multitude of sociocultural factors into a discussion of ways of making meaning and learning. Critical race theorists, clearly, discuss the impact of race on knowledge creation and a “renewed appreciation for the value of nondominant people’s experiential knowledge” (Closson, 2010, p. 10), therefore challenging the typical deficit thinking in educational circles. One way this idea manifests itself

is in the use of counter stories, which will be discussed in the following section on Latinos and learning.

Of course, as noted previously, it is unwise to think that emancipatory education would take place without conflict, since teaching that anticipates conflict can be problematic. English (2005) confirms this view and calls this process “making difficulties,” or helping learners to “surface the complexities” (p. 85). In this, the educator has the ultimate responsibility for constructing a productive, open environment and in ways that “are politically astute and life giving” (p. 86) with regard to culture and “boundaries of difference, identity, language, and nationality in challenging, political environments” (p. 88). According to Giroux (2003), this kind of education requires “forms of education capable of expanding the meaning of critical citizenship and the relations of democratic public life” (p. 9). These issues surrounding feminism and positionality are expanded below with an exploration of their application to Latino populations

Latinos and Education

Literature on Latinos and adult education is scarce. There is a wider body of literature about Latinos in general and in the broader education area, as well as a discussion of Latino critical race theory, better known as LatCrit (Stefancic, 1997), and a wide body of literature on Latinos in education. Thus, for purposes of organization, the discussion begins with an explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of LatCrit. Next, I will consider the pluralities of Latino communities in the US. Then, I will move on to the general education on Latinos, and close with an examination of the theoretical literature on Latinas.

LatCrit and its theoretical underpinnings. LatCrit uses “race as a lens and language through which to assess the Latino/a experience” (Haney Lopez, 1998, pp. 57-58), despite the

acknowledged problematic nature of creating a consensus for calling the various Latino groups as one race. Creating a racial category has structural and possibly marginalizing implications both legally and socially in society. However, it is important to recognize that the use of race in LatCrit as a perspective from which to view the world is a question of “Latino/a identity” (p. 62), which enables individuals of disparate backgrounds to call attention to their shared experiences as an oppressed group. The focus of the five main tenets of LatCrit is on Latinos and education: a) race and racism are endemic and there is an undeniable intersectionality with other forms of marginalization; (b) challenging the dominant ideology is central; (c) social justice is paramount; (d) experiential knowledge is crucial; and (e) LatCrit is interdisciplinary (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). One of the strengths of LatCrit is its normalization of racism, which then allows for the use of different strategies, “strategies targeting conditions of our society,” (Closson, 2010, p. 8) instead of focusing on isolated instances of racism. In addition, in the search for social justice, there is an attempt to “explain the *persistence* of racism despite the considerable efforts in past decades to eradicate it” (p. 17). Another advantage to the use of LatCrit and critical race theory is the intersectionality, or rather, the inclusivity of all forms of oppression, that contribute to race-related issues. Solorzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005) address this point in their discussion of Latinos and general educational inequities when they grapple with the large number of variables that must be considered in the experiences of learners of color, clearly bringing in the many sociocultural influences on learners.

Critical race theory, like with other critical perspectives, insists on the educator’s recognition of his or her power to “oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3), in this case, acknowledging the shifting power relationships between educators and their Latino learners. This concept is

particularly significant for those educators who are in traditionally held positions of power in society, such as White, middle-class individuals. LatCrit and critical race theory analysis, with its focus on race/ethnicity and its normal existence in society, searches for ways to restructure marginalizing systems in society and White privilege, including an examination of “seemingly race-neutral laws, policies, social structures, and histories that may continue to disadvantage persons of color” (Closson, 2010, p. 17). Counter-stories, using fictional, or “composite” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) characters, have been utilized as both a pedagogical tool and in literature as a way to demonstrate that the politically correct color-blindness in society actually hides the oppression still being experienced by people of color (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The plurality of Latino communities in the U.S. Prior to discussing Latino populations further, it is important to acknowledge the difficulty in categorizing individuals into racial or ethnic socially constructed categories. As Tejeda and Gutierrez (2005) remind their readers, “when difference is referenced with regards to people it usually refers to their juxtaposition on the basis of sexual, racial, cultural, and/or linguistic characteristic or features,” whether those differences are “actual” or merely “supposed” (p. 278). Aside from the practical aspects of identifying, for example, a person of mixed Asian, Black, and Hispanic as belonging to only one or to all of those groups, “conceptions of race have historically been one of the key factors in ensuring racial minorities' political and social exclusion from the public sphere in the United States” (Oboler, 1996, p. 291). Race and race relations have also been used as the reason for problems or issues in a community or country, while failing to take into account the full range of social factors that influence the same community (Torres & Ngin, 2005). Therefore, it is critical

to guard against using any categorization as further evidence of any group's "otherness" (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997), or difference from the White majority and White dominant culture.

In addition, it is equally problematic to identify all Spanish-speaking individuals in a community as Latinos, although language is a defining factor for all individuals, becoming "the necessary terrain on which Latinos negotiate value" and creating the medium through which all perception is filtered (Flores & Yudice, 1997, p. 178). In fact, in addition to recognizing its role in identity formation, it is important to acknowledge the marginalizing effects of language difference, since although "capitalist society does not cause racism any more than it does linguistic stratification; it does, however, make all these differences functional for the benefit of hegemonic groups" (p. 175). In addition, as defined by Martinez (1995), a person of mixed heritage, Latinos

combine, in varying degrees, indigenous (from pre-Columbian times), European (from Spain's invasion of the Americas), and African roots (from the millions of slaves brought to the Americas, including at least two hundred thousand to Mexico alone)...and whose background link them to some twenty countries. (p. 1019)

The experience of Cuban immigrants differs significantly from that of Puerto Ricans, both of which differ from those experiences for immigrants from Central American countries, such as El Salvador, or island nations, like the Dominican Republic. One example of this kind of difficulty comes from one of the most prominent Latina feminist writers is the late Gloria Anzaldúa, an educator and scholar in Chicano studies, who is Tejana, born and raised in Texas, but still identifying with her Hispanic heritage. In fact, Darder, Torres, and Gutierrez (1997) encourage educators to stay "away from the trap of static, monolithic, and essentialized notions of culture and Latino identity," rather insisting on the "multiplicity of social factors which shape

and structure identity formation both in terms of individual identity and a sense of collective consciousness” (p. xvi).

However, following Oboler’s (1996) call for a “much-needed unity in the struggle for social justice” (p. 310) among individuals of Hispanic origin, and reflecting Anzaldua’s (1987) call for taking a name to unite in the search for identity, individuals with a Hispanic background living in the U.S. and those whose first language or that of their parents is Spanish, are identified as Latinos or Latinas (Gonzalez & Gandara, 2005), with the exception of specific instances when the study participants self-identify as Hispanic. Indeed, this term will be used inclusively, as a way to recognize and understand the multiple and varied experiences of individuals who are Latinos Non-White (LNW), as well as recognizing the equally important intersections of race, gender, nationality, and culture (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997). In addition, appreciating that the gendered nature of the Spanish language, even the term “Latino,” ending in the masculine “o,” can be seen as marginalizing women, this study will use the inclusive “Latinos,” which signifies both men and women, or the term “*latinidad*,” signifying the experience of existing as Latinos. When referring to women only, for clarity, the study will use “Latina/as.”

Latinos and general education. There are many issues in the area of Latinos and general education that have been addressed in the literature. However, as discussed above, it is problematic to imply that the issues from one article or study, regarding one population, are applicable to other Latino populations. Acknowledging this difficulty, this discussion will attempt to illuminate some of the current areas of research and what is currently known about Latinos and education in general.

Academic achievement in K-12 education has long been an issue of concern for Latinos, particularly when compared with similar measures of academic success in Whites and children

of other races or ethnicities. Some success has been found in schools that use an “additive curriculum,” with education in the core academic subjects, but based on “students’ funds of knowledge, critical pedagogy, and a historical grounding...that links their own histories” and allows them to approach their lives with knowledge of the structural inequalities (De Jesus, 2005, p. 365). Teachers considered successful “use cultural knowledge and experiences to overcome some of the debilitating and negative messages of schools and society...these teachers encourage students to think critically and work actively for social justice” (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 185). This idea is confirmed repeatedly in the literature, that linking the learners’ background and culture together in the educational process is the key to overcoming poor academic performance. This idea is also reflected in the work of Levins Morales (1998), who suggests that her experience as an “organic intellectual,” similar to the previously mentioned idea of Gramsci, comes from creating “theory out of shared lives instead of sending away for it” (p. 67). Using Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of living on the “frontera,” or on the border between two worlds, discussed in more detail in upcoming sections, Munoz (1997) calls for “a pedagogy of la frontera, a pedagogy that engages many aspects of identity but especially connects Latina/Latino youths with their communities” (p. 54), and, therefore, with their cultural selves.

However, most schools do not incorporate these elements into their education. Stereotypes abound that account for poor Latino academic performance, naming behaviors of the families as responsible for their lack of success, in essence, blaming the victims. For example, parents are often blamed for not being interested in their children’s success at school, despite the cultural evidence that demonstrates the importance of family support for education in many Latino communities. Hidalgo (1997) points out that “Puerto Ricans share a collective identity in which the achievements of one member, such as a child, reflect on the family as a whole” (p. 20).

And, in fact, many Chicano educators believe that “educating Chicanos and Chicanas continues to be the sole means for rising up from the deplorably oppressive circumstances that have historically governed” the lives of many members of the Latino community (Mejia, 2004, p. 41).

These concerns over academic success have carried over into higher education research (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) have addressed the lack of Latino males attending institutions of higher education compared to Latinas, reinforced by Solorzano et al.’s (2005) findings that Latino males are more likely to leave high school prior to graduation and more likely to do the same in college in the interest of finding a job. Reasons for this migration away from education include negative experiences in their early education, including perceptions of Latinos and males of color of academic achievement as “acting White” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 60) and the difficulty in adjusting to changing social and personal challenges that might conflict with familial expectations (Zell, 2010).

In addition, in overall college or university graduation rates, Latino Americans have the lowest percentage, at 11%, compared with 17% for African Americans, 27% for White Americans, and 47% for Asian Americans (Liu et al., 2006). Latinos are also seen as “diserved” by an educational system that “does not acknowledge—much less honor—their unique cultural heritage and distinct ways of knowing about the world” (p. 61), in addition to the “structural barriers that discourage academic success” (p. 62). Research by De los Santos, Asgary, Nazemzadeh, and DeShields (2005) has shown increases in Latinos pursuing higher education, but the gap between Latinos and White and Black populations is widening. Studies have also demonstrated that Latinos experience racism on college campuses, creating an alienation that contributes to drop out rates (Lopez, 2005).

Solorzano et al. (2005), again using the term “race” as it is used with critical race theory in an attempt to acknowledge systematized discrimination of Latino populations, attribute these concerns to:

how race and racism are woven into the structures, practices, and policies of colleges and universities...how in practice, higher education adopts practices, norms, and policies that clearly inhibit the success of Latinas/os and other students of color. (p. 287)

This is despite the role the Latino students can play in the classrooms as providers of alternative perspectives and sources of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). These experiences of Latino learners in the educational system in the U.S. illustrate the ways in which people of color are “pushed out or alienated” (Reyes & Rios, 2005), creating not only a stronger sense of solidarity among Latinos (Lopez, 2005), but also a feeling of being outside of the dominant structures and institutions in this country. This place, often referred to as the “borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990) or of being from “the land in the middle” (Ortega, 2004), is this experience of “othering” while living in the world formed and defined by the dominant culture (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997) that can be significant in an educational setting and to the learners’ meaning making.

The long-term financial implications of this difficulty in achieving academic success in a society that highly values this kind of outcome are not always immediately apparent, but can be hypothesized as highly deleterious. Evidence from income levels, homeownership levels, retirement savings, and net worth measures indicate that, overall, Latino groups continue to struggle financially in America. Of course, not all members of this category of people experiences difficulty in their financial lives, but the numbers, when compared with other population groups, indicate that a majority of Latinos are not finding financial well being easy to achieve. For example, mean retirement pensions in 2001 for Latinos stood at \$10,184, compared

with \$65,268 for White American, while mean income for Latinos in 2001 was \$44,268, while it was \$73,012 for Whites (Lui et al., 2006). To be sure, there are many factors that can affect income levels, savings, homeownership rates, and other measurements of financial health, but educational attainment is clearly one of them. As pointed out by Darder, Torres, and Gutierrez (1997) in their book about Latinos and education,

schooling is widely upheld as the promise of upward social mobility, individual privileges, economic opportunities, intellectual development, and personal satisfaction. Education is consistently promulgated as the vehicle for social and material success... what we have here are blatant contradictions which have often served to obscure the problems faced by Latino students and the best solutions for addressing these problems. (p. xii)

The Latina perspective. Latinas, as women, have discussed their own positionality by adding the lens of race and/or ethnicity to the feminist perspective. Acknowledging the fact that all of these cultural influences intersect and interact with respect to an individual's position in society is an important concept to understand. These are not just women, but Latina women, whose experiences differ in significant ways from that of a Black woman, an Asian woman, or a White woman, partly due to their positionality and the sociocultural influences in their lives. Using this literature from the Latina feminist perspective adds valuable insight for this study, in that it clearly informs the understanding of the intersectionality of the experiences of these individuals and learners and, thus, the ways in which women with similar backgrounds might make meaning of the teaching and learning in financial literacy education setting.

One of the most important themes that emerges from this Latina feminist literature is the recurrence of the degree to which Latinos, particularly women, feel a sense of not belonging to

any one group, but of traveling between different identities (Anzaldua, 1987, 1990; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Ortega, 2004), a “displaced person with no real culture or homeland” (Abalos, 2007, p. 52), and living in the “borderlands” (Anzaldua, 1987, 1990). Identifying a homeland or other “place” of their own carries over into the area of self-identity. Latina literature focuses much attention on the need for identity, and sees it as “the basis for living and for life, is the basis for the struggle for selfhood” (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 41), since not identifying a group “constitutes including them by omission” (p. 42), making them irrelevant, or worse, non-existent. At the same time, there is a contradiction in identifying as one group, since “no single representational term has the power to portray a community as internally diverse and complex” as the Latino community (Guerra, 2004, p. 8).

There has been extensive literature about this issue of identifying Latina women as belonging to a single group, creating a space to occupy that might be outside of other groups, but is, at least, inside one group. However, while calling for naming, so that individuals are not ignored, Anzaldua, in a speech in 1992 (Keating, 2009), explained that “we stress that Others can’t be lumped together, our issues collapsed, our differences erased,” and that no group should “let our histories, stories, and theories be appropriated, made invisible, or turned against ourselves” (pp. 203-204). She believed that the crisis of identity is purposeful, created by the White hegemonic culture that wishes to maintain the status quo of power, making other groups feel like they “don’t fit. We are alienated. We are exiled” (p. 206). Underlying all of these issues of identity and homeland are the political, economic, and social powers associated with each of the possible identifications that Anzaldua mentions, and then, by extension, the educational opportunities offered under each categorization.

A second theme that can impact teaching and learning is the experience of Latinas in the traditionally male-dominated culture, wherein the men make the decisions about money, family, education, and about the roles of the women as wives, daughters, and mothers. These issues were explored in detail, but from a masculine perspective in Hurtado and Sinha's (2008) study of male Latinos who identify as feminists and the intersectionality of gender and culture. The study calls attention to the privileged characteristics of social identities and how they "interact in ways that exclude specific groups of men from systems of privilege on the basis of devalued group memberships" (p. 337). In the lives of the men who appeared to have feminist sensibilities, their actions caused them to be devalued by individuals within their own gender. If they had followed the more traditionally accepted familial and cultural behavior of men in Latino society, including keeping women in "a state of suspended dependence," but in a way that "was blessed by the culture" (Abalos, 2007, p. 81), they might have found more acceptance.

In Abalos' (2005) interpretation, the Latino family structure is dependent on men who "fulfill their masculinity by cultivating and securing a safe haven for loved ones," while at the same time, these "fixed sexual roles in the family have made the family dependent upon the economic potential of the father" (p. 82). It must be made clear, here, that this pattern of familial construction is not limited to Latinos, but exists all over the world in traditionally-built family units. However, the recurring theme in Latino literature brings it to the forefront of this discussion. It is also significant to note that, according to Abalos, Latinos are experiencing some shifts in roles within the family structure, with the women taking more of a role in providing for the family and in the decision-making process. Abalos argues that the same relationship exists, however, between men and women, pulling at and attempting to influence both the men and women as they struggle to define their new roles. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of this

transition, significant to this study is the fact that family relationships and gender roles still have a strong impact on the lives of the individuals involved.

From this exploration of sociocultural perspectives, critical perspectives, feminist perspectives, and these same perspectives associated with Latinos in education and adult education, it is clear that acknowledging the importance of sociocultural aspects in learning cannot be denied. In fact, it only assists educational efforts to recognize the impact these aspects have on the life circumstances and structures that surround the learners, as well as on their experiences in the classroom. In the section that follows, the discussion turns to the practical implications of changes and how the learning might result in individual changes.

Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change

These perspectives above offer much critique of the structural factors that can influence and negatively affect an individual's life in the U.S. However, there are not often many solutions suggested for how to make the actual desired change (Brookfield, 2005), or some of the solutions do not feel very "empowering" to all constituents (Ellsworth, 1989). Following from this lack of solutions is a lack of research into how and why individuals might make the desired changes. Therefore, this study is also informed by work that has been done using the transtheoretical model of behavior change (TTM), which offers insight into elements that are necessary for change to take place.

Originating in health behavior change, specifically in smoking cessation programs and processes (Prochaska, 1996; Prochaska & DiClementi, 1983; Prochaska, DiClementi, & Norcross, 1992), TTM offers a view into the processes individuals must go through in order to make actual and measurable changes in their behavior. This stage process has been found to be effective in stopping addictive behaviors by identifying each individual's stage in the process of

changing and then tailoring the program to fit the needs of the individual. This process has since been applied to other addictive behaviors, such as over eating and eating unhealthy foods, as well as to positive behaviors, like exercise, use of condoms, and use of sunscreen (Prochaska, Velicer, Rossi, Goldstein, Marcus, Rakowski, Fiore, Harlow, Redding, Rosenbloom, & Rossi, 1994).

There are five stages in the process: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Pre-contemplation is the stage at which an individual has no plans to make changes within the next six months and can be “defensive and resistant...and demoralized by previous failures.” Contemplation is the stage at which individuals are planning to make changes within the next six months and are “aware of the benefits of changing,” although they may remain in this stage for years. The preparation stage finds individuals ready to participate, ready to make personal changes within the next month, and are considered “motivated.” It is at the action stage where individuals modify their behavior and work the hardest, needing at least six months of hard work to make the change permanent. The maintenance stage takes place after about six months, still working hard to change their behavior, but not needing to work as hard as before. The duration of the maintenance stage depends on the individual, whose “unhealthy habits” might be eradicated completely or need continued efforts to avoid (Prochaska, 1996, p. 722-723). It is important to note that while first conceived as a linear progression through changes, in fact, change often takes place in a spiral fashion, indicting the return of undesirable behaviors, then moving in a positive direction again over time (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992).

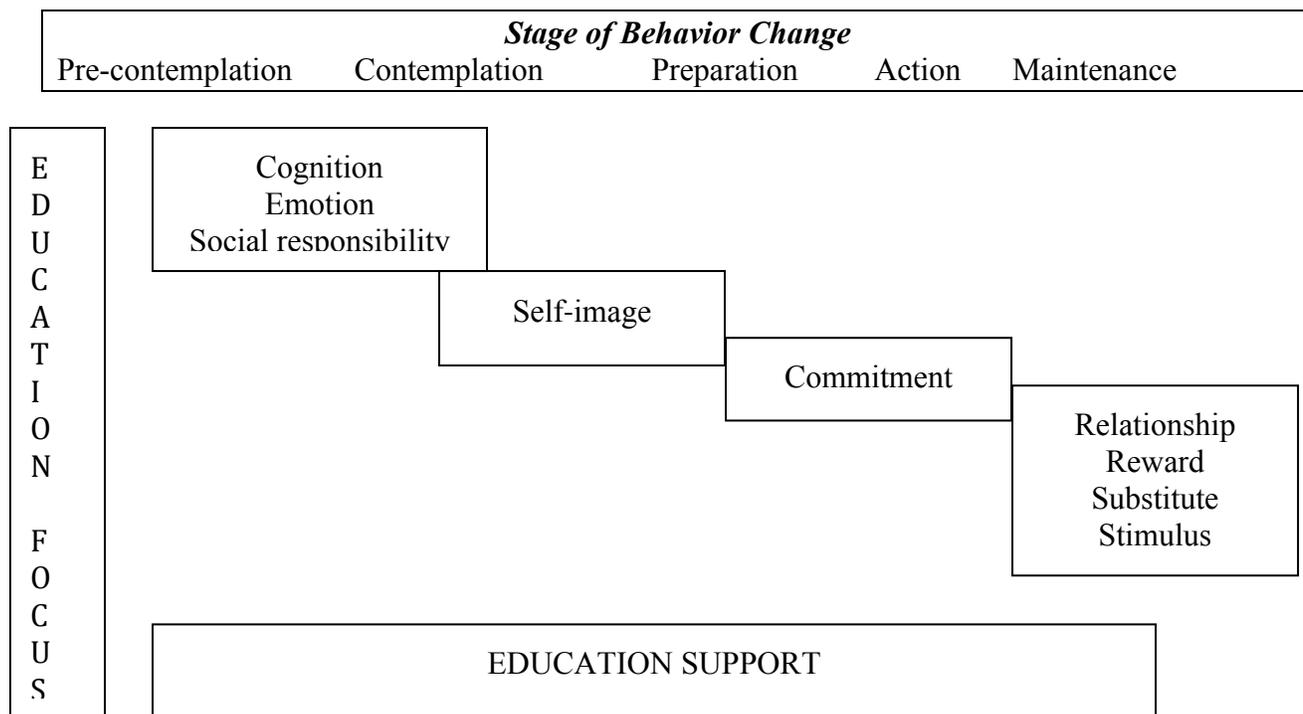
TTM has been presented by Kerkman (1998) as a possible way to motivate behavior change in financial counseling settings. In this detailed description of TTM’s application to financial counseling followed by a hypothetical case study example, Kerkman translated the

stages of change, listed above, into a stages of change model for financial counseling. Her model includes descriptions of client characteristics at each stage and appropriate counselor tasks, and recommends accurate and immediate assessment of the clients' stage at the outset of counseling. For example, in the pre-contemplation stage, the first of Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's (1992) five-stage process of change, clients in financial counseling might display a resistance to change, stating that they do not need to change. They might indicate someone else in their lives who needs to change, such as a family member or employer, and a stoppage of counseling is often a resulting behavior. Recommendations for counselors with clients at this stage include raising doubts about clients' financial practices and raising awareness of risks and problems associated with those behaviors. The case study demonstrates the successful use of TTM from the first contact with the clients and how the counselor used the stages to identify the needs of the clients throughout the process of change. As Kerkman points out, TTM provides "direction for the counselor in guiding clients through the process of change, as well as in selecting interventions that are appropriate and effective for each particular stage" (p. 20), which offers potential sources of insight for educators in other settings, as well.

In addition to identifying the various stages through which individuals travel in the process of making changes, Prochaska, Redding, and Evers (1996) also developed ten change processes that created a useful and more specific lens through which to identify the changes that assist or indicate change. The change processes are consciousness raising, social liberation, dramatic relief, self-reevaluation, self-liberation, counterconditioning, stimulus control, contingency management, helping relationships, and environmental reevaluation. These change processes have been shown to be especially helpful for educators to use as indicators of needed target topics for financial education (Xiao, Collins, Ford, Keller, Kim, & Robles, 2010; Xiao,

O'Neill, Prochaska, Kerbel, Brennan, & Bristow, 2004b). Figure 1 below demonstrates how TTM has been applied to the financial education setting, including brief explanations of what types of behavior can be encouraged at each stage. For example, the first change process listed, consciousness raising, is defined as finding and learning new facts, ideas and tips that support the healthy behavior change (Prochaska et al., 1996), and was applied in the Xiao et al. (2004b) study by focusing work in the financial education program on the raising awareness of the positive ideas of beginning to save money and reducing debt. Another example is the self-liberation change process in which individuals make a commitment to change. This was translated into the Xiao et al. (2004b) study through participants setting their own personal financial goals.

Figure 1. Financial Education and Stages of Behavior Change.



Notes: The above chart is from Xiao et al. (2010), in which it is noted that it is adopted from Prochaska et al. (1992), including some modifications of terms as appropriate to financial education.

1. Cognition: Education focuses on awareness of the importance of the behavior by providing knowledge and skills. This and the following two interventions are more effective for moving people from pre-contemplation to contemplation.
2. Emotion: Education focuses on awareness by arousing emotions.
3. Social responsibility: Education focuses on awareness by stressing the social impact of a behavior change.
4. Self-image: Education focuses on the new self-image to move people from contemplation to preparation.
5. Commitment: Education focuses on personal commitment to move people from preparation to action.
6. Relationship: Education focuses on using family and close relationships to facilitate behavior change. This and the following three interventions are effective to move people from action to maintenance.
7. Reward: Education focuses on nonfinancial awards for desirable behavior change.
8. Substitute: Education focuses on establishing desirable substitute behavior for behavior change.
9. Stimulus: Education focuses on removing/adding stimuli to facilitate behavior change.

From an educational standpoint, this information is useful in that learners might be at different points along the spectrum of change and, therefore, be in need of attention to particular change processes, something of which the educator and learners could be made cognizant.

Prochaska (1996) even points out that prior to the identification of these stages, doctors and smoking cessation counselors thought of those individuals in the pre-contemplation stage as not

being ready to stop smoking. Prochaska argues that the doctors and counselors were the ones who were not ready to help the smokers at that stage. The same argument can be made with relation to financial education. Schuchardt, Hanna, Hira, Lyons, Palmer, and Xiao (2009) made this argument in their summary of the research priorities that came out of the 2008 National Research Symposium on Financial Literacy and Education. Acknowledging the difficulty in motivating learners to make changes in their financial behavior, the Symposium participants determined that more research is needed into applications of behavior theory to financial education. In fact, Spader, et al. (2009) suggest that application of this theory to financial education has the potential to “improve financial education interventions” (p. 77), and can help educators identify the stage at which learners are most accepting of financial education learning. Detailed explanations of the empirical research of TTM and financial literacy will follow in the research section.

Financial Literacy Education

There has been much discussion in recent years on financial literacy and financial education. In the past two years this is probably due to the recent financial crisis, but there has actually been greater attention to financial literacy issues in the past 10 years. The literature review that follows focuses first on general contextual issues in financial literacy in general, some of which is based in the empirical literature, and including much of the underlying assumptions in the literature. This will be followed with a review of the conceptual and empirical literature in financial literacy education.

General Contextual Issues in Financial Literacy Education

As indicated in Chapter One, the American economic situation is changing every day. Unfortunately for those who began this most recent economic crisis with little to no money, they

probably have even less today, due to the loss of low-skilled jobs as businesses and manufacturers' closings and the increase in the cost of the basic necessities like food and gas. Census data from 2002 indicate that, on average, Black, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic Americans all earn substantially less than the average White American household. While the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 has focused the nation's attention on financial issues and financial literacy, a growing discussion of financial literacy issues has grown throughout the earlier years of this millennium.

As noted in Chapter One, the financial literacy level of Americans has been named as one factor in the overall financial difficulties in the country, as well as part or all of the reason for the personal financial difficulties at the individual level. A 2008 Financial Literacy Survey and thus before the severe financial crisis of 2009 and 2010, conducted by the Princeton Survey Research Associates International, on behalf of the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, showed that 10% of Americans were having trouble making their mortgage payments; millions of Americans had "serious difficulties" (p. 1) paying their bills each month; only 20% keep track of spending; more than 1/3 have inadequate savings and do not know their credit scores. The most interesting results of this survey, and most significant for this research into Latinos and financial education, is that Latinos are less likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have medical or life insurance, making them more vulnerable to financial difficulties. In addition, and interesting for financial educators, is that most respondents to the survey indicated that they learned about personal finance from their parents or at home, raising concerns about perpetuation of family financial issues.

In 2004, Seidman, Hababou, and Kramer conducted a large-scale survey of low- and middle-income households in three major metropolitan areas in the U.S. They attempted to

determine the financial behavior and attitudes of respondents as they relate to participation in mainstream financial institutions, such as banks and credit unions, and alternative financial institutions, such as payday lenders, a predatory lending institution. Nearly one million individuals participated in the survey, with racial distribution of 20% White, 41% Black, 31% Hispanic, and 5% indicating a mixed background. Data showed that 29.6% of participants are considered unbanked, meaning they use neither a checking nor a savings account at a bank or credit union, but have found other means of taking care of their money. Not surprisingly, the data confirmed that the unbanked portion of the population was “disproportionately poorer and less educated” (p. 4). Additionally, a larger percentage of the unbanked group was Black, with equal percentages of White and Hispanics in this group, but most significant is the percentage within those groups. Only 3.3% of Whites were unbanked, contrasting with 36% of Black households and 41.9% of Hispanic households.

To combat some of these disturbing statistics, President George W. Bush and the U. S. Department of the Treasury created a National Strategy for Financial Literacy in 2006, called *Taking Ownership of the Future*. This strategy for improving financial education across the country includes challenges and solutions, encouraging organizations to provide resources, much in the form of funding for financial literacy education initiatives, and encouraging individuals to take advantage of the resources to improve their savings, buy a home, plan for retirement, or better manage their money. In addition to this strategy and, therefore, an increase in the number of financial education offerings available to consumers, organizations such as the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the American Banking Association have called upon their members to act as financial educators (Snyder, 2005). Another example of increasing financial literacy education is from Beale (2009), who illustrated the success of encouraging

university business students to provide community service in the form of financial literacy education to low-income populations in Virginia.

To further understand this seemingly murky world of financial education, it is useful to shed light on what is happening today in financial education in the U.S. As indicated above, there is a wide variety of financial education offerings, including written materials in the form of pamphlets or booklets, full-length self-help books, online materials and classes, face to face classes, videos, television programs, or a combination of any or all of these forms. In addition, there is financial education that takes place in one-on-one situations with accountants, bankers, financial planners, friends, coworkers, and relatives. For the remainder of this study, the focus will be on financial education that takes place in the face-to-face setting with an educator and two or more learners, also known as a formal classroom setting (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Even with this limitation, the possibilities are nearly endless, as each class can vary in number, duration, time of day, physical location, size of the class, and materials and technological resources used for each class meeting. For example, it is possible to learn about saving for retirement in one Saturday afternoon in a hotel conference room or in three evening meetings at the local community center. The afternoon meeting might utilize materials created by the educator, while the community center provides published booklets and worksheets printed from the Internet. The hotel conference program might charge a fee and bring in a guest speaker who does a presentation using a laptop and projector, while the community center provides the service for free with a community center volunteer as the teacher who uses a chalkboard. In addition, other factors affect the financial education program, including, but not limited to, the cultural and racial diversity of the learners, their existing financial knowledge, their income level, and their reasons for attending the program.

Despite this multitude of factors affecting the financial education programs and their exponential increase in availability, the materials utilized by them are typically very similar in format and content. One example is Wi\$e Up (Granovsky, 2003), a set of materials created by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor to benefit young adult women. These materials include instruction in money management, credit, saving, insurance, homeownership, and investing; similar topics and a similar presentation that can also be found in most of the other widely available classroom materials (e.g., Jump\$tart and mymoney.gov). Although there is a clearly stated need for financial education programs across the country and calls to establish them along with the topics that should be covered, there has been very little discussion of pedagogy or how to teach the classes. Although the American Banking Association (Snyder, 2005) called for volunteers to teach financial education in local communities, there were no accompanying recommendations for how to do so. In addition, from a scholarly perspective, little of the research in financial education has addressed pedagogy or the ways to educate adults. To add some clarity into financial education, assumptions underlying this education will now be addressed, along with the ways in which educators appear to approach teaching, based on the definitions of financial literacy in the literature.

Assumptions and Definitions in Financial Education

There are a number of assumptions and definitions at play and intertwined with each other in the financial literacy education literature.

Major assumptions. Many of the financial literacy programs in existence today are based on the theoretical framework of empowerment, the implicit assumption being that someone can give you power through financial knowledge. This knowledge would assist individuals in becoming more powerful within the existing societal structures. Underlying this

framework are three further assumptions: (a) individuals are accountable for their own success or failure; (b) there is a deficit on the part of the individuals and they need help; and (c) “if consumers know more (are smarter) they will engage in more productive financial practices and behaviors (get richer)” (Watson, 2006, p. 12). In this view, then, education in financial topics is the key to pulling oneself up by the proverbial bootstraps.

This is also the theoretical assumption that is present in much of the general literacy research—that literacy results in improved lives. In fact, this framework is quite similar to the assumption underlying critical perspectives and emancipatory education—that awareness of, or education in, the oppressive structures in society will lead to a better world and social action to make that better world a reality. However, some critical literacy researchers

have challenged these beliefs, arguing that literacy does not necessarily lead to these positive outcomes and that, in fact, literacy education has often been used for oppression...that literacy education is inherently political and see many current programs as continuing social control and fostering deficit perspectives and the literacy myth. (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007, p. 276)

In fact, academic literature on financial literacy, apart from financial education, does recognize some other possible reasons as at least partially responsible for the perpetual differences in incomes among races/ethnicities, tied to the financial institutions themselves. Mainstream financial services have been limited in communities with high concentrations of people of color. Practices of redlining are common, in which financial services are denied or their costs increased for residents in certain communities. Mainstream banks have merged into larger financial corporations, leading to closings of less profitable local branches, many of which are located in lower-income communities, leaving a vacuum of financial service providers filled

by less scrupulous, unregulated businesses, including check cashing stores, payday lenders, and predatory lenders. Interestingly, many of these lucrative businesses are now underwritten by the larger, mainstream financial institutions. There has historically been discrimination in the mortgage loan industry, which sees significantly higher denial rates for people of color than for White applicants of the same income level. Thus, as Watson (2006) so clearly points out,

given this significant ongoing legacy of industry abuse, neglect, and mistrust, it is critical not to divorce the institutional context from the financial behaviors and norms it has and continues to produce, within communities of color. Changing the financial reality for low-income people of color therefore entails not only encouraging individuals to trust in a system that has historically not acted in their best interest, it also requires a diligent uphill struggle to monitor the predatory tendencies of mainstream and fringe institutions.

(p. 10)

This is the financial world in which financial literacy program participants live. It is now important to determine how the literature defines financial literacy and how it addresses contextual and cultural differences within the programs. To that end, research that is available on financial literacy includes both conceptual pieces and empirical studies.

Definitions of financial literacy. Defining financial literacy appears to be largely standard across the literature, but there is a lack of a comprehensive view of the life of the individuals in question. General adult literacy definitions, as discussed previously, are typically more complete, using either a functional, skills-based approach, a more holistic, sociocultural approach, or a combination of both. Defining financial literacy in the literature which specifically addresses the topic typically follows one of two approaches, neither of which appears to take in the full range of factors that take place in the decision making process. The

first definition takes the knowledge possession approach, declining to define the meaning clearly, assuming an understanding by the readers. For example, Mandell and Klein (2007), using a definition from Chen and Volpe (1998) and Volpe, Chen and Liu (2006), simply indicate that financial literacy would be possession of the “basic knowledge needed to make good financial choices” (p. 106). This definition’s vagueness allows the educators to encompass many possibilities and options in their work, but it gives little philosophical or pedagogical guidance to researchers or educators.

The second and more common approach is the functional approach, delineating specific skills and knowledge learners need to have acquired upon completion of the program. For example, students might study income taxes, cosigning loans, investments, social security, savings, and homeownership, as they did in Murphy (2005). While the meaning of financial literacy remains in “flux”, Watson (2006) suggests using the description used by David Lawson at the 2003 National Conference of State Legislators, which accounts for both the vague suggestion of possessing knowledge along with most of the specific skills:

financial literacy is familiarity with the money, banking, and credit system. Financially literate people know it is safer to keep their money in a bank, rather than in their home. They know where to go to apply for a loan, the power of credit, and how to establish a credit rating. While they may not know every detail of the home buying process, they know the basics and where to go to initiate the process. In general, financially literate people know how to best use their income to build wealth. (pp. 11-12)

Definitions based on further assumptions. These definitions take the previously discussed deficit approach, assuming that individuals are lacking some pieces of knowledge that

would help them survive in the world, in a more secure, stable way, but do not look into the many factors that influence financial decision making in the real lives of the American people.

In addition, there is that assumption that arises, again, that if people only knew what to do, they would do it. It is a model founded on imputation” (p. x), and reflects the race, class, and gender biases that permeate education in the U.S. Like in general education circles, Willis (2008a, 2008b) and Gross (2005) both suggest that this approach to financial literacy education is detrimental to the learners themselves, blaming and “shaming them,” but also is effective at preventing changes that might improve the equity of the financial system, inhibiting “the development of other policy tools for improving the welfare of Americans” (Willis, 2008a, p. 202). Therefore, those with financial difficulties are often seen as responsible for their own situation.

The final assumption of financial literacy education is that if people are provided with the appropriate information, they will no longer have financial problems (Hathaway & Khatiwada, 2008), despite the lack of empirical evidence (O’Connell, 2008; Willis, 2008a, 2008b). This idea “depends on the belief that personal finance literacy programs not only can improve decisions, but can do so to the degree necessary for individuals to protect and even increase their welfare in the modern financial marketplace” (Willis, 2008a, p. 201). This vision of the power of education is by no means limited to financial education, since the very existence of education and educational systems exhibits its perceived efficacy. In effect, “the cornerstone for the argument in favor of financial education rests squarely upon the validity of these links” (Hathaway & Khariwada, 2008, p. 1), such that if financial education programs provide the appropriate information, their learners’ financial literacy will increase and their financial problems will go away.

Returning to the issue of defining financial literacy, this definition often ignores the social, political, and economic structures and institutions that limit the access to, the ability, and possibly the motivation of the learners, to take part in the processes of the financial community. One study stands out among the others, though, in that although it does not have a clearly stated definition of financial literacy, Spader et al. (2009) do take multiple factors that affect financial decisions into account in their study. It has been suggested, in Chapter One, that financial literacy might benefit from a holistic definition, due to the wealth of information about the variety of factors that affect financial decisions and knowledge. Estelami (2009) suggests that poor financial decisions can be the result of a variety of cognitive factors, few of which are indicators of low financial literacy, but which should be considered by financial educators, such as heuristic decision-making or willingness to take risks. Other researchers cite factors in individuals' lives such as overall education (Fry, Mihajilo, Russell, & Brooks, 2008), poverty, low wages, and lack of health care benefits (Lown, 2005; Sanders, Weaver, & Schnabel, 2007), individual values (Vitt, 2004), the complex nature of financial products and services, emotional coping mechanisms (Willis, 2008a, 2008b), attitudes toward money (Dowling, Corney, & Hoiles, 2009), unscrupulous financial service providers (Chang & Lyons, 2008; Marlowe & Atilas, 2005; Watson, 2006), cultural trends toward materialism (Stone, Wier, & Bryant, 2008), and other cultural factors, such as gender, class, and race or ethnicity (Bihagen, 1999; Endres, Chowdhury, & Alam, 2008; Loibl & Hira, 2006; Lucey, 2004). Without taking a more holistic view of financial literacy, then, educators might miss some of the major factors that contribute to financial decision made by learners, and thus, to their apparent financial literacy. These and other issues in the research will be addressed shortly.

Critical Perspectives on Financial Literacy Education

An assumption underlying the literature discussed to this point, and as mentioned previously, is that financial education must be beneficial for people. Indeed, there is an assumption that financial literacy is beneficial for people. What has been ignored, however, is the possibility that people are already financially literate in ways that enable them to function outside of the mainstream financial system. The possibility that financial education benefits other people or institutions more than the financial education learners themselves has also been ignored. Three authors in four conceptual articles take on these topics and add a critical perspective to financial education (Gross, 2005; Williams, 2007; Willis, 2008a; Willis, 2008b). Gross (2005), examining the increasing frequency of financial education at all ages, but also suggesting that the idea of ensuring financial education is given to everyone can lead to blaming the victim, through making the individual responsible for financial problems in society and at the individual level. She argues that this educational movement can actually prevent necessary structural changes from taking place, such as revising the credit scoring system, which penalizes low-income individuals. Williams (2007) echoes this argument and suggests that the “responsibilization” (p. 226) of consumers that takes place with financial education can be disempowering as it is sold to the public. Williams takes an additional step and posits that the benefits from increased financial education and the accompanying increased use of financial institutions results in expanding financial markets, clearly benefitting institutions.

In two articles, Willis (2008a, 2008b) evaluated the effectiveness of financial literacy education, but from a legal perspective. She confirms what has been stated before regarding the lack of empirical support demonstrating through outcomes the effectiveness of financial education. She then suggests that the reasons for institutional support of unproven financial

education programs could be based in the benefits received by the institutions themselves. In fact, she states

because good financial decisions by consumers are less lucrative for many industry players, these firms' support is likely predicated, in not on a conclusion that financial-literacy programs are ineffective, then on the premise that these programs are less effective than other regulatory policies industry would otherwise face (p. 211)

These types of critical perspectives are increasingly necessary as the educators and learners immerse themselves in learning the financial system and how to function inside these institutional boundaries. In addition, they continue to raise awareness about the structural forces that affect the lives of everyone involved in financial education.

Research in Financial Education

In addition to the conceptual literature in financial literacy education discussed above, research in financial education has led to insights into what is happening in financial literacy education. Numerous conceptual pieces emphasize the need for financial literacy education (Breitbard, 2003; Fox, Bartholomae, & Lee, 2005; Greenspan, 2003; Regan & Paxton, 2003; Stone, Weir, & Bryant, 2008) and overlap to some extent with the themes in the research literature. This section on the current and informative research and conceptual articles relevant to this study will be organized according to their overriding themes and their importance to financial education in general. A total of 39 articles were reviewed, with 28 empirical studies and 11 conceptual pieces. Themes discussed here are related to workplace and retirement financial education, assessing financial education success, and attitudes, values, and behavior change literature. The literature review will discuss those studies giving attention to difference, diversity, and positionality issues in financial education research, including women, low-literate

populations, and low-income groups. Finally, the review of literature will focus on what is known about Latino populations and financial literacy education.

Workplace and Retirement Financial Education

Workplace financial education is paired here with retirement education, as they are often synonymous. Although not unheard of, workplace financial education is typically retirement funding education, often held by the companies who manage the workplace retirement savings plan, such as a 401(k) plan. Four empirical studies will be described below, all regarding retirement financial education (Bernheim & Garrett, 2003; DeVaney, Gorham, Bechman, & Haldeman, 1995; Loibl & Hira, 2006; Oehler & Werner, 2008), but this discussion will begin with a conceptual piece. Lusardi and Mitchell (2007) argue that a small number of workers ever attend retirement financial education classes and therefore lack the tools necessary to prepare themselves adequately for retirement. They suggest that one-time seminars or financial education only are not the answer, but rather that “consumers require additional support for old-age retirement planning and saving” in addition to the need to target specific groups of learners to meet their needs. This work is supported by Oehler and Werner’s (2008) empirical study into retirement education that works best for older individuals. Although the study took place in Germany and the U. K., the results are informative to financial educators in the U. S. They found that financial education was most effective among older adults when it met their needs at their particular stage in life at which important decisions were made. In other words, learners were most responsive to learning about those issues of immediate concern to them, confirming the need to target education for particular populations.

Berheim and Garrett’s (2003) empirical research surveyed households to determine the effectiveness of workplace financial education directed toward saving for retirement. Their

results showed a significant increase in the savings rates for those individuals with employers providing financial education on retirement savings, possibly supporting the view that financial education leads to positive behavior change. The two final empirical studies on retirement saving and financial education were focused on women. DeVaney et al. (1995) looked into the factors associated with changes in financial decision-making and outcomes of the education program. Results from the pre- and post-program assessments indicate that confidence in making financial decisions was associated with level of education, influence of other program participants, and completion of the written exercises in the program. Loibl and Hira (2006) were interested in discovering which type of self-directed media was most effective for workplace financial education. They found that the women in the study learned the financial information more effectively when it was associated with social network support in the workplace. Although these studies all surround retirement and/or workplace financial education, they are most significant for the present study in that they highlight the attention that must be paid to the individual needs of the learners for most effective financial education learning.

Assessing Success in Financial Literacy Education

Assessing the success of financial education programs has been problematic, in fact warranting a call for research into ways of effectively and accurately evaluating outcomes from the National Research Symposium on Financial Literacy and Education (Schuchardt et al., 2009). Watson (2006) indicates that “very little formal research into the impact and efficiency, if any, of financial education programs in general on the long-term behavior of low-income. Most evaluations of financial literacy programs only examine the self-reported financial knowledge or skills of participants” (p. 13). However, there are four overviews of financial literacy education

that assist in understanding assessment and success of the programs, and two additional research studies have attempted to evaluate the success of specific programs using specific curricula.

Four reviews of financial literacy education appear in the literature. O'Connell's (2008) review takes place in Australia, but offers insight into financial education in the U. S. Indeed, the most interesting findings are repeated in the literature discussed above and below this section. O'Connell indicates that there is little program evaluation taking place in the financial education programs there, leading to the conclusion that research into the effectiveness of the programs is inconclusive. In addition, she suggests that there is not enough evidence, either, of what works best in the education programs for communicating information and encouraging learning and behavior change. Martin (2007), in reviewing financial education's effectiveness, contradicts O'Connell's findings by concluding that there is a causal connection between increases in financial knowledge and financial behaviors as well as benefits of financial education that include retirement planning, savings, home ownership, and use of credit.

Lyons, Palmer, Jayaratne, and Scherpf (2006), likewise, were interested in finding out if financial education programs were finding success and used an empirical study using surveys and focus groups to make their assessment. Among the interviews and surveys of financial professionals and educators, they found that program evaluation is still unsatisfactory, but that some programs were beginning to attempt to assess behavior change over time. Researchers were encouraged to find much anecdotal evidence of success, however. Conducting a similar study using focus groups and financial education professionals, Toiussant-Comeau and Rhine (2001) found that opportunities for partnerships between community-based organizations, consumer counseling organizations, and educational and government agencies must be utilized to find resources to expand financial education opportunities in communities.

One longitudinal, quantitative study by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in 2007 evaluated its own *Money Smart* curriculum. This curriculum offers basic study in checking, savings, credit, and budgeting and is taught to a “diverse group of low- to moderate-income community residents” (p. 10). Using a pre-training survey, a post-training survey, and a follow-up telephone interview 6 to 12 months after completing the training, FDIC researchers were looking for “positive changes in respondent money management skills and behavior over several months” (p. 3). Their study concluded that it is possible to change consumer behavior, as respondents increased their savings rates and use of budgets increased from before the start of the course, and their overall confidence in financial affairs increased over the course of the survey period. It is important to point out the limitation that the respondents all self-selected to participate in this financial literacy program, indicating that they were motivated to learn about this topic. As Mandell and Klein (2007) indicate in their quantitative study on motivation and financial literacy, using another national financial literacy program, Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy, the “level of aspiration is one of the most important determinants of financial literacy” (p. 106). In 2005, Lown explored the success of a bankruptcy prevention program used by extension programs in Utah, called *Take Charge of Your Money*. Although the study did not measure outcomes, early indications are that consumers are being taught to make their own decisions about their own debt, thus making them feel empowered and in charge of their own financial situation. The hope of the program is to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Utah.

The remaining articles related to assessing success in financial education programs are conceptual, all expressing concern over the lack of clear and well-researched findings in outcomes from the programs. Hathaway and Khatiwada’s (2008) critical review of programs was

interested in the likelihood of financial education programs resulting in behavior change in participants. They suggest, as has been seen in other studies, that financial education programs should target the specific needs of learners, including targeting the specific financial activity. In addition, they advocate for assessment of program success in every future program. Lyons (2005) addressed this exact issue of program assessment in her review of assessment practices across programs and made recommendations about ways to approach evaluation methods. She also advocated for necessary assessment of program outcomes. Lyons, Hogarth, Schuchardt, Smith, and Touissant-Comeau (2003) make a similar argument in their review of the program evaluation as part of the conference for the American Council on Consumer Interests. They conclude that long-term affects must also be assessed, along with a need for uniform measurements and standards to be used across programs.

Attitudes, Values, and Behavior Change in Financial Education

Attitudes and values about money appear to have an effect on financial decision making and therefore are an important area for researchers to explore. Four conceptual articles (Estelami, 2008; Robinson & McGound, 2007; Stone, Weir, & Bryant, 2007; Vitt, 2004) address their importance. Vitt's (2004) article discusses the strength of individual values in making decisions, indicating that educators and counselors need to utilize the media as an example of how to spark the desires of the learners to motivate them to make changes in their financial behavior. She acknowledges the wide range of factors that affect decisions, including psychological, physical, and social values. Estelami (2008) also explores decision making processes and blames poor decisions on cognitive drivers, such as short-term memory overload, poor knowledge of risk levels, and hyperbolic discounting or "money today is more valuable than money tomorrow" (p.

274). Estelami also suggests that financial educators can tailor their programs to recognize and account for these negative cognitive drivers in their classrooms.

Robinson and McGound (1998) discuss the importance of taking the social situations of learners into account. Although situated in the personal financial advising setting, it is possible to learn lessons from that field, as they also deal with a diverse clientele, as in the financial education classroom. They suggest observing the budgeting practices of individual families to get an idea of what the family feels and knows about financial issues, but most important, they suggest that financial decisions are not rational and therefore all factors in the decision process must be considered. The final conceptual article comes from Stone, Weir, and Bryant (2007) and the world of certified public accounting. Their work posits that there is a connection between financial attitudes and happiness, in fact a stronger link than between financial literacy and happiness. They argue that perhaps financial education should focus on changing attitudes about money as part of financial literacy education.

Four empirical studies demonstrate the importance of knowledge of attitudes and values for financial education. Dowling, Corney, and Hoiles (2009) found that attitudes about money, along with financial management practices, were an indicator of financial stability and satisfaction among young males in Australia. Researchers suggest the need for financial education initiatives that might influence attitudes about money along with financial management. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explore attitudes about money, and acknowledging that "there is too much diversity in individuals' background and socialization experiences to identify a singular meaning of money" (p. 86), Oleson (2004) demonstrated that there is a relationship between needs of men and women and their attitudes of obsession, anxiety,

and achievement as they relate to money. He asserts that understanding the stages of progression and the level of need satisfaction could inform educational practice.

A recent study of college freshman (Cummins, Haskell, & Jenkins, 2009) demonstrated the influence of money attitudes and perceptions and spending habits. Using a quantitative survey, respondents indicated that those who spent their money wisely were admired by their peers. Both males and females viewed credit card use as equally disadvantageous, but females were more likely to feel that budgeting took the fun out of spending money. Researchers posit that educating college students about financial issues they will approach in the future would result in more positive attitudes about money and better financial behavior in the future. Mandell and Klein (2007) studied the similar area of motivation and financial literacy in a similar young adult population. Their research showed that financial literacy could be associated with motivation to learn about the topics. Again, their findings reinforce the necessary step for financial education in making the topics relevant to the population attending the classes.

One of the objectives of financial literacy education, above providing knowledge for learners, is assisting the learners in making positive changes in negative financial behavior. As has been noted previously, there was a call for further research into the potential for utilizing knowledge from behavior change research in financial education (Schuchardt et al., 2009). The transtheoretical model of behavior change (TTM) has been applied to financial literacy education in a small number of empirical studies (Shockey & Seiling, 2004; Spader et al., 2009; Xiao, Newman, Prochaska, Leon, Bassett, & Johnson, 2004a; Xiao et al., 2004b), which will be reviewed below.

The first study of interest, by Xiao et al. (2004a), applied the TTM to assessment practices and consumer debt reduction. The study desired to develop an assessment tool for

financial educators, counselors, and researchers that might help consumers change their negative financial behaviors associated with credit card debt. Focusing on the stages and processes of change, discussed previously, Xiao et al. (2004a) conducted qualitative interviews with five experts in consumer debt and 15 telephone interviews with consumers with troubling credit card debt. Using these interviews and the TTM, the researchers created a mailed survey for consumers with debt troubles, focusing on their stage of change, demographics, and debt-related behaviors. Results from the study indicate that the tool developed during the study can be used to accurately assess the stage at which consumers are in their readiness to change their negative credit card debt behavior. Xiao et al. (2004a) feel that educators and professionals can “develop various strategies based on a specific stage of change to help consumers in debt move forward to get rid of credit card debt” (p. 97). Specific suggestions by the researchers for actions that educators can take as a direct result of this TTM assessment tool include designing an educational program oriented for behavior change, developing educational components that match the stages of change, and discussing pros and cons of behavior change.

The second study, by Shockey and Seiling (2004), took place in a financial education program designed for use with an Individual Development Account (IDA) program. IDAs are programs created to assist low-income individuals with beginning or increasing their savings. As part of the program, participants were required to attend 4 weeks of financial education classes encouraging debt reduction, increasing savings, credit, and accessing the matched savings in the IDA program. Shockey and Seiling used the TTM to assess financial management behavior changes over the course of the financial education classes, believing that

while providing financial information is important to affecting change in financial behavior, helping participants understand what changes they can make, observing that

they are ready to make the needed changes, and providing a structure that they can use to make the changes are all helpful aspects of the process of inspiring change. (p. 44)

Shockey and Seiling assessed changes in six specific behaviors in pre and post program tests, administered at the beginning of the first class and at the end of the fourth class, respectively: using a spending plan, reducing debt, tracking spending, setting financial goals, setting aside money, and saving money. It is important to note that the curriculum for the four classes was designed specifically for the IDA program in question and with the six specific behaviors in mind, and that participants, in their participation in the IDA program itself were possibly more “ready” for change than most individuals. Results from the study show “noticeable growth” for the participants in all of the six areas of interest. It was, therefore, also demonstrated that the TTM can be used in the financial education setting to measure behavior change, echoing Xiao et al.’s (2004a) suggested use for TTM, and, perhaps more importantly, to increase the ability to educators to provide the necessary tools and strategies to enhance and encourage positive behavior change.

Xiao et al. (2004b), in the third study, demonstrates the most ambitious use of the behavior change model. TTM was used as a framework for the design of a financial education program used as part of cooperative extension programs in the U. S. between 1996 and 2002, and focused on increasing savings and reducing debt. It is possible to say that the financial education program, called Money2000™, was created with the belief that “the key to fostering successful change in others is to understand what stage the person is in and then decide what strategies (processes) he or she could use to move forward” (p. 56). During the program, participants were asked to set their own financial goals in the form of dollar amounts of savings and/or reducing debt. They were provided with a variety of financial services throughout the program, including

newsletters, classes, conferences, computer analyses, home study courses, and access to websites, and their financial behavior was surveyed every 6 months. In addition, participants were asked to complete a survey that assessed their stage in the change process.

As indicated previously, in addition to the stages of change, there are also change processes. The Money2000™ program was designed to give participants an opportunity to access different tools and strategies that were appropriate to their change process or stage. For example, participants identified as needing assistance with stimulus control might receive strategies designed to control their environment to avoid impulse spending and increase spending. Alternatively, participants with helping relationships might be provided with strategies to request assistance from family members in developing saving behaviors. The overall success of this financial education program is impressive, with millions of dollars saved and much debt reduced across the country. Xiao et al. (2004b) found that the use of two change processes in particular, social liberation and self-liberation, were both key components of the program. The researchers encourage educators and other researchers to use TTM in developing other programs, themselves finding it easy to operationalize. A final study utilized TTM as a framework for a financial education program (Spader et al., 2009) targeted for Latinos, and will be discussed in the section on Latinos and financial literacy.

Diversity/Positionality Issues in Financial Education

As stated in other sections, literature in adult education and general education indicates the importance of attention to differences among learners in educational settings. Learning is affected by the context in which it takes place, including factors such as race or ethnicity, gender, income level, etc. (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2002; Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 1998). Studies demonstrate that the individuals in the financial literacy programs have extremely

diverse backgrounds, regardless of context. A report on the training needs of financial literacy educators in England advocates for training that includes “awareness around different cultural attitudes and practices in relation to financial capability and financial products” (Goro, 2006, p. 2). In addition, the curricula would not take into account the fact that “financial decisions also involve psychological, physical, and social values” (Vitt, 2004, p. 70). There is some agreement in the general adult literacy literature that “when learners were allowed more control in defining curriculum, learner retention was higher” (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007), and that a “connection between increasing local control by teachers and learners over the curriculum, effective pedagogy, and performance outcomes for both programs and learners” (p. 285). This feeling is carried over into the financial literacy literature, “neighborhood-level practitioners...informally report lackluster results at best. Practitioners report mounting evidence of a programmatic disconnect between the financial literacy message, the program delivery mechanisms, and the communities of color they seek to influence” (Watson, 2006, p. 13).

In a recent study of financial educators, English (in press) explored issues of power as they relate to knowledge creation in financial education programs. Using critical discourse analysis, English and her colleagues were interested in the ways in which the educators and financial education professionals become complicit and/or resistant in spreading the dominant ideologies of the financial and government organizations funding the creation of a financial education program, designed for new parents. This study explored how, why and by whom knowledge was produced, all within the history and context that shape its production. An interesting insight for financial educators to recognize is that “subtle resistances in the everyday world of financial planning and education are instances of how power is resisted” (p. 2). For example, if educators are interested in behavior change and outcomes, it might be important to

consider whether a lack of change is due to poor decision making, a common assumption in the literature, or if the lack of change might be attributable to resistance behaviors associated with power. The study also reinforces some of the ideas from the conceptual pieces, discussed previously, regarding critiques of financial literacy education, including the importance of the ways in which financial literacy and its accompanying knowledge dissemination can perpetuate inequalities, the importance of community needs in the context of financial education, and a better identification of opportunities for resistance as they relate to power relations.

In a 2000 study of financial literacy educators, Toussaint-Comeau and Rhine found that culture, including race and ethnicity issues, was a recurrent theme in discussions of both learners and educators in the focus groups exploring delivery of financial education programs. However, research and literature in financial education does not often acknowledge the importance of this part of the teaching and learning process in the educational setting. Frequently, research in financial education focuses on the financial literacy or difficulties of specific groups, such as low-literate individuals (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Hajaj, 2002), low-income learners (Chang & Lyons, 2008; Seidman, Habadou, & Kramer, 2004), women (Endres, Chowdhury, & Alam, 2008; Loibl & Hira, 2006), specific racial or ethnic groups (Lucey, 2004; Murphy, 2005), prison populations (Koenig, 2007), young adults (Dowling, Corney, & Hoiles, 2009), and individuals considered unbanked (Lyons & Scherpf, 2004; Regan & Paxton, 2003). As a whole, this valuable research indicates the importance of targeting financial education to the learners and echoes previously discussed literature. However, this research also ignores the impact of cultural differences upon the teaching and learning processes, particularly the always important topic of how these learners make meaning in their lives from learning about the mainstream financial world.

In a nationwide, large-scale, mixed methods study, Tisdell, Taylor, and Sprow (2010) asked financial educators who teach in community-based programs about their teaching in the financial education setting. Among those findings relevant to this study, the researchers found that sociocultural factors have an impact on the teaching in the financial education classroom. In fact, 95.5% of the online survey respondents indicated that they believe it is important to consider the different backgrounds of the learners when making pedagogical and content decisions.

A study by Murphy (2005) was targeted at Black college students and financial literacy, addressing some of the income disparity concerns in the conceptual literature. This quantitative study explored the influence of race, gender, age, major, and parental educational on the financial literacy level of undergraduate students at a predominantly Black university. The study demonstrated that race, major, and parental educational level were significant to explaining the level of participant financial literacy knowledge. Age and gender were not significant factors. This study also indicates the nearly complete lack of financial literacy knowledge of undergraduate students, since the average score in the survey was three out of ten correct answers. Murphy's study is supported by the *Money Smart* (FDIC, 2007) study, discussed previously, in regards to race, age, and education level prior to the program training. Blacks and Latinos were less familiar with certain financial concepts and practices, and financial knowledge rose with education level. Age appeared not to be a factor. Participants with a low income and those living in rural areas were judged by the *Money Smart* study (FDIC, 2007) as needing more financial literacy training than those with higher incomes and living in urban areas.

Low income or class is a factor in financial literacy and stability repeatedly addressed in the literature as a socioeconomic factor from which is very difficult to escape. Ozawa, Kim, and

Joo (2006) quantitatively analyzed this issue utilizing a large-scale survey of consumer finances, and demonstrate that “the receipt of an inheritance is a major reason why the net worth of white households is significantly higher than that of black households” (p. 213) and that, in general, a higher income leads to higher wealth accumulation, a seemingly common sense determination. However, it is important to consider this result in regards to financial literacy education and the positionality of the participants. The large majority of participants are from low-income households, making the possibility of their moving up in income and class even more daunting. This factor is one more piece of knowledge necessary for education programs and educators.

Studies that address women specifically demonstrate that gender can be a major factor in financial literacy. Continuing the research on the *Money Smart* program (FDIC, 2007), women benefited more from the training than the men, which is a positive result since the conceptual and empirical literature suggest that women utilize different investment decision making skills than men (Endres, Chowdhury, & Alam, 2008; Lyons, Neelakantan, & Scherpf, 2008; Loibl & Hira, 2006), women have different needs in regards to financial advising (Chen & Volpe, 2002; Stenardi, Graham, & O'Reilly, 2006), and married and heterosexual cohabiting women tend to defer to men in financial decision making, an indication of their lack of confidence in this area (Mock & Cornelius, 2007). A review of literature in financial education focused on women and the literature that informs their experiences in the financial education setting. Jarecke and Taylor (2009) conducted a review of literature in financial education and women and the literature that informs their experiences in the financial education setting. They found that the literature appears to support the view that the gap in knowledge between men and women can be minimized or closed with financial education. It also confirms the findings that financial education programs are most beneficial when targeted to the specific needs of the learners.

Latinos and Financial Literacy Education

As stated previously, there is research in financial education that focuses on gender, class, and race or ethnicities, but there is very little on Latinos as a specific group. “Financial illiteracy remains high across all segments of the population. But financial illiteracy is of particular concern for Latinos, whose overall education rates and wages are lower than those of other segments of the population” (Richman, Barboza, Ghilarducci, & Sun, 2008, p. 25). In addition, in a reflection on Latino immigrant consumers in America, Marlowe and Atilies (2005) discuss the increased difficulty this population faces when compounded by low-English language skills and unfamiliarity with the local marketplace. These issues can increase this group’s vulnerability to consumer fraud. Marlowe and Atilies suggest that financial education is one way to counteract these types of immigrant problems.

The National Council of La Raza (2004), a non-profit civil rights advocacy organization for Hispanic Americans, conducted an analysis of financial education programs, products and results. Their research was composed of roundtables with researchers, policy experts, and community leaders, and site visits including interviews with administrators and educators. Findings from the study include confirmation of the difficulties for Latinos with language issues in financial education materials. Direct translations have been problematic, even unintelligible. Programs do not always take place in locations and at times that are accessible to Latinos working multiple jobs. Financial education programs are not always attuned to the perceptions that Latinos hold regarding financial institutions. Finally, there were immigration status issues that needed to be addressed as they related to financial education.

One of the most interesting and recent research articles focusing on Latinos and financial literacy education (Spader et al., 2009) looks into the success of the use of a *telenovela*, or soap

opera, television program that embeds financial literacy knowledge in the social relationships shown in the program, tailored to the immigrant population in North Carolina. Called “edutainment” (O’Sullivan, 2008, p. 1), *Nuestro Barrio*, a miniseries presentation of a *telenovela*, of 13 episodes, intended to “compete for and attract viewers for its entertainment value” (p. 60), exposing viewers to “core elements of homeownership...types of financial services products and providers and the documentation requirements necessary for each” (p. 60). Spader et al. view the program and its educational possibilities through the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) model of behavior change, and address some of the concerns with the limitations of the financial literacy definitions. TTM, as discussed previously, theorizes that behavior change is a process comprised of pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance, which requires decisions along the way between healthy (e.g. saving money) and unhealthy (e.g. using credit cards) behaviors. The researchers indicate that traditional financial literacy programs likely overlook people in the pre-contemplation stage, since many programs are for those who desire change. *Nuestro Barrio* attempts to fill that gap. Using a Likert-type scale, participants in control and treatment groups responded to questions about their behavior. Results indicate that the telenovela “may be effective both at raising awareness about the benefits of bank account use and homeownership and at altering viewers’ attitudes toward banks” and may reach “individuals who might not seek out traditional financial education” (p. 77). While this study is interesting in its entirety, it is most relevant in this discussion due to its clear recognition that there are many Latinos who are not accessing financial literacy opportunities, that some are overlooked by those recruiting for the programs, that it is possible to use alternative methods for educating Latinos, and that different cultural groups have different needs

with respect to financial literacy. Unfortunately, the sample size was small and located in one community, but does offer interesting insights into behavior change and financial literacy.

Relevant Research and Pedagogy in Adult Education

Sociocultural perspectives have been used as a theoretical framework in several studies in adult education (e.g., Alfred, 2003; Prins, 2005; Sparks, 1998), and those studies specifically dealing with issues related to sociocultural perspectives, curriculum, and critical pedagogy that would be most relevant to Latinos in financial education settings will be discussed here. Nine qualitative studies will be reviewed below: four looking into sociocultural issues, three dealing with issues of critical pedagogy, and two specifically studying Latinos and their experiences in the learning environment.

The first study utilized sociocultural perspectives as its theoretical framework was done with Caribbean immigrant women in the U.S. Alfred's (2003) research asked these women to reflect upon the influence of their culture upon their learning experiences in postsecondary educational institutions. In this process, Alfred examined the ways in which learning can be impacted by the cultural factors that were a part of the learners' lives. This study found that it is important to examine the power relationships in the learning community as these power differentials impact the source of knowledge and learning. In addition, she emphasized the importance of acknowledging "our sociocultural histories, identities, biases, and assumptions, and we must recognize how they influence our worldviews" (p. 258), clearly one of the goals of sociocultural, feminist, and critical perspectives.

A second study by Prins (2009) focused specifically on place, through a lens of the critical geography literature, one element of a sociocultural perspective, which can influence the "group dynamics, what and how participants learn, their sense of belonging, and, ultimately,

their program persistence” (p. 91). Studying the interpersonal experiences of adult learners enrolled in family literacy programs through interviews with educators in the program, she found that the contextual factors, including geographical features of the region in which the learning took place, can generate tension between individuals and groups, as well as creating cohesiveness between those from similar places. Prins concludes her study with suggestions for educators that include investigating the background, economic, and social features of the place in which they teach and making these features “a topic of exploration” (p. 104), a useful strategy for financial educators.

Another study that is particularly applicable to the present research is an earlier 2005 study by Prins that explored the experiences of adult learners in El Salvador in a literacy program. Through the lens of feminism, and considering literacy and empowerment, Prins found that the outcomes most significant to the learners were sociocultural in nature, with the removal of illiteracy and the shame associated with it in their community. In addition, in the process of learning in the classroom, the social space that allowed for community interaction was as important as the learning that took place there. She suggests that traditionally instrumental approaches that focus on skills and productivity “overlook the very social meanings that learners most appreciated,” and that “educators should examine what kinds of social practices they intentionally or unintentionally instill [*sic*]” (p. 85).

Sealey-Ruiz (2007), in a study of adult African American women, looked into the responses of the learners to the use of a culturally relevant curriculum in higher education. The 15 Black women in the study were students in a freshman composition class that “centered on their life experiences and sociohistorical backgrounds” (p. 48), using strategies such as sharing of life stories. Results demonstrate that language validation was the most significant revelation

for the learners, with positive self-identity and self-affirmation or affirmation of goals also being beneficial. The women told their stories, using their own voices, and “extracted and offered wisdom” (p. 52). From a critical perspective, the study participants also found their history and their communities as affirming, allowing them to “alter and control the images presented of them” (p. 54) and deconstruct the stereotypes they and others hold for them. Sealey-Ruiz also ends with suggestions for educators, including the utilization of readings and coursework that reflect the lives of these learners, along with opportunities for learners to discuss their culture.

Three empirical studies address aspects of critical pedagogy. In a two-year study of the practices of two educators in English as a second language program, Worthman (2008) found that the pedagogical approaches of the educators reflected how they “defined and valued learner experiences as a resource for learning” (p. 457), one of the major tenets of critical pedagogy and critical race theory. The two educators’ approaches differed: one was instrumental and selective, while the other saw experience of the learners as a resource in making meaning and identity. Worthman interprets these differences using Inglis’ (1997) definitions of empowerment and emancipation, positing that the latter educator was using an emancipatory pedagogy, while the former was merely empowering the learners, teaching them to work within society’s structures and acculturating them. Worthman’s work also echoes the findings of the studies discussed previously in the importance of giving learners voice in the learning environment.

McCormack (2008) employed critical pedagogy framework, specifically calling on Freire (1971), in a community setting in which participants were tenants learning about housing stock transfers in the United Kingdom. The transfer moves housing from government owned entities to privately owned properties with landlords. Participants in the study were tenants in the housing units to be transferred, who needed to learn about the implications and possibly to become active

citizens in the process. Interview data from the participants demonstrated that Freire's conception of critical pedagogy would be useful in developing a dialogue between tenants and housing authorities, including the opportunity for landlords to learn from their tenants in a democratic manner.

Dialogue is the key component in another study based on critical pedagogy, Kaufmann's (in press) re-analysis of data from an earlier ethnographic study of undergraduate students in an Ethnic Studies class. She was inspired to revisit this data through two experiences in a recent class related to dialogue and to look at the data specifically as it relates to the interactions and dialogue between learners. Her research reveals that there are cultural factors that influence who speaks in group interactions, when, and how often. In large groups, dominant speakers were likewise from dominant cultural groups—White or those perceived as White. Likewise, in small groups, privilege was also a factor in who spoke, but more participants were offered opportunities to speak in this format. Participants indicated that they were inhibited by culture, being raised not to interrupt or to listen attentively until someone else finished speaking. White students also demonstrated silencing techniques, interrupting or confirming another person's story, but then replacing the story with his or her own story. Encouragingly, some of the participants "articulated an understanding of positionality in relation to voice and silence" indicating critical consciousness (p. 11). One small group in particular, all participants of color, found the venue a safe place to "deconstruct ideological structures that have the propensity to oppressive lives [sic]" (p. 13). Kaufmann suggests that educators critically reflect upon the knowledge they bring to the classroom for dialogue to ensure that they are not perpetuating dominant ideologies.

Two empirical studies look into the specific experiences of Latino learners. Tying the sociocultural perspectives to Latinos specifically, Sparks (1998) explored how Chicanos in the U.S., who choose not to participate in adult basic education programs, interact with social structures within the dominant culture. Her work led to findings that include men and women deciding not to participate in education programs as a result of structural discrimination that ignored the structural, cultural, and historical contexts of the potential learners' experiences. She identified a "lack of intercultural understanding...reminiscent of...social, political, and economic life where individuals are defined as "Other" (p. 256). In addition, echoing the feminist Latina writings, Sparks discusses the movement of the Chicanos "across cultural borders," resulting in "discontinuities, contradictions, and oppositions" (p. 256), all of which can impede the learning process if not given adequate attention and recognition by educators. Finally, her work addressed the conflict between the collective nature of Chicano culture which directly contrasts the individualistic nature of the dominant culture.

A second study also highlights the importance of using the stories and cultural backgrounds of the Latino learners as a tool to enhance understanding and learning. Fernandez (2002), in a narrative inquiry framed by critical race theory looked into a Latino's personal educational experience. Her study found that inadequate educational opportunities resulting in low academic achievement, as discussed previously, might be improved with the incorporation of the learners' own perspectives on their education. She concludes her work by stating that narratives, storytelling, and counter-stories can be transformative and empowering for educators, students, and community members...using experiential knowledge, challenging dominant ideologies, and acknowledging the centrality of race in American

life help us uncover and understand school practices and students' responses to those practices. (p. 60)

All of these studies, along with the multitude of literature in adult education, discussed earlier in the theoretical framework section, discuss and analyze difference and the importance of cultural responsiveness in education. They emphasize the advantages of utilizing pedagogical strategies and tools that focus on the life circumstances of the learners and on the resources the learners can bring to the classroom, all of which would greatly benefit financial literacy education.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for financial literacy education in America. Literature from empirical studies and conceptual pieces in financial education all make the same kinds of statements: as the financial system grows in complexity, consumers are ill-prepared and appear to lack financial education (e.g., Lyons & Chang, 2004; Lyons, Chang, & Scherpf, 2006). There are many existing programs which are educating people, teaching them financial skills which will help them open a checking and/or savings account at the sponsoring financial institution, at least. Unfortunately, these programs are not always reaching the communities that need them most, those illuminated in by Spader et al. (2009) who are in the pre-contemplation stage of behavior change, or those in the contemplation stage, but who are not reached with the existing curricula or programs. The literature, as discussed above, indicates that the necessary education may not be having the desired effect resulting in changes in negative financial management behaviors. In addition, there is sparse research into the effects of culture, particularly among Latinos, and the impact of these issues on their learning and outcomes from financial literacy education programs. Watson (2006) suggests that there is

mounting evidence that improving financial knowledge alone has little long-term effect on the financial behavior, financial status, and outcomes of low-income consumers of color without changes in the neighborhood and financial services context they live in. (p. 15)

Viewing the financial literacy education potential from a wider, sociocultural and, therefore, critical view would allow for more diversity in the curriculum and materials, all more suited to the actual needs of the recipient population, in this case, the Latino population. This perspective would also bear in mind the structural aspects in society that might affect their learning and implementation of the skills and knowledge learned in the financial education classes. Additionally, this sociocultural perspective would take into consideration the larger social needs of local Latino communities, and by extension, of the American society, creating a more equitable and sustainable community for everyone. In addition, there is potential use for the transtheoretical model of behavior change to offer insights into the learning and changing processes individuals go through in a financial education course. These views are advantageous to educators, as well, in that they afford a wider view of the whole lives of the learners, before, during, and after the conclusion of the program, while still considering the needs of each individual at their respective stage of behavior change.

Research demonstrates the potential for use of these sociocultural, feminist, critical, and Latina feminist perspectives in adult educational settings. However, this type of research, using a sociocultural theoretical framework in adult financial education, has not been done to date. Therefore, research is still needed on the impact of the life circumstances of Latino learners in financial education programs. Adding even more knowledge and insights into the processes of change taking place in these programs, the theoretical framework will also be informed by the

transtheoretical model of behavior change. This study, with its purpose of exploring the impact of these perspectives on teaching and learning in financial literacy education programs, will fill these gaps in the research and add to the knowledge for both adult education and financial literacy education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the qualitative case study methodology including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, all designed to explore the purpose of the study. It will begin with a brief explanation of the qualitative research paradigm and, more specifically, the case study design that informed the study, a consideration of the research perspective in light of the theoretical framework and researcher background, as well as the methods that were used, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

The purpose of the study was to explore the teaching and learning that takes place in an adult financial literacy education setting targeted to Latina single mothers from the perspectives of the teachers and learners. Of particular interest for this study were the influences from the sociocultural factors that might impact the teaching and learning in this specific context. Knowledge gained from research in adult and general education, as explained in detail in Chapter Two, has illuminated the idea that learning of any kind takes place within a social and cultural context, and that this context cannot be divorced from the learning experience. Research and conceptual work surrounding culturally responsive teaching, also as discussed in Chapter Two, has found that recognizing and utilizing the sociocultural context in which the learners live can not only enhance teaching and learning opportunities, but also can create new ones. This conception and design of this study, then, was heavily influenced by these ideas about the influence of sociocultural factors on education, specifically from a critical and Latina feminist perspective, as discussed in Chapter Two, which affected what was attended to in this study.

In exploring the sociocultural influences present in this financial literacy education classroom, targeted for Latina single mothers, this study utilized a qualitative paradigm. More specifically, to obtain a full understanding of the teaching and learning at work in this setting, a case study design was chosen. To some extent, the study was also informed by ethnography, in the sense that it focused on the examination of culture, in exploring the financial education classes targeted for Latino learners. The case study design allows for the study of the interactions between learners, and between learners and educators, as well as the collection of data from multiple sources, including class observations and interviews with the learners, educators, and administrator, as well as the analysis of documents. This design will be discussed in detail below.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) and Yin (2009) so clearly point out, the research questions, and not the topic of the study, must be the guide in deciding on a research paradigm and methodology for any research project. Allison and Pomeroy (2000) confirm with their readers that different approaches to research will yield different results, and an awareness of the assumptions underlying the research is important to understanding and interpreting the results. They also make the very important point that education, which benefits in many ways when focused on the actual process of learning, particularly when considering ways to improve learning, too often focuses on documenting outcomes.

A qualitative study approach, however, also enables the study to look for participant perspectives on the process of learning to be financially literate and changing financial behaviors. Qualitative research gives the researcher the capacity to “provide contextual information” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106) in the research process, not just the factual information. In addition, qualitative research allows the researcher to view the observed

phenomena with the objective of gaining insight into the “meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities” (p. 106). As Merriam and Simpson (1995) confirm, qualitative methods allow researchers to “uncover the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved” (p. 97). So, in choosing a qualitative research paradigm, it become part of the responsibility of the researcher to attempt to understand how the individuals make meaning of their experiences. Given that this study is heavily influenced by sociocultural and critical perspectives, it makes perfect sense to choose a paradigm whose underlying assumption is that “reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 97), emphasizing the contextual features of the world that might influence the learners and how they interpret their experiences. Deshler and Grudens-Schuck’s (2000) believe that researchers “should focus not only on what influences us as humans, but on how our minds and consciousness enable us to shape our future” (p. 600). Use of a qualitative paradigm allows this kind of holistic understanding of the Latina women and their experiences, particularly in a financial literacy classroom that often focuses on financial content.

Within qualitative research, there are several possible approaches that can be taken to conducting research, such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Each inquiry approach has its own advantages, so it is up to the researcher to make the best choice to satisfy the research questions. For example, narrative research typically focuses on one or two individuals and is most concerned about describing or telling the story of their experiences. Phenomenology attempts to explain and interpret the meaning of a particular phenomenon, something that the research feels is interesting or important to understand, looking at the phenomenon from the perspectives of several different individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question. Grounded theory looks like phenomenology, but the goal of this

research is to move past the interpretation and create a new theory to explain what is happening (Creswell, 2007).

Taking the qualitative approach and the concept of delving deeper into the thought processes behind outcomes and behavior one step further is the use of ethnographic research. This kind of research “aims to get a holistic understanding of how individuals in different cultures and subcultures make sense of their lived reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 193). In practice, the researcher attempts to obtain an understanding of what individuals are doing on a daily basis, in order to then inform the researcher about their culture or parts of their culture. Data collection can take place through the use of field notes, observations, interviews, documents, and any other observable evidence. This approach to research is appropriate when a study “requires an in-depth understanding of the social *context*” (p. 197), and when the goal is “exploring and describing social phenomena” (p. 198).

There are multiple approaches to ethnographic research. Ethnographic approaches can also include critical ethnography, whose goal is to highlight and change social norms that marginalize groups, and feminist ethnography, which focuses on women’s and gender issues. However, the main advantage of ethnographic observational research is that instead of describing an entire group within the larger society, “the observational ethnographer will be able to provide a rounded account of the lives of particular people,” (Angrosino, 2008). To some extent, this is what this study attempted to accomplish. Although this study does not consist of the long-term observation and immersion into a culture that are characteristic of ethnographic research (Merriam & Associates, 2002), as I was only able to spend a week doing observations and interviews at the research site. But, to some extent, this study was informed by ethnography in that it focused on the sociocultural context of Latina learners in a financial literacy program

aimed specifically at addressing their financial literacy needs. Given time limitations, and the fact that the financial education program studied is more than 1,000 miles from my home, long-term observation beyond the week that I spent there was simply not a possibility. For these reasons, a case study research design was chosen in an attempt to illuminate some of these same areas of interest, while at the same time, allowing for “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 108), within the necessary time constraints. It is discussed below.

Case Study Research Design

Case study research involves examining the “functioning and activities” of the case, so as to understand the “working parts...functional or dysfunctional, rational or irrational, the case is a system” (Stake, 2006, p. 2). The case is the specific phenomenon or entity under examination (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The research in this study was designed to explore the system of a financial education program with Latina single mothers as learners, to understand the ways in which the sociocultural features of their lives affect their learning, as well as how it impacts the teaching in the class. It gives an example of what is happening in this learning environment and with these learners (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The case study research design, then, allows for a complete picture of what is happening in this particular financial literacy education classroom, a picture of what is happening among these learners and educators, as well as a picture of how these learners and educators perceive their teaching and learning experiences. This case study of a financial education class allows for a view from the classroom to see what is taking place, while focusing on those interactions that are relevant to the study (Stake, 2006).

Merriam and Simpson (1995) define case studies and posit that they are an “intensive description and analysis” of the unit under investigation and “tends to be concerned with

investigating many...variables” while seeking to “uncover the interplay of significant factors that are characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 108). They also point out that case studies have three defining characteristics: (a) they focus on a specific entity or phenomenon; (b) they end in rich description; and (c) they can bring new understanding or confirmation of existing knowledge. Likewise, Yin (2009) defines case study as an “all-encompassing method—covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 18). In other words, case studies take many different factors into account in writing the picture for the study, considering all factors to determine what best represents the situation, or case, which is the unit of analysis, as opposed to one factor. The case study takes a picture of the situation and participants, giving a “holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon within its social context,” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 256) and therefore, is heavily influenced by ethnographic practices, although not typically with a long-term observation or immersion, as discussed previously. This picture can be especially valuable to financial educators and researchers as the literature up until this study offers no clear picture of what is happening in the financial education classrooms targeted for Latino learners.

Case studies are often based in social constructivism (Creswell, 2009), in that, as stated previously, they can illuminate the multitude of factors that affect a given situation or phenomenon, like learning and teaching in a given setting. For this study, the case study allows for recognition of the fact that it is not only the ability to understand the messages about financial literacy that affects learning; it is not only the interactions between learners that affects an individual’s learning; it is not only the educator that makes learning happen; nor is it only the sociocultural context that influences all of this learning and these interactions. Case studies enable researchers to recognize that there are many different factors involved in educational

settings, including the positionality of the educator and learners, the cognitive ability of the learners, the social, environmental, and economic factors, some family and work responsibilities, the power of financial and social institutions in society, the demands of living in a capitalistic society, and the role of media images, in addition to other, often marginalizing, factors such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

The case study design gives the researcher flexibility to focus on the factors most relevant to the issue under exploration, as they develop under observation. Among the multiple advantages discussed above, an additional advantage for using a case study design in research is that the case is

typically able to avoid the kind of essentialist and context-free analyses that have historically been harmful to disempowered groups...[and] allows for a highly complex and nuanced understanding of the subject of inquiry. (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 256)

As noted in multiple places throughout these chapters, it is unclear from the research exactly what factors, of the many potentially influencing factors, are actually having an impact on financial education classes and on the potential for behavior change among learners. Along with the critical perspectives theoretical framework, the case study design enabled this research to unveil some of them, illuminating the ways in which educators and learners in these settings can learn more effectively together.

As noted above, this case study was of particular program located in an urban city in the Midwest that specifically did financial education targeted to Latina single mothers, where classes were conducted in Spanish. To understand what was happening in this financial education program for Latina single mothers, data collection followed the typical collection methods found

in case study research, in which trends and themes are searched for in many types of data, often including interviews and focus group discussions, usually with open-ended questions, observations, and the collection of documents, such as course materials, brochures, written work by learners, syllabi, and/or course planning materials. In this study, interviews were conducted with the educators, learners, and with the administrator in the financial education program. Classes were observed, and documents were collected. A tour of the facility in which the classes take place was conducted. Data also came from the voluminous field notes taken during the process of interviewing and observing, all of which are relevant to understanding what is happening in the financial literacy classroom and program. These data types will be discussed in more detail in upcoming sections.

However, it is important to note, at this point, that case study research typically involves one data collector, the researcher. Influenced by my experience and theoretical framework, I designed the study, composed the interview questions, wrote down the field notes, decided which pamphlets to pick up and bring home, interacted with the interviewees, developed the themes during analysis, and interpreted the data. Therefore, in order to have a full understanding of the study, in addition to the previously discussed theoretical framework, it is important to have an understanding of the research theoretical perspective of the study in light of the theoretical framework and my background and point of view, and how they might influence the study.

Research Theoretical Perspective

If the goal of research is to make a contribution to a body of knowledge, it is possible to say that the act of doing research creates knowledge. In all research, and as mentioned previously, it is the researcher who determines the outcomes, from the first moment of the study's conception to the final report and narrative of the work. It is the researcher who

determines the topic, the parameters, the literature to include in the review, the theoretical framework, the methods used to collect data, the participants selected, the way to analyze the data, and the interpretation of the data. The background of the researcher, including his or her education and professional and personal life experiences, impacts all of those decisions during the research process. This gives great power and responsibility to the researcher, just as an educator has power in the classroom for disseminating and helping to create knowledge for and with the learners. Therefore, along with an awareness of their role in creating and disseminating knowledge, “adult educators must understand their role in perpetuating current power structures” (Rocco & West, 1998, p. 172). For example, Tisdell (1998) points out the importance of acknowledging race as part of a researcher’s positionality.

As both a research and educator, keeping these issues in mind while conducting this study was important to my process of researching and interpreting the data, since the interpretation relies on underlying structures, relationships, influences, and the meaning of events to all parties involved in the research. As pointed out by Cheek (2008), it is important to consider “our place in the research process; where we are coming from in terms of our assumptions and understandings; and how these might impact on our choice of topics, approaches, and analyses” (p. 121). Therefore, it is important to note the research perspective taken in this study. It is informed by the purpose of the research, my own background and positionality, and the theoretical framework of the study, which is the lens that determines, to some extent, what is focused on in the study. To discuss the research perspective, further, I will first remind the reader of the theoretical framework of the study and how it relates to the research process, and then consider my own background.

Theoretical Framework as Related to Research Design

As noted in Chapter Two, this study was informed by critical perspectives in adult education. These perspectives, which call into question the structures that contribute to the marginalization of groups of people in society, allow for a global view of the financial circumstances in which many of the Latina study participants find themselves. As also discussed in Chapter Two, there are functions of the financial system that discriminate and further lessen the ability of low-income individuals to increase their power in society. Critical perspectives also indicate that there is a multitude of factors that contribute to these marginalizing aspects of our systems, including the race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability level of individual groups of people. This study design attempted to take these multiple factors into account in consideration of the life circumstances of the educator and learner participants. In addition, in choosing a program targeted for Latina single mothers, it explored this group of women who belong to a cultural community that historically has been marginalized in the U.S., as discussed in Chapter Two.

Taking critical perspectives one step further is the perspective of feminism, which uses the lens of gender, but also can include other socially constructed categories that are often used for marginalization and the maintenance of the existing positions in society. The feminist perspective and the Latina feminist perspective become particularly important to the development of the study, as it became clear that the focus would be specifically on Latina women in a financial literacy education setting. Like the influence of sociocultural factors in society, it is undeniable that there are gender influences, as well as the impact of being women in a machismo culture, that will affect the teaching and learning that happens in any setting. As such, and as mentioned previously, in choosing to study this program, designed for Latina single

mothers, the feminist perspective allows their experiences as women come to the forefront of the discussion. Questions were designed specifically to elicit information about the critical and feminist perspectives as they related to the experiences of the educators and learners in this financial education setting.

From the more global sociocultural, critical, and feminist perspectives, this study was also influenced by the recent research in financial literacy education at the level of individual changes in financial management behavior, as detailed in Chapter Two. Adding this additional lens to view the data, the study was able to explore the teaching and learning within a particular context, but also the actual impact of this teaching and learning on the behavior of the learners. The transtheoretical model of behavior change (TTM) looks at behavior change as a change process of stages, with accompanying influencing factors that might move the individual forward in his or her progress. Looking at teaching and learning from this perspective enabled the data to be viewed with an eye toward the specific approaches that might more positively encourage these changes, as well as the ways in which the learners have made positive changes in their financial management.

Background of the Researcher

As a White, working class, educated woman, with a critical perspective on the social, economic, and political structures that influence power exchanges in society, these issues of positionality are particularly salient to my understanding of research and education. In preparing for and conducting this study, I wanted to avoid “objectifying the subjectivities of the researched, by assuming authority, and by not questioning” my own position of privilege (Villenas, 2010, p. 346). In studying Latinos in a financial education program aimed at their needs and that was conducted in Spanish, despite my formal education in the Spanish language and literature and the

fact that I am more or less bilingual, it was important to recognize and bring to the forefront of the discussion the position of privilege I occupy, and how that position might have affected the ways in which I perceived the teaching and learning that was taking place in this financial education setting. This was of particular concern, since I was using a sociocultural lens with a cultural group in which I am only marginally a member.

In addition to being a program for Latinas and financial education, the setting also included the additional feature of being designed for single mothers, a category into which I fit, though I am not Latina. As discussed in previous and later sections, it is also a program designed for working Latina women, earning between \$10,000 and 30,000 per year, although there are several participants who were unemployed at the time of the observations and interviews. Socioeconomic class must, therefore, also be incorporated as part of the lens through which this group of learners is considered, with special attention to the fact that they are occupying a less-privileged position in the structure of society than I am. Although often ignored in literature focused on gender and race/ethnicity, it is my belief and understanding of critical literature that class cannot be ignored as a factor in a capitalist society and therefore influences this research.

Fortunately, while I would not consider myself fully bilingual, as I have availed myself of few opportunities to practice my active Spanish language skills, I can understand most of what I hear. Therefore, I was able to understand the instruction and nearly all of the conversations that took place between the learners. It is important, however, to point out that the level of my ability in recognizing subtle cues and messages that are exchanged between individuals who know each other well, and who share a community context inside and outside of the classroom, is not sufficient to warrant complete confidence in interpreting what took place during the observations. I did my best to negotiate the meaning and made notes and followed up with the

educators in instances of misunderstanding. Thus, while I could not possibly put myself into the places of the participants in the study, my awareness of these issues and ability to relate, on some level, to their experiences, combined with my status as an outsider and experience as an adult educator, allowed for a nuanced look at what was happening in the classroom.

My conception of power structures in society also impacted the research process, from the initial ideas to the interpretation and writing of the implications of the findings. Marx and later critical theorists, who posit that social, economic, and political power structures work to maintain the status quo of society, have heavily influenced my development as an adult educator and researcher. It is my belief that there are power structures in our society that influence “how people see the world through the management of meaning” and can create a “false consciousness” (Gordon & Grant, 2005, p. 31) about the world and the social constructions around them. In this state of consciousness, people do not always realize that a possible source of their marginalization or misfortune exists in the daily routines and structures that surround them, and is sometimes even due to the management of knowledge taking place outside of their individual existence.

In my view, this concept of knowledge management applies to financial literacy programs in that education in how to enter into and continually participate in the financial institutions can increase the power of those institutions. As discussed previously, this is a negative characteristic of the financial system in our society, in that the institutions do not deal fairly and equally with all individuals, which often leads to the marginalization of many members of those groups targeted by the financial literacy education programs, as discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Therefore, in studying this financial education program, targeted at a group that has been traditionally marginalized in our society, part of my perception and

interpretation as a researcher was with those issues underlying my study framework, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In fact, I intentionally incorporated these issues into the interview questions, with questions about gender and culture effects on the teaching and learning experiences, as well as questions regarding discriminatory practices in the financial services industry. As it turns out, as will be seen in Chapter Four, there were some interesting findings related to these issues, which might not have been interpreted as such by another researcher asking different questions or using a different lens to view the data.

In addition, from a more global perspective, it is my personal opinion that helping learners gain an awareness of the forces in society that impact everyone is one of the most important contributions an adult educator can make to the greater good of society. For this reason, this study was undertaken with a critical perspective that hoped to find financial education taking place within this realm of critical awareness. As Lincoln and Guba (2002) point out, this study will ideally create some piece of the power to “enable those whom it affects directly or indirectly to take action on their circumstances or environments” (p. 211). While social action might be a stretch for individuals in difficult financial straits, the awareness alone can potentially act as a catalyst for action in the future.

On the other hand, it is not up to me, as a researcher from a privileged position, to problematize the lives of the women who participate in the financial education program. It is not my job as a researcher to judge them based on our larger societal values and norms, to create problems where they do not exist, to issue statements about the larger Latino community, or to make recommendations about what is best for the learners and educators. Rather, it is to describe, attempt to understand, and then, using the comb of a White, single mother, educated in critical perspectives and adult education, to gently work out the tangles that limit our ability to

see the individual experiences of Latina single mothers in a financial education program as valuable and worthy of the attention from the academic community.

Case and Participant Selection

As described in the purpose statement, this study explored an adult financial education program for Latina single mothers with the goal of understanding and describing what is happening in the classroom, through the lens of sociocultural and critical perspectives and with an eye toward behavior change mechanisms. Of particular interest were the factors related to culture that might influence the experiences of the teachers and learners as they progress through their program. As mentioned previously, the study used a qualitative case study design, which allowed me to get an in-depth picture of the teaching and learning experiences, as they related to culture and financial literacy education, in the location chosen for the case.

There were five main criteria for being selected as a case for the study: (a) the program must be for adults, since the study is based in adult education; (b) the program must teach financial literacy education; (c) the program must consist of two or more classes, for long-term interaction between learners and teachers; (d) the program must be targeted for, but not necessarily limited to Latinos, a group that has rarely been the subject of study in financial education research, as mentioned previously; and (e) the program must be within driving proximity to my home, therefore limiting possible choices to the Northeast, Midatlantic, and Midwest regions. To my surprise, multiple Internet searches and utilization of a database of financial education programs across the country revealed very few programs that specifically targeted Latino populations. Of this small number, only two were within my zone of proximity. Of those two, only one administrator responded to my overtures to visit, observe, and collect data about their work. In fact, the chosen program administrator and educators were enthusiastically

welcoming and excited by the interest in their program. Fortuitously, given my background as a single mother who also speaks Spanish, the program chosen for the case focuses on Latina single mothers, as mentioned previously. The case under exploration, then, was a financial education and community leadership program for Latina single mothers in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest region of the U.S. Additional details about the program follow in later sections.

Data Collection Through Informed Consent

In the upcoming section, the manner of obtaining informed consent from each of the participants in the interviews will be described in detail, as will each of the data collection procedures.

Informed Consent

Prior to the beginning of data collection, consent to do the study was granted by Penn State's Institutional Review Board's process for research with human subjects. Informed consent from the participants was also obtained both from the program administrator to do the study at this particular site and by each interview participant in the study. Every interview participant in the study read and signed the informed consent form, which let each individual know that the study was not harmful and that her privacy would be respected. Each participant received a copy of the signed form, which included contact information in case questions or concerns arose from the research process.

In case study research, trends and themes are searched for in many types of data. In this study, interviews were conducted with the educators, some learners, and with the administrator of the financial literacy education program, and comprised the primary means of data collection for the study. Two secondary methods of collecting data were the multiple class observations and the voluminous field notes taken during the process of interviewing and observing, all of which

are relevant to understanding what is happening in the financial literacy classroom and program. Documents were collected, and a tour of the facility in which the classes take place was conducted. Data collection procedures followed those described by Stake (2006), Merriam (1998), Merriam and Simpson (2000), and Patton (2002), and are described in detail in the upcoming sections, beginning first with the interviews conducted, the class observations and facility tour, the field notes, and then the analysis of documents.

Interviews

Data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with the administrator, the two financial educators, and three learners in the financial education program. These semi-structured interviews, recorded using a digital voice recorder, consisted of open-ended questions designed to get the interviewees to think about their experiences as the learning process progresses in the financial education classroom, using a variety of question types, such as illustrative and presupposition questions (Patton, 2002). This method of interviewing, called “unstructured” by Fontana and Frey (2008), is an effort to “*understand* rather than to *explain*” (p. 130). The questions are designed to allow the interviewees to expand on the main topic of the interrogatory with their own ideas that they feel are relevant to their answers. This open-ended method of questioning can also allow a conversation to develop between the researcher and the interviewee, one that might reveal interesting data on its own.

Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a type of “conversation that has a structure and a purpose,” but it is “not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls” the topics that are covered (p. 6). However, the interviews were allowed to progress naturally and openly, with little intervention by the researcher, except in a guiding way, to keep the interviewee in the general field of education, learning, and culture. I made a concerted effort

to “minimize the imposition of predetermined responses” (Patton, 2002, p. 353), which supported the quality of the research process and assisted in illustrating appropriately the educational process taking place at Mujeres Fuertes.

As stated previously, interviews were conducted with the administrator and the two financial educators in the financial education program. The administrator and educators were Latina women who live in the Midwestern city and near suburbs. They are all educated at the university level in the U. S. Marisa, the administrator, has been working with Mujeres Fuertes since just after the program started, nearly three years ago. She does the administration, organization, and marketing for the program, as well as participating in the grant process. Sonya, one of the educators who has been with Mujeres Fuertes for almost a year, holds a degree in secondary education in math and science from a university in Mexico and is presently pursuing an additional degree in business. Marisol has been with the program for almost two years, and has extensive experience in financial training. Both educators also have experience working in a field related to financial services, and they were attracted to the jobs at Mujeres Fuertes, despite the low salaries, because they saw it as a needed service for the community. While working there, they have also been able to complete further training and workshops to enhance their financial knowledge.

The program administrator was selected for an interview because of her extensive knowledge about the organization of the program, about the learners, and about some of the information presented in the documents about the program and its outcomes. The financial educators were selected for interviews, because they are the only financial instructors in the program, and they allowed me to observe their classes. These interviews were all recorded

digitally, transcribed, and entered into NVivo 8, a qualitative data analysis software, for assistance with analysis, as will be discussed in detail in the data analysis section.

On the second day of the class observations, a semi-structured interview with the program administrator and one financial educator was conducted on site, lasting approximately one hour and forty-five minutes (see Appendixes A for a list of questions used for learner interviews, Appendix B for a list of educator questions, and Appendix C for a list of administrator questions). Although the interview was primarily focused on the administrator, she asked the financial educator, with whom she shares an office, for assistance with financial education and counseling questions to which she did not know the answer. The advantage of this hybrid group interview was that both interviewees confirmed and expanded on each other's ideas and experiences in the program. This format also assisted in the process of the discussion of their shared cultural interpretations of their experiences with the learners, which they may not have otherwise considered (specific interview data can be found in Chapter Four). Similar semi-structured telephone interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were conducted separately with the two financial educators, the one who had not yet been interviewed, and the one who was part of the initial interview described above.

The interview with the administrator focused on, but was not limited to, the program organization, funding, recruiting, the process of choosing and accepting learners into the program, the goals for the program and for the learners, the role of the program in the lives of the learners and in the community, the methods used for measuring outcomes, reasons for learners leaving the program, and the sociocultural factors that impact each of those aspects of the program. Educators were asked about their background, both professional and educational, their decision to work in this particular financial education program, their curricular and pedagogical

choices, and their beliefs about the impact of Latino sociocultural factors on the teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Further, semi-structured telephone interviews, lasting approximately forty-five minutes each, were conducted with three of the learners in the program. These learners were part of the cohort whose class I observed. At the end of the class, I was given the opportunity to solicit interview volunteers. Due to my self-perceived rusty Spanish speaking skills, I requested learners who could speak English comfortably, since the interviews would be conducted in English. Six individuals volunteered, signed consent forms, and provided contact information and the best hours of the day to call them. Three of the volunteers were unable to participate or did not respond to messages about setting up an interview time.

Therefore, three learners were interviewed. The interviewees are all Latinas in their late 20s to mid 30s. They are all mothers and either separated or divorced. Christina is unemployed at present and has two children. She aspires to be a nursing assistant and to improve her life for herself and her family. Rosa is also unemployed and taking ESL classes so she can join the nursing assistant program like Christina. She has two nieces living with her, a baby on the way, and thinks the program will help her to “follow her dreams.” Alma is employed, having found a job and been promoted to a managerial position in just three months. She has four children and is planning to buy her own home in the near future. She is working to “break the cycle” and teach her children differently than the way she was raised.

The three women were interviewed mainly about the curricular and pedagogical experiences that are most effective for their learning and for their potential behavior change with regard to their personal financial management. I also asked them questions designed to encourage them to think about the influence of their Latino background on those experiences.

Names of the program and participants have been changed to pseudonyms throughout this document to protect the privacy of the individuals involved in the financial education program.

Class Observations and Facility Tour

The class observations took place after initial contact was made with the program administrators and educators and consent given. The class observations were an extremely valuable data source, giving me a view into the classroom interactions. My role was that of “observer-as-participant,” in which the educators and learners knew of my role as a researcher, but my interaction and participation in the proceedings was “limited” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 205). Interactions between learners, educator responses to learner concerns, activities, learner reactions to activities, interaction between the learners and the educator, descriptions of the classroom space, etc.; all were noted in extensive field notes both during and after the observations, in an attempt to fully describe the case, and as recounted in Chapter Four.

Three separate classes were observed: an orientation session for a new cohort of learners, the first financial education class for the same new cohort members, and a financial education class on income taxes for a cohort that was already approximately 18 weeks into the program. The total number of hours spent in observing the classes was approximately six hours. I did not participate in the classes but rather sat off to the side taking detailed field notes, as mentioned above. My presence was noted in both classes, with learners in the tax class openly commenting upon my observations. I spoke briefly to the learners and invited their questions about the research. Several willingly and enthusiastically responded and consented to my request for volunteers for interviews, as described above. Following the class observations and some brief chatting with the educators, I was given a tour of the facilities and gained an understanding of the resources and opportunities offered by the community center in which the classes take place.

Field Notes

Field notes, as described by Warren and Karner (2010), are “inscriptions (written representation of what has been observed), and they are, ideally, thickly descriptive” (p. 109), but “attending to as much detail as possible” (p. 110). In this study, I used them in an attempt to write down everything I saw and heard during the class observations, so that I would have no trouble remembering what everything looked like, felt like, as well as things that struck me as interesting or about which I had a question. These field notes were in Spanish and English, with the Spanish parts usually being quotes from the participants. In addition, follow up field notes, written after the class period was over, were used to record any additional ideas deemed as relevant to the study. These notes were used both as a data source and as a resource for the interviews, so that I was able to bring up any issues or questions I had with the interviewees.

This emerging process led to some interesting data, which will be discussed fully in Chapter Four. Field notes were also used as a follow-up to each interview, as a place to make notes about striking pieces from the interviews or impressions from them, in fact acting as a potential means of collecting and analyzing data (Eisenhardt, 2002). As Patton (2002) reminds his readers in boldface, “What is not optional is the taking of field notes” (p. 302), as its ability to document the research process and the development of ideas throughout the process is invaluable, again complementing the iterative emerging themes process. This approach also allowed for “flexible data collection” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 16), or the freedom to make necessary adjustments as the research progresses. In addition to the notes, I also used a log system from the first contact to the last, in an effort to keep an accurate timeline during the process of data collection, as well as an effort to keep the data organized.

Document Analysis

Sources of qualitative data in case studies also come from documents that are present in the program (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006) and were a large source of data in this study. This type of data included information from the program and community center website, program orientation information handed out to the learners on the first day, brochures and handouts about educational and employment opportunities at the community center and through the financial education program, brochures about the organizations that participate in and contribute to the financial education program, a list of the program curriculum, PowerPoint presentations from the observed classes, and charts showing the enrollment and participation in the program. In addition, the PowerPoint presentation that was used for the orientation class was obtained in both Spanish and English. Program documents included data and charts that demonstrate program statistics, such as learner attendance, reasons for dropping out of the program, course completion, course offerings, and course schedules for each cohort. Items that indicate the purpose of each of the three participating organizations were also collected. As indicated previously, all of the documents offered by the program and collected independently helped to inform my understanding of what is taking place in the financial education classroom and was used in the data analysis to work toward a complete picture of the education that is taking place in this location for these Latina single mothers.

Data Analysis

The data was categorized and organized into manageable units using aggregation. In other words, the data was organized into classifiable categories as it was collected (Merriam & Simpson, 2000), rather than waiting until all data was collected to begin classification. This method supported the inductive emerging themes process. Stake (2006) suggests that researchers

have a general idea of themes that are likely to emerge prior to beginning data collection, while at the same time recognizing that having general ideas ahead of time about what will be found in a study can lead the researcher to oversimplify themes and perhaps miss other important issues along the way. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) support this “inductive process,” however, during which the researcher attempts to “discover what the data you gathered means” (p. 220). Warren and Karner (2010), who describe this process as an “overlapping circle of activities” (p 121), also support this emerging process of data collection and analysis, as a way to continually evaluate and reevaluate your data, ensuring that themes are developed as they emerge and not overlooked by waiting until all data has been collected.

However, the initial data analysis followed the method presented by Warren and Karner (2010), who recommend the use of “open coding to develop analytic patterns or themes” (p. 219). Using the qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 8, I uploaded the transcripts of the interviews and began the coding procedure with the data. This coding is the same process as choosing themes and subthemes, but allows the researcher to easily pull all of the data from one theme or from multiple themes together into one file or document (see Appendix D for examples of the coding of themes, and how the raw data is pulled out of the software for additional analysis). The field notes were also entered into the software program and coded. Therefore, rather than organize the data with an eye toward expected themes, data analysis began with the general areas of the teaching and learning classroom that are significant to educators and learners alike in mind. Data were catalogued according to area of concern, including learner-learner interaction, educator-learner interaction, in-class activities, educator strategies (e.g., for clarification, for encouragement, for increasing learner comfort), educator and learner background, and ways sociocultural and critical perspectives were brought into classroom. In this

way, the data was sorted from the beginning, with an eye toward thematic emergence as the data accumulated.

Continuing with Warren and Karner's (2010) recommendations, the themes were culled to determine the areas on which I wished to focus the most attention, then marked and further coded with subthemes within the larger themes. Again, NVivo 8 was helpful in organizing and reorganizing the data, as the codes can be placed into "trees," which function as larger branches (themes) with smaller branches (subthemes). For example, a portion of the interview was coded as "educator background," but then other sections were coded as "educator education" and "educator professional development," which would be the smaller branches of the coding tree. Another example is the use of the broader theme of "cultural influences," with subthemes like "sharing food" and "machismo."

Using these themes and subthemes, confirmation of the presence of the same themes and subthemes in other places in the data was obtained. This data analysis technique, called triangulation of the data, helped me to guard against reaching the wrong conclusions or focusing on minor rather than major issues. This technique is a way of checking data within the case, making sure that the same concept or idea appears in at least three different places within the case, thereby creating stronger substantiation of constructs (Eisenhardt, 2002). For example, when there was an indication of a particular issue in the classroom, I looked for evidence of the same issue in the transcripts from the interviews with the learners and educators and in the document data. The important point was to locate the same information in three places, completing the triangle of information, and finding confirmation of the idea, concept, or theme. Assisting with this process of triangulation was my advisor, who helped me develop, clarify, and revise my thematic categories, checked my supporting data, and made sure my interpretations

were supported by the evidence. In addition, triangulation and my consultation with my advisor offered me alternative ways to see the same information. In the example used above, I might interpret a classroom event in one way, find that the educator perceived it in another way, and find still another interpretation from the learner. With this technique, then, I could more accurately understand and interpret the situations and interactions between the learners and educators.

The most important step in the process of data analysis was the preparation of the written narrative. As Patton (2002) points out, the write up of the case study should take the reader into the educational setting, so that the reader could accurately see and understand the experiences of the educators and learners. That multitude of data can also lead to lengthy narrative documents as a result, perhaps making them inaccessible to those who make and plan policies related to financial literacy programs. Case studies can also be limited by the fact that “our conclusions—our analytic descriptions—are specific only to the population that we studied, and perhaps even to the time and process of our involvement” (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 242). Therefore, generalizability of details is not possible, but at the theoretical level, it is possible to generalize (Creswell, 2009) and make statements that contribute to knowledge creation in the fields of adult education and financial education. Patton (2002), however, warns researchers to remember their “first and foremost responsibility,” which “consists of doing justice to each individual case” (p. 449). This is important to remember as the discussion moves to issues related to dependability and verification of the findings.

Issues of Dependability and Verification

There are always strategies that can be employed in qualitative research to increase the credibility, dependability, and verification of the research report. In verifying a study, the

qualitative researcher considers both intrinsic features of the study, as well as extrinsic factors and strives to verify each aspect, thus ensuring a quality study that can contribute to the knowledge base, in this case in adult education and financial literacy education.

In addition to the issues of quality discussed shortly, the research followed a strict documentation of the development process, much of which is covered by the guidelines from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Pennsylvania State University's Office of Research Protections. This IRB process, which consists of training and study verifications, must be completed and approved prior to beginning any new research. It ensures that the privacy of the participants is adequately protected, and that the researcher followed ethical guidelines for research with human participants. As such, I conducted the research within the highest ethical boundaries, as discussed above, and with respect for the participants, for the research, and for the contributions of the research to the greater base of knowledge in education.

Credibility

Credibility of a study can be determined by "prolonged engagement," "persistent observation," "triangulation," "negative case analysis," "member checks" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 18-19), and "external validation" (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 243). As stated previously, the data collection procedures began with the first moment of contact with the case until the final themes were developed and interpreted, with constant monitoring of the quality of the study procedures. The data were analyzed using triangulation, also known as cross checking, in which replication of themes or data were recognized and utilized across and within data types. Another aid to credibility was peer debriefing, which takes place as a regular part of the research process in a doctoral program, including debriefs with dissertation committee members and colleagues.

Member checks were utilized for verification of the data and the findings by the researcher and by interviewees upon completion, and problematic areas and interpretations were discussed, all of which contribute to Lincoln and Guba's (1986) conception of credibility of qualitative research. In this study, the member checks that were conducted were "both informal and formal" (p. 314), and occurred throughout the process. For example, while conducting the class observations, I was able to make notes and then check with the educators and learners about those notes during the interviews. These member checks also played a role in the triangulation process, contributing to the "accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of the data analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 560). Thematic interpretations were also shared and discussed with the educators and administrator for verification. This was especially important to the process of interpretation, since they are the individuals whose lives and culture were being observed and interpreted. As an outside researcher, it was imperative for me to obtain participant feedback for credibility and verification of my interpretations of their experiences.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability refer to the idea that the research study was conducted and analyzed in such a way that the findings and results are considered credible, discussed above, and confirmable. By thinking of these two aspects of the research process, the consistency in systematically collecting data, documenting that data completely and effectively, and analyzing this data with attention to the issues discussed above regarding credibility. However, dependability and confirmability are mainly focused on the "quality of data collection and analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 562). In the doctoral process, this evaluation of the quality of the study is partly the role of the doctoral committee, which is sufficiently diverse in their expertise to render a conclusion of the quality of the study. In this study, the advisor was also active in the

entire process, ensuring that the procedures of data collection and analysis were followed.

Expanding Trustworthiness

In addition, I took care in the interactions with the interviewees and the observed participants, as suggested by Rallis, Rossman, and Gajda (2007) in their exploration of expanding the definition of trustworthiness to include relational matters. This approach to research requires “long-term, thoughtful, and sensitive relationships that build as part of sustained research,” with the ultimate goal of ensuring ethical procedures that engage with participants with “respect for the dignity and capacity of all humans,” as opposed to focusing entirely on the procedure of research (p. 405). And, as Maxwell (2002) points out, “*understanding* is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity” (p. 39). This research considered both the relational issues as well as the procedural rigor of the study with its approach to understanding, verification, and involvement of the participants in the process.

In attempts to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, otherwise collectively known as “rigor” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 13), as the researcher I took ample time in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and took extreme care in accurately describing and interpreting the data to contribute accurate and useful information to the fields of adult education and financial education. The actions described above satisfy the Miles and Huberman (1994) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) guidelines, as well as Merriam’s (1998) suggestions for qualitative research credibility and trustworthiness. In Lincoln and Guba’s (2002) words, “process judgments can tell the reader something about the trustworthiness and authenticity of a given study, but they say little about the quality *of the narrative presented*” (p. 206). This is particularly the situation in case studies, in which the

knowledge gained is based solely on the descriptions made by the researcher. For that reason, the researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the narrative with the assistance of the dissertation advisor.

Summary and Conclusion

The qualitative case study, then, was chosen as the best way to explore the teaching and learning that took place in the program targeted for Latina single mothers located in a Latino community center in a large Midwestern city. To gather data, interviews and class observations were conducted, and document data was collected. The findings from the analysis of these data will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter will provide an overview of the setting in which the case study research took place, as well as a discussion of the findings. As the reader might recall from previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to explore the teaching and learning that takes place in adult financial literacy education setting, targeted to Latino/Hispanic learners from the perspectives of both the teachers and learners in their program. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) In what ways does the cultural background of Latino learners and educators impact the teaching and learning that takes place in the financial education setting?
- 2) How do financial educators respond to the specific needs of their Latino learners in light of the learners' cultural background?
- 3) How do educators and learners perceive that their experience in financial education classes or programs has contributed to changing how they deal with financial issues?

To explore the research questions, the teaching and learning in *Mujeres Fuertes*, a financial education program targeted for Latina single mothers in a large Midwestern city, was chosen for study. The administrator, the financial educators, and some of the learners were interviewed. Classes were observed, documents were collected, and a tour of the facility was completed. The data were analyzed, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the findings can be found in the upcoming sections.

Before the detailed discussion of the findings of the study, however, an overview of the financial education program itself will be presented, to provide some background on the organization and mission of *Mujeres Fuertes*. Although the research was completed as a case

study, and not conducted as a long-term ethnographic study, it was informed by sociocultural perspectives. This perspective requires an understanding of the context in which the teaching and learning takes place. Therefore, in a departure from the traditional format of the findings of a case study, and more like that of an ethnographic study, after the section on the background of Mujeres Fuertes, the class observations will be discussed in detail. This approach will provide a fuller picture of the cultural context of the organization. The remainder of the chapter will focus on the findings of the study, including the interviews, document evidence, and the class observations. In addition, each section of the findings will include a summary as it relates to the sociocultural context. The implications of the findings will be discussed in the final chapter.

The Setting of Mujeres Fuertes

The financial education administrator, educators, and learners who graciously participated in this study are part of a program designed to help Latina single mothers improve their lives through education in financial literacy and community leadership, called Mujeres Fuertes. The program takes place in a local Latino community center, located just outside of the center of a major, Midwestern city, in a large Latino neighborhood filled largely with a population of Mexican ancestry. This community is one of many Latino communities in the city, comprised of individuals of a variety of descents, including Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Dominican, Mexican, and Colombian. As noted in Chapter 3, Mexican (75%) and Puerto Ricans (11%) make up the largest population groups among the Latinos in the city. It is important, at this point, to note that, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the women of Mujeres Fuertes most often use the term “Hispanic” to refer to themselves, and so that is one of the cultural identifiers used interchangeably throughout the findings, along with Latino or Latina, the identifiers used in the program’s publications and on their website.

The community center serves as a charter school during the weekdays, and an education center in the evening and on weekends. The building is located close to an intersection of two major, busy streets. It has no parking lot, and individuals visiting the center park on the street or walk. Across from a gas station on one side, residential and commercial buildings on another, it is also directly across the street from a large transportation and distribution facility, which accounts for the loud truck traffic mentioned in my field notes as present whether the windows were open or closed. When arriving at the front entrance, also as noted in the field notes, I saw that the building was painted white and blue with a tall iron fence and gate surrounding the facility, also painted light blue. Standing at the gate, I saw the busy gas station with newspaper boxes in front, including a free Spanish-language newspaper. Across the street was a huge warehouse for the trucking company and a much taller iron fence surrounding what looked like acres of property. At the intersection of the two busy streets, just a half of a block away, was a bridge with another busy street passing over the other two, and a large billboard sign advertising a national bank's services in Spanish.

Once inside the building, there are concrete block walls painted in bright colors and bulletin boards everywhere. As noted in the field notes, the first floor has a lobby and chairs filled with individuals of all ages, chatting with one another and with the community center staff behind a long desk. The lobby also had plastic pamphlet holders attached to the walls, filled with information about the programs offered in the center, including various social programs that are available. There is also a large multipurpose room with long, cafeteria-style tables, with a bank of desktop computers at individual tables all along one wall, and a kitchen at one end. Down one long, narrow hallway are classrooms and a computer lab, in which some of the financial education classes take place. The stairwells, one on each end of the building, which would

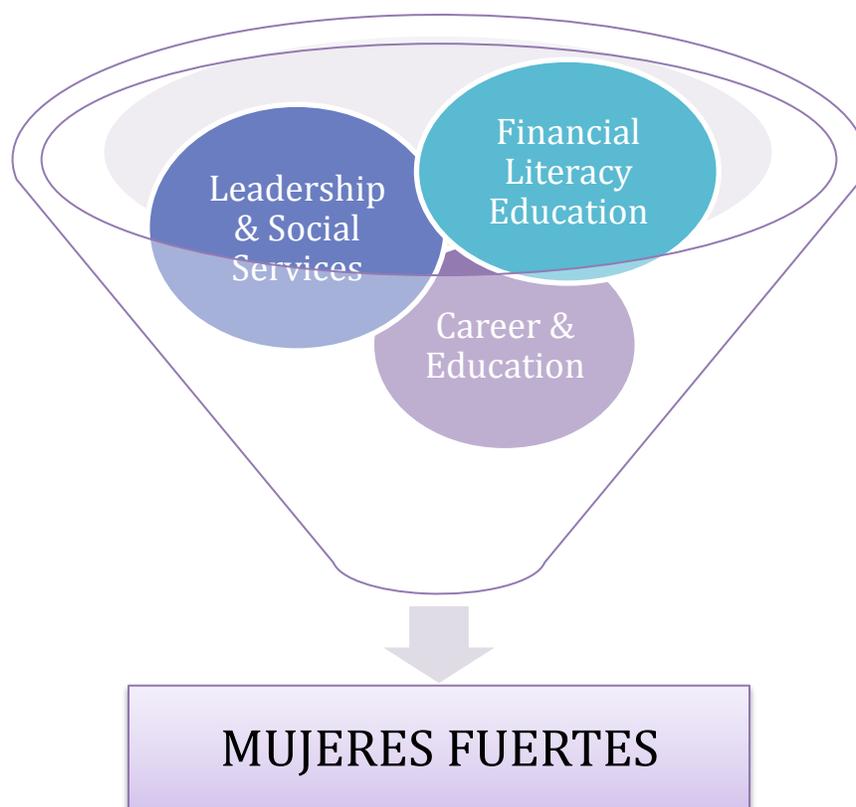
otherwise be dark, are painted brightly with murals of children and families. Although the building appeared to be aging and well used, judging by the number of people in every space, it was clean, well maintained, and felt to me to be a safe, friendly, and welcoming place.

Overview of the Organization of Mujeres Fuertes

Mujeres Fuertes is funded through a large charitable foundation that targets its grant money to organizations and research assisting single, working women in improving their lives. Their mission, as stated in their literature, is a “partnership model” that aims to “improve the lives of women through effective training, inspired leadership, and creative personal growth,” and providing “services in career pathways, wealth creation, Latina leadership, and social supports.” Mujeres Fuertes is a combination of three local organizations that work together to provide ways for the Hispanic women participants to improve their life circumstances: (a) a Latino community center, devoted to improving the lives of Latino individuals through education, and providing the educational and career guidance, facilities, technological resources, and materials for the classes; (b) a housing and financial services organization, focused on building relationships and communities in the Latino communities in the metropolitan area, and providing the financial education and counseling portion of the program; and (c) a social services organization for Latina women and their families, that provides leadership education and access to counseling and other resources or guidance as needed by the program participants. From one of the pieces of document data collected, a PowerPoint presentation used to demonstrate the progress of learners, the three organizations came together in January 2008, with the goal of “investing in Latina women; firmly believing in their potential; providing support services; impacting the whole family and community,” and ultimately acting as a model for duplication by other programs. As demonstrated in Figure 2 below, all of the contributing organizations

involved in Mujeres Fuertes are essential to the personal and professional development of the Hispanic single mothers enrolled in the program. Therefore, although the focus of this research is the financial literacy education part of the program, it is impossible to separate the effects of one part of the program from the others.

Figure 2. Elements of the Program, Mujeres Fuertes



Women interested in attending Mujeres Fuertes learn about the program from a variety of sources: a friend or relative who attended or attends the program, a church bulletin, an announcement posted on a bulletin board at their children's school or at the local community center, an advertisement in a local free Spanish-language newspaper, an advertisement on a Spanish-language radio station, or even from a local news broadcast on the Spanish language television station. A recent advertisement from the local newspaper, collected as part of the document data, reads,

Si desea estudiar, mejorar su empleo, entretenerse en una profesion que pague mayor, concocer su credito y mejorarlo, ahorrar e invertir su dinero, aprender a hablar en publico, involucrarse mas en la escuela de sus hijos y conocer que servicios estan disponibles para usted en su comunidad, inscribase en [Mujeres Fuertes]. [If you want to study, get a better job, enter into a profession that pays more, learn about and improve your credit, save and invest your money, learn to speak in public, involve yourself in your children's school, and learn about services that are available to you in your community, enroll in Mujeres Fuertes.]

Other advertisements, like the one collected from a local church bulletin, tells them that they need to be bilingual or Spanish-speaking single mothers, employed part-time, earning between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per year, living within the city limits, and desirous of improving their lives through educational opportunities. The employment, income, and marital status requirements are negotiable, as the administrator indicated during the interview, and small numbers of learners from outside of the city are admitted at times. In addition, in a personal email communication from the administrator, in response to a question about undocumented learners, she indicated that up to 20% of the enrolled women can fall outside of the grant requirements, allowing them to enroll a few “married women, women not working, and undocumented women,” the last of whom are referred to a “legal advocacy organization” with which the program works. An unwritten rule at Mujeres Fuertes, also communicated to me during the interview with the administrator, is that they attempt at all times to help those women who need the most assistance, thus accounting for the flexibility in the enrollment requirements.

The women who attend the program are motivated by a need to improve their lives and the lives of their family members. They have observed that they can use assistance in completing

their education or in learning how to become stronger advocates in their own lives. They recognize that educational opportunities can help them, like those listed above in the advertisements for the program. The women see that one possible road to improving their financial and career situations is to gain education, also a stated goal of the community center in which the classes take place. Underlying this desire is the belief that greater education can lead to greater opportunities and more powerful positions in their lives.

Classes were taught only by Spanish-speaking, Hispanic women at the time of the research. Although their ethnicity is not a requirement of the grant or the program, fluency in Spanish is a requirement, as the classes are all taught entirely in Spanish. As described previously, there are classrooms upstairs, a computer lab downstairs, with plenty of space for the educational and creative childcare, for 3 to 12 year-olds, by experienced caretakers that is provided by the program while the mothers attend classes. The classes they attend will be going on amidst a variety of other community classes and activities that range in topics from sewing and guitar classes to computers and reading groups for children. The weekend I visited, as noted in field notes, there was guitar music coming from classroom down the hall on one day, and music and dancing coming from the basement multi-purpose room on the next morning as they practiced for an upcoming Hispanic festival, in addition to the delicious smells from the food table set up in the hall for the dancers. While these elements might seem distracting to the learners trying to focus on improving their lives and learning about financial issues, in fact, to me, the atmosphere seemed more of a celebration of the community and its history, and concrete evidence of the kind of pride in their own experiences the leadership courses and the program as a whole are trying to communicate to and engender in the learners.

The entire program lasts for three years, and they join the program with a cohort of other learners, all of them intending to complete the entire three years of the program. To date, from documents provided by the program administrator, there have been 10 cohorts to enter the program, with the first two cohorts finishing late in 2010. During the first year, there are two terms of classes, each lasting fifteen weeks, for a total of thirty weeks of classes. The second and third years are devoted to participants' educational and career development and their work on committees at the community center with members of other cohorts. When the women come into *Mujeres Fuertes*, they have the option of beginning a new career in customer service, or they can become a Certified Nursing Assistant, Licensed Practical Nurse, or even a Registered Nurse. The classes and materials needed to achieve these goals are all funded by the granting organization, are taken at local partner technical colleges, community colleges and universities, and are designed to be completed in three to four years, depending on the chosen program of study. Participants also have the option of taking computer proficiency classes, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and/or high school equivalency (GED) classes, depending on their educational needs, abilities, and goals. The second and third years will also find participant working on committees at the community center that are intended to give the women a chance to practice their leadership skills in the local community. These committees participate in local workshops, demonstrations, or other community activities that concern the Hispanic population. An example of these activities is an organized group from *Mujeres Fuertes* learning about taxes and then assisting members of the community in completing their taxes at the community center at tax time.

Returning to the first year of classes, the part of the overall program on which this research is focused, the participants attend one four-hour session each week, made up of two

two-hour classes. Classes are held either on Friday evenings, from 5:00 to 9:00pm, or on Saturday mornings, from 9:00am to 1:00pm, depending on the cohort. For example, the more advanced cohort I observed always attends classes on Saturdays, while the new cohort always attend on Friday evenings. For approximately twenty of the thirty weeks, students attend a two-hour class on financial literacy, have a fifteen-minute break during which they share food, and then the remaining time is spent on the leadership skills listed in the next section. The remaining ten weeks are focused on computer skills and career development, with classes on job searching, resume development, and mock interviews, all of which fall under the academic and career development part of the program. Although the career development is clearly an important part of the overall program, Mujeres Fuertes spends the least amount of class time on these topics, as indicated in the documents collected, particularly because this part of the program takes place in one-on-one meetings with the career counselor. The two major educational pieces of the program are discussed in more detail below.

Leadership for Mujeres Fuertes

The leadership classes, while not the focus of this research, are integral to the development of the women in all aspects of their lives, including in their financial management, as will become obvious in the findings and discussion sections. Therefore, a brief overview of this part of the program is appropriate. As mentioned previously, this part of the program is the contribution of a social services organization for Hispanic women and their families, or “La Agencia,” as the women participants in the program call it. Educators from La Agencia provide the women with education in areas that can increase their self-confidence, such as public speaking and goal setting, and attempt to increase their self-esteem with a strong emphasis on the history of women’s roles in Hispanic culture. For example, one of their classes is titled, “La

Mujer, Cultura, y Religion [Women, Culture and Religion].” Although the women are often from different countries, as will be seen in later sections, they share a sense of community created by their common background and experiences as Spanish-speaking, Hispanic women. Their leadership classes explore the following topics, taken from the schedule of courses given to me by the program administrator:

- a. Leadership and Community
- b. Self-Esteem
- c. Women, Culture, and Religion
- d. Sexuality
- e. Setting Goals and Problem-Solving
- f. Communication, Constructive Criticism, and Negotiation
- g. Public Speaking

This part of the program includes a celebration of the personal histories of the women participants and their potential for achievement in the future. Through La Agencia, they find strength in themselves and in the women in their cohort.

Financial Education for Mujeres Fuertes

The financial literacy education classes are designed to give the women participants the skills they need to tackle the complex financial problems they are facing at the present time and in anticipation of the financial issues they will face in their future lives. As mentioned previously, this part of the program comes from the organization that provides housing and financial education workshops for the local Hispanic community, and the financial educators are employed by this organization. In class, they explore the following topics over the thirty weeks,

taken from the schedule of classes given to me by the administrator and from the curriculum list given to me by Sonya, one of the financial educators:

- a. Essentials of Financial Health
- b. Budgeting
- c. Basic Banking
- d. Credit and Credit Card Use
- e. Loan to Own and Avoiding Loan Default
- f. Basics on Income Tax and Credits
- g. Long Term Financial Planning
- h. Renters' Rights, Affordable Housing
- i. Home Ownership and Home Maintenance

In concert with these classes, the women in the program participate in one-on-one financial counseling with one of the two financial educators, beginning at the very beginning of the classes. They all fill out an "intake form," which serves as both a guide for the counseling sessions and also as a baseline to measure the financial health development of the participants. The form includes information about income, debt, housing, savings, credit scores, investments, and collections, and is part of the financial portfolio the counselors use over the course of the program for each learner. They then meet periodically with their financial counselors/educators to track their progress, and to get advice or assistance with access to resources, such as food stamps, housing subsidies, child support, or alimony. Over the course of the three years, their progress is monitored by the financial counselor/educator in areas like credit scores, debt reduction, savings, and homeownership.

Tracking the Progress of Participants

Women in the Mujeres Fuertes program are monitored and tracked in their progress over the entire three years, and assistance and resources are offered to them at every stage of their progress. At the beginning of the program, intake information is gathered with respect to their financial and housing situation, about their families, their education and educational and career goals, their employment status, and their needs with respect to legal issues associated with child custody, child support, and alimony. This detailed form is filled out at the very beginning of the program during the very first financial education class, as described below. This “intake form” is very important to the ability of the program to track their progress. The administrator, Marisa, mentioned that they think of the initial intake information as an indication of, “you are here,” and then what each learner will need to do, “step by step.” As they proceed through their educational and/or career plan, each of these steps is recorded. For example, a participant who wants to complete her GED will be tracked on the completion of her classes, the scheduling and taking of the examination, and then her result will also be recorded. Her plan for after completion is also tracked, including any increases in income, reduction in her debt, increases in her credit score, etc., all parts of the financial portfolio, as discussed previously. If she gains access to social services, such as food stamps or utility relief, those numbers would also be tracked as a positive change in the individual’s life circumstances. In addition to tracking their progress, the women would find themselves always encouraged and pushed to take advantage of opportunities that might help them advance in their lives, an integral part of improving their financial management and planning. Ideally, Marisa says, “if they increase their education level, they should be able to increase their salary as well.”

Class Observations

Mujeres Fuertes is the program where this research study took place. It fulfills all of the requirements to answer the research questions. It is a financial education program designed for Hispanic learners and infused with sociocultural influences on the teaching and learning. A further advantage is that the program is designed for single mothers who want to improve their lives and see education as an opportunity to do so. This chapter now continues with a description of each of the three financial literacy education classes that I observed: an orientation class, the first financial literacy education class of a newly entering cohort, and the class on taxes, followed by the findings gleaned from the observations, interviews, and document data combined together.

The Orientation Class

The first class I observed was the very first orientation for the new, incoming cohort and took place on a Friday evening, after a huge summer thunderstorm that made the outside temperature bearable after days of record heat. While most of the learners were on time, the storm had knocked out power for much of the surrounding neighborhood, including many traffic lights, so three of the eleven students straggled in late with their wet rain jackets and umbrellas. From the first moment, everything was in Spanish. The women had an overview presentation of Mujeres Fuertes, learned what to expect and what was expected of them, did a meet and greet activity with their classmates, and were introduced to all of the instructors and personnel involved in the program. According to the field notes recorded during the observation, the atmosphere appeared somewhat tense among the learners, judging by their closed body language, including their “crossed arms, crossed legs” (Field notes, 2010) and their nervous laughter. The program personnel appeared somewhat disorganized, as they were entering and leaving the room

to see when it was their time to speak to the learners. At the same time, the atmosphere was welcoming to the new students in its informality. My presence, the only White woman, sitting on the only couch in the room, scribbling field notes, likely added to the confusion.

The room was upstairs in the building, clearly used for classes in the charter school. Field notes indicate that the room had light blue and dark blue contrasting walls, institutional off-white tile floors, reading charts, lots of bookshelves, a reading and poetry chart, encouraging slogans in English on the walls, a door at either end of the room, a snagged rug on one side of the room against the wall, topped by a soft and comfortable blue and yellow striped, two-seat couch, placed right next to a lot of attractive looking books on shelves, waiting to be read by the children who attend classes there during the day. Along one long wall was a white board with a small pull-down screen hanging from the ceiling. There was a coffee station on a table at the back of the room, with Styrofoam cups and sweetener packets, and the air was very cold, creating condensation on the windows. Marisa, the program administrator, said during her interview that the classroom is always over air-conditioned. During the break between classes, one of the financial educators opened the two large windows to let some of the fresh air into the room, marginally and briefly warming the space, but then had to close them again when classes started due to the noise of the tractor-trailers and other big city traffic coming from the street. The eleven learners, the total number who arrived over the first twenty minutes or so of the class period, sat in plastic folding chairs at plastic folding tables arranged in a U shape, centered on the small screen at the front of the room, pulled down over the whiteboards along the wall.

The women ranged in age from the early 20s to the upper 50s, typical for the program as a whole, which has an age range of 20 to 58 years old, as one of the program's PowerPoint presentations indicated. The women shivered in their summer clothes of jeans or capri pants and

tank tops or light blouses. Older cohorts learn that it is best to bring a sweater to classes. The women in the class were from a variety of countries, including Colombia and Mexico, but several claimed the Midwestern city as their home. To help them get to know one another, they did an interview activity to solicit information like names and countries of origin. They all received a binder with information for the orientation session. The binder, according to Marisa during her interview, is supposed to be used throughout the program to store all of their program papers and information, although not all of the members of the older cohort still carried them to the classes I observed. Marisa gave me the documents from a binder, which included contact information for the program staff, the expectations or rules for the program, the schedule of classes, information about the career and financial counseling part of the program, and a “contract” (p. 2). For this final document, they were later asked to remove it from the binder, sign it, and hand it in, showing that they understood and would follow the rules of the program. Interestingly, the contract was in both Spanish and English, perhaps accounting for those few learners whose Spanish language abilities do not match that of the other learners.

Then, using a laptop computer and portable projector for a PowerPoint presentation, Marisa introduced the program to the learners, discussing its organization and goals. This presentation was passed along to me by Marisa in both English and Spanish, to add to the document data collected for the study. All program staff were “dressed casually” (p. 2), contributing to the informal atmosphere. The new cohort was encouraged at every step to ask questions, although there were very few questions asked, and to stay in constant contact with the program about their needs and their progress. The financial educators, Sonya and Marisol, were introduced, and the childcare providers were brought into the room to talk about the ages and expectations of the children in their care during the classes. These qualified caretakers, both

university educated in childhood development and education, make sure that homework gets done, and they work on a variety of projects with the children, making their time in the community center as productive as possible. Field notes from that day recorded the childcare providers saying that they run a “programa de educacion por los ninos [educational program for the children]” (p. 1), and that they emphasized that the women learners could relax and focus on their classwork. This was one of the first indications that Mujeres Fuertes was not just about helping the women themselves, but also about the children and the community, a finding confirmed by the stated goal of the program in the PowerPoint presentation, mentioned previously.

The leadership educator, Mercedes, then came into the room and talked briefly about how her classes would help them reach their own personal goals, not the goals set by anyone else for them. Field notes from that part of the presentation show that Mercedes said that the women learners would work on their “auto-estima, confianza, y desarrollo,” on their self-esteem, confidence, and development. She also discussed how all of the personnel in the program, “somos bien conectadas en la comunidad” (p. 2), or that they are all well connected in the community, with access to resources or information about potential resources to assist the women with whatever their “recursos[needs]” might be (p. 1). The only person not present at this first class was the woman who handles the career and educational advising and counseling, but with whom the learners would make appointments the following week. The last visitors to the orientation session and to meet the new learners were two women from more advanced cohorts: one was from the second cohort, so she was in her third year of the program, and another was from the sixth cohort, and so in her second year of the program. Their mantra, delivered repeatedly to the women, was “si se puede,” or “yes, you can” (pp. 1-2). The learner from the

second cohort had even purchased her own home, a long-term goal of many of the women, and about which the woman talked with excitement and encouraging tones, again saying, “si se puede.” Their presence was undoubtedly inspiring to the new cohort, the purpose of their visit, according to Marisa.

The women were then encouraged to help Marisa come up with a calendar for bringing food to share during the breaks at every class meeting. She pointed out that they were there for four hours each day, also coinciding with meal times, and that having a different person bring food to share with the class each time was a way to ease the burden on each other. They did not make the calendar at that moment, however. This food-sharing element of the program will be discussed in more detail in the findings section.

Interestingly, at the end of this orientation presentation, the women were asked to open their binders to the page describing the expectations of the program, called the “Camino al exito [Road to success].” The teachers took turns reading each statement to the learners. The very first statement on this list was about showing respect to everyone, “respetar la opinion de todas [respecting the opinion of everyone],” a point that had been mentioned by Marisa earlier in the presentation. She had said that Mujeres Fuertes strives to create an “ambiente del grupo con respeto [a respectful atmosphere]” (p. 2). The list continued with the importance of being on time, absenteeism, childcare, and privacy. This last point of privacy, or “confidencialidad,” of what is said in the classroom is considered “la mas importante [the most important],” since it helps everyone to “sentiremos respetadas y seguras de todo lo que compartir [feel respected and safe about everything that is shared].” Even though this rule reading seemed authoritative, when none of the previous parts of the presentation were, this step is seen as necessary to ensuring that all of the women, with their varying levels of education and abilities, thoroughly understand the

expectations for success. As mentioned previously, the women also sign a contract indicating their commitment to the program. The program is interested in helping all of the women to improve their lives, which was very clear after this initial class.

Surprisingly, the women did not question my presence in the classroom. In fact, they did not really seem to notice me. Perhaps it was because there were so many people coming to and going from the classroom as they were introduced. Perhaps they were so involved in learning about the program, figuring out who their teachers were going to be, and getting to know each other, that the presence of one more stranger was not significant. On the other hand, it is possible that they simply did not think it noteworthy, since this was their first class, and they would not know that my presence was unusual. Marisa mentioned who I was and why I was there, but the learners were much more interested in scheduling the food calendar and their appointments for career and financial counseling sessions than in talking with a researcher.

The First Financial Literacy Class

After a break and the infusion of fresh, warmer air into the classroom, the new cohort began their first class in financial literacy education, taught by Marisol. On this day, they did not have food to share, but did refill their coffee cups from the back table. The windows were once more closed, and Marisol passed out a sheet of paper to each learner. The intake form, which acts as a baseline of financial information for each learner, is very important to the program, to the financial counselors, and to the women. It is on this intake form that the improvement of their financial situation begins, and the place at which the tracking of their progress begins. Marisol gave strict instructions to the women not to work ahead, but treated it very much like an employment application, explaining what information was needed for each question. In the first five minutes of the activity, she warned the learners three different times to be careful, read the

directions, and not to go further than everyone else (Field notes, 2010), so its accuracy and significance to the program was clear. Marisol again emphasized this same point just five minutes later, explaining how important the form was to the reporting of the program, and talked about “los cambios [the changes]” that take place “antes de programa [before the program]” and “despues de programa [after the program]” (p. 3).

Although filling out this form might not seem like an instructional activity, in reality, it gives the women an opportunity to reflect upon all of the factors that contribute to their financial well-being and gives them exposure to the kinds of topics and areas they will be learning about over the next year. It also gives Marisol the opportunity to define financial terms clearly at the outset of the classes. For example, she talked about the differences between being separated and legally separated, which has implications for financial assistance that might be available to a parent and her family. She also clarified terms like earned income tax credit, who is the “dueno de casa [head of household],” and full-time versus part-time employment.

Before beginning this class, Marisol and I talked briefly about the upcoming session. She mentioned that the women were always reluctant at first to share their financial information, as the “trust has not been built yet” (p. 3), between the educators and learners and between the learners themselves. Although they would not be sharing all of their information with the other learners during this activity, they were all sitting close together, so even inadvertently some of this private information would be exposed. In addition, as the class progressed, women would ask questions that would give an indication of their financial situations. The body language of the women at the beginning of this activity, closed arms, crossed legs, and bent heads, as mentioned previously, all indicated a level of discomfort with the material and with each other.

Throughout the class, Marisol continued to answer questions about the difference between having access to a computer and having a computer in their homes, about how to determine the number of people living in their homes, and about how to show that they were looking for another place to live. Determining items such as whether or not they work part time or full time and their hourly pay was problematic for some women. There were instances in which the women work for themselves, or they work only intermittently. For example, one learner cleans other people's homes and does not keep track of her hourly wages. In the questionable situations, Marisol asked the learners to bring a copy of their paystubs to the first counseling meeting so they could determine the numbers at that time, or to leave an answer blank until the meeting. As mentioned previously, this all took place in Spanish, which caused a bit of trouble at times, when the women were only familiar with certain terms in English. For example, when the question of child support and alimony came up, those words were only in English. Some of the women required further explanation of the differences, and Marisol indicated that if they do not already receive child support, they might be able to get it for their children. What became clear as the discussion proceeded was that, as I noted in the field notes, in Marisol's guidance through the activity, there was "recognition of widely differing experiences" among the women (p. 4).

Marisol was also careful to emphasize and encourage the learners throughout the process and was constantly telling the learners that there are resources out there that are available to them, if they were not already taking advantage of them. An example of this came up in the discussion of what they pay for childcare. Marisol mentioned a childcare assistance program, called Action for Children, benefits associated with "desempleo," or unemployment, and the advantages of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Again, she also reminded the learners

multiple times that Mujeres Fuertes would use these numbers to report differences to the granting agency, both on an individual basis and as a cohort, and encouraged them to report any changes in their status because “quiero ver la diferencia [I want to see the difference]” (p. 4).

The intake form covered all of the expected areas of concern, including monthly bills, rent or mortgages, credit card debt, credit scores, foreclosures, collections or judgments, repossessions, savings, car payments, and insurance. Marisol briefly talked about payday loans, those loans a person can get in advance of their regular paycheck. They then pay back the loan with interest when they get paid. Marisol asked them if they knew the amount of interest that was charged on one payday loan, if it was figured out over an entire year. The learners responded with answers of “30%” of “50%” (p. 5). Their shock was palpable, when she gave the answer of 400%. However, the discussion would be taken up later in the courses, with this information acting as a teaser to grab their interest. She also talked about how they were all going to make a plan and write it down, and not keep it in their heads, a sternly stated comment accompanied by laughter from the women. The intake form also included more unpleasant financial information, such as I noted in the field notes in a mix of Spanish and English, “foreclosures, coleccion, care repossessed, judgments—take money from check” (p. 5). Marisol mentioned how difficult it is to make changes, but that they could do it, especially with repetition of the positive behavior, evidence of the constant encouragement offered to the learners at all times.

As the two hours passed, the women appeared to relax. They gradually began to make whispered comments or questions to one another from time to time, their body language relaxed, and they were looking up with interest at each other and at Marisol. They asked more and more personal questions over the class period. One woman asked about what to do if a relative used her name for a credit card, but then left the country, so it was now on her credit report. Another

woman asked about taxes that she had not paid for four years. When the forms were finished, Marisol asked them how they were feeling. One woman answered, “frias [cold]” (p. 5), which evoked much laughter and agreement from her classmates. They were also eager to set up the calendar for bringing food, with three different women volunteering to bring food the very next weekend. At this point, at the end of the first day of classes, the atmosphere had changed dramatically, the reasons for which will be addressed in the discussion chapter.

The women were also eager to follow Marisol down the hallway to her office that she shares with the other members of the Mujeres Fuertes personnel in order to make their first financial counseling appointment, while their children waited impatiently in the hallway. This hour-long conversation would take place as soon as possible, so that the program can get the most accurate information possible about the point from which the women are starting. During the first meeting, they go over the intake form, pull the learner’s credit report, make a financial plan based on her goals, do an income/expenses worksheet, and make a budget for the learner to follow.

After the learners had made their appointments and left, Marisol showed me an example of a financial portfolio, which contains the intake form and countless other items of documentation that the financial counselors need to help their learners. These items include copies of their credit reports, a financial plan, copies of pay stubs, any relevant correspondence, bank statements, a budget, and an expenses and income worksheet, mentioned above (p. 6). She indicated, in our brief and informal conversation, that some learners require additional time to discuss their situations, and she even spent four hours with a woman one time. She also mentioned that sometimes the women appear to need to “vent,” to just talk about their financial troubles with someone, especially with someone who wants to help, so that she might ask “one

question, and they talk for 30 minutes to explain one thing, then she has to ask the same question again” (p. 7) to get them to answer the question. I noted in the field notes, written in the car, immediately after our conversation, that Marisol talked with me about how the emphasis of the program is on “how to help them find success to reach their own goals that they set for themselves—it’s their plan for their own lives...guiding them to find their own independence, not the independence someone else thinks they should have” (p. 7). Marisol always talked about the women in the program with a lot of respect and admiration, emphasizing how “the women have been through so much...much more than she personally had” (p. 7), and how the educators and learners all learn from one another.

The Financial Literacy Class on Taxes

The financial literacy education class on taxes was for the more advanced cohort, which was beginning its second 15-week session. These learners, then, had already completed 15 weeks of financial education and leadership classes, had a break of one week, and had just started their second 15 weeks. It was taught by the other financial educator and counselor, Sonya, and started at 9:00am on a Saturday morning. Marisa mentioned to me that morning, a little before 9:00, that tardiness was a problem for this cohort. Therefore, in an effort to encourage them to be prompt, they were raffling off tickets to see one of the major league baseball teams in the city. Only those who were on time would have a chance to win the tickets, which had been donated by one of the sponsors of Mujeres Fuertes. The morning, then, started off with some excitement of getting the attendance sheet, part of each class, signed as early as possible. The members of Cohort 10 were dressed casually, as the new cohort was, but with sweaters and jackets. The window was open, making it loud, but not as loud as the previous day’s rush hour traffic. The women who had arrived early talked with one another about the week. One woman shared that she was pregnant

and the others responded with warm congratulations and a rubbing of her slightly distended belly. They asked about one another's families and the day-to-day concerns friends share.

In the field notes, I noted that at 9:05am, there were only five women there, as the educator finished setting up the laptop and projector. A few minutes later and with more learners present, a total of 9 learners by 9:15am, they immediately asked Sonya who I was, and why I was there visiting. She explained that I was working on "un estudio [a study]" (p. 8) and would be observing. She invited me to introduce myself, which I did. Taking the opportunity to talk with them, I also explained a little about what I was studying, and then asked for their help with the interviews. The response was welcoming and enthusiastic. This communication took place in English, as I was not feeling confident that my message would be delivered accurately if I used my rusty Spanish. The women in this cohort were nearly all bilingual, although some had more confidence in their English language skills than others. Even though I indicated that the interviews would take place in English, even those without a high level of English ability volunteered. As the class progressed, there were multiple times when Sonya, a native speaker of Spanish, but whose English skills nearly matched her Spanish skills, would forget to always use Spanish and had to be reminded, laughingly, by the class.

Before jumping into the topic of taxes and her PowerPoint presentation, Sonya handed out copies of the slides to everyone, including to me to add to my growing stack of documents. Most of the learners put their packets into their binders, but a few of the women arrived empty handed. Sonya then began the class with an explanation of what the government does with the money they collect from income taxes. She asked the learners why knowing about taxes was important and called on a learner when no one raised her hand to answer. She used hybrid language at times, commonly called Spanglish, like "el IRS" or "el social security number" (p.

9). There was also some confusion about “impuestos,” the word for “taxes” in Spanish. Sonya clarified by saying, “impuestos son taxes y ingresos son income [impuestos are taxes and ingresos are income]” (p. 9). Several of the women simply reverted to “los taxes.” Once this vocabulary was clear, Sonya spent time talking about all of the topics relevant to federal income taxes, including the W-4 form, dependents, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with claiming more exemptions, saying that there are “consecuencias,” or consequences to each choice.

To give a bit more context to the atmosphere in the room and in the building, some of which was mentioned previously, the following was included in my field notes from that morning:

Today, less traffic, window open, loud, motorcycle. Noisy classes going on—lots of talking, guitar music. Table in hallway with Mexican food-yum. Dancing in cafeteria, smell of Mexican food. Students again at plastic tables in plastic stacking chairs. (pp. 8-9)

All of this activity and noise around them did not seem to take away from the interest and ability to concentrate by the learners. I also noted later in the notes that the last learner arrived at 9:26am and closed the window before sitting in the last empty seat. As is the case in any other classroom in the U.S., the learners who arrived late were “sometimes embarrassed, sometimes no” (p. 9).

At every point along the way, Sonya was careful to make sure the learners understood and did not have additional questions. She often answered “depende de la situacion [it depends]” (p. 10-11), while also referring them to La Agencia for special cases, the social services part of the program. During her explanation of the fees involved in filing and paying taxes late, one student seemed worried and asks if there is help for those who do not pay on time. Another

student asked what would happen if someone else used her social security number for working when she was not working herself, prompting talk about identity theft. After that, the discussion moved to child support and alimony, the latter on which income taxes must be paid. Many learners did not know the difference between the two kinds of income, just as in the new cohort on the previous day, nor did they know where they could have their taxes done for them, the next topic.

In talking about tax preparation, Sonya told the class about an experience she had with a “fast refund,” in which she did not realize until it was too late that there are charges associated with them. She said, “esos son prestamos [they are loans]” (p. 11) which, of course, have interest charges. Sonya mentioned that she had not carefully read the paperwork and had to “pay \$150 to have her money” (p. 11), to which the learners responded with understanding laughter. She recommended that it might be better, if they can, to “wait a little” (p. 11) for their money. As the class continued, the learners stayed interested throughout the presentation, never lacking for questions that might challenge Sonya. One of the learners had a lot of experience with taxes, and Sonya made ample use of her expertise as needed, deferring to her knowledge when Sonya did not know the answers.

The discussion took an interesting turn when the “estado civil,” or the marital status of the women, was addressed, along with the advantages and disadvantages to filing jointly or separately. Delineating the differences when someone is married, living together, but separated, or how living together was not legally married. These are the kinds of confusing issues that she suggested should be addressed by expert tax preparers. She also cautioned them from preparing their own taxes online, unless they knew a lot about them. Sonya talked about how the man is

usually the head of the household in this society, but that it did not have to be that way, and then answered a learner's question about dependents when a child is away at school.

At this point, nearing the end of the class session, the learners were getting restless, using the bathroom, getting more coffee, and stretching frequently. There are additional questions about paying family members who work for one of the women in her cleaning business, how to handle childcare expenses, and claiming unemployment benefits as income. Sonya, wrapping up the taxes presentation, amidst the restless learners closing their binders and getting ready to go, encouraged the learners to visit the website for the Internal Revenue Service (irs.gov) for more information about any of the topics they have discussed, emphasizing that she is not an expert on taxes. Surprisingly, the learners asked if they could have additional classes on taxes. Sonya reminded them that free tax preparation is always available at the community center as tax time approaches. The class ended with the drawing for the baseball tickets. As the guest, I was asked to draw the names for them. There was a lot of excitement surrounding this event, and I was pleased to participate in providing two of the women with two tickets each to attend the local team's game. The women chatted comfortably with each other as they prepared to share the food with each other during their break between classes.

This, then, is the context in which the learning takes place in the financial education program. They are immersed in the classroom community with the other Hispanic single mothers, learning from the educator and from each other. As will be seen in the findings that follow, this sociocultural context strongly impacts the educators, the women, and their experiences learning about financial education topics.

Introduction to the Findings

As previously mentioned, data for this case study was collected through the class observations detailed above, through interviews, a tour of the facility, and documents, including the website information for Mujeres Fuertes. A description of some of the class observational data, to provide a sense of the learning culture of the group, has already been provided. Analysis of the data overall suggests that there are three main findings about the factors that influence the teaching and learning that takes place in this financial education program for Hispanic single mothers: (a) the program's holistic approach to financial education that includes the supporting role of the program in providing resources and connections to resources, the development of learners' leadership skills, the role of the program in the development of the local community, and the creation of connections and a cultural community between the women; (b) the use of a pedagogy that emphasizes content and process, including the use of stories and shared experiences as a pedagogical tool and source of knowledge and cultural connection between the learners; (c) the importance of encouraging and monitoring learner behavior change for improved financial management. Although sociocultural factors cannot always be easily delineated from other factors in the classroom, the findings will first be presented in each of the categories listed above, and then followed by considerations of the salient sociocultural influences that impact the findings and, therefore, impact the teaching and learning in this financial education classroom. For clarity, a data display of the findings appears on the next page, and then the discussion continues.

Data Display: Findings

A Holistic Approach to Financial Education

Providing resources and support for the learners

Developing leadership

Leadership skill building

Cascading effect

Establishing a cohort as a cultural support community

Emphasizing commonality

Sharing food as cultural community building

Gender, bonding, and the effects of machismo

A Pedagogy that Emphasizes Content and Process

Emphasis on meeting learner needs

Personal stories as pedagogical purpose

Creating a comfortable and trusting environment

Promoting learners' engagement

Providing a sociocultural and gendered dimension

The Promotion of Financial Behavior Change

Tracking changes in savings and credit reports

Motivating learners through positive effects and role models

Setting goals

Building on small changes

A Holistic Approach to Financial Education in a Cultural Community

As mentioned in previous sections, Mujeres Fuertes considers many factors in the mission of the program. As their literature states, both on their website and in the various brochures and pamphlets I collected during the research process, the program strongly encourages education as the way to increase their power, both in their lives and in their community. As previously mentioned, in one of the presentations about the overall program, they state that their goals are to (a) invest in Latina women; (b) believe in their potential; (c) provide support services; (d) impact the whole family and community; and (e) act as a model for other programs in other locations. This view of the learners as whole persons, not limited to needing only knowledge about financial matters, is a holistic approach that extends beyond the financial education classroom, so that the women are learning about and gaining access to financial management skills, but also learning skills they can apply to all areas of their lives. The findings indicate that not only are they learning basic financial knowledge, they are also learning how to take an active role in their own lives, in making changes, in developing a sense of responsibility in their communities, and then in becoming leaders in their community. The upcoming discussion about this holistic approach will include findings about the multitude of resources the program provides for the learners to help them learn in all areas of their lives, followed by a discussion of the role of the cohort and cultural community that also offers support for the learners.

Providing resources and support for the learners. As mentioned above, Mujeres Fuertes is not only about education, but a combination of services that help the women in all areas of their lives, from helping them to provide food for their families to giving them opportunities to learn about different hobbies for their free time. They have the advantage of

having three organizations working together to help them, as discussed previously. The program tries to satisfy any needs the women might have that could stand in the way of their future success, whether it might be getting child support or counseling for their children. Mujeres Fuertes works very hard to provide the women learners with as many resources and as much support as possible to help them with whatever kinds of problems they might have, especially with the kinds of problems that might stand in the way of them improving their lives.

For example, from the interviews and from the orientation session, both the observation and the PowerPoint presentation used that day, I learned that women with children are able to access a variety of resources within the community for help with childcare, housing, child support, food, and utilities. The learners also may have a need to access to counseling services for themselves and their family, or for assistance with understanding their employment rights, which would be handled by La Agencia, the social services part of the program. For more specific issues related to financial resources not listed above, the financial educators provide locations for tax preparation, ways to raise a credit score, responsibilities related to home buying and maintenance, renter's rights, and how to access banking services, all in addition to the basic financial education in the classroom. For example, if a learner is preparing to purchase her own home, she could go to the financial services organization, one-third of the tripartite organization that is Mujeres Fuertes. The financial services organization, according to their pamphlet in both English and Spanish, offers extra help to be a "sabio y responsable dueno de hogar [smart and savvy homeowner]." They also offer opportunities to prevent foreclosure and to "descubra vivienda a precios economicos [discover affordable housing options]." Mujeres Fuertes helps the women to locate whatever help they might need to put them in a better financial position, ideally so that they are no longer in need of the assistance.

Both educators and the program administrator emphasized in the interviews how much of an advantage they have in providing the necessary resources for their learners, because they have three organizations working together in the program. They even mentioned this during the orientation presentation I observed, when Mercedes stated, “somos bien conectadas en la comunidad [we are well connected in the community]” (Field notes, 2010, p. 1). The walls of the building in which the classes take place were covered with bulletin boards, pamphlets, and fliers about educational and assistance opportunities, in both Spanish and English, giving them more access to resources they might need. For example, some of the titles of the fliers I collected were, “Hazte Ciudadano Americano! [Become an American Citizen!,” “Entrenamiento para Servicio al Cliente [Training in Customer Service],” “Camino al exito [Road to Success],” “Computers en espanol sabados [Computers in Spanish Saturdays],” “Free CAN Preparation classes begin soon!,” and “Viernes de SNAP [Food Stamp Fridays],” demonstrating the many opportunities the women have to get more education and assistance.

As described, Mujeres Fuertes combines the expertise of a financial and housing organization, an education and career organization, and a social services organization. In addition to these services, they also bring in outside resources from the community. Marisol talked specifically about this ability of the educators, “we do a lot of networking, we have a lot of contact with banks, with other organizations, a lot of contacts that we already have, and we just call them and ask.” They bring in guest speakers, always bilingual or Spanish speakers, as needed by the learners. Marisol and Sonya recognize that they are not experts in all areas of personal finance, so they are happy to have people who have the necessary expertise into the classroom. They have guest speakers from within their own organizations, from outside sources, from members of more advanced cohorts who have developed expertise in a particular area, or

from friends and family members of learners who have a similar expertise. There are speakers from local banks, nearly always banks that are involved in the local community:

we just ask them to stick to the topic and not promote or talk about their specific things.

If someone is interested in their services, they will approach them, and then they can give their card, but not come specifically to promote their bank.

The educators are also careful to be present for the presentations, in case there are additional topics that emerge from the presentation that might be useful to talk about in class. They also “make sure that topic or the class is going with what we need it to be, and also to give the ladies the comfort that they are not just with someone new, that there is someone they know there.” This last point of making the learners comfortable is especially important early in the program. Sonya mentioned some more specific people and sources for information that they have access to for the learners,

we have tapped a lot into the resources of our coworkers [in the financial and housing organization]...They have a lot of knowledge, they work a lot with foreclosure and loan modification, so they are aware of that, so they come and help us with that. We try to, you know, get a diversity of guest speakers. And, like in the class, a student says, “oh, well I know someone,” I say, well give me her number. And we try with all of those topics, to bring that person to give that topic. We have contacts in the social security office, in the Cook County assessor’s office,...the state’s attorney’s office.

In the classroom, during the observation with Sonya’s class, she also deferred multiple questions about specifics of taxes to a student who knew many of the answers to questions. The woman has experience with doing her own taxes as a self-employed individual, and therefore

could help other students in her situation. Having people visit or speak to the class are not the only ways the educators provide resources for the learners. Marisol talked about how they also, show them online, this is how you look up who your representatives are, this is where you can find the person you need to report to, or these are the resources around your neighborhood that you can actually go to and get information about this particular issue.

It is not unusual for them to refer the learners to other organizations or places to go for additional legal or other kind of assistance. Marisol has found it to be an advantage to her to live in the same community as the women, to be close to the issues that might arise in the community, and to have lots of experience working with these women, in order to know how to help them effectively, “it gives a lot of experience in just listening to them and learning from them about their own personal experiences, learning what is happening in the communities.”

In addition to these resources gained by the educators, Marisa, the program administrator, mentioned that they sometimes conduct workshops on topics of interest for the women learners:

Sometimes our students have questions that aren't on the curriculum, so we try to do workshops, you know, some of them mentioned, “what if I want to open my own business, what do I do?” So, we ask people from the Chamber of Commerce to come in and do a seminar. And they give them the basic information, how to open your own business, basic entrepreneurship, from the state's attorney, we have someone coming in to talk about child support, who qualifies, how to do a follow up. So, even though it's not on the curriculum, we ask, you know, what do you need to see that they didn't get to see, and we get those outside resources.

They all appear to be very responsive to the needs of the learners. Marisa also mentioned how the social services organization can provide additional counseling for victims of domestic abuse and for mothers and daughters who appear to be struggling.

However, providing resources is not the only objective of this part of the program. Rather, they show the learners how to find the information they require themselves, helping them to reach a higher level of independence in all areas of their lives. Since, as mentioned previously, part of the goal of *Mujeres Fuertes* is to assist the women learners in becoming leaders in their community, this component also contributes to their independence. As mentioned in previous sections, the educators are trying to encourage the learners to go find the answers themselves. Marisol talked about this during our informal conversation, noting that they “help them find success to reach their own goals” (Field notes, 2010, p. 7). From her perspective, then, it is not the achievements of the program that are important, but the achievements the women learners make on their own. The program acts as facilitator.

The interviews with the learners offer additional support for the efforts of the educators and of the program in providing access to resources the women need and how they are encouraged to find their own answers. They follow up with whatever information the women need, if they do not have immediate access to it.

Our teachers,...they aren't always able to go over every bit of material, but they guide us in the right direction. To each, they go ahead and follow up with the information they present to us, the materials and the support is what makes us stronger.

Rosa went even farther in explaining details of the kinds of help the staff of *Mujeres Fuertes* offers to the learners:

They offer to help you with your credit...If you are interested in another program, they put you in the first of the list because you are in the program...they help you a lot...How to save money. How can I make a retirement, like a bank account, all different programs that I didn't know about before that we can have when we retire. I thought we have to wait until we are 60 years old to do it, but no, we can start and make savings right now, because we might not have it in the future. I think that's the most important part. That information is really helpful.

The women learners, then, have found the resources and access to the local resources to be very helpful to them in their financial and personal improvement, as a supplement to the financial education they are receiving in the program.

Developing leadership. As explained in the previous section about the organization and mission of Mujeres Fuertes, the leadership component of the program plays an important role in meeting the educational and personal needs of the learners. Accordingly, in addition to the career skills classes and the financial education classes, the leadership part of the program and the cascading effects the program hopes to create are discussed below.

Leadership skill building. As mentioned in previous sections, while the learners are attending classes in financial education topics, they also attend classes that help them improve their knowledge of goal setting, communication skills, problem solving, sexuality, Hispanic culture, leadership, and self-esteem. The goal is to create leadership in the community by confident, knowledgeable women. Although these topics do not specifically have to do with financial education and learning, the women all talked about how their learning in that area of their lives has positively affected their personal financial management abilities and successes. Marisa talked about how much success they have had in creating these leaders,

they really do become leaders in their community. We have a local church,...and we have some of our women volunteering there, I think the topic was labor rights, so they are actually going out to get those rights. Not only are they learning the topic, they are being trained for this, and they are gonna go and give this information to the community.

Sonya mentioned a specific occasion when the learners volunteered with a national organization for Latinos, during a community fair. She also confirmed the impact of the leadership program on the community as a whole, as well as on the families:

I think we have had a very positive impact on the community. Women, that's where we start the base of the community, then we have the children, and then we have overall the community. So, we invest in the women's progress, we are literally investing in the community. So, we have seen, like at church, they may be offering a class, or they might be looking for volunteers for help with their financial fairs, or anything our students might be able to help with, you know, they are making that positive impact in the community.

When asked about the most important aspect of the program, overall, to their lives, the learner interviewees all cited the leadership part of the program. They also all mentioned the self-esteem classes as helpful to them and the way they see themselves, their lives, and their future. In our conversations, Sonya and Marisa both brought up the statistic the leadership program uses to talk about the success of the program. They have projected that 80% of all of the members of the cohorts will have improved their self-esteem, based on pre- and post-program testing. The learners interviewed support this assertion. Christina, the most tentative of the learner interviewees, discussed how important the leadership part of the courses and the leadership instructor, Mercedes, have been for her, "that class helped me with my personal me. To want

things, to see...” Rosa also talked about her personal changes, including her previous tendency to be shy about speaking English, a shyness that was not evident at all during the interview, but how that changed under the guidance of the leadership instructor:

before I was so shy to be speaking English. I thought everybody would be laughing at me because I didn't pronounce the words right in English, so I would do like, my instructor...would say, “you know what, don't feel like that, because at least you try. You are trying and that's good. It's double work for you doing it right now. Even though English isn't your first language, you are trying it and you speak it really well.” I'm doing my best.

The findings suggest that the support from the wealth of resources offered by Mujeres Fuertes is giving the women the kind of help they need at this point in their lives, both from a financial and personal perspective, which then enables them to help others in their community.

Marisol and Sonya both addressed this combined effort on multiple occasions, talking about the incorporation of community issues in the financial education classroom, and then how that connects the leadership component with the financial component. Marisol stated that, “we are always trying to make a connection between the finances and the leadership and how it impacts yourself and you pocket, but also your children and your community as a whole.”

Marisa also mentioned this idea of a combined effect of the program in achieving success for the women in all areas:

We have noticed that each component, you know you might think that its an individual, stand-alone component, but they all really correlate with each other. We have noticed that with the leadership class, they really get to develop their self-esteem, their self-confidence, and then when we look at their education or their professional development,

if their self confidence lags, the self-esteem, you know, they might be lacking that to start a career. They might not believe in themselves, and think, “oh, I can’t do that, I have three children, and I haven’t been to school in 10 or 15 years,” so building that leadership, that self-esteem helps with the education component. And, they say, “yeah, I can do this. I believe in myself.” But what happens if they lack the financial guidance, right? What if they don’t know how to budget? Or, really, how would they pay for tuition, for books? You know, it can be very expensive. So that can pull that component in, and they are all tied together, all related.”

Sonya continues this thought of the combined effort between the two components of the program as being partially responsible for the women’s success. She said that the women are leading by example, the importance of education, of leadership, of financial educated and literacy, all of that involved making new decisions. I have seen that it’s not one component. It’s everything together, that they are able to make a significant change in their attitude, in their way of life, of seeing life. Their children are also seeing that change and seeing that change is possible. And, that there’s a better way.

Cascading effect. It is one of the hallmarks of Mujeres Fuertes, that they are trying to achieve a cascading effect, in which the knowledge and behavior is spread to children and neighbors in the community, making the entire community stronger. Marisol gave a specific example of a learner who said that her family members and coworkers now call her for advice and information, instead of the other way around, as it used to be. Marisol also pointed out that the women are no longer content to be without whatever information they need. The program has helped them develop their own skills to find their own answers, so that now,

if they aren't comfortable with where they are, they start seeking out knowledge, and they continue, "where can I get this?" And, that same eagerness, that same wanting to learn, is also reflected on other people that they come and ask them, what should I do? You know, they start sharing what they learned and they realize that they don't know everything and they start looking for answers.

Sonya and Marisa, during what became the joint interview, were laughing proudly about this exact issue. They talked about how their "ladies," as they call them, are always asking for more. Sonya said that of all of the classes that are offered in community center, the staff always knows that, "whoever is gonna come and complain or demand something, "oh, it's [Mujeres Fuertes, Mujeres Fuertes]." Marisa followed up on this comment with the reasons why they complain or demand more education or information,

Because they always want the best. And they aren't comfortable with what they have, like [Sonya] was mentioning. If they say in the ESL class, "oh, why are we watching movie, we should be learning something else." And they go and they talk with the instructor. They are really committed. And they stand out.

Sonya believes it is this combined program that helps the women see the "potential in themselves," that they do not have to accept things as they have always been. In the financial management part and in the leadership part, Sonya made the point that the educators lead by example, and encourage the learners to

confront whatever the problem is and find the solution. And because we tend to do the same, you know, if we don't have the answers, we will look for them or guide you in the right direction. "Try here, try there, have you tried this?" Look for resources. And they start doing that.

Thus, the findings indicate that the women in Mujeres Fuertes are receiving the benefits of learning about financial education from within a larger program that includes a more holistic look at the lives of the women. It recognizes that the women are in need of more than just basic financial education in order to achieve success.

Establishing a cohort as a cultural support community. The Hispanic women learners in Mujeres Fuertes, along with the administrator and educators, create a community that enriches and supports them as they go through the program, and contributes to the holistic approach in supporting the women in all parts of their lives. Although they come from different countries and cities, they share a language, a personal history, a culture, and the community in which they live, all of which function to pull them together into their own community inside the cohort. They quickly develop close connections with one another, making their peer group similar to a family. The findings from these phenomena and their apparent effects on learning in the financial education classroom will be discussed in the sections that follow, including the emphasis in the program on the commonalities among the learners' experiences, the use of food to create connections, and the ways the learners bond as Latina women.

Emphasizing commonality. The women in the Mujeres Fuertes program are all single mothers and come from a variety of countries, such as Mexico, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S., with some of them having grown up in the Midwestern city. In spite of some of these differences there is an emphasis on commonality, or the experiences they share in their life circumstances. They are all bilingual, although there are varying degrees of comfort speaking one or the other of the languages. As the program is given in Spanish, and as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the women must have a working knowledge and ability in Spanish in order to qualify for participation. Aside from the fact that they are all Hispanic and Spanish speakers,

there are other cultural commonalities among them. For example, a topic that emerged from the interviews with both the educators and learners was the male-dominated culture in Hispanic communities and how it affects the lives of the women and their families. The women in this group share that background, and it is likely that this culture in which they were raised contributed to their need to attend a financial education program. They also share a love of food and the role food has in creating connections in the Hispanic community. In addition, the women share their experiences as mothers and trying to raise children on their own and in a consumer-driven society. In addition, they share the neighborhood and city in which they live, as well as the need and desire to empower themselves through education.

It is important to note at this point in the discussion that although the women all live in the same community within a larger city, they are not all from the same countries, as mentioned previously and as will be discussed in more detail in later sections. In addition, within this particular city and in other cities across the country, there is tension between the different groups; between those who are citizens and those who are not; between those who are in seasonal professions and those who are not; between those who are here legally and those who are undocumented; between those who are bilingual and those who only speak their native language; and between those who are from one country as opposed to another, to name a few of the conflicting issues. However, *Mujeres Fuertes* focuses on the similarities between the women and their experiences, not on their differences. As Sonya points out,

they could come from different countries, but most of them are Hispanic, so even though there are differences between different countries, in general, the culture is basically the same. And even for the ones that were born here, somehow they were exposed to the Hispanic-American culture. So, it's not, at least with the population we're working

currently, you don't really see those difference. You see them, in general, the same. On an individual basis, we do see differences, but I think culturally, it's one, it's seen as one. I would assume that if we were in another population where there was more Anglo culture, we would see the differences, but right now, all of it is considered, I would say, one type of culture.

In addition to this emphasis on their cultural similarities, Sonya also talked about the use of the term "Hispanic" as opposed to "Latina," an issue that can become important to the identity of the women, as mentioned in previous sections. She spoke to the new identity that immigrants "learn" when they come to the U.S., when they had previously identified themselves as from a particular country or continent, such as "Mexican or Guatemalans or South Americans, you don't learn Latino or Hispanic identity until you are here." She indicated that in the program, in the interest of bringing the women together as a group, with their shared experiences and backgrounds, "we try to keep it Hispanic... You are like, oh okay, then we are all Hispanic." Sonya also equated this identification to the labels used with groups of individuals from Asian countries, "I think it's similar to the Asians. You know, we say they are all Asians, but maybe among them, they are not all the same... and they would say, no, we're different."

Thus, their shared histories are important to building community, and apparent in the general discussion about a Hispanic background, despite their differing countries of origin. Sonya pointed out that "even though there are differences between different countries, in general, the culture is basically the same. And even for the ones that were born here, somehow they were exposed to the Hispanic-American culture." Marisol agrees that even though they "come from so many different backgrounds, but still kind of the same, a lot of our values and teaching are the same way." Similarly, Rosa, one of the learners, also commented on this topic, saying that, "we

all speak the same language, and we have the same social, we share food we have in those states and the families...and you know, what was it like when we were little in our countries. That's why I think we are really close."

Sharing food as cultural community building. There was an emphasis on the significance of food, which seemed to have a cultural community-building dimension. This became evident, when, in an attempt to enhance my understanding of this and other cultural factors that affect the classroom and the program, I asked the interviewees specific questions about how they see the role of the Hispanic culture in *Mujeres Fuertes*. The topic of food emerged immediately in the first interview with the administrator, who had an interesting story to tell. As mentioned previously, the interview with the administrator, Marisa, took place in the shared office space of the program, and Sonya was also present. Questions specific to financial education curriculum and tracking were referred to Sonya, but she also contributed to the conversation when this food and culture topic emerged. Also described previously, the women learners are in class for four hours straight each week with a short break. The administrator and educators encourage them to take turns bringing food to share with the rest of the class and they make up a schedule to help with the organization of this endeavor. As we sat and talked, the administrator and educator both had plates of food that the students from the older cohort had brought to share. I asked about this schedule and what they thought about how the class with the new cohort members had ended with their eagerness to create this calendar for their class. Marisa told me that there was one group who decided not to share food, the second cohort out of the eleven. She continued,

And, what we noticed was that the women were not really connected with each other.

They, you know, after maybe 15 weeks together, they still wouldn't remember each

other's names...And, we also noticed that attendance started lagging. So, we had people being absent, and we would ask them, "how about your companera, have you heard what's going on?" And they would say, "Oh, no, no, I don't even remember who that is."

Marisa and the educators concluded from this experience that the sharing of food helps develop a "connection with each student." She pointed out that the other member of groups are very close and know what is happening with each other all the time. If someone is absent, there is always someone who knows why. Marisa went on to say that for the non-sharing cohort, that decided not to share food, it was the group that we had the most dropped people from that class... it was because of that experience, we encourage it a lot. You know, it's not mandatory... it's optional, and we say that it's gonna help and bring benefits.

She and Sonya then described how the bringing of food develops in the cohort, with it starting out as just cookies or store-bought food, but then it evolves into something more complex. Marisa said that, "they know, and they start knowing each other, and they know that you make a special dish. This dish is delicious, and you specialize in that...and they start knowing each other and they start looking out for each other." Marisol also confirmed this point of view about the connections between the members of that particular cohort:

What made them all or most of them drop, I'm not sure, but I think that the bonding, that they didn't really accomplish, I think that it really had something to do with that. They really didn't look out for each other, they didn't call each other or anything like that...it's that meeting and talking and sharing part that was missing, that bonding was missing.

This experience with the cohort and sharing of food, then, appears to build relationships between the learners, creating a support network for them inside and outside of the classroom.

Wanting to know more about this topic of food, I followed up this story with questions about food as it relates to the Hispanic cultures. Marisa and Sonya both agreed that food was very important in all gatherings of family and friends. Marisa talked about the importance of food in every family event, offering something for any guest. Sonya also addressed this issue of sharing and,

the importance of that is the sharing the little or big item that you have. It doesn't have to be something extra-ordinary...And it's very simple ingredients, but they do it in such a way, and it's like, it doesn't have to be what's in it, but in how it's prepared and how it's offered. And, within the culture, it's that. You are welcome.

Sonya also talked about her experience of being raised for part of her own childhood in the both U.S. and Mexico, and what it was like to come to the U.S. and experience the difference in culture surrounding food and sharing. She was surprised at the reactions from people with whom she tried to share her food, and also attributed the sharing of food as part of building a community.

I came from Mexico, over there, it's very frequent that you sit down, we almost take it for granted. "Oh, I have this, would you like some?" And I didn't notice that until, you know, I would get here, and say, "would you like some?" and they would look at me like, "huh? Why would you offer me food? Someone you don't really know?" But it's part of that, and you start forming the community, based on that, and it's sharing...It's part of a community.

By the end of the conversation about food and culture, Marisa and Sonya were finishing each other's sentences on this subject. They were talking about their workplace and how they get

together to share food there, as well as at home with their families and friends. Sonya began, “And it’s a symbol of...,” and Marisa finished, “We care about you.”

Marisa went on to discuss the importance of sharing food in the workplace, and how it has brought the Latino coworkers together on professional and personal levels, due to the cultural interaction that takes place through food. She told me that,

It’s mostly Latinos working here and we have a strong Latino culture in the organization. And, just two days ago, you know I thought about this, the rest of the department, they said, “You know [Marisa] why don’t you come,” the day I was testing, they said, “Why don’t you come downstairs, we have a torta [sandwich] for you.” And I thought, “Oh, that’s nice.” So, I go downstairs, and I said, “Where did you get these tortas from?” And they said, “oh, well, we were in the office and we thought, oh we’re hungry, why don’t we make something together, but we’re in the office.” So, they went to the bakery, they bought bread, they bought ham, they went to the grocery store and bought a can of refried beans, and just put them in the microwave, and they had tortas de frijoles en jamon [ham and bean sandwiches]. And, I just thought of, wow, you know, and the whole department was gathered together, and at that point, we were just talking about family, work, and I thought, this is why I love [the community center]. It’s just our culture, I love the way we are with each other. And there was that component of food brining everybody together. You know, my coworkers thinking of me and the rest of the co-workers to get food for everybody. I thought that was very moving.

Given that the learners in the program are women and the individuals telling the story about the workplace are women, I wanted to explore the issue of gender related to the sharing of food. I asked Marisa about the gender of the participants in the “torta” luncheon. She said that

there is one man on the community center staff who works with Mujeres Fuertes and who was there that day. I asked if he helped prepare the food. Marisa said that, “it was very interesting, because, you know, we were sharing the tortas, and he brought his laptop and would say, “what would you guys want to listen to?” And he would play it for us.” She emphasized that he was “just awesome to be around,” and that they suspected it was his wife who prepared the food items on the days when the coworkers bring food. In probing this issue a bit more, I asked if they thought the dynamic with sharing food in the classroom would be different if there were men in the Mujeres Fuertes classes. Sonya believed that the success of sharing food would depend on the educators’ presentation of the plan, “I think it would depend on us, and on all of us, we would try not to make it a difference. ‘You are part of the group and participate.’ Maybe their personal participation might be different, they might not probably make something.” Marisa agreed that “They would share food if there were men in the class, but I’m not sure they would make it.” Despite any effects on gender, Sonya pulled this piece of their cultural experiences together with her comment that this sharing of food creates “community.” She says that her sister, at her job, “they share food. It’s like, you know, “oh, it’s my turn to take...” This, in the office over here, with our coworkers, with [Marisa], “oh, you bring this, you bring this.” It’s part of a community.”

Gender, bonding, and the effects of machismo. Sonya and Marisol both addressed the machismo, or female gender bias, that is present in much of the Hispanic culture that these women share, and how it has brought many of the women into the program, particularly as it relates to money and the handling of money. Sonya made the point that Hispanic women are often not raised to take responsibility for their families’ financial management, including bringing money into the home:

we may not come from the culture of preparing a woman from the very beginning to be independent, to be financially independent to be the head of the household. We are not trained to do that from the time that we're born. So we are going out there and it's sort of like double work for women, more than men, because they are usually looked at as head of the household, they are the ones who have the money, and so it's not that. Yeah, some of the time, most of the time, it is the man who works, but usually it's the woman who is handling everything that is happening at home. But then you have that aspect where the man handles everything and the women are not allowed to do much, but house jobs and how to pick up the children and things like that. So we are not sort of guided in that independent businesswoman and how to prepare yourself to be out there on your own, in case you lose your husband, or in case you separate, or something like that. You aren't prepared for that future.

While this scenario is clearly not the case for all women, even for all of the women in *Mujeres Fuertes*, this differentiation between home-making and money-making can have a detrimental effect on the women raised to do only the former. Marisol also had an opinion to express about the machista culture common in this community and roles women are delegated to fill, as well as the frequent financial consequences of this kind of culture:

they were not allowed to do anything, but watch over the children or cook...And they were never allowed to go to school...the father told them, you know, "you don't need to go to school, you need to get married, and your husband will support you." Or they get married...and the husband is not allowing them to do anything, and then all of a sudden they take off and leave them alone. So, it's like, now what? Where do I start?...because they never learned any of this...But, that will come up, well, I own a house, but not

really, he isn't there, but he won't do anything with it, you know, he would rather lose the house, could be in foreclosure or stuff like that. You know, the male figure preventing them from getting ahead. And, like I said, in the Latino culture, well, not only in the Latino culture, because I'm starting to realize that it's in other cultures as well, where the male figure is very dominant.

It is in this shared background that the women learners find support for one another and connect to facilitate their learning.

They also appeared to develop close ties with one another because of their shared motherhood and life experiences. Christina finds strength in just being able to "talk with each other," something they might not otherwise have time to do in their busy lives. Alma states that, I think that what we all have went through, the classroom setting that we've had, to introduce ourselves and what we've been through, I think it has helped us to want to be there for each other, because there are so many cases where we are so similar and we are all there for basically the same reason.

She followed up her statement about being close with the one of the other learners in particular because of the similar background and experiences they have had: "we kind of clicked in the beginning. And then later on, just through talking with her personally, she did mention to me that she went through basically the same situation as myself." Rosa agrees with Alma's point of view about sharing the background with the other learners and attributes their closeness to it. "We are Latinas...so we share a lot of information that we pass through and we learn from each other, to get close to each other." I also asked the learners about the importance of having a Latina as an instructor and how it might be different if their instructor was from another gender or background. Rosa summed up the opinions of the other learners,

I don't think they would make any difference. I have in my experience before had one. Right now in [Mujeres Fuertes], I think it's the best option to have a Latina as the instructor, when we are Latinas, I think we click right away, we share a lot of information, we through culture and a lot of stuff, so I think it's great to have a Latina as an instructor. Also, we can say that we advance, like we have a different step to jump. So, to me it's great to have a Latina instructor in [Mujeres Fuertes].

In many ways, then, the Latina women learners are helping one another by sharing their food, themselves, and their culture with each other to create a community within their cohort.

These connections they are making with the other members of their cohort can lead to family-like relationships, in which they watch out for each other, keep track of the happenings in each other's lives, and support each other as they "pass" through one stage after another, as noted previously. Rosa made a point of talking about how rapidly they connected with one another: "Immediate, we were quick, we one, I mean we are like a family, every Saturday, we are like a family. We share everything, we are like sisters." Alma's experience with her cohort also indicates the depth of their relationships:

Although I do have family, we all confide in each other. When one of us are down, we try to bring each other up. I think we are really, really close. I would say that I've never known a sorority sister setting, but I would say it's something like that. Because you know, we do feel like we're family with each other.

Although it is clearly possible that not all of the students experience this closeness with the other members of the cohort, it is plain to see that these learners have connected with one another on cultural and personal levels, bordering on familial feelings. They have also connected based on the more practical aspects of their situations, including the fact that they are all trying to

raise their children, make a home, support that home financially, and educate themselves to manage their money more wisely and to provide a better career for themselves.

A Pedagogy that Emphasizes Content and Process.

In addition to considering the holistic approach of *Mujeres Fuertes*, an exploration of the pedagogical approach and practices of the financial educators is warranted. The upcoming discussion will address the delivery of financial information and the teaching methods these educators find useful, the ways they adjust the curriculum to fit the learners' needs, and the ample use of personal stories. On the surface, it is apparently content-driven teaching, using traditional information-delivery methods and activities, but the findings from the comments of the educators and learners and class observations reveal that there is a lot of attention to the specific needs of the learners, much of which is communicated through stories.

Content delivery with alternative techniques. The content of the financial education courses, as shown above in the overview of the program as a whole, demonstrates that the topics follow those typically covered in financial education courses, including budgeting, credit scores and reducing debt, loans, taxes, and homeownership. It is likely that many of the topics are prescribed by the requirements of the grant-funding agency. From the class observations, it appeared that the classes are run in a traditional style, with the educator delivering information for the learners to listen to and interact with on a limited level. As mentioned in the descriptions of the class observations, and as recorded in the field notes, the educators stand at the front of the room, the learners are seated in a U-shape, and there is often a PowerPoint presentation with the educator explaining the elements on the slides. Sonya mentioned in her interview that there are PowerPoint presentations prepared for each of the topics.

Two of the learners confirmed that this is typical in their financial education classes with their statements during the interviews. Christina, one of the learners, mentioned during her interview that the financial educators, “They do presentation, and we talk with each other.” Alma, another of the learners, commented on her impressions of the types of activities they do in the financial education classes. In addition to a few essays and class presentations by the learners, she says that the class activities are:

more like presentation materials. They answer questions, like a question-answer thing.

We do a lot in groups, we sometimes have a group setting where we are able to freely speak, which for some of us we need that support group. At the beginning, we did have a kind of homework activities that we had to do, which was like keeping track of our budget, our intake and outtake, things like that, but that’s pretty much about it.

Marisol agrees that, “there are different kinds of activities, but we always like to have something that the women can walk away with. So there is always a PowerPoint or some slides or a handout, something so that they can take something with them.”

However, as evidenced from the interviews, the educators see the most benefit from the activities that break from the traditional delivery method. Sonya talked at length about the positive experiences her learners had when working in the computer lab with amortization tables. Each learner could sit at a computer and see for herself what happens to the accumulation of interest on a loan when additional amounts are paid. The exclamations of amazement that were elicited from the learners during the activity were significant for Sonya, as she saw how motivated the learners were to “strive to” make larger payments. Another example of the kinds of alternative activities they use, other than the information delivery method, is one that is found

in many financial education settings. Marisol recounted her use of the activity to help the learners think about budgeting while engaging them in interaction with the other learners:

we were recently doing a budget activity, where we had different sets of cards and different sets of things on there that they need to spend so much money on. You know, we give them like \$20 or so to spend on utilities, or the groceries, typical things that you would spend on a weekly basis or a monthly basis. It was a very interactive activity, where they have to sit in a group, on a team, and brainstorming, well, what do we pay, we have so much, how do we divide the money. It's sort of an activity for them to see how to budget better and for them to see, you know, that you can always end up saving, even if it's only a dollar, whereas before, you were just thinking, oh I have to pay this, I've got to pay that, and there's never any money left for anything. And sometimes we aren't really thinking about what we are spending on, you have to prioritize, like the utilities, and what about the rest of the things that we spend on, where is that money really going to. So we try to have very interactive activities with them, so they can move around and not just sitting there.

Sonya and Marisol often also bring in bilingual guest speakers from local banks to cover topics like opening checking and savings accounts, or they might have individuals from other local organizations that “serve the Latino community...or involved with the Latino community,” as referred to by Marisol. Sonya spoke specifically about what someone from a bank might discuss during her interview:

opening an account, what are the processes for opening an account, what are the benefits of opening an account, savings, they can go into detail about, you know, there are these

types of checking accounts, and the people are like, okay, “why would it benefit me?” They would get into more about how the bank functions.

When guest speakers are present, the educators make sure to stay in the classroom and watch, “we try to be present to also learn. You know, there might be a comment or a topic that we could always build on.”

Emphasis on meeting learner needs. Despite the apparent adherence to the financial education topics, which would be expected as part of the grant funding requirements, there is also evidence in the findings that the financial educators adjust the topics to meet the specific needs of their learners. For example, Marisol discussed how they tweak the courses, to make them fit the backgrounds of the learners, which can vary depending on the make-up of each cohort. For example, Marisol, during her interview, mentioned these issues:

We might have a group where 60% of the group are homeowners in one way or another, and we may have a group where only 1 of the women is a homeowner. So some of the classes, regarding homeownership, might not, at that time, be of much interest to the ones who are renting, because it covers how to maintain your home. So we need to tailor that part of the class to one that is going to meet the needs of that group. We might have some of the women, some of the groups we may have like, some of the group, a diversity in the ages. We had a group that was from 21 year olds to 60 year olds, and so difference in between them as well. Some of the middle-aged women had more educational background than the elderly women. So, you have some with experience and educational background, and then you have some with very little. So to work with both, and then you have the very young people who are maybe just starting, just out of high school, or maybe need to finish high school, or completed high school, but they didn't go to college

or anything like that. So you have different levels of education as well that you've got to deal with... usually by the first class, we have the intake form to see how many are homeowners or how many children they have, that's another thing, they may have teenagers, they have older kids or they have babies, how is this going to affect them. So, from the intake, we can tell a lot about how it's going to go.

Marisol continued to talk about how they provide opportunities for learners at all educational levels to get the same information. As mentioned previously, the financial educators provide copies of the slides, or they have,

the basic points on a piece of paper, or just a sheet of information or tips, things like that. And, we always want to make sure that they have a hard copy so they can walk away and put it into their binder that we give them at the beginning of the program, so they always have it on hand in case they need to go back and remember something.

As will be demonstrated in an upcoming section on the use of stories in the classroom, the educators also glean a lot of information about their needs from the learners telling their personal financial stories to determine what is needed in the classroom content. From previous sections, one of the goals of the program is to help the women achieve the goals they set for themselves, so the financial educators and the program, overall, works to help them achieve those goals. Marisa, the administrator, mentioned during her interview, how she will set up workshops outside of the regular class hours if there are topics that the women are interested in that are not covered in the classes or are not covered with enough detail. She talked specifically about a workshop on taxes she set up, since the course content is limited by time constraints, interest level of the learners, and the expertise of the educators. Marisol reinforced this point when she said that, "we try to give them as many tools as possible in learning."

As mentioned at different points throughout the discussion of the findings, viewing this information from a sociocultural perspective can add insight into the teaching and learning in the financial education program at Mujeres Fuertes. The learning experience of the women in the program is strongly strengthened and enhanced by the fact that the program and the educators work together to make the life circumstances of the learners relevant to their learning, while still delivering the financial knowledge to them through traditional and alternative types of activities and presentations. The knowledge the program and educators possess about the learners and their backgrounds makes them able to assist them with the necessary resources, but also to combat the debilitating effects of the culture on the learners' lives. They create a strong community of learning and teach the women how to take control of their lives, in both the financial aspects and all other areas of their lives.

Personal stories as pedagogical purpose. The findings indicate that the use of personal stories in the financial education classroom at Mujeres Fuertes has a specific pedagogical purpose is a key factor in the teaching and learning that takes place. Both the educators and the learners use the stories for multiple purposes, both consciously and unconsciously. The financial educators appear to share their own personal stories as a pedagogical tool to make the learners feel more comfortable, to personalize the sometimes complex or uninteresting financial education material, to encourage the learners to share their stories, and to connect with the learners on a more personal level. The learners appear to use their own personal stories in much the same manner, but likely without the educators' objectives of improving the learning experience. In telling their stories, the learners create connections with one another, personalize the content of the class, and encourage other learners to share their stories, while also turning themselves into additional sources of experience and information for their classmates to access.

This sharing of stories by the educators and learners contributes to building the sense of community in the classroom.

The educators participating in the study made ample use of their own personal stories in the classroom during the observations and indicate that it is a tool they use frequently and intentionally as a pedagogical strategy. As mentioned previously, the educators are all women and Latinas, in both the financial education and leadership parts of the program, although their gender and ethnic backgrounds are not specific requirements to teach in the program. They must be bilingual, however, for easy movement between the teaching, in Spanish, and the administration of the program, often in English. The educators have found personal stories to be helpful in encouraging learners to feel comfortable about their own backgrounds and financial histories, in creating connections between themselves and the learners, in demonstrating how to manage their money, or how not to do so, and in building trust so that the learners feel comfortable in sharing their own stories.

Creating a comfortable environment and trusting environment. The educators and administrator repeatedly talked in the interviews about the importance of creating a comfortable environment for the learners to enhance learning and sharing in the classroom. They addressed the difficulty of talking about financial mistakes or difficult financial situations, but that in demonstrating their own real personal experiences, the educators are able to make the women learners feel at ease about their own situations. Sonya was very clear on this point, saying that she strives

To engage them and also to put a personal aspect to the knowledge and make them feel like they aren't the only ones in that situation. Sometimes as a student, you can see the teacher as someone superior, as someone with no faults, that they know it all, and just

conveying that we are humans, and part of our knowledge has come from that experience—that as we knew better, we also began making better choices. And I think that that is the major reason for that, not to keep it just as theory, but also as real life. This is something that does happen and it happens to everybody. It's not something that could have happened to you for personal reasons, but it's part of the process... that change could be possible.

These “better choices” mentioned by Sonya are, of course, the goal of financial education, and the educators are finding that sharing their stories helps the women see that even their teachers learned to make better choices. Marisol supports Sonya's point when she states that “That's what it is, it's the reality. We can't come and make up stories about things. We use reality because this is what they're living. This is what they're going through.” Making up stories to demonstrate a point is not an option for these educators. They find that showing the learners evidence of the educators' own mistakes makes the women more comfortable and, therefore, able to learn and participate.

Sonya used this technique in the classroom when I observed her teaching. As mentioned previously, she told the class about her experience with professional tax preparation and the fast refunds that are available. She spent time talking about not taking the time to read the small print on the form she signed, not realizing that there was a large fee associated with the early refund, actually a loan with a misleading name. There was laughing and nodding of heads as she discussed her mistake, effectively connecting with her learners. Sonya again pointed out that,

Sometimes what I've observed is that they can relate to it, and it opens up that they can say, “oh, I've been in that situation, too, or based on your experience, what could you recommend,”... that we understand them, that we get where they're coming from.

In addition to making the learners feel comfortable, using the stories as instrumental teaching tools, and building connections between learners, they also use them to build trust with the learners. Marisol talked about this specific advantage to using stories with the learners, that's one of the main goals, so we would be able to develop a kind of bonding, so that we can create it in the classroom itself. So, it's sharing a part of you with them. And showing that it's not just expecting from them, but you are also giving, so you have to open up a little with them, and you've got to be careful not to make up any story, but be truthful about something if you're going to share part of your experiences or your stories with them. And, I think they get that right away and they start sharing themselves.

The learners confirm the views of the educators about the positive uses of stories by the educators, suggesting that the educators are finding success in their attempts to connect with the learners, create trust, and make them feel comfortable. Rosa, in particular, commented on it during the interviews, and stated that,

I think it make me feel like free to be, they made me feel free to speak my own experience. I think it's really interesting to hear about the other person, especially the instructor, because it made me, like, good, to be free to share my, whatever I have to share with them.

Surprisingly, one of the women, Christina, did not remember the educators sharing their own personal stories in the classroom, but focused much more on the benefits of hearing the stories of the other women in the class, which will be addressed shortly. Findings from the learners, however, overall seem to support this use of personal stories by the educators in the financial education classroom, and evidence from the classroom observations indicates that stories are used frequently by the educators. It makes sense that in the context of a classroom

filled with sometimes technical, confusing, and sometimes dry information, that the educators would try to personalize it. In addition, as educators, they would want to warn or caution others about the pitfalls they have experienced. As the next section of findings will indicate, sharing stories is not something only the educators participate in, but it also extends to the learners, who share their own personal stories in the classroom, encouraged by the educators and each other.

Promoting learners' engagement. Like with the educators, discussed above, the learners also find it useful to share their stories and listen to stories from their classmates, though they are encouraged to do so by the educator in their modeling and asking questions; the use of stories has the effect of engaging the learners. This is a classroom occurrence that is encouraged by the educators for a number of reasons including the previously mentioned purpose of creating connections in the classroom, this time between learners; in personalizing the content of the courses for the learners for more effective learning; in determining the needs of the learners more effectively; in encouraging them to use one another as resources for additional learning; and in finding motivation in the successes and experiences of the learners' peers.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, in the section on class observations, it was noted the women in the new cohort of learners appeared to be uncomfortable and nervous at the beginning of their first financial education class. Not surprisingly, during the interview, Marisol mentioned that it takes time to build trust with the new learners, until they are comfortable talking about their personal experiences with money and financial difficulties. This was evident during the beginning of the class when they were filling out their financial information intake forms. As mentioned previously, these forms are used for the program records, used as a starting point for the financial counseling sessions, and also used as a measure of the needs of the learners for the financial education classes. As the class progressed, the women began asking questions, specific

to their personal situations and difficulties. It quickly became clear that many of the learners were in different financial situations, but almost all of them were problematic in some way. For example, when the question on their form came up about how to document receipt of unemployment benefits, two learners asked questions about this topic, sharing a bit of their own personal financial stories. When asked to show by raising their hands if they knew how many credit cards they have, only three learners raised their hands while the others giggled. Gradually, the women began sharing their own personal stories with each other, and by the time the class ended, the atmosphere had changed to one of comfortable chatting and making plans for sharing food in the next class meeting. The sharing of their stories appeared to ease the tense learning environment to one of more relaxed shared experiences.

I asked Marisol about her thoughts on how the class developed on that day in an informal conversation following the class. She agreed that the atmosphere changed over time and, as noted in my field notes, that the learners “think ‘Oh, that’s like me,’ and then by the end their nervous feelings ease” (p. 8). Marisol, during her interview, talked again about the way the class developed that day, and how the educators encourage the learners to share:

And the first thing we ask them is, has anybody ever had any experience with this? And then the conversation starts from there. There is always a person who had that experience or who knows someone who has experience with it, and then we take it from there, things like that. And then we sort of integrate that topic, you know, what about this, what do you think about this, and different slides and scenarios, you know, which one would you choose? Which one do you think is better? And then a lot of questions start coming up, how did you do this? What if you did this? Many questions start coming out and they just sort of direct the way of the class.

As can be seen from the quote above, Marisol also pointed out how the learners and educators then take that information and use it to expand on the topics covered in class, how they are then integrated into the curriculum, and therefore, how they are responding to the needs of their learners. Sonya also used this technique of encouraging the learners to share their stories in the classroom on the day I observed. She asked learners about their experiences, which the older cohort members freely shared.

The learners, during the interviews, also addressed the importance to them of sharing their stories, connecting with the other learners, and how they learn from one another or engage with each other. Christina saw the benefit of hearing from the other women in the class who are unemployed, as she is. She mentioned that listening to those stories is “where we know,” or how they learn about what to do in those difficult circumstances. Rosa also pointed out how the stories come out in class from the learners who “listen and participate in class, and if you anything that happened to you personally, you can speak and share with the other classmates.” Alma discussed a more formalized way of getting to know the personal stories of the other learners, when she explained the process of preparing for and giving a presentation to the rest of the group. She also brought out how the experiences of the other learners taught her how to manage certain situations and how it personalized the content of the courses for her:

It’s through different presentations, that everyone just openly expressed what they’ve been through, through their own experiences, so we can learn from each other. I just know that the confidence that we have in each other, to freely express what situations we’ve been through, to avoid what a classmate, to avoid the same thing like home foreclosure, renting, the dos and the don’ts, and a lot of times, you don’t really pay

attention to that sort of information...what is so big about this program is that we learn from each other, but also that older students who have passed our steps.

This idea of other learners who have “passed” a step in their lives was brought up by all of the learners interviewed. The learners demonstrate respect for and depend upon the other women in their classes who might be older, and who have been through the experiences on which the younger women are currently working. For example, one woman mentioned her experience of starting her own business, and how another student had done that on her own. She was able to ask her fellow student for advice and recommendations about the various difficulties she might encounter along the way. They all expressed appreciation for the women who have already completed a stage in their lives, who then share their experiences with the class, and help those who are either in that stage or approaching it. Rosa stated, also, that listening to the other women was inspiring to her:

We learn a lot but the other person already passed through the things. We think we can't do it, but the other person says, oh no, they already passed it and they do this and this and this. And we don't feel bad very because they try to help you in whatever they can.

When asked if they ever felt embarrassed or judged in any way by their classmates when they shared a story, Rosa pointed out the advantages of being in a class with women who have experienced similar things:

No, I just feel very comfortable. I see them all the time and I feel really comfortable with them and I don't think they would judge me. We are all women and we experience the same thing, so no, I don't think they judge me.

Marisol, one of the educators, also talked about how careful the educators are to understand the situations in which the women learners find themselves and not judge them or tell

them what to do to handle their particular problems, financial or otherwise. She says that the educators,

have to be receptive, and more than anything, we have to be really cautious in how we direct ourselves to them. You can never expect for them or tell them what they need to do. We can sort of set the scenario for their different options that they may have, and seeing where they're coming from.

Therefore, the educators work to create a comfortable atmosphere, in which the learners feel free to share their experiences.

Providing a sociocultural and gendered dimension. Sharing stories is apparently a valuable and essential part of the learning experience for these learners in the financial education classroom, but these stories are grounded in the sociocultural context, and a gendered context, given that they are all women. Given the research questions, the objectives of the study, and the background of this specific group of learners, it is important to view this useful classroom tool and way of creating connections through a sociocultural lens. Further, underlying the stories and then revealed through the stories, is the culture of the women and the awareness of the educators about the culture in which the women are living and in which the women were raised, both of which further strengthen the connections between the learners.

Sonya told me about her experiences growing up in the U.S., although she was born in Mexico and returned there to live when she was 12 years old. The transition from America to Mexico, and then coming back to the U.S. as an adult, has made her more aware of the cultural differences that exist. She says that her experience,

has given me the opportunity to see some cultural differences and be aware of them, making sure that some of the pinpointing and stressing that what we have done or believe

in has to do a lot with the culture and not whether what you are doing is right or wrong. Sometimes it could be that here in the United States, the upbringing is different... So, I think that for my personal experience, I try to keep that in mind, that there are issues that are cultural knowledge that sometimes can be different, and because they are different, we don't consider them or they can be seen as bad. And it's like, no, it's not bad, it's just different.

Their experiences as women will be influenced by their experiences in a gendered society, and the fact that they are women in a predominantly machismo Latino culture, where in general, men are to head up the household and control the money in the family is part of their socialization. Both the educators and learners addressed this issue on multiple occasions during the interviews. Marisol talked about this cultural subject related to gender roles and Hispanics, and demonstrates an awareness that these issues are revealed through the stories that come out in the classroom:

we may not come from the culture of preparing a woman from the very beginning to be independent, to be financially independent to be the head of the household. We are not trained to do that from the time that we're born. So we are going out there and it's sort of like double work for women, more than men, because they are usually looked at as head of the household, they are the ones who have the money, and so it's not that. Yeah, some of the time, most of the time, it is the man who works, but usually it's the woman who is handling everything that is happening at home. But then you have that aspect where the man handles everything and the women are not allowed to do much, but house jobs and how to pick up the children and things like that. So we are not sort of guided in that independent businesswoman and how to prepare yourself to be out there on your own, in

case you lose your husband, or in case you separate, or something like that. You aren't prepared for that future.

Alma also talked about gender roles and machismo in the Hispanic culture, and how the women in the financial education classes joke with each other when they tell their stories about their own situations in their relationships and families. She states:

a lot of Hispanic women do work, and they hand their checks over to their husbands, or their husbands are more, the dominant part of the relationship, and I know that is something that has come out. At times, we have made small jokes about it, but for the most part, everyone is getting a more understanding that that's serious, and we should be more women enough to not be so dependent to anybody, that we can do it on our own.

In addition to their experiences as women, the learners are also single mothers. Therefore, there is the additional cultural factor of their experiences as mothers in a society that values motherhood and expects devotion to this role in their families. Unfortunately, their value is not usually compensated for in a financial way that might increase these learners' abilities to support their families and improve their lives. As mentioned in the quote from Marisol above, the women end up with "double work," with their professional and home responsibilities. Marisol continued at length about this issue of gender roles and the family, and how they are exposed through the sharing of stories in the classroom:

We may have women coming from a background of being very machista, where they were not allowed to do anything, but watch over the children or cook, and just do that womanly part. And they were never allowed to go to school or if they did, they would have to pay consequences. Either the father told them, you know, you don't need to go to school, you need to get married, and you husband will support you. Or they get married

and now the husband is still doing the same thing, and the husband is not allowing them to do anything, and then all of a sudden they take off and leave them alone. So, it's like, now what? Where do I start?...You know, the male figure preventing them from getting ahead.

Marisol agrees that this kind of understanding is important to the women learners and to her teaching. She lives in a neighborhood that is close to the community center where the classes take place, in one part of the area in the city that has a large Hispanic population.

I think that living with them, or living in the neighborhoods that the women are coming from, it's understanding them, understanding the culture. More than anything, being Hispanic myself, and how we come from so many different backgrounds, but still kind of the same, a lot of our values and teaching are the same way.

This awareness is necessary so that the educators can tell their stories of their experiences that are relevant to those of the women learners, as well as ensuring that there is always a respect for the differences that exist between women and cultures. Marisol's understanding of this situation, through the women learners sharing their stories in the classroom, and combined with her own experiences as a Latina in this community, make her a more effective educator, able to relate to these women and share the most relevant information they need in their lives.

In sum, then, in these financial education classrooms, then, the educators and learners have found enormous positive outcomes to using personal stories. They offer educators an opportunity to assess the needs of the learners and tailor their teaching accordingly. Stories give the educators and learners opportunities to connect and personalize the content. They offer learners, and educators, as well, the opportunity to be the experts and teach other learners about their experiences. In addition, sharing of stories allows learners to develop trust in one another

and in their teachers. This trust and connection with and between the learners is one of the key components in creating a community in the cohort, which will be addressed in the next set of findings.

The Promotion of Financial Behavior Change

The goal of any financial education program is improved financial management behavior by the learners. Clearly, education is equivalent to an increase in knowledge, but the knowledge without any accompanying action taken by the learners would be nearly meaningless in their lives. The findings from the class observations and interviews, as well as from the financial tracking done by the program, indicate that the learners are changing their behavior with regard to their personal money management. These changes will be discussed below in sections about tracking their financial behavior, motivating the learners to make changes, setting goals, and building on small changes. Other changes in behavior by the women have been noted, and some have been discussed previously, particularly with regard to their independence and self-esteem, but this section will focus on their changes in financial management. The educators, the administrator, and the learners all attest to these changes.

Tracking changes in savings and credit reports. As discussed in the overview of the program, the financial educators also play the role of financial counselors, meeting with the women for one-on-one sessions, at the very beginning of the program and then periodically throughout the three years of their participation in Mujeres Fuertes. At the beginning, they work with the women to create individual financial portfolios. Sonya and Marisol shared a blank portfolio with me during the interviews. This thick, official looking, brown folder would, over the course of the program, consist of the intake form, their credit report, copies of paystubs, documentation from social services agencies, correspondence with relevant financial agencies

and institutions, their budget, and their spending tracking charts. With this information at hand, the financial counselors can help the women achieve their goals. Although this sharing of information is unquestionably intimidating, when the women sit down in the chair next to Marisol's desk, if they look up at the file cabinet in front of the chair, they would see that Marisol has taped a copy of a poem in Spanish by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, titled "Mujer [Woman]," likely meant to encourage them and make them feel strong about their role as women in the lives of their children and society. This financial portfolio is used to track the progress of the women throughout the program.

During the initial interview with the administrator, Marisa, and the educator, Sonya, told me about the ways in which they track the learners' progress in the financial areas of their lives, as described in previous sections. One of the primary tracking methods is using the numbers of learners enrolled in social services programs, such as childcare and housing subsidies, and food and utilities assistance. Although this is a way for the program to see an increase in the women applying for and receiving needed services, this does not necessarily demonstrate a change in their financial management behavior.

Not surprisingly, the program also tracks increases in the salaries of their women learners. I mentioned the chart from the hallway that I had seen to Marisa during the interview, and she showed me the "Individual Action Plan" they use to track their salaries. It has their educational goals as well as their goal for their salary increase. There is an arrow pointing upward to show that they will increase their salary over time as they progress with their education. Marisa told me that they have had good success with the increases, but that they have not seen very many increases in recent months. So, they are seeing the women gaining more

education, but their income is not changing, as it has in the past. Marisa attributes this unfortunate development as due to the poor economy.

Despite lower increases in income, the program is also able to track and demonstrate change in the increases in savings, one of the most easily tracked methods of determining improved financial behavior. Sonya mentioned during her initial interview that the goal of Mujeres Fuertes is to have the women save 10% of their earnings. Marisol mentioned that some of the women have no savings account at all at the beginning of the program, and just having them open an account and make any deposits is a positive step. She has also been encouraged in her teaching by the women who open savings accounts for their children while in the program. Rosa, when asked about her plans for changes in her financial behavior, told me that she planned to open a savings account, followed by a retirement account. Alma, defining herself as “not a spender,” stated that she was hoping to dramatically increase her savings with her new job. Christina also has plans to “start” an account and build her “savings, little by little.” She believes that her experience of saving “nothing” has made her life more stressful. She would think, once she was unemployed, “why didn’t I save. And it was messed up.” She feels that she has learned how to save now and can do it.

Another way Mujeres Fuertes keeps track of their progress is through the monitoring of their credit scores. The program has seen marked increases in their credit scores, an average increase of 19 points for the program so far, as well as a lowering of their credit card debt, two financial behaviors that go together. Sonya pointed out that the learners are

more conscious and they try to reduce their credit card debt. And also, doing that and correcting any errors on their credit report, their FICOS score could increase, so they

become more aware and they try and reduce unnecessary expenses, so they can have more income and try to eliminate the overspending aspect.

Motivating learners. This combination of being aware of the improved behavior followed by the actual behavior change is the purpose of financial education. Mujeres Fuertes motivates the learners in a variety of ways, including through activities that demonstrate potential for positive changes and the use of role models.

As mentioned previously, Sonya also talked about amortization tables as one way to get the learners motivated to make changes in their behavior related to debt, in fact using this lesson as her most effective teaching experience with the women. The class she described took place in the computer lab with a website that had the amortization tables. She showed the learners how even small additional amounts can drastically lower the long-term interest accumulation, and described their initial reaction as “Oh my God, you’ve got to be kidding!” She then continued,

So we plug in numbers, what’s going to happen, observe the numbers, how do they change. They would be doing that, and I remember hearing, “OMG this is great, I can’t believe it!” Just the fact that how much interest we end up paying for the life of the loan. And, like, “you’ve got to be kidding,” and like, “yep.” If you do additional payments, what happens? Or a couple of dollars, put ten dollars, and it’d be like, “wow!” See if you do, like, 10 dollars a month, see how much you save... That small amount. And then I’d say to put more. And they’d play with it and be like, “wow!” So, that I remember and just looking at them and having that expression of, you know, that’s something I need to consider now, even if you know, it’s a smaller additional payment, you know, I have to strive to do that.

Marisol, also as previously mentioned, used a budgeting activity to motivate learners to think ahead about their bills and regular expenses. As will be seen in a later section, these kinds of activities have resulted in the learners thinking about their spending, instead of just spending. Their increased awareness from this hands-on activity may contribute to their changes in their repayment and financial management behavior. These activities are then reinforced during the financial counseling sessions, during which the educators give personal attention to the specific financial needs of each individual.

Marisol also talked about the motivation of the learners to make changes as an essential part of the process of actually making changes. She told me about her experience with a class she taught with a different group of learners, and how those learners were required to attend the financial education program. Those learners appeared to her to be unmotivated and not receptive to the tools and tips she offered, which contrasts strongly with the women in *Mujeres Fuertes*. She said,

here, they know from the very beginning what they are getting themselves into, and they want to be here. They want to continue, they want to be part of it. I think that makes it, you know, when you want to do something, when you yourself want to do something, I think you can do it.

Setting goals. Being motivated to make changes can often come from setting short-term and long-term goals. *Mujeres Fuertes* spends a great deal of time talking about these goals in the financial education and leadership parts of the program, and then directing the women to the resources and education they need to achieve those goals. Both Sonya and Marisol talked about this practice during their interviews, and the concept of setting goals is also addressed in the leadership part of the program. Sonya discussed how the program helps the learners develop

their own goals, not those the program or the educators see as appropriate for the women. The emphasis is on what the women want from their own lives. Sonya explained some of the tools they teach the women in considering their options,

We first try to establish goals, short term and long term goals, and then we talk about what is a financially successful life, and how do we utilize the tools that we have to get them there, and that's where we compare your income versus your expenses, and make it known that the goal is to have more income than expenses.,,so we try to reduce the expenses and increase the income, and trying to give them the basic knowledge of how that works. You know, a lot of them have the short vision just to get by, but we try to give them, you know, if you make changes, identifying needs versus wants, eliminating as many wants as possible, so you can have additional income and put it towards savings, and focusing on how the short term sacrifice can give you the long term benefit.

They spend time, in talking about goals, on the practical aspects of their goals and the steps necessary to accomplish them. Marisol cited a woman who had her goals laid out for her future and that of her family, and then had her children sign a contract with her to commit to helping her accomplish those goals.

The learners talked about their financial goals, when asked. As mentioned previously, the women are all developing a desire to save money for future emergencies and future large purchases, like homes. There was no hesitation in their answers, as they had thought about them and have worked with the financial counselors to figure out how to achieve them. Alma, the learner with the new job, had a goal of "bringing in more money," including asking for a raise at work. She also plans to purchase a house soon, and has a plan for the home maintenance costs, that she learned about in the program. On another level, Alma's goals include "breaking the

circle [cycle]” of destructive behavior in which she was raised, to create a better life for her children. Rosa, the learner mentioned previously, who plans to open a savings account, was excited about her financial future, “and now I am more independent, and I think that I can do it myself, and I don’t need anyone to do it for me, and now I can follow my dreams!” As mentioned previously, in an informal conversation recorded in the field notes from the class observations, Marisol talked about teaching the women to be more independent, and “reach their own goals that they set for their own lives...guiding them to find their own independence, not the independence someone else thinks they should have” (Field notes, 2010, p. 7).

Building on small changes. When I asked the learners about the changes in their financial behavior they have made already, they all cited their spending habits and the needs versus wants concept the program emphasizes, although not in those exact terms. They are thinking before spending and seem to be building on the rewards of small changes. Christina talked about how her spending habits have changed and how she thinks before spending, something she did not do before:

Sometimes when I have money, I go to the store and buy things that I didn’t needed, and now, I think first. It’s the little things, but I know I changed that. They give it to us some sheets to put where we...the expense each day and she give us some tip how to don’t spend too much.

Rosa also confirms this idea of thinking before spending and pointed out that she does not:

buy the stuff I don’t needed. I decided to save the most that I can. I used to spend all my money and think that I don’t need it. One of my best ways to save money that my instructor tell us is that we make a note, a list of whatever we need, and go to the store

and buy whatever we need and not to buy things I don't need. Even if we see something pretty and just say, oh, I want to try it, you say, no if I don't need it, don't buy it. And then, that's what I do right now, and I don't spend a lot of money on anything I don't need.

The resulting pleasure she takes in having enough money to pay all of her bills, as well as to buy herself a hamburger every once in a while, was palpable. Alma's success at controlling spending has come from the use of the budget encouraged by the financial educators. She says that,

we don't think about the smallest things that can save us...It can be as small as making lunch instead of getting lunch, just taking the time to do that. Or, little things like, not having your money into a bank, to where that dollar here and there is going to save you that dollar here and there. But, I have made a lot of changes in how I spend money, um, with going over what I have because I need stuff or want stuff. Where I go on what I need, instead of what I want, because if everybody goes on what they want, it's never going to make a change.

Interestingly, the area seen by the educators as the most difficult for the learners to change is their daily spending habits, due to their lifestyle and/or the needs or desires of other family members. Sonya and Marisol both addressed this issue of family members impeding the changes, particularly with older children and their needs and wants. Despite these difficulties, though, Marisol cited the "testimonies" from the women about the other changes they have made, in addition to lowering their credit scores and increasing their savings, and how they are then motivated to keep making those changes:

They say that they don't spend as much money on certain things, like they cut down on their grocery bill, things that they didn't realize before, once they start doing their budget and write down exactly what they are spending on, that's when they realize, when they start calculating the amount of money they are spending on something that they can really do without, that's when they start making the changes...we have had other women who didn't have direct deposit in the past and when they see that it's so convenient for them, they have gotten direct deposit now. So, there's little things they've done on their own. And there are big changes. There's this lady who talked to this group and said, you know, I went to this workshop at this housing fair, and learned how to do this modification on my home, and I did it on my own, and she was so proud of herself. So, when they accomplish something, it's really a push for them, and they keep going.

The findings indicate, then, that the women in *Mujeres Fuertes* are making changes in their financial management behavior, however small or large those changes might be. Some of these changes are documented through the financial portfolio, through the academic progress sheets, or in their "Individual Action Plan" forms. Other changes in behavior are less tangible in a number sense, but are notable in their importance to the individual learners and their process of improving their lives, as well as to the educators in seeing their learners improve their lives.

From a sociocultural perspective, the findings indicate that the changes in financial management behavior these learners are making are significant and meaningful to them in their lives, not only as women, but also as Hispanic women.

Chapter Summary

Data from this study of a financial education program for Latina single mothers, called *Mujeres Fuertes*, were gathered from class observations, a tour of the community center where

the classes take place, both expounded upon in extensive field notes, educator and learner interviews, and document evidence. Data analysis revealed four main categories of findings: (a) the program utilizes a holistic approach to financial education; (b) personal stories are used for a pedagogical purpose by the educators; (c) the program promotes behavior change in learners' financial management; and (d) the cohort model results in a cultural community of support for the learners.

Learning about how to make changes in the personal financial lives of the learners appears to be enhanced by the holistic approach the program takes toward financial education. The program, a combination of three social services organizations, offers so many resources and access to other resources and connections in the community, that the needs of the learners are filled in many areas of their lives, not just the educational aspect. The program also has a goal of helping the women learn how to be leaders in their community, and so they spend time in the classroom learning about other topics that will make them stronger women, all of which supports their financial education progress. The financial education itself appears to follow a traditional approach, using information delivery as the primary way of transmitting knowledge, but incorporates additional interactive activities as well as ensuring that the content is relevant to the life circumstances of the learners.

The educators make ample use of their own personal financial experiences as a tool to help the learners feel more comfortable and to create connections between themselves and the learners. The educators always make sure to use their own authentic stories from experiences to which they are confident the learners can relate. In addition, their sharing of their own experiences also encourage the learners to share their own stories, helping the educators to pinpoint the needs of the learners and helping create connections between the learners, as they

recognize their shared backgrounds. Part of their shared backgrounds involves the similar experiences the women have had as Latinas, as women, and as mothers.

These shared experiences and connections contribute to the efforts of the financial educators to encourage positive changes in financial behavior. The women's financial behavior is tracked and encouraged through the financial counseling and use of the financial portfolios, reinforcing the behavior changes encouraged in the classroom content. The positive changes are encouraged through goal setting, role models, and building on the small changes they are making in their lives.

The educators and the program also emphasize their commonalities, both experiential and cultural, to create a community in the classroom that can offer support to the women learners as they progress through the program. The program uses a cohort model, so that the women in each cohort take their classes all together, encouraging them to make friends and support one another. Part of this creation of connections takes place through the sharing of food, which has a cultural dimension for the Latina women in the program. They also find their experiences as Latinas in a machismo culture to be significant to their shared experiences.

The significance of the findings and the implications for financial education and adult education will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the teaching and learning in financial literacy education classes targeted for Latina learners, particularly with respect to the sociocultural impact of the learners' life circumstances. This chapter will begin with a brief summary of the findings, followed by a detailed analysis of the findings in light of the theory and research literature that informs the study. The implications of the findings for the theory and practice of adult financial literacy education will then be explored, along with suggestions for further research. Finally, the dissertation will end with some of my final reflections on the dissertation process as a whole.

Findings Summary in Light of the Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded primarily in a sociocultural theoretical framework that includes a blending of critical, feminist, and Latino perspectives on adult education. The transtheoretical model of behavior change was an additional theoretical framework, since the study was also hoping to examine how learners were affected by financial education and behavior change. However, before reviewing the framework, it is important to remember that the study took place in the financial education setting for Latina single mothers, in a Latino community center in a large Midwestern city. It consisted of a combination of three independent entities that work in the local community: (a) a financial services organization that provides financial education classes and individual financial counseling for the learners; (b) a career services organization that provides opportunities to attend classes to begin a new career and individual career counseling for the learners; and (c) a social services organization that provides leadership and personal development classes and individual counseling as needed for the women learners and sometimes

for their families. One of the slogans of the program, as stated in their literature, is to “empower women through effective community partnerships,” and their mission is stated as: “to improve the lives of women through effective training, inspired leadership, and creative personal growth.” The focus of the study was on the financial education classes that are offered during the first year of the three-year program.

While attention in this study has been given to sociocultural influences and Latina learners, adult education pedagogy, and behavior change, as part of the theoretical framework, this all takes place in the financial education classroom. The advantage of viewing the financial education classroom through these lenses is that the previous research has not adequately explored these influences and perspectives in this setting. In addition, Latino groups in the U.S. are often faced with difficulties with regard to personal wealth and the development of financial stability, such as rates of retirement savings, net worth, homeownership, income levels, and educational success, when compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Lui et al., 2006). And, as mentioned in Chapter Two, “financial illiteracy is of particular concern for Latinos, whose overall education rates and wages are lower than those of other segments of the population” (Richman, Barboza, Ghilarducci, & Sun, 2008, p. 25). Therefore, while the findings are significant to adult education and the knowledge about the role of sociocultural factors in an adult Latina classroom, this study also offers strong insights specifically into the increasing numbers of financial education classrooms and into the research that has been done and is ongoing, all of which will be discussed in more detail in upcoming sections.

As discussed previously, a sociocultural perspective in education emphasizes that there are social factors that influence learning and the ways in which individuals make meaning. Tejada and Gutierrez (2005), two of many authors on sociocultural issues in Latino education,

posit that it is impossible to separate education from the social and cultural forces in society, that the classroom is “fundamentally situated” among the “socially mediated forces” influencing the teaching and learning that take place. In addition to this broader idea of the influence of all possible sociocultural factors, are more specialized theories that focus on specific aspects of society that can influence teaching and learning. Critical perspectives, including feminist perspectives and critical race theory, in education, focus on issues of power and positionality in the educational process, including the influence of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and/or ability. More specifically, in Latino critical literature, or LatCrit, issues of power and positionality are seen from a Latino perspective (Haney Lopez, 1998; Stefancic, 1997), and in the Latina feminist literature, can be found similar issue, but related to the experiences of Latina women (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Gonzalez, 2005; Guerra, 2004; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Ortega, 2004).

Finally, the theoretical framework for the study included a look at the changes in behavior that might be occurring as a result of the work the Latinas are doing in the program. This exploration was done using the transtheoretical model of behavior change (TTM) which describes the stages that individuals travel through as they make behavior changes (Prochaska, 1996; Prochaska & DiClementi, 1983; Prochaska, DiClementi, & Norcross, 1992), including some suggested actions educators can make to encourage this movement (Xiao et al., 2004a; Xiao et al., 2004b; Xiao et al. 2010), as explained fully in Chapter Two and later in this chapter.

With the theoretical framework in mind, then, the primary means of data collection were administrator, educator, and participant semi-structured interviews and class observations, which included extensive field notes. Document data was also collected and analyzed. As noted in Chapter Four, the case study findings of the teaching and learning in *Mujeres Fuertes*, a financial

education and leadership program for Latina single mothers, emphasize three primary dimensions:

- a) a holistic approach to financial education;
- b) a pedagogy that emphasizes content and process; and
- c) the promotion of financial behavior change.

The program emphasized a holistic approach to financial education that included providing any resources or connections to resources that the Latina learners required to reach their goals. As mentioned previously, *Mujeres Fuertes* is a combined effort between three different entities, which work together to help the women improve their lives personally, academically, and professionally. The financial education piece of the program becomes one of the essential parts of the education in the program that the Latina women need to improve their lives. This holistic, combination approach allows them to feel supported as they take steps forward and learn how to be independent and self-sufficient at taking care of their finances, as well as other challenges in their lives, with a longer-term objective of the learners taking an active role as leaders in the local community. The sociocultural influences in this financial education setting appear in the Latina community that is created by the cohort; a community that emphasizes their similar backgrounds, as opposed to their differences. The program and its educators strive to create connections between the learners through the sharing of food and in sharing their commonalities associated with being women in a largely machismo culture.

The second major finding relates to a pedagogy that emphasizes both content and process, and the pedagogical techniques the educators use to teach the financial education classes. While using some of the same approaches that are found in most classrooms, such as lecture and PowerPoint presentation, they often incorporate other activities and techniques to

give the learners some hands-on experience. These educators, and the program itself, in its list of expectations, also encourage a safe and trusting environment to utilize the personal experiences of the learners as tools and sources of information for the other learners, particularly important when sharing personal financial information with others. This storytelling is also a way for the educators to gain a more thorough understanding of the experiences and knowledge the learners possess. The educators encourage the learners to make connections with each other by using stories as a way to create a comfortable environment filled with individuals with similar stories. Like a domino effect, the educators share their own personal stories, and then the practice spreads to the learners. The bonds that are created also impact the supportive environment in the classroom, such that the learners support one another and recognize in each other additional sources of learning and experience.

The third finding surrounds the manner in which the program promotes financial behavior change in the learners. The educators, who also act as financial counselors in one-on-one sessions with the learners, encourage their Latina learners to change their financial behavior in positive ways through the use of various techniques, including tracking changes, motivating the learners through role models, examples, etc., assisting the learners in setting their own goals, and in encouraging and applauding small changes. The program and the educators combine these techniques with the organization of the program to encourage positive changes in the financial behavior of the learners, resulting in the holistic approach that benefits the learners in many areas of their lives. The financial education program teaches and guides them through the changes in their behavior, tracking and encouraging them all along the way. The result is a Latina woman who knows how to take control of her finances and has started the process of making changes. A

more detailed discussion of these findings in light of the theoretical framework and research into financial education follows.

The Importance of a Holistic Approach that Attends to Culture

Prior to this discussion of the findings related to the holistic approach of this program, it is useful to remind the reader of the major assumptions and findings in financial education research as a whole, which have revealed the following information:

- (a) there is a need for improved financial literacy in the U.S. (Breitbard, 2003; Fox, Bartholomae, & Lee, 2005; Greenspan, 2003; Regan & Paxton, 2003; Stone, Weir, & Bryant, 2008);
- (b) financial education courses and programs often use published and standardized curricula, even though there is little agreement on exactly how to define financial literacy (Lawson, 2003; Watson, 2006);
- (c) delivery of financial information can result in improved financial behavior (Hathaway & Khatiwada, 2008; Watson, 2006);
- (d) workplace and retirement financial education has been most successful at demonstrating positive outcomes (Bernheim & Garrett, 2003; DeVaney, Gorham, Bechman, & Haldeman, 1995; Loibl & Hira, 2006), possibly due to the prescriptive nature of retirement programs in the workplace and/or due to the appropriate life stage at which the education takes place (Oehler & Werner, 2008);
- (e) multiple factors are at play in the financial behavior of individuals, not just their level of knowledge, and include attitudes, values, emotions, and sociocultural and structural factors in society that are difficult to accurately assess, such as race, gender, class, etc. (Cummins, Haskell, & Jenkins, 2009; Dowling, Corney, and Hoiles, 2009; English, in

press; Estelami, 2008; Oleson, 2004; Robinson & McGound, 2007; Stone, Weir, & Bryant, 2007; Vitt, 2004);

(f) these sociocultural differences can be used in the classroom by educators to address the specific needs of the learners (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010; Vitt, 2004, 2009);

(g) small amounts of research into Latino populations indicate that they have specific needs that can be addressed in the financial education setting (Marlowe & Atilas, 2005; National Council of La Raza, 2004; Spader et al., 2009); and

(h) financial management behavior change can be viewed through a lens of other behavior change models to more accurately assess the needs of the learners (Shockey & Seiling, 2004; Spader et al., 2009; Xiao, Newman, Prochaska, Leon, Bassett, & Johnson, 2004a; Xiao et al., 2004b).

As just noted, Vitt (2004) particularly cites the combination of factors, including contextual factors, that can impact financial decisions in order to demonstrate all of the countless issues that must be considered in financial education. In fact, Vitt (2009) states that, “the societal influences on financial decision-making behaviors are so pervasive that it is necessary for financial educators to focus...more on the context of their cultural and social environment” (p. 7). In a later study, Way and Holden (2010) demonstrated that the majority of teachers of financial education, at a variety of levels, are unprepared to address the “social/cultural background” of the learners influences financial literacy understanding. While Robinson and McGound (1998), among others, also posit that social situations, presumably sociocultural situations as well, must be taken into account when discussing financial issues and considering the choices individuals make in their personal financial management.

The holistic approach of Mujeres Fuertes addressed many of these issues, not simply the content of the financial education classes. The program offers the Latina women an opportunity to raise their level of education. They work with the leadership program to increase self-esteem and the ways they value themselves as individuals and as women. In the financial education classes and leadership classes, the educators talk with the learners about setting goals and attempt to work against the materialistic bent of our society, encouraging them to do their own needs/wants analysis with each purchase. In another recent research study on which I worked, my colleagues and I found that it is a common practice in financial education classes to teach the learners how to do the needs/wants analysis, often combined with the budget part of the course (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010). Similarly, Mujeres Fuertes is also trying to help the women get out of poverty and increase their income or find a job that pays a living wage. In this way, Mujeres Fuertes gives the women a combination of skills and advantages they would not normally have, so they can then make the best decisions for improving their lives and that of their families.

Providing Resources and Support

One of the primary ways the program supports its learners is in providing resources. As noted in multiple locations in the previous sections, the combination of the three organization means that there are three times as many opportunities for the Latina learners to access help for whatever they might need. As demonstrated in our earlier study (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010), the educator often plays the role of contact point for additional resources and sees the provision of sources and resources as a major part of their jobs. That is the case, also, at Mujeres Fuertes, where the learners find contacts for any type of assistance they might need, both financial and otherwise. There are contacts and resources available about homeownership,

savings, investing, legal troubles, childcare issues, food stamps and other public assistance, career planning and advice, and mental health counseling. In this way, the program is able to provide what is needed at the time it is needed for each individual. For example, a learner who needs help with buying a home, and a learner who needs help with retirement savings, can both be helped, due to the multitude of resources they have available. As Oehler and Werner's (2008) study indicates, financial education that is needed for the life stage at which the learner finds herself will be most effective. In fact, the learners who participated in the interviews talked at length about the other, usually older, learners who have "passed" through particular life stages. The learners in those stages find the most benefit in learning from those who have passed it already and have valuable information and advice to share.

Another advantage for Mujeres Fuertes in providing so many resources for the learners is that the learners begin to figure out for themselves how to find the additional resources they need. This piece of the program, when combined with increased self-esteem from the leadership classes, can have a dramatic effect on the learners' financial decisions. In some studies on women and financial literacy, women utilize specific investment decision-making skills (Endres, Chowdhury, & Alam, 2008; Lyons, Neelakantan, & Scherpf, 2008; Loibl & Hira, 2006), and married and heterosexual cohabiting women tend to defer to men in financial decision making, an indication of their lack of confidence in this area (Mock & Cornelius, 2007). To counter these sociocultural effects, the program provides the resources and teaches them how to, then, go out and find their own.

Developing Leadership

The combination of financial education classes and leadership classes make up the holistic educational environment offered by Mujeres Fuertes in the Latino community center, in

addition to the courses in their chosen field of study, such as the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes. The purpose of the leadership portion of the program is two-fold: to create leaders in the community and to create a cascading effect on the families and within the community. To do this, and as evidenced by some of the interviewees in the study, the women are interested in making an impact on their families by changing the ways that have led to their present challenging financial situation. Part of this change will require a switch from the machismo culture that is a part of the women's lives, as shown in Chapter Four, primarily through the interview data. The women in the program, who, as single mothers, are clearly without a male figure to care for the family, were often raised in a "state of suspended dependence" (Abalos, 2007, p. 81). This culture of dependence frequently does not allow for educational opportunities that might teach the women the skills and/or the knowledge to take care of their families themselves, which then ultimately negatively affects the community.

The leadership part of the program achieves this cascading effect of improving the lives of the women and improving the community by specifically addressing the education from a multidimensional aspect. It teaches the Latina learners about a variety of topics about which they might need to learn to help them be successful in life, in general. For example, as mentioned in previous sections, the classes for this part of the program include leadership and community, self-esteem, women, culture and religion, setting goals and problem-solving, communication, constructive criticism, and negotiation. It is possible to see that the combination of financial knowledge and improved skills and attitudes in all of those other topics listed above, would make the possibility of financial success more likely. As Vitt (2004) points out, financial decisions do not occur in isolation from other factors, but "involve psychological, physical, and social values" (p. 70).

The Cultural Community of Support

An important part of the success of any long-term cohort program is the creation of a learning community. In *Mujeres Fuertes*, the program encourages and capitalizes on the commonalities shared by the Latina learners. As Vitt, Reichback, Kent, and Siegenthaler (2005) point out, community organizations like *Mujeres Fuertes* “provide comfortable (and safe) financial education settings for many people...they offer hope, motivation” (p. 10). During the interviews, and as mentioned in Chapter Four, the administrator relies on the close connections created by their shared experiences to ensure attendance, support, and information about the learners as they progress through the program. This kind of meeting and sharing of experiences is imitative, whether intentionally or unintentionally, of the consciousness-raising groups encouraged by feminism (Weitz, 1982). It was in these groups that the women connected with one another through their commonalities, which led to increases in self-esteem and reductions in depression, something the women in *Mujeres Fuertes* experienced themselves.

Although the women are from different countries, are of different ages, and all have different experiences, the program works hard to emphasize their similarities. As Sonya pointed out, the learners are all exposed to the “Hispanic American culture,” that there are differences that they have on an individual level, but that they are “seen as one.” This kind of perception of the learners goes to the heart of the disagreements discussed in the section on the literature related to identifying the entire Latino community with one identifier. However, the reasons for choosing one term over another in this setting is not about social exclusion (Oboloer, 1996) or creating an “other” (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997), but rather is a way of creating an inclusive way of seeing the cohort of learners. It is not meant to diminish in any way the uniqueness of each person’s own individual heritage or essentialize her experiences (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez,

1997), but rather to reflect the possibilities in coming together as a group to support one another in their similar background and experiences, as suggested by Oboler (1996).

One of the most obvious ways in which this shared culture creates a community of support for the learners is through the use of, what is for most of the learners, their first language of Spanish. This use of Spanish, perhaps, addresses the need pointed out in the work of Marlowe and Atilas (2005) and the National Council of La Raza (2004), which cited language issues as one of the primary factors in low financial literacy rates among Latinos. While all of the women in *Mujeres Fuertes* are bilingual to some degree, the majority is most comfortable in Spanish. The program honors this shared history of its learners by running the entire program in Spanish, including any guest speakers. Problematic at times, with the financial education vocabulary, the women were sharing, all together, some of the issues of living on Anzaldua's (1987) "frontera [border]" between the two worlds. Sharing the experience and negotiating the meaning together, the cohort of women become more supportive of one another.

In addition, the leadership part of the course, in classes that run on a separate curriculum from the financial education part of the program, includes work on Latina history and culture. In this way, the program is providing the core topics while accessing the learners' "funds of knowledge...and a historical grounding" (De Jesus, 2005, p. 365), a technique that schools have found useful in countering the lack of academic achievement by Latino students, as cited in general education literature. These kinds of connections between the Latina women might also be a function of the program's creation of a space for the women to feel valued and in which they "fit" (Anzaldua, 1992), rather than being an "other" in the hegemonic White culture. This encouragement of the women to honor and foreground their cultural experiences can be seen as evidence of the potential for organic intellectuals to develop (Gramsci, 1971; Levins Morales,

1998). It is this role of the leadership part of the program that values the women and their knowledge that demonstrates to the women that their experiences are valuable to the community, not just to themselves and to their families. In this setting, the learners are the culture and the community from which they can draw strength and grow.

Another way in which the program foregrounds the shared cultural background of the learners is through the use of food to create connections between the members of the each cohort. Much time was spent during one of the interviews discussing the significance of food in creating community. This idea of creating a space for the women to create their own connections has been shown in adult education literature to be important in creating cohesiveness in a group (Prins, 2009). A clearly measurable outcome was discovered in the only cohort that chose not to share food; nearly half of that cohort dropped out of the program, a number completely unheard of in all of the other cohorts. The administrator and educator interviewees cited the importance of food in the Latino culture as a way of showing acceptance and caring to even strangers, as a way to build close relationships and get to know other people, and as something that is present at every gathering of family and friends no matter how small or large. In this way, then, *Mujeres Fuertes* is honoring “their unique cultural heritage and distinct ways of knowing about the world” and helping to create a family-like atmosphere of caring and sharing that appears to carry over from the food break table to the classroom, and then into their lives outside of class. This practice of sharing food can also be considered as valuing and emphasizing the “social meanings” (Prins, 2005, p. 85) that are most significant to the learners. The work being done at *Mujeres Fuertes* also reflects the research in adult education that demonstrates the importance of recognizing and valuing “our sociocultural histories, identities” (Alfred, 2003, p. 258). This

Latina cultural community then melts over into the community, partly through the work the women do in the leadership part of the program, which will be discussed in the next section.

Pedagogy in the Financial Education Setting

Viewed through the lens of sociocultural and critical perspectives, this holistic approach, discussed above, meets the needs of the learners, partly by providing the previously discussed resources. Despite the large amount of knowledge that exists regarding financial education for adult populations, there is very little known about what actually happens in the classrooms. The Tisdell, Taylor, and Sprow (2010) mixed method study included interviews with financial educators about some of their pedagogical practices. As mentioned previously, they found that the life circumstances of the learners are key factors for educators in deciding how to teach and organize their courses. How exactly this plays out in the classroom, however, is not easy to explain, since there has been very little research into the interactions in the financial education classroom. Through the use of a partially critical pedagogy, a specialized curriculum and many personal stories, *Mujeres Fuertes* creates a comfortable environment to explore financial topics, while still centering around the delivery of the relevant information associated with financial literacy education.

Financial Education Content Delivery with Critical Pedagogy

As just mentioned, the financial education part of *Mujeres Fuertes* focuses much of its attention in the classroom on the delivery of information to the learners through traditional classroom methods, such as PowerPoint presentations with handouts. As discussed in previous sections, the financial educators also utilize other types of activities in the classroom to engage the learners more fully, such as hands-on computer activities, small group work, or limited learner presentations.

Delivering needed content. However, the decisions on what information to work with in the classroom, who the guest speakers will be, and what items are included in the curriculum are all based on the what the educators know and learn about the learners. As Vitt (2009) points out about teaching in the financial education setting, “the more you know about your learners’ cultural context, the closer you will be to unlocking the secrets of their financial behavior” (p. 13). In knowing the learners, the educators can be sure the curriculum and activities reflect the needs of the learners, including those needs associated with their sociocultural background. For example, the educators both addressed the specific needs of these learners related to their gender and how they have been raised in the Latino culture. As mentioned in the previous section, the machismo culture does not encourage women to be independent and find solutions to the problems with which they are faced.

In choosing content appropriate for these learners, then, the educators make careful decisions with those sociocultural factors in mind. A specific example of this “tweaking” (Marisol, 2010) of the content to fit their learners’ needs, Marisol mentioned that they always consider the ages of the children in the learners’ families. To be sure, it is not the case for all Latino families, but the Latino culture is typically seen as having a strong “collective identity” associated with family (Hidalgo, 1997), which must be accounted for in teaching Latino groups. In the experiences of these educators teaching in this program, the women with younger children find it easier to implement changes in the management of household finances. In their experience, as the children get older, the children have to be involved in the process of budgeting and planning, or the plan will not work as intended. Therefore, the educators show examples of contracts that former learners have used with their older children to make sure everyone is in

agreement with the changes. If all of the learners have young children, it might not be necessary to discuss these issues.

Using personal stories. Much of the sociocultural information gained from the learners about needs for content changes in the classroom comes from the use of stories by the participants that the educators use as a source of knowledge and as a learning tool. Recalling that the educators use their own stories from time to time to emphasize a point, to personalize the content, and to make the women feel comfortable, they also encourage the learners to share their own stories with their classmates. As Gay (2010) points out in her text about culturally responsive teaching, stories are a “powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them. . . , penetrate barriers to understanding, and create feelings of kindredness” (p. 3). Reflecting the work of Worthman (2008), which demonstrated the importance of valuing “learner experiences as a resource for learner” (p. 457), the women in this setting share a background with similar sociocultural influences, a feature of their histories that can be used for teaching and learning. As discussed in Chapter Four and above, the findings indicate that the educators tailor the topics in their classes to fit the needs of the learners, rather than staying with the one-size-fits-all approach to planning their curriculum. This is not a surprising finding, given the fact that the Tisdell, Taylor, and Sprow (2010) study also found that 95.5% of financial educators, in a nationwide survey, believe that it is important to take the needs of the learners into account, rather than using the same approach for everyone. Using stories assists the educators in finding out what exactly the learners need, both in regard to information in the classroom and in additional resources they might have to offer them.

An example of how the stories can be used to assess and meet the needs of the learners, on a sociocultural level or simply on a services or information level, during one of the class

observations, one of the learners asked a question with a story included about taxes and a relative who used her social security number for work but then left the country. This kind of question lets the educator know that the learners in the class might need additional instruction related to taxes, dependents, legal issues, and/or undocumented workers. This situation could also inform the educator further about the importance of family connections and the ways in which the learners might be helping their families with money.

A second example, as discussed in the findings chapter, is that the learners might have issues with the head of household designation or questions about the difference between being separated and being legally separated, seemingly related to the machismo culture. The educators knew that this particular population of learners might have questions about these issues and so were prepared with explanations and examples for them. While I saw both educators talk about heads of households in their separate classes, Sonya even briefly addressed this issue from a more societal perspective and as a woman. She pointed out that usually in American society, it is the man who fits into this category, but that “it doesn’t have to be that way.” Interestingly, she made that statement, but then did not take the topic further. Both educators commented, though, that it was not their belief that these kinds of issues are unique to Latino groups. All of these methods of gauging the learners’ needs contribute to the process of revising and “tweaking” (Marisol, 2010) the curriculum and class content to match what the learners want and need, in order to learn the most they can from the financial education classes and from the program as a whole.

The fact that the financial educators are both women and Latinas appeared to give them additional tools and knowledge to utilize pedagogically in the classroom. For example, Marisol, who lives in the same neighborhood in which *Mujeres Fuertes* is located, was able to anticipate

some of the needs of the learners, simply through her knowledge of the community in which they live and then adjust the curriculum as needed. She also mentioned that the learners often bring in stories about the community into class, on which the educators are then able to expand. Another way in which these financial educators anticipate the needs of the learners is by using their knowledge of the Latino culture and the accompanying machismo, which was discussed at length by both the educators and learners during the interviews. As explained in Chapter Two, the Latino culture sanctions, although not always, the male-dominated family structure (Abalos, 2007). Carrying this cultural issue over into the financial education setting, the learners talked about how they never learned how to handle their own finances. The educators confirmed these statements and went on to explain how many of the women in Latino groups are discouraged from getting their own education and supporting themselves, but then end up without a man to support them and their children, as discussed previously.

To be sure, these statements should not be taken as true for all Latino families, but in this program targeted for Latina single mothers, female heads of households in a male-dominated culture present a variety of difficulties. The educators attempt to counter these male-dependent attitudes and teach the women about their own abilities and potential success. They deliver the relevant financial content and show them how to take control of their lives. They follow this up with encouragement, financial counseling meetings, tracking, checking on budgets, role models, and a variety of other methods designed to instill and stimulate change, all according to the specific needs of the learners. All of this leads to the can-do perspectives that the Latina learners appear to be developing. The interviewed learners talked about how they now felt like they make their own success happen.

An additional advantage to using stories in the classroom, as mentioned in Chapter Four, is the knowledge that learners share with one another about their experiences. In sharing their experiences, they are soliciting advice or help, but also offering up their own “wisdom” (Sealey-Ruiz, 2007, p. 52) with one another, wisdom that might have been gained through difficult circumstances. Gay (2010) posits that “stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention on a very personal level, and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are” (p. 3). Sealey-Ruiz found that this process allows the women to use their own voices to express their experiences and come away with a more positive self-image and an affirmation of their own histories, communities, and goals. The non-judgmental, private, and safe environment that is created for the women allows this story telling to be positive, creating, perhaps, more motivation to make even more progress.

In one of the few financial education research studies, and working with a Latino population in North Carolina, Spader et al. (2009) looked at the way in which this population could be targeted for financial education, based on the knowledge the researchers had about the sociocultural influences on the learners. Their findings related to behavior change will be pointed out in the next section, but what is significant here is that the learners benefitted from alternative forms of pedagogy, in this case a *telenovela* or soap opera. However, even more significant, is that the soap opera was in Spanish and recognized the specific needs of those targeted learners. Although the study does not offer specific pedagogical insights that are particularly useful in the classroom, it does confirm all of the points that have been made to this point, which are that background and life circumstances of the learners are important factors in the education process. For this reason, Mujeres Fuertes is finding success for their learners, both in the financial education and positive changes in their financial managements, but also in other areas of their

lives and in the community around the community center. The changes will be discussed in the section below.

Calling on critical pedagogy. This discussion of pedagogy and the impact of sociocultural influences brings to mind the critical pedagogy of Freire (1971). Although *Mujeres Fuertes* could not be considered critical pedagogy in a complete sense, particularly as it focuses primarily on delivering the financial education topics and information that has been determined to be necessary to the Latina learners, the work being done there has several of the elements of Freire's (1971) critical pedagogy: (a) it utilizes the knowledge that the learners already possess; (b) it helps the learners claim their own power; and (c) it helps the learners find their own voices to claim that power. As noted, *Mujeres Fuertes* clearly does not completely follow Freire's idea of shelving the "banking concept" (p. 60), since it delivers financial information to the learners in a fairly traditional format. But, the program, using the holistic approach, assists the learners in finding the answers to their own problems, which can lead to increased levels of power and feelings of confidence in their ability to make their own financial decisions.

However, the tension between the instrumental financial learning and the critical parts of the pedagogical approach taken by the program can be problematic for both the learners and educators and brings to mind the work of Gross (2005) and Willis (2008a, 2008b). They question the power and institutional interests in educating individuals to participate in the existing financial structures in society. Both Gross and Willis suggest that the possibility for changing marginalizing behavior on the part of the financial institutions and government regulations are discouraged as more and more individuals participate in the mainstream financial world. However, it is important to recognize that while *Mujeres Fuertes* might be educating to assist the Latina women to make changes in their lives, it does not appear to be trying to change the

financial institutions themselves. Through the education of the women in how the financial institutions function, they are also learning to value their own lives and backgrounds. They are then also learning to ask for the things they have a right to expect society to provide. Ultimately, this might extend that questioning behavior to the institutions that have possibly marginalized their lives in the past, but that is not an immediate goal. In this program, then, the critical pedagogy takes place at the individual level, with the potential to expand to the community and societal levels at a later date.

As discussed, the learners and their backgrounds are valued by the educators and enhanced in the classroom, like the one on Latina history and culture. As pinpointed in the work of Sparks (1998) and Fernandez (2002), a key component of a successful academic program for Latino groups is one in which the learners are valued as a resource in the classroom, possibly through the use of their stories and experiences. They are also taught about leadership and taking a role in the local Latino community to help solve the problems. Although not necessarily focused on social change itself and how to make change happen, the program, in its mission, wants to help the women to take a role in the community and act as role models for change in both their families and the community.

Behavior Change and Financial Education

Taking the discussion from sociocultural and community factors to the individual level, and since positive changes in financial behavior are the goal of any financial education program, the observed changes and the ways in which the program encourages those changes will now be addressed through the lens of the transtheoretical model (TTM) of behavior change. TTM has gained recent attention in financial education research (Schuchardt et al., 2009; Shockey & Seiling, 2004; Spader et al., 2009; Xiao et al. 2004a; Xiao et al. 2004b; Xiao, Collins, Ford,

Keller, Kim, & Robles, 2010) as a possible way for educators to respond more accurately to the needs of the learners. Recalling the explanation of TTM from Chapter Two, there are five stages in the process of behavior change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Kerkman (1998) applied these changes to the financial setting for use with financial counselors to assess their clients, and then created “interventions that are appropriate and effective for each particular stage” (p. 20) to be taken by the counselors to encourage forward movement through the stages. The five stages were later developed into ten more specific change processes (Prochaska, Redding & Evers, 1996) that have been shown to be helpful to educators in identifying topics that learner are in need of in class (Spader et al., 2009; Xiao et al., 2004b): consciousness raising, social liberation, dramatic relief, self-reevaluation, self-liberation, counterconditioning, stimulus control, contingency management, helping relationships, and environmental reevaluation. Figure 1, from Chapter Two on page 53, demonstrates how these stages have been applied to financial education settings (Xiao et al., 2010), identifying both the stage of change that the learners might be experiencing and the suggested educational behavior that will support and encourage the learners to continue their progress. For example, as shown in the figure, in the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages, forward movement through those stages might be encouraged by educational support and focus of lessons in raising the emotions of the learners related to money and finances, raising learners’ awareness of their social responsibility, and/or improving their self-esteem. These actions might assist the learners in making forward progress in their process of changing their financial behavior.

In *Mujeres Fuertes*, as in most financial education programs, there are many things that are being taught at any one time. It must be recognized that in a classroom setting, the learners

have different backgrounds and different ability levels, as well as different resources available to them to make the suggested changes. In a one-on-one financial counseling setting, as referred to previously, Kerkman (1998) found that targeting individual stages could be used as a potential means of making effective interventions. However, in the classroom, identifying the stages and then creating activities around individual needs is not always practical. For example, in the class on taxes that I observed, there was very basic information that was being discussed and a few more advanced issues that were also brought up over the course of the discussion. Going into details about taxes related to self-employed individuals who pay a relative in cash for help, and the implications of that situation on her tax form is perhaps not the best use of class time to encourage behavior change. Mujeres Fuertes is fortunate to have personal financial counseling as part of the program in order to address individual issues like that one, as well as a wealth of resources to which they can refer the learners for consultation.

In the classroom setting, then, the best approach might be the kind I observed on the first day of classes for the new cohort, in which a variety of kinds of encouragement was offered. It must be noted that the women are voluntarily attending this program and have taken the initiative to obtain information about the program, apply and enroll, and so have likely recognized that they would like to improve their lives. This is the very first step in making changes, and so these learners are likely already beyond the pre-contemplation stage of TTM at which they do not necessarily recognize that change needs to take place, unlike the Latino learners who watched the *telenovela* in the Spader et al. (2009) study that was driven by TTM. However, since the process of change is often not linear, but more of a spiral shape in which individuals return to previous stages throughout the process before moving forward, continued encouragement and reinforcement in the skills and emotions from previous stages is also beneficial.

As shown in Figure 1 in Chapter Two, page 53, then, in moving through the stages, individuals at the contemplation stage, during which time they plan to make changes in the next six months or so, might respond to improvements in their self-image, a key element in Mujeres Fuertes according to the learners interviewed. Beginning with the orientation class, from my observations, the women are encouraged; they see role models; they are valued as women, as mothers, as Latinas, as members of their community; and they are learning how to make changes. The interviews with the learners appear to confirm the effectiveness of this approach, in that they have all made small changes in their financial management and in the way they think about budgeting and spending, and they are all also planning to make changes, some sizeable, as a result of the program's instruction and support. As the document data and data from the interview with the administrator also demonstrates, there have been positive quantitative changes in the savings, debt, and credit scores of the learners, as noted in Chapter Four. The combination of consistent support, education, and their accurate identification of the needs of the learners appear to offer support for their positive behavior changes. In addition, the educators and the program as a whole are supporting the women in all areas of their lives.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Further Research

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into for the theory, practice, and further research of adult financial education. Although this study was limited in scope in that it focused exclusively on one program with one population of learners, the experiences of the educators and learners in this program targeted for Latina learners can be useful to financial educators and adult educators in understanding the ways culture influences teaching and learning, and possibilities for change that needs to be considered for the theory, practice, and further research for adult education and financial education. This section will end with a brief

discussion of the limitations and suggestions for further research and final reflections on the process of conducting this research.

Critical Perspectives

The study offers implications for how we theorize about adult education for social change, particularly for Latino learners, but more broadly for culturally responsive education that promotes change. In adult education, researchers and theorists often discuss critical perspectives and social change as a possibility (Newman, 1994, 2006; Welton, 1995), but do not as often suggest ways to make that change happen. This study demonstrates some ways to apply the theory to practice and assist in the development of further insights into how adult education can contribute to social changes. In addition, this study further confirms some of the theory that has developed around culturally responsive education (Gay, 2010), and more specifically offers further insight into the strength of the cultural connections that are possible within Latino groups. Despite the fact that the women in *Mujeres Fuertes* are from diverse Latino groups, the program emphasizes their similarities, which allows theorists to see that creating connections is possible in order to respond to the learners in a culturally responsive manner.

Adult education has spent very little time discussing financial education, despite the fact that there are a lot of adults participating in this kind of education on a daily basis, both as educators and learners and in both formal and informal settings. As English (in press) points out in one of the few explorations that incorporates financial and adult education, the experiences of adult educators in this setting need to be analyzed with respect to issues of power, dominance, and hegemony, taking the critical perspective toward education (Brookfield, 2005). This critical perspective toward power is one of the concerns that arises in the financial education literature. Consideration of the power of financial institutions and the role of financial education in

reinforcing the power of those institutions (Gross, 2005; Willis, 2008a, 2008b) offers an additional site for exploring these issues related to critical perspectives.

The results of this study of financial education in this Latina program offers adult researchers and educators an opportunity to explore and theorize about what research and practice based on critical, feminist, and culturally responsive education theory might mean in an area that is strongly content based, as well as an area of education that has large implications for society and possibilities for social change. For example, *Mujeres Fuertes* is helping the Latina learners develop into community leaders, potentially with the ability to begin the process of social change. In addition, the financial changes the women are making are occurring at the personal level of the family and children, which also has long-ranging effects for their community. These avenues of research can be accessed by researchers to see how these changes happen. Financial educators have topics that must be covered, but it is possible that they can utilize critical, feminist, and culturally responsive pedagogies and explore what that approach would look like in this novel setting.

Sociocultural Perspectives

Likewise, knowledge from critical, feminist, and culturally responsive perspectives and learning in adult education can be incorporated into the practice of financial education, a field that has not generally utilized insights from adult education in practice, but is slowly increasing (Lusardi, Clark, Fox, Grable, & Taylor, 2010; Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010). Financial education, as discussed previously, has largely centered on behavioral approaches that promote one action resulting in one outcome, and the assumption that delivery of information results in improved behavior. However, the research into financial education programs demonstrates that these approaches to financial education may not be delivering the outcomes that are desired

(Willis, 2008a, 2008b). Additionally, researchers in financial education have called for more specific attention to the background and needs of the learners (Hathaway & Khatiwada, 2008), making the same points that researchers in adult education have made (Alfred, 2003; Guy, 1999; Prins, 2009; Sparks, 1998). The incorporation of sociocultural perspectives into financial education approaches can only enhance the work of financial educators and the benefits the learners are receiving.

However, it is important to note that although adult education researchers are sometimes looking at education from a sociocultural perspective, there has been very little research into Latinos. There has been much research into the experiences of African American learners and educators (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Guy, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007) and much theoretical discussion about African American learners particularly in light of the new handbook on race and adult education (Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, Brookfield, & Associates, 2010). There have also been many studies into the experiences of Latino learners in general education literature (De Jesus, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Munoz, 1997), but there remain many areas of Latino experiences that have not been explored in adult education. The few studies that have been done, discussed in Chapter Two (Alfred, 2003; Prins, 2004, 2009; Sparks, 1998), demonstrate the importance of culture and understanding the different life circumstances that affect learning for Latino groups, but much more research is needed.

Behavior Change and the Role of Culture

Another area of research related to financial education that has the potential to benefit from research into adult education and culturally responsive education is the transtheoretical model of behavior change. The previous study in which I participated (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow,

2010) emphasized the importance of a culturally responsive approach that encourages learning, while at the same time, respecting and incorporating the specific characteristics of the learners into the pedagogy. This approach can be incorporated into the model of behavior change (Xiao et al., 2010, see Figure 1 on page 53), to acknowledge that other factors that are involved in the process of learning about and then making the positive changes in financial management (see Figure 3 below on page 227).

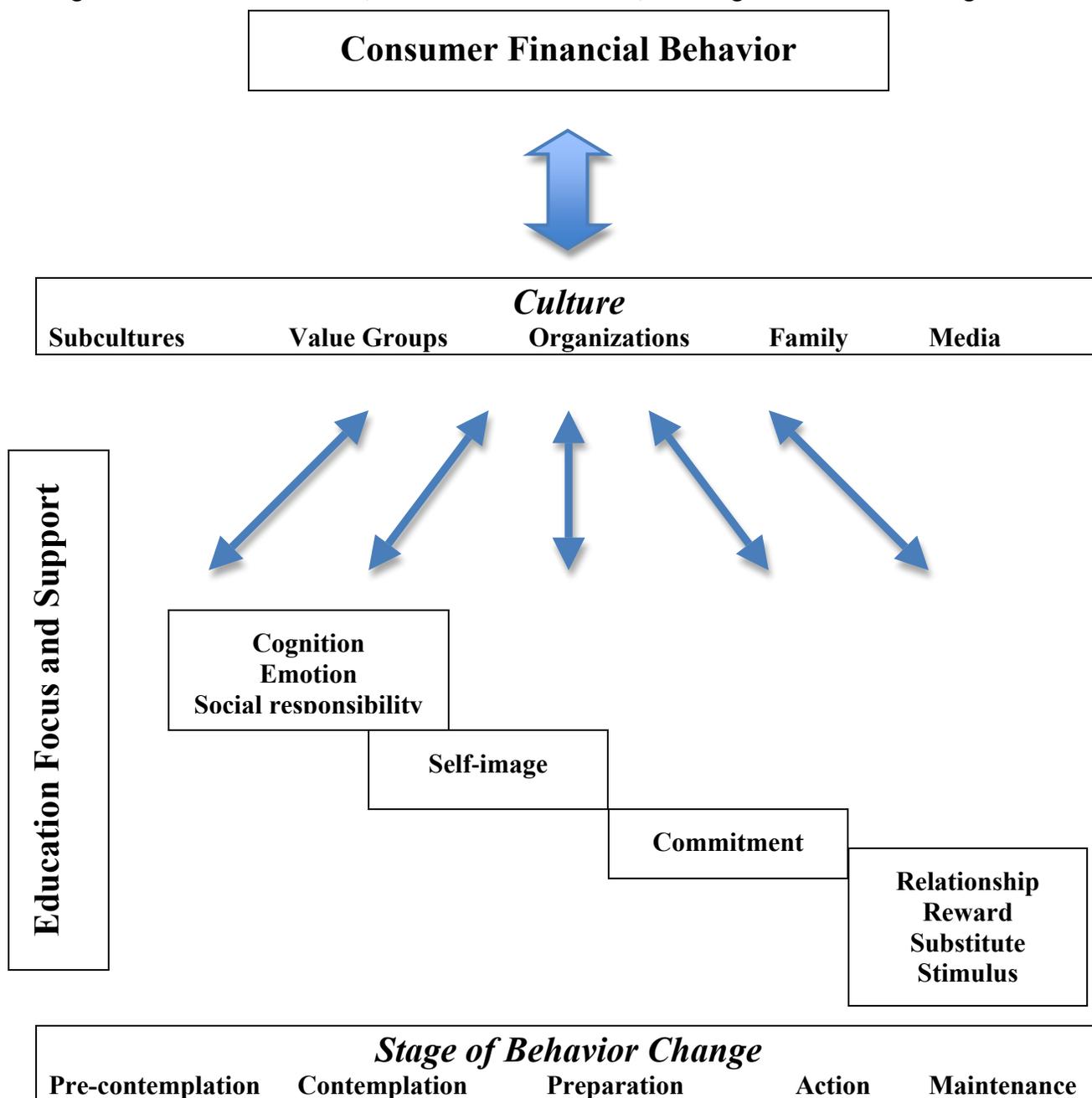
Some of the financial education literature and research is grounded in the transtheoretical model of behavior change, though often the cultural influences are ignored. Although their paper acknowledges the differences in sociocultural experiences and factors related to wealth and wealth creation, Xiao et al.'s (2010) work, including the chart in Figure 1, depicted in Chapter 2 on page 53, does not account for the effects of these same sociocultural influences of financial education itself. Figure 3 below, an adaptation of Xiao et al.'s chart which includes the cultural element as applied to financial education, emphasizes the focus on the education, support, and needs analysis throughout the entire process, at which *Mujeres Fuertes* appears to excel.

However, Xiao et al.'s model does not address the sociocultural influences that can be capitalized upon to encourage learners to make more changes at every stage, something else *Mujeres Fuertes* and its educators appear to do well. For example, *Mujeres Fuertes* encourages the learners to be proud of their Latina heritage, possibly increasing their self-esteem, their sense of social responsibility and connection to the community to encourage them to move forward through the stages of change. Therefore, the model of behavior change has been adapted with the addition of an umbrella of additional factors that educators can consider when preparing to teach financial education for adult learners. It draws on Vitt's (2009) description of the "flow of cultural influence on consumer financial behaviors" (p.14), and recognizes the enormous

influence that sociocultural factors have on every part of our lives and decision-making processes.

For example, using Vitt's (2009) descriptors for the types of cultural influences on our lives, culture is the overriding society we live in, with its subcultures, as in racial/ethnic categories or categories associated with social class, with which we might share beliefs and values. There are also value groups, such as our peer groups or generation of peers, with which individuals identify. Organizations play a large role in our culture, particularly those that include a membership of some kind, like a religious organization or educational institution. The new model, which includes many of the sociocultural influences that exist in our lives, acknowledges that role those influences can play in both our financial decision-making process, but also in our education about those processes. It also intends to illustrate the knowledge and recommendations for practice that the study has revealed. As you will see in the adapted figure, there are many ways in which Mujeres Fuertes sets an example for other programs in that it supports its learners in multiple areas of their lives, addressing these influences.

Figure 3. Financial Education, Sociocultural Influences, and Stages of Behavior Change.



Notes: Adapted from Xiao et al. (2010), who adapted it from Prochaska et al. (1992) & Vitt (2009).

1. Cognition: Knowledge and skills. 1, 2, & 3 effective for moving from pre-contemplation to contemplation.
2. Emotion: Awareness by arousing emotions.
3. Social responsibility: Awareness by stressing the social impact of a behavior change.
4. Self-image: New self-image to move people from contemplation to preparation.
5. Commitment: Personal commitment to move people from preparation to action.
6. Relationship: Family/close relationships. 6, 7, 8, & 9 are effective to move from action to maintenance.
7. Reward: Nonfinancial awards for desirable behavior change.
8. Substitute: Establishing desirable substitute behavior for behavior change.
9. Stimulus: Removing/adding stimuli to facilitate behavior change.

Further Implications for Practice

With these implications for theory and practice in mind, and drawing on some of the insights of others, the study also offers some further implications for practice. Utilizing the illustrative model in Figure 3 above, which combines the transtheoretical model of behavior change and takes sociocultural factors into account as a way to foster positive changes in financial behavior, the following three implications will be discussed: (a) the importance making financial education a holistic practice, not isolated from other factors in an individual's life; (b) the importance of incorporating the role of sociocultural influences into pedagogy and curriculum; and (c) the importance of identifying and incorporating learners' needs into the financial education program organization and curriculum.

Making financial education a holistic practice. This study has demonstrated, through the experiences of these Latina learners, that their financial education and improving behavior cannot take place without the accompanying learning in other areas of their lives. As Figure 3 shows, and has been pointed out in multiple places in the financial education literature listed above, it is not possible to completely isolate financial knowledge and learning, and ignore the other factors that assist us or hinder us in our efforts to make changes in how we manage our money (Vitt, 2004, 2009).

As such, it is possible to imagine financial education classes that incorporate analysis of those other multiple factors and include additional educational opportunities for the learners. Some of these additional topics might include things we would normally find in life skills classes, such as goal setting and negotiation skills, as Mujeres Fuertes incorporates into their program. However, they might also include classes in critical media literacy, helping learners to see the ways in which the media influences our desires for more consumer goods. Financial

education classes in the future might also include practice at improving self-esteem so that learners are more confident in making financial decisions (Endres, Chowdhury, & Alam, 2008; Loibl & Hira, 2006). A series of financial classes might include more family members, instead of just the head of household, recognizing the influence of family and the legacy of family financial practices and attitudes (Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010). Another financial education class might include an exploration of the discriminatory practices of financial institutions and the ways in which those practices affect entire communities of people (Seidman, Hababou, & Kramer, 2004); or perhaps the class might include community leadership training, so that the effects of the classes are felt by a larger community of people. The important point is that financial literacy is not limited to financial knowledge, but is part of a complete picture of literacy about the society we live in and the ways in which different parts of society work together.

Identifying and incorporating learners' needs. As Mujeres Fuertes has demonstrated, it is important to tailor educational program to fit the needs of the learners. The model in Figure 3 also emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction according to the specific stage at which the learners are residing, in order to push them forward. It would not be useful for this group of women, at this stage in their lives, to learn about investing retirement savings, although that is one of the goals some of the learners have set for themselves. Through the use of multiple elicitation practices, such as the use of stories, the one-on-one counseling sessions, and the extensive intake information that is collected, it is possible to accurately assess the needs and desires of the learners and adjust and adapt the curriculum and classroom activities accordingly. However, recognizing that needs assessment practices are not always practical in every financial education setting, these educators demonstrate how extensive knowledge of the Latina learners and their background are useful in preparing to teach and in program development.

The educators also work hard to create a respectful atmosphere of comfort and safety, in which their learners feel free to share their issues, questions, and stories, primarily by sharing their own authentic stories and always being respectful of their learners experiences and knowledge. Again, while not always practical in every financial education setting, this is a way to get learners to open up and explain the details of their financial feelings and concerns, so that the learners' needs can be addressed in concert with their life circumstances, whether that is through tailoring activities to match their apparent stage of each learner's own change process, through providing resources and counseling, or through adapting the curricular materials and topics covered to meet those needs. In these ways, then, and as shown in the presence of the education focus and support along the bottom and sides of Figure 3, it is possible for educators to ensure that the needs of their financial education learners are being met.

Incorporating sociocultural influences into pedagogy and curriculum. Meeting the needs of the learner effectively cannot be done without recognizing and valuing the role of the sociocultural influences in their lives and how those influences affect learning. As shown in Figure 3, the cultural influences are an overriding factor in the ways in which the learners are receiving and processing the information they receive as they proceed through the processes. As Vitt (2009) points out repeatedly in her recommendations for financial educators, they must “never underestimate culture” (p. 13) and the important role it plays both in financial management decisions and in adult learning, in general (Alfred, 2003; Prins, 2009).

One of the methods that has been recommended for recognizing the influence of sociocultural factors on the way individuals see the world is through a process of reflection and evaluation of those perceptions (Brown, Cervero, Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2010; Tisdell, Taylor, & Sprow, 2010; Vitt, 2009; Weitz, 1982). Once individual learners begin to realize the

influence that culture has on their financial decisions, and once they can begin to critically reflect on whether or not those influences are positive, they can then make more informed choices for their lives. This critical reflection and encouragement of developing a critical perspective can be approached through a variety of practical methods, including analyzing media influences on consumer behavior, raising awareness of the power and influence of financial institutions, encouraging knowledge of the marginalizing activities of these institutions, etc. It can also be helpful for learners to see their lives reflected in the curricular materials they use in the classroom, such as in diverse photographs, accessible language, and activities that reflect learners' life circumstances.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

While this study offers much insight into the experiences of the Latina women in *Mujeres Fuertes*, there are some limitations associated with this research, given that this was a case study, and thus the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. But, the study does offer a beginning place for understanding what we know about Latina learners in financial education programs, and suggests great opportunity for further research. As mentioned above, there has not been nearly enough research in adult education into the learning experiences of Latinos in any setting. Additionally, there has not been enough research in financial education using adult education perspectives. More information is needed about the teaching and learning, specifically about pedagogical issues in financial education classrooms, and more specifically, those that target specific groups of learners. Further research that combines adult and financial education can only benefit both areas of study.

Programs like *Mujeres Fuertes* offer inspiration for the rest of the world of financial literacy education. While the teaching and learning that is happening at that location cannot be

fully generalized to the population as a whole, the experiences of these courageous Latina learners and educators allows us to take a closer look at the influence of sociocultural factors on financial education. Insights are not limited, however, to the education itself, but can be expanded to a more thorough understanding of how culture can offer additional pedagogical opportunities for learning. One of the core elements of sociocultural and critical perspectives is the importance of valuing and respecting the experiences of learners in the process of learning. *Mujeres Fuertes* demonstrates this element in action, showing us how to incorporate and capitalize on the experiences of their learners as Latina single mothers, as they navigate through the process of learning, changing their behavior, and then taking an active role in their community. Financial education can benefit from this holistic approach to teaching and learning, utilizing the experiences of the learners to enhance their learning. If the mission of financial education is to help learners make more responsible and positive financial decisions, the holistic approach, exemplified so well at *Mujeres Fuertes*, can assist with accomplishing those goals.

Final Reflections

From the outset of this research process, there were two primary goals in my mind. I wanted to do something that would make a contribution, both to the field of adult education and to society on a larger scale, and I wanted to study something that reflected the critical perspective that I have developed in the last three years during my study of adult education. Although this project took on several permutations, beginning with critical media literacy and critical documentaries, progressing to financial literacy and critical pedagogy, then to financial literacy and Latina learners, there was always an element of the critical present. Looking at the literature review in Chapter Two, I can see the effects of my earlier passion for critical theory and my

insistence that it remain a part of my theoretical framework, no matter what form the study would ultimately take.

In its final form, I was very fortunate to locate the program for Latina single mothers for this study. This case offered me the opportunity to see a program that is passionate about helping women improve their lives through educational opportunities and encouraging them to take an active role in the community. It also honors their background and histories as women and as Latinas in ways that support and inspire them to reach their goals, and in ways that society, in general, does not do enough. It was a fortuitous result that there are elements of critical pedagogy in the work they are doing in this program, with the potential for actual social change that might bring their community closer together.

In the process of researching and writing the results, the reflection process strongly influenced my writing. Each time I requested feedback from the participants, I was struck by my feelings of inadequacy related to my positionality compared to the positionality of the participants. Although I was aware at the outset that I had strong feelings about the imposition of a researcher's work on the development of knowledge in the field, I thought that my critical perspective released me from those colonizing actions. In fact, though, I was perhaps more aware of the fact that I was imposing my beliefs and perceptions about their lives onto them. This imposition, though, did not only take place in academic circles, but actually within the experience that is their individual lives, since I requested their input about my writing. I pondered at length the question of how I would feel if someone outside of my life, a man, perhaps, or someone from a different background than I have, came into my life and tried to document what my behavior means. Would their interpretation be different than my own

perception of my life? Would it give me more of a voice or less of one? Would that researcher see more than I see or less?

These questions remain unresolved as the research process nears its end. What is clear is that research is a never-ending process of questioning, discovery, and reflection. Even without answers to those questions, it is my hope that some contribution has been made to the knowledge of Latina women who are learning about financial education, as well as the importance of considering other factors in financial education, not simply the content. Change can take place, but it involves many factors, only some of which we can control. Recognizing those other factors might be the key to positive financial change. Just ask the women of Mujeres Fuertes.

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APPENDIX A

Learner Interview Questions

Learner Background

- Tell me a little bit about yourself, why you are attending this program, where you work, about your family.
- What led you to attend a financial education program?

Accessibility of Program and Reasons/Motivation for Attending

- How did you find the financial education program you are attending?
- Why did you decided to attend this particular program?
- What does the program do to make it easier for you to attend the classes?

Curriculum and Class Activities

- What kinds of financial topics has your class discussed so far?
 - In what ways does the instructor make the topics relevant to your life experiences as a woman and as a Latina? Can you give me an example?
 - How does the instructor relate the topics in class to Latino community financial issues? Can you give me an example?
 - How does the instructor discuss social and economic issues as they relate to discriminatory and/or predatory practices, like payday lenders? Can you give me an example?
- What kinds of activities does the class do?
 - Interaction between learners? Inside and outside of class?
 - Instructor stories about her financial experiences? Student stories about their experiences? Example?
 - Are you comfortable sharing your personal financial stories in class? Why or why not?
- Of the materials the instructor uses, how do they reflect your life experiences as a Latina? Can you give me some examples?
- Do you think the race and/or ethnicity of the instructor affects your experiences as students in the classes?

Personal Experiences with and Influence of FLE

- What is the most significant thing you've learned in class?
- What changes have you made in your financial management as a result of the class? Of those changes, why are those the ones you made?
 - Do you have plans to make any other changes? Why are you planning to make those changes?
 - Are there some things you talk about in class that are easier or harder than others to include in your life? What are they? Can you give me an example?
- Can you give me an example of an activity or class the particularly resonated with you? What about it left you with strong feelings?
- How do you think your experience would have been the same or different in a class with students of other races/ethnicities and/or gender?

APPENDIX B

Educator Interview Questions

Educator Background

- Can you tell me a little bit about your background, how you came to teach financial education? Where did you learn about these topics? Your education?
- What led you to teach in this particular financial education program?
- Do you live in the same community as the students you teach?
- What is the most important thing you are teaching the students in your classes?

Curriculum and Class Activities

- Do you use a published curriculum? Or do you create your own? Why? Which one?
- Of the materials you use, how do they reflect the life experiences of the Latina students? Can you give me some examples?
- What financial topics do you cover? Why those? Does the background of your students affect these choices?
 - In what ways do you make the topics relevant to the life experiences of the Latina students? Can you give me an example?
 - How do you relate the topics in class to Latino community financial issues? Can you give me an example?
 - How do you discuss social and economic issues as they relate to discriminatory or predatory practices, like payday lenders? Can you give me an example?
- What kinds of activities do you have the class do?
 - Is there one class or activity that particularly stands out as successful or inspiring to the students in any way? What about the activity made it so?
 - How can you tell when you are really reaching the students?
 - Do you tell stories about your experiences? Why? Can you give me an example? How do the students react to these stories? Do they seem to increase the amount of discussion? Does it encourage them to share their stories?
 - Do the students tell stories about their experiences? Can you give me an example?
- Are there things about your Latina students that you are particularly conscious of with regards to their background? What are they?
- Are there things you think you might do differently with another group of students?
- What changes do you see your students making in their financial management?
- Are there some things you talk about in class that seem to be easier or harder than others for students to include in their lives? What are they? Can you give me an example?

APPENDIX C

Administrator Interview Questions

Program Characteristics

- Can you tell me about the mission or the objectives of this financial education program?
- How does this program advertise about its classes?
- How is the program funded? Do the students pay for classes?
- How do you determine who is accepted and who is not?
- Can you explain the breakdown in the partnership between the three organizations, and what each partner contributes?
- What are the long-term goals of the program, with regard to the pilot program?
- Can you explain how the program works? When are the classes? Where are they held? How often do they meet? Etc.
- How often do the students meet in one-on-one counseling sessions? What are the requirements of those sessions?
- Can you tell me a little about the students enrolled in the program? Their work status, gender, race/ethnicity, age, in general?
- Does the program do anything to make it easier for students to attend the classes?
- How does the program evaluate its effectiveness? Are there follow-up procedures that you use? How long? What is the method of assessment?
- Does the program fund continuing education for the teachers?

APPENDIX D

NVivo 8 Thematic Organization

The table below is an example of the themes and subthemes, called nodes, from NVivo 8. The themes are accompanied by the number of sources that contain information on the theme, and the number of times each theme was referred to by each source. For example, the theme of creating community was mentioned by five different sources a total of 17 different times. Below that larger theme are three subthemes that give additional information about the general theme of creating community.

Table 1. Themes, Sources, and References from NVivo 8.

Theme and Subtheme Names	Number of Sources	Number of References
Attitudes about money	1	1
Behavior Change	2	3
Childcare	1	1
Collaborative learning	1	1
Community	3	11
Connection between financial and leadership	1	1
Creating Community	5	17
Cohort	4	18
Connections	5	16
Sharing	4	14
Culture	5	17
Curriculum	6	28
Adjusted to learner	2	5
Budgeting	1	2
Credit	4	10
Homeownership	3	4
Most important	1	1
Needs-wants	2	2
Predatory practices	1	1
Savings	3	5
Taxes	1	1
Dependent and independent	4	8
Educator Background	2	8
Family	5	13
Feelings	3	7
Financial Counseling	2	2

Theme and Subtheme Names	Number of Sources	Number of References
Financial Goals	5	8
Financial needs of immigrants	2	6
Food	3	6
Gender	5	11
Holism	1	1
Identity	1	2
Judging	3	3
Leadership	4	9
Learner background	5	21
Learner development	6	17
Asking questions	2	7
Grow	2	5
Learner most important	1	1
Learner needs	3	13
Learner stories	5	18
Learners as experts	4	9
Measuring Outcomes	5	19
Motivation	2	4
Pedagogy	6	29
Guest speakers	3	6
Providing information	2	2
Tools	3	4
Personalization	4	4
Pre-program Learner Assessment	1	2
Program Organization	3	17
Advertising	1	4
Disqualifying factors	1	1
Educational	1	1
Opportunities		
Employees	1	1
Enrollment	1	1
Grant funding	1	2
Program creation	1	1
Recruiting	3	3
Resources for Learners	5	20
Self Esteem Self Confidence	4	6
Single Mothers	6	12
Spanish language	5	6
Support for learners	1	2
Tailoring for learners	1	1
Tracking Progress	1	1

APPENDIX E

NVivo 8 Sample of Thematic Data

Below is a partial sample from a data extraction from NVivo 8 after the data was coded and ready to be analyzed in greater detail. This sample was extracted due to my interest in the theme of the use of stories by the educators in the classroom. It is presented below in the format used by NVivo 8.

§ 1 reference coded [2.28% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.28% Coverage

M: It's a combination of both, because the program is including leadership, even though we don't cover leadership, or the topics, we still need to be part of encouraging them to be active, to participate in their neighborhood. So, if somebody has or brings an issue from their neighborhood, we can link it to the community and how it (unclear). So we are always trying to make a connection between the finances and the leadership and how it impacts yourself and you pocket, but also your children and your community as a whole.

2 references coded [5.73% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.59% Coverage

S: To engage them and also to put a personal aspect to the knowledge and make them feel like they aren't the only ones in that situation. Sometimes as a student, you can see the teacher as someone superior, as someone with no faults, that they know it all, and just conveying that we are humans, and part of our knowledge has come from that experience. That as we knew better, we also began making better choices. And I think that that is the major reason for that, not to keep it just as theory, but also as real life. This is something that does happen and it happens to everybody. It's not something that could have happened to you for personal reasons, but it's part of the process, sometimes it's lack of ignorance, something that you knew all your life, that it's a way of, that change could be possible.

Reference 2 - 3.14% Coverage

sometimes what I've observed is that they can relate to it, and it opens up that they can say, "oh, I've been in that situation, too, or based on your experience, what could you recommend." Or, be more accessible to them, to probably ask questions, or encouraging them to ask questions, sometimes something can seem like a stupid question or not relevant, just more accessible, that we understand them, that we get where they're coming from.

K: And, do you see, then, that the students are also more open about their experiences?

S: Yes, yes, definitely.

§ 4 references coded [19.04% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.51% Coverage

A: Um, you know what, when I started, it's funny, but in the classroom setting, the classes are in Spanish, and although I am bilingual, my main language is English, and there was another girl in the class who was in the same boat as I was. So I know we kind of clicked in the beginning. And then later on just through talking with her personally, she did mention to me that she went through basically the same situation as myself, which is when I was younger, I was molested by my stepfather, and my mother never did nothing about it, and she continued to be with him. And the same thing happened to her. She was almost raped by her stepfather, and her mother never did nothing. So, I had learned that through her, through personally talking to her because we clicked right in the beginning. Through our classroom presentations, that we were talking about, my subject was sexual abuse, and through that presentation, everyone learned that her and me happened to have went through that same experience, you know, just two different people, and how it affected our lives. And, then, it's through different presentations, that everyone just openly expressed what they've been through, through their own experiences, so we can learn from each other.

Reference 2 - 2.98% Coverage

A: I just know that the confidence that we have in each other, to freely express what situations we've been through, to avoid what a classmate, to avoid the same thing like home foreclosure, renting, the dos and the don'ts, and a lot of times, you don't really pay attention to that sort of information, sometimes it's really useful and sometimes it's not.

Reference 3 - 3.57% Coverage

A: I think we learn from, what is so big about this program is that we learn from each other, but also that older students who have passed our steps, and our teachers, and so many, you know, they aren't always able to go over every bit of material, but they guide us in the right direction. To each, they go ahead and follow up with the information they present to us, the materials and the support is what makes us stronger.

Reference 4 - 1.98% Coverage

So the teachers also share their experiences with you?

A: Not their experiences, but, actually yes, not too much, but they have expressed some situations they have been in, but not too much into what exactly they have been through.

§ 1 reference coded [4.09% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.09% Coverage

K: Do the students talk about their experiences with money?

C: Yes, just because someone don't have a job, or that's where we know.

K: Do you help each other, the students?

C: Yes

§ 6 references coded [16.68% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.57% Coverage

K: And so that helps you understand the women and where they're coming from and their experiences. Your experience of living there in the community or having the same or similar background helps you relate to the students better. OK.

M: And, I think working with other organizations as well, seeing the same population, seeing the same kind of people that we work with, it gives a lot of experience in just listening to them and learning from them about their own personal experiences, learning what is happening in the communities.

Reference 2 - 2.41% Coverage

K: do community issues come into the classroom also?

M: Yes, yes they do. Many times, the actual things that happen throughout the community are the things they bring into the classroom, because they may have problems with a renter, they may have problems with housing, they may have problems with just getting something done in the community. And, they don't know who to refer to, who do they need to call. So, all of those issues have to be taken into consideration and talked about, well this is the things that we need to do. We also show them online, this is how you look up who your representatives are, this is where you can find the person you need to report to, or these are the resources around your neighborhood that you can actually go to and get information about this particular issue you are looking at.

Reference 3 - 2.28% Coverage

K: so the students bring in those stories or those issues or concerns, and they you talk about it? Or do you sometimes bring in things that you anticipate or think might be an issue for them and then you talk about it? Or is it a combination of both?

M: It's a combination of both, because the program is including leadership, even though we don't cover leadership, or the topics, we still need to be part of encouraging them to be active, to participate in their neighborhood. So, if somebody has or brings an issue from their neighborhood, we can link it to the community and how it (unclear). So we are always trying to make a connection between the finances and the leadership and how it impacts yourself and you pocket, but also your children and your community as a whole.

Reference 4 - 4.90% Coverage

K: how you address things like predatory lenders, like the payday loans, like the rent-a-center type of things. How do you address those kinds of things in your class?

M: Well, in the classroom, we try to give them as many tools as possible in learning about it. What is the difference between one thing and the other, you know, leasing to owning and things like that. And the first thing we ask them is, has anybody ever had any experience with this? And then the conversation starts from there. There is always a person who had that experience or who knows someone who has experience with it, and then we take it from there. Things like that and

then we sort of integrate that topic, you know, what about this, what do you think about this, and different slides and scenarios, you know, which one would you choose? Which one do you think is better? And then a lot of questions start coming up, how did you do this? What if you did this? Many questions start coming out and they just sort of direct the way of the class. And then predatory lending, in class, we may touch on, you might say, theory, we may talk about a lot of real stories, but there's a lot of, it depends on the issues, sometimes we might need legal advice or someone to sit with them one-on-one for that topic, you know, if they want to do a modification on that home. That is something that is very time consuming that we really wouldn't be able to deal with here, because of the number of women we are working with, and then we have the connection to the resources here in our organization, so the people that can work with them. And we do a lot of referrals to organizations for a specific topic.

Vita

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Education

- D.Ed.**, Adult Education, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, 2010
Dissertation (Chair: Elizabeth Tisdell): Adult Financial Literacy Education and Latina Learners: A Qualitative Case Study
- M.A.** Teaching English as a Second Language, University of Illinois, 1996
- M.A.** Spanish Language and Literature, University of Alabama, 1993
- B. A.** Spanish Language and Literature, University of Alabama, 1991

Professional Experience

- Assistant Project Director, ESL SCOPE Certificate Program, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, June 2010 to present.
- Lecturer, ESL SCOPE Certificate Program, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, May 2009 to present.
- Adjunct Faculty, ESL Program, Harrisburg Area Community College, January 2007 to present.
- Graduate Assistant, Behavioral Sciences and Education, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, August 2007 to May 2009.
- Program Coordinator, Executive MBA Program, The College of William and Mary, August 1998 to May 2001.
- ESL Educator, August 1996 to present.

Selected Refereed Articles and Presentations

- Tisdell, E. W., Taylor, E. W., & Sprow, K. (2010). *Financial Literacy Education for Adult Learners in Community-Based Programs: A Report on the Mixed Method Study of Financial Educators*. National Endowment for Financial Education® (NEFE®).
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- Tisdell, E. J., & **Sprow, K.** (2009). *Critical public pedagogy and Michael Moore's film Sicko: Creating a national dialogue for changing health care*. Proceedings from the 50th Annual Adult Education Research Conference (AERC), Chicago, IL.
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