Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological basis for the study. The research questions that guided this study express interest in the way students and members of the Latino community formed relationships. Most of the relationships were bounded by the confines of the semester since that is the unit of time that governs student life; the multiple characters that populated the study extended over the course of five semesters. However, as is witnessed in the three case studies and the individual vignettes, there was great emphasis on the relationships formed during a student’s semester placement in a community home. Since my interest lay in hearing the voices of the participants as they described their experiences with each other, ethnographic methodologies were an appropriate technique for data collection.

Herein, I briefly review the way the course functioned in the community, describing the role and involvement of the students and the families in the service-learning program. I present a picture of the context of the community and the university, the settings for the study. Next, I describe the qualitative methods used for data collection: interviews, written artifacts, and participant observation. Finally, I explain data management techniques used for sorting through vast amounts of information and the data analysis process itself.

Throughout this chapter, I describe the way the students, the families, and I worked together to tell the story of relationship building among people who probably would not have interacted in a personal sense without the catalyst of the service-learning program. I report the interactions and words of the participants, but the venture was truly one that was dependent on every participant in the program.

Ethical Issues

Qualitative researchers face ethical issues distinct from other research methodologies. I asked the participants to choose a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. I attempt to present the data so that they cannot be recognized easily. At all
times, I try to be straightforward and not deceptive (Creswell, 1998).

Because of the close relationships that I enjoy with the participants in the study, the matter of ethics is especially important. Many of the participants felt comfortable enough with me to share intimate details of their lives, but I am bound by personal ethics to not disclose any information that could place anyone in danger or cause anyone embarrassment (Creswell, 1998). For that reason, I omitted some personal information that was important in the lives of the participants and that helped me to understand them better, but which could possibly endanger or humiliate them. However, in no way did the omissions distort the specific research questions I explored in this particular study.

While I present three cases and sixteen vignettes of varying lengths, each involving students and Latinos, I try not to include any identifying information about the individuals. This was problematic, because all the people involved in the study knew other participants, and they will undoubtedly be able to identify one another. When I read them the consent forms for the study (Appendixes F and G), I stressed that I could only promise confidentiality on my part, and not on the part of the other participants. As Merriam (1998) says, “At the local level, it is nearly impossible to protect the identity of either the case or the people involved” (p. 217). I also explained to them that the data would be used to write my dissertation, which would mean it would be available to be read by many people in its published form. I promised to share the findings with the participants.

To sum up the issue of ethics, May (1980) explains:

The duties of field-workers to their host populations—duties to respect confidences, to communicate to them the aims of the research, to protect anonymity, to safeguard rights, interests, and sensitivities, to give fair return for services rendered, to anticipate the consequences of publications, to share the results of research with affected parties, and to be sensitive to the diversity of values and interests of those studied—all these duties rest on a deeper footing than a contract, on a lower pedestal than philanthropy [that pretends to a wholly gratuitous altruism], and on a more concrete foundation than Kant’s universal principle of respect. (pp. 367-368)

In all that I did and am doing to conduct and report the findings of this research project, I
have tried and am trying to treat other people as I would hope to be treated were I to participate in a research project orchestrated by another researcher.

Qualitative Research

The Research Design

“A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 28). I approached the research from the framework of a critical theorist whose perspective is feminist; the actual research project was situated in qualitative research techniques. In conducting this study, my objective was to understand the meaning participants constructed of their interactions. True to qualitative research, I present the findings in a narrative format relying heavily on description, stories, and citations from the participants.

An appropriate qualitative methodology for this study was a case study using ethnographic data collecting techniques, a method that relies on the examination of a single subject or event (Feagin, et al., 1991; Merriam, 1997; Naumes & Naumes, 1999; Stake, 1995), focusing on the culture of a particular culture (Merriam, 1997). This study is an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (Merriam, 1998, p. 12). Creswell (1998) expands this definition by stating that this bounded system “is bounded by time and place (p. 61),” with data being collected through “multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Merriam (1997) defines the case study as an approach for gaining an “in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). Case studies must be richly descriptive in order to provide the reader with the sense of having been there (Merriam, 1997).

Some of the most famous case studies in the social sciences have been conducted in cities and communities (Orum & Feagin, 1991). This case study examines the meeting of two disparate cultural communities: the university student and the Latino living in the Roanoke Valley. In using the case study method to examine the nexus of the relationship of these groups who interacted within the bounds of a service-learning class, this microsocial order (Sjoberg et al., 1991, p. 26) can be viewed in rich detail. The case study has the advantage of allowing a “close reading of social life” as well as “attention to the
broader social context” (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 274). The setting of the service-learning course presented the opportunity to observe the interactions of the students and the families by means of studying the written materials, the interviews, and the discussions generated by the participants.

The social situation of the project had three components: the place, the actors, and the activities (Ary, et al., 1996). The participants in the case studies were the actors functioning within the integrated system (Stake, 1995) of the service-learning program. The service-learning program itself was the place, and the activities were the interactions among the students and the community participants as generated in the data. The study’s purpose was to seek understanding of the guiding questions about the formation of relationships within the confines of a service-learning environment. The narrative follows “a chronological or biographical development of the case; a researcher’s view of coming to know the case” (p. 127).

The three comprehensive case studies highlight relationships that occurred during the fourth semester of data collection. I present the findings for each of the three cases, using within-case analysis. At this stage of analysis, I treat each case as a “comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam, 1997, p. 194).

I also consider various participants who demonstrate interesting phenomena that have implications for further research or development even though they were not part of the case studies presented in the previous three chapters. These are presented as vignettes that represent only one aspect of the relationship between the students and the Latinos. The cross-case analysis in the last chapter ties together all the threads that comprise the tapestry of the five semesters of data collection, conceptualizing the findings that emerged from the data from all the cases.

The Case Study

Crossing the Border through Service-Learning

Each semester, the class averaged between 12 and 25 students, some of whom were majoring in Spanish, others who were minoring in Spanish; preservice teachers of English as a Second Language who wanted to learn about the community they planned to work in as teachers; and some students who simply had a desire to serve in the
community. The students were from diverse backgrounds, coming from areas as varied as New Jersey or Southwest Virginia, and representing a variety of ethnic groups and socioeconomic statuses.

In the course of the semester, we read approximately 55 articles, short stories, and chapters from books (see Appendixes H and I). The readings were a blend of academic and literary, and most of the weekly three-hour class revolved around discussions of the readings coupled with relationships with and situations in the families. We read about issues that Latinos face living in the United States as well as about service-learning and teaching for social justice. The weekly reflections that we posted to the discussion board on Blackboard\(^1\) related the readings to the community experiences. I tried to provide a wide array of readings in order to avoid molding the students into a one-sided perspective of life for Latinos living in our country.

Most of the families were people I met through the Health Department, one of the primary providers of health care to low-income families, so the families tended to be at or below the poverty level according to the intake forms I helped them to fill out at the Health Department, part of the agency’s method of checking eligibility for reduced fees for medical services. Consequently, the students do work with a certain segment of the Latino population, although the educational levels of the people involved do vary.

**The Situation Surfaces**

Following the pattern described by Ely et al. (1991), rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the qualitative researcher finds a situation that is consummately interesting and begins to immerse herself in the context, perhaps even becoming one of the participants in the study. In my own case, I discovered that I was looking at myself as the Other, a sensation that made me feel somewhat schizophrenic until I read in Ely et al. (1991) that part of the ethnographic process involves becoming the Other. As I left the familiarity of my middle-class existence and moved freely in the world of those who are often described as marginalized, working poor, immigrants, etc., I discovered a person who was hitherto unknown to me (Tilley-Lubbs, 2000).

When the students began to write in their weekly reflections of similar experiences

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\(^1\) Blackboard is an electronic course development and management program.
of becoming the Other or of feeling like a member of the family in their Latino families, I realized it would be useful to examine their journeys across the border into another culture, a journey bounded by relationship and knowledge of another culture from the perspective of the members of that culture. I wanted to understand what caused these unlikely relationships to form. Had the students and the families expected a relationship built on mutual respect and affection to evolve, or had it been unexpected? Would there be situations in which the relationships did not form?

I had taught the class for three semesters and one summer, so myriad data were stored on the shelves in my study, comprised of student reflections, transformation papers, and my personal journals. Re-reading all the collected data, it seemed to be time to design a study that would examine the hunches I had about the unlikely closeness of the relationships that I had observed developing over the course in the last year and a half. I wondered how the families felt about the relationships that had evolved. What would their written and verbal assessments of the relationships look like if I had gathered data as systematically from the families as I did from the students? The time had come to investigate this intense interest.

When I first began to conceptualize the intense part of the study, I planned to examine the relationships that developed in each of the dyads formed by students and families, but after careful consideration, I realized it would be impossible within the confines of a 15-week semester to conduct interviews and interpret data from all the participants in the program, a total of 17 students and 15 families. Also, by the third week of class, I realized that some of the participants were providing richer and more varied data, so I opted to narrow the study to four dyads, each consisting of a student and a Latina. I remembered Carger (1996) who started a research project involving of a number of Latino children in an after-school tutoring program. Before the semester had advanced very far, she realized there was one child who captivated her heart and whom she wanted to study as a single case study rather than looking at the tutoring program as the case.

In a like manner, some of the dyads emerged as providing more useful data for a number of reasons, not the least of which was their interest in the project and their willingness to share openly about their experiences and the relationships that were emerging. I also recognized there were certain dyads that would represent “purposeful
sampling” (Creswell, 1998, p. 62) by showing different perspectives. To provide a variety of perspectives among the Latinos, I wanted to have representation from a Honduran and a Mexican, a range of ages, and a range of educational levels. On the part of the students, I wanted to have a Spanish major or minor, an ESL preservice teacher, a graduate student, and an undergraduate.

On a more pragmatic level, I needed students who were conscientious about writing reflections and visiting the families regularly. I needed families who were committed to the students and who would be conscientious about being at home regularly and upon whom I could depend to stay in Roanoke for the semester. This in itself presents a limitation to the findings for the three case studies since I did not choose to present in detail the partnerships in which the students or families did not exhibit commitment to each other, primarily since there were fewer data for the relationships that were less successful. In an attempt to overcome the limitation of presenting of only positive relationships, I present some of the partnerships that were less rewarding for one or both of the participants in the vignettes following the third case study, relying on the available data to demonstrate that not all the partnerships result in close relationships; some are even unsuccessful and require a change in placement.

By the third week of classes, I had interviewed all the students. At the same time, some of the reflections I received from the students focused on the readings in a particularly meaningful way as they related to the Latinos with whom they were partnered. As I read and interpreted each week’s reflections, there were several students whose observations and self-examination began to emerge as being appropriate for the study. I chose students to follow, primarily because of their reliability about turning in reflections on a weekly basis and about visiting their families, and on their ability to be articulate. By the same time, I had interviewed all the Latinos who were participating in the program. While all the interviews provided rich data, some of the participants were more communicative than others, and it was becoming evident which Latinos were reliable about their appointments with the students, and also with me when I went to conduct interviews.

As I prepared to conduct the second round of interviews, I chose seven of the Latinos whose first interviews had been especially informative and who were
demonstrating serious dedication to the students and the program. I had already decided that the students with whom they were partnered were among those whose reflections were rich in detail, analysis, and self-reflection. I also chose the dyads to follow based on the variety of perspectives I was seeking.

At the end of the semester, I collected the final documents from the students, and I conducted the final interviews. By then, I had decided on three dyads based on the criteria described above as the cases that inform this study.

*Contextual Framework*

*The Places*

This research was primarily conducted in two locations: a classroom at Virginia Tech, and in the homes of the certain Latino families now living in the Roanoke Valley, a medium-sized metropolitan area located in the Appalachian Mountains. The university is situated in Blacksburg, a medium-sized town also located in the Appalachian Mountains in Southwest Virginia. The Roanoke Valley is about 35 miles northeast of Blacksburg, but due to the curvy mountainous roads that connect the two, the trips the students make twice a week average an hour each way.

The Roanoke Valley is comprised of Roanoke, Roanoke County, Salem, Vinton, and Botetourt County, with a metropolitan area that is over a quarter of a million inhabitants. Because it is the only major city in that part of the state, there is a fair amount of commerce, along with several large factories. Numerous smaller factories and businesses such as restaurants provide employment for a wide variety of workers. According to the interviews I conducted with several of the families (Tilley-Lubbs, 2000), this is one reason that so many Latinos are attracted to this area despite its lack of bilingual services.

Blacksburg is a township that has a total population under 40,000. The main industry in town is the university, an enterprise that gives employment to many residents. Blacksburg bills itself as a diverse community (Town of Blacksburg, 2000, Community profile). However, when the population statistics are reported by ethnic group, there is no designation for Hispanic, the usual nomenclature on Census reports. The only category that could include Latinos is “Other,” and that category has 744 persons. The university
population is listed as 25,000.

The Participants

In presenting the cross-case analysis of the three case studies, I discuss each of the participants regarding their disparate backgrounds in terms of ethnic group, language, educational level, and socioeconomic status. Although some of the student participants share similar backgrounds with each other, and the Latinas also share many commonalities, the two groups differ significantly from each other. For the case studies, I chose to present only Latinas. Due to work schedules, there were no men present for all three interviews.

The Students

Ethnic group and language. The three students, Kathy, Carol, and Liz, are Anglo; none of the three has any Latino heritage in her background. They all speak English as a native language; they all studied Spanish as a second language. Kathy and Carol were majoring in Spanish and International Studies, both of which were Liz’s majors as an undergraduate. Because of their background in languages, they all had a special interest in becoming more fluent in Spanish and in learning more about Latino culture.

Education. Kathy and Carol were pursing undergraduate degrees in Arts and Sciences; Liz was pursuing a graduate degree in Education. All their parents graduated from college. From the interviews, I gathered that education is important in their families. The students were all new to the program.

Socioeconomic status. Kathy and Carol came from middle class backgrounds, while Liz self-identified as upper middle class. Although Kathy came from a middle class family, she receives no financial support from her family, a fact that places her in the category of lower class if we look at nothing beyond financial resources, but her education coupled with her having been raised in a college-educated family make me reluctant to place her in that category based on financial considerations alone. Carol still received financial support from her family; she did not work to finance her college education. Although Liz came from an upper middle class family, she was in the working world for two years, supporting herself; however, at the time this study was conducted,
she was once again living with her mother and stepfather, substitute teaching as her schedule permitted. Her perspectives seemed to reflect the upper middle class values that shaped her background, as is evidenced by her self-identification.

Carol described a rich family life to which she continued to relate and with which she still felt a strong connection. Liz and Kathy were more removed from their families. Liz was living in her mother’s home, but more as a convenience so she could finish her Master’s degree. Kathy was alienated from her family and hardly ever saw her parents. Carol’s parents were still married; Kathy’s and Liz’s were both divorced and remarried. All three were single.

All were members of a privileged class, attending a university that is largely inaccessible to people from the lower economic strata of society in this country unless they are able to obtain scholarships based on economic need coupled with other criteria such as ethnic diversity or academic ability. Despite the slight variations in their backgrounds, they were all members of the dominant class in this country, in terms of ethnic group, language, educational level, and socioeconomic status.

The Latinas

The Latinas represented a slightly more varied group, although here in the United States, they still lived in marginalized conditions as members of the low socioeconomic class. Despite the fact that they lived in conditions that were considerably different from those of the students, they all considered their economic situations here in this country superior to the ones they left in their native countries.

Isabel had participated in CTB since its inception, but Rosa and María were new to the program. María knew about the program, and had an idea what to expect; she lived with Esmeralda who had participated in previous semesters, so she was not without expectations. On the other hand, Rosa was a complete novice to the whole concept of the class, having never participated in the program and having never had a close relative or friend who had been a participant.

Ethnic group and language. Isabel and Rosa are Mexican, and María is Honduran. They are all from cities, and all of them immigrated for economic reasons. They all speak Spanish as their native language.
Education. Isabel and Rosa both attended the preparatoria for the final years of what we call high school in the United States where they prepared to be secretaries, occupations they practiced briefly after finishing their preparation courses. Isabel did not complete the program; she left school when she was sixteen. Rosa finished the two-year course, and left school when she was seventeen. María completed ninth grade, and by her own admission, did not like school.

Isabel is matter of fact about the work she did in Mexico; for her, working in offices provided a way to earn a living, and she is pleased that she had the opportunity to learn about women’s health when she worked for a gynecologist. She tries to help Janeth with her schoolwork, and she was grateful when Kathy or her friends helped with her homework. Rosa admitted that she was not excited about school, but at the same time, she talked about the importance of education in her family. She is determined that her two older children should do well in school; her concern for her children’s schooling is a constant theme in all her interviews as well as in Carol’s reflections and transformation paper.

Socioeconomic status. From their descriptions of their families in the interviews, I gather that all the Latinas came from families that would be classified as part of the lower to lower middle socioeconomic class in this country, based on their occupations and their lifestyles. I must admit that placing their economic level is more difficult for me than placing the students since Latino culture is not my native culture; despite the many years I have been involved in the community, I am not as conversant with class markers in the Latino community, and I am not comfortable asking probing questions that would enable me to place them at a more definite socioeconomic level. It is when dealing with cultural markers of this nature that my position as the Other is apparent in regard to the Latinas who are my friends and participants in the study.

Isabel’s parents are divorced, but the others’ parents are still together. Both Isabel and María left home when they were quite young, Isabel to go to school and María to go to work. María left children behind in Honduras. Isabel and Rosa have all their children with them here in the United States. At the time I first interviewed them, Isabel and María planned to return to their native countries after acquiring some money, whereas Rosa thought she would probably stay in the United States. By the time of the last interview,
Isabel was the only one who was still planning to go back to Mexico; her husband was insisting that she return to Mexico despite her objections. The others were making plans to obtain papers and/or dreaming of buying their own homes.

**Entering the Community**

I began teaching at the university five and a half years ago, at the same time that I began my doctoral studies, and since that time I have come to feel a part of the university community. Four years ago, I began interpreting for the Latinos in the Roanoke Valley, and since that time, my life has been inextricably intertwined with the lives of the women for whom I interpret. I have close relationships not only with the Latinos, but also with my students. I tend to be granted the status of “mom away from home” for many of my students as well as for the Latinos, perhaps because of my age and my “mom appearance.”

As part of my personal, uncalculated relationship building, I participated in numerous activities with the students and the families. We ate together, spent days together, traveled to various destinations together, and spent many hours of quality time talking and sharing thoughts and feelings while sorting clothes during a workday or while waiting the interminable hours in the clinic waiting room. I assisted the Latinos as an interpreter and cultural mediator on countless occasions, ranging from medical appointments to apartment rentals and advice on childcare. They were most willing to allow my students to take over for me; they seemed to trust them through me. When asked about this in interviews, they said they realize that I am so busy that I cannot be everywhere at once, and for that reason they appreciate having someone to help them with English. I believe that my own relationships with the students and families has fostered acceptance on their part of one another, providing a common ground for their mutual relationship building.

Since my relationships were at first almost exclusively with the women and children in the community due to my work in the Health Department, for the preliminary study, I expected to place the students primarily with women. However, once the word spread that the students were in the community, the men began to attend the “English classes” offered by the students. The male students in the class seemed to bond especially
well with the men, according to their reflections. I was somewhat concerned about the male students going into the homes when the husbands were not present, so I always made a point of placing a male student with a female student. In my experience, another male is not always welcome in the home when the resident male is not present, but so far, that has not seemed to be a problem. When asked about this, the Latinos said it was not an issue; the husbands knew they were coming to help their wives learn English.

Since those early semesters, I had come to feel comfortable enough with the situation to allow the students to choose whether they wanted to work in pairs or alone, Most students chose to work alone because it was easier to work around only their schedule and that of the families. They also expressed a concern about being able to have enough time to come to know the family and to be able to practice their Spanish if they went with a partner.

With the exception of two families who lived in Blacksburg, all the families involved in the program lived in the Roanoke Valley. At the beginning of the program, all the families were people I met while working as an interpreter at the Health Department, but through recommendations on the part of the families themselves, the Latino group expanded to include friends and family members of the original group. If I receive calls from people who want to participate in the program, I accept them only if they have been referred by someone whom I know and respect. The safety and security of the participants is my primary concern, and screening those who wish to be in the program provides more control.

Throughout the course there have been 35 families who have participated actively in the program by partnering with students. There are 45-50 families who have been involved to a lesser extent. For those families on the periphery of the program, we provided material goods on workdays as well as interpreter services for medical and social service appointments. Each semester was comprised of a different group, depending on work schedules, compatibility of family and student schedules, family commitments, motivation to learn English, and various other factors. Five of the families had participated every semester since the inception of the class.

Some of the families in the extended group are from rural areas and others emigrated from urban areas in Honduras or Mexico. Some left abject poverty and
deprivation; others came because they wanted to be able to have more than the basic necessities. The families represent a variety of educational levels and social classes. Their ages range from 18 to 38, and their educational levels are between the equivalents of second and twelfth grades.

The University Students in the Service-Learning Program

Occasionally a student who participated in the service-learning class was from the local area, even from the Roanoke Valley, but many of the students were from all over Virginia or the surrounding states. They represented diverse geographical areas that ranged from rural areas in southwestern Virginia to urban centers in northern Virginia and other states. Their majors varied, ranging from Spanish to agriculture with many others in between. Their future goals varied as well. Some planned to be teachers; others wanted to join the Peace Corps, to say nothing of those who intended to enter the business world. From their interviews, reflections, and class discussions; it was apparent that they also represented a variety of backgrounds, not only geographically, but also in social class and in the educational levels of their families.

In the five semesters of the course, the students also represented various levels in the university, ranging from freshmen to students in the Post Masters degree program, their ages between 18 and 40. Their levels of Spanish varied as much as their majors and levels, ranging from Pre-novice to Advanced as defined in the Proficiency Guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). As expressed in their first reflective journals in which they described their reasons for taking the course, most shared a common a desire to learn to communicate in Spanish with native speakers of the target language. Most of the students also had a desire to know more about Latino culture as experienced through contact with native speakers. Throughout the course, the students in their reflections consistently referred to the families and their relationships with them.

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2 ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) established proficiency guidelines that are used to evaluate the proficiency levels of students of second languages. The ratings range between novice low and superior high (ACTFL, 2003).
The Latinos in the Roanoke Valley

Demographics. It is necessary to understand the community in its complexity in order to understand the beauty of the way in which the students move in and out of their culture (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997). The Latino community in the Roanoke Valley lacks a sense of unity and community, similar to the situation that Sister Mary Helen Rogers (1987) described when talking about the Latino community that settled in the northwest Indiana in 1925. The highest concentrations of Latinos in Roanoke are in the northwest part of the city and in Old Southwest (Roanoke Times, 2000) but Latinos live all over the valley, as I witnessed interpreting for the MIC (Maternal and Infant Care) visits that I made with the nurses from the Alleghany/Roanoke Health District. Latino families live in southwest Roanoke County, Salem, Vinton, Botetourt County, and various areas of Roanoke City, ranging from southwest to northeast. The only region where I have seen any evidence of a barrio forming is in the northwest area of Roanoke City where one of the apartment complexes now houses some 8 to 10 Latino families; at the same time, there is another apartment building in the northeast part of the city where a similar number of Latino families lives.

However, there does not seem to be a sense of unity among most of the families. Some of the families who live close to each other socialize on a limited basis; others do not. Perhaps it is as Portales (2000) says, “By keeping experiences within the insularity of our own consciousnesses, Hispanics also express a reluctance to reveal ourselves and connect with the larger barrio community and Hispanic world, as well as with American society” (p. 123). I do not know why, but there does not seem to be a sense of solidarity among most of the families with whom we partner, defined by Fox (1996) as alliances that become key to building a wider Latino identity.

Compared to the Chicago suburbs where I did my first work with Latino immigrants, the Roanoke Valley is in the embryonic stages of development as a Latino area. In Aurora, Illinois, where I first experienced working with Latinos in 1970, the Mexican population grew during the 1980’s by 62% to almost twenty-three thousand, comprising a quarter of the population of the city. In the city of Elgin, another Chicago

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3 Coordination—Case management services by a registered nurse or social worker to the high-risk pregnant woman or child.
suburb where I held my first position as a Spanish teacher, the Latino population grew to fifteen thousand, or 18% of the total population, during the same time-period (Valdés, 2000). Upon examination of the 132% rise in the Latino population in Roanoke during the 1990s, it is easy to speculate that the population will continue to rise, based on these other representative Latino populations. Just as Latinos continue to pour into the North in search of employment in industry, the Hondurans and Mexicans continue to stream into the Roanoke Valley, following the relatives and friends who preceded them.

Employment. The Mexicans and Hondurans who participate in the service-learning project are by no means representative of the entire Latino population in the Roanoke Valley, but nonetheless they represent a diverse segment of that population, working in a variety of jobs, ranging from foundries to bakeries, from construction to packaging for mail order companies. The Latinos I met through the Health Department also represent a variety of work statuses. Some work legally with work permits; others purchase papeles chuecos, the false social security numbers that allow them to work in classified jobs; others work with no papers at all, receiving personal checks from their employers “under the table.” Some bring with them a high school education that enabled them to have employment as a professional in the home country; others have only a second-grade education and worked in the milpa [field] back home.

Mexican immigrants overall only earn about half as much as non-Latino Whites. Central American males in 1989 were the second lowest paid of any Latino group (Chávez, 1989). Many of the Latinos who are involved in the service-learning project report earning between $5.50 and $8.50 per hour. The inability to speak English is a key element to Latinos only being able to work in low-paying jobs (Chávez, 1989). Even those who are trained or educated as teachers, social workers, or computer operators in the home country are unable to work at those professions when they are unable to communicate with their employers or co-workers.

The family members frequently work at two jobs in order to make enough money to send back home to feed and clothe their children and other family members they left behind. Some are less concerned with sending money home, and overall, have more plans of staying in the United States and establishing a home. Others are planning to stay for a couple of years, until they make enough money to return to their home countries to build
a home or to put floors or windows in or roofs on existing homes.

Some of the Honduran men living in the Roanoke Valley entered the United States during the window of time when TPS was being granted, and they currently renew their status every July, thus continuing to work legally. For the families that I know, however, it has been impossible to obtain similar legal status for the family that later joined them, either by entering on tourist visas and not returning home when they expired or by crossing the border illegally with a coyote.

Crossing the border. As indicated by interviews with both Honduran and Mexican women living in the Roanoke Valley, it is also common that women who are traveling alone are subjected to rape by the coyotes, an act that is regarded as part of the payment for being conducted across the border. The fee for the border crossing is between $1000-$5000, a price that many of the Latinos now living in the Roanoke Valley paid in order to come here to seek work. Most often they borrow the money from a relative who immigrated earlier; at times, they obtain a loan from the coyote or another outside agent who has ready cash to loan. Frequently, the interest on these loans is exorbitant, resulting in payments over a couple of years. In interviews, when asked why they were willing to endure such hardship to come to this country, many people told me their lives are so much better here that they would cross the border again, regardless of the horrors accompanying the trip.

Some of the Latino immigrants who live in the Roanoke Valley used to travel back and forth across the border. However, the majority of people are now unable to do so, especially since the lack of official papers creates an obstacle to returning to the United States with increased vigilance on the border after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Some of the Hondurans send their children back and forth, but the adults have plans to stay for a given period before returning home permanently.

The struggle for social justice. The struggle for social justice has not yet become apparent in any documented or explicit way in the mainstream culture that dominates the Roanoke Valley, but I expect it to become visible in the near future. I am personally aware of their struggles because of the time the students and I spend in their homes and their lives. The recent immigrants with whom I work are concerned about finding and
keeping jobs that provide a fair and equitable wage that will allow them to support their families. Affordable, decent housing is another constant concern. There is often a lack of affordable, available health care. Many times when we help children to enroll in school, there is a struggle when there is no social security card, despite the fact that Virginia law states that no child can be refused admission to school on those grounds. We hear stories of discrimination in subtle or palpable forms that the Latinos label as racism. Even though our families have not yet organized to make their struggle known, the seeds have been planted for change.

The cultural landscape. In larger cities in the United States, there is local Spanish language television and radio. With the availability of satellite TV, telenovelas (Spanish soap operas) and Latin music are among the first luxuries to be added in the most humble homes I visit. Many Latino immigrants listen faithfully every evening to the news in Spanish, enabling them to stay in touch with the homeland (Chávez, 1989). In Miami or Texas, it is possible to live for years without learning English, and to an extent, this is also true in the Roanoke Valley. Even though there is not widespread explicit community building that I have observed, most of the immigrants work together, visit each other, and watch TV together, socializing and moving within the small group that shapes their daily existence. Based on my interactions with them, the need for English is only apparent in issues of employment, health care, school, and locating necessities. The families I work with tend to have friends within their own small community; lacking is the barrio where a large number of Latinos live in close proximity and interact with each other.

Setting the Parameters of the Study

At the onset of the course, I planned to conduct the preliminary study the first semester and the final study the second semester. Due to time constraints in my personal and professional life, the timeframe expanded to five semesters rather than three, a circumstance for which I am most grateful. Had I done the study in the time I originally planned, I would not have had the opportunity to let my intuition and insight develop, nor would I have had occasion to let the research questions emerge and the ideas and observations weave together so that I could check to see if my initial impressions were correct. By the time the semester for intense data collection arrived, I had been immersed
in the course and the community for so long and so completely that I knew the questions I wanted to ask to confirm or disprove my hunches.

Through numerous informal conversations with the Latinos coupled with literally hundreds of documents generated for the class by the students, I had formed many perceptions of the nature of the relationships that emerged between the students and their partner families. I was ready and eager to conduct rigorous research that would illuminate answers to newly formed research questions, and I felt prepared to begin the study.

Throughout the semester as I conducted interviews and read reflections, some of my hunches proved to be true, and others did not. I knew that most of the relationships that had developed in the previous three semesters were positive, but others were neutral; an occasional one was even negative. An infrequent relationship would not work, and the student would have to be moved. The problems that arose generally involved work schedules that changed so that the families were unable to be home when the students could come, but there arose one personality clash that mandated a change in placement. On the whole, however, the participants from each group positively evaluated the program over time. It was with this understanding of the program that I began to set up the actual study.

*The Research Questions and Transformations*

Because I have spent four years in the Latino community, I have had the opportunity to know many Latinos, to see where and how they live, to understand familial and friendly relationships within the community, and to know some of the trials they suffer as immigrants in an alien culture. They have confided to me their hopes and dreams as well as their fears and problems. Many of them call me “doña” Gresilda,” a term of great respect which I hardly feel I deserve, and one which makes me realize that despite the closeness I feel with them, there still exists a barrier of sorts. Interestingly enough, they refer to certain Latino women, also in our program, as *doña*; when they refer to *doña* Juana, there is a certain amount of respect implied.

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4 *Doña* can be translated as “madam,” “ma’am,” or “Mrs.,” but none of these translations capture the essence of meaning. The term is often used to refer to people who are perceived as being members of a higher social class; it is always used with the first name, and carries a feeling of greater affection and respect than *señora*, the direct translation for “Mrs.,” used with the last name.
Being doña Gresilda also places great responsibility on my shoulders, because by granting me this title of respect and affection, they assume that I can fix anything and everything, which can be disconcerting at times. There are many problems beyond my control; even though I can make calls in the middle of the night to tell the emergency room that a sick baby is on the way, I can do nothing to help when a husband is in jail in Texas, having been apprehended by the Border Patrol. I have to remember the confianza, or mutual trust, that Moll (1990) describes or the relationship of the comadre, as defined by Behar (1993) as an intimate but respectful friendship and patronage forged between persons of high and low economic standing, with the better-off person expected to offer assistance if requested (p. 5). At the same time, I feel sad that the hierarchy that shapes our society causes them to assume that wisdom and resources accompany my privileged position in society.

Because of my relationships that have been developing during the past four years, I have been able to integrate my students into the community, knowing they will be welcomed and nurtured. However, it was because of the strength of my ties to the Latinos that my initial research questions seemed inadequate and empty once I began to organize this study. The families are so interwoven into the story of the research that it was imperative that they be included in the research questions. It was not enough to look at the linguistic and cultural growth of the students; it was essential to investigate the relationships between the students and the community as they worked together toward the common goal of knowing more about each other in a meaningful and rich way. What had started out as research questions to complete the requirements for writing a dissertation evolved into a passion to investigate the relationship that emerges as the result of a service-learning course. As I proceeded with the research, one main guiding question and three sub-questions shaped the data I collected:

1) What does the formation and development of the relationship between these two groups look like?
   a. What are the expectations of each person involved in the relationship and how do these change over the course of the semester?
   b. What are the salient issues that factor into a mutually beneficial relationship between students and community families?
c. What role does the service-learning course play in the development of a relationship between students and community families?

Based on the written data and the informal interviews generated by the preliminary study, it was possible to conclude that having the experience of seeing the world so intimately from the point of view of another culture could cause the scales of indifference, disinterest, and judgment to fall from one’s eyes. This study once again looks at the data generated by the students, this time adding formally generated data obtained through interviews with the families in order to see if the relationships developed and flourished in another, similar situation. I look at the resultant relationships, examining the interactions between two disparate groups of people united through a service-learning class, realizing that every service-learning class will be comprised of individuals who will cause the shape of the data to differ.

Although the idea had its inception in the preliminary study in the first semester I taught the course, this study has changed its emphasis from examining the students’ growth and development in language and culture to examining the nexus of the relationships that form in the course of the service-learning experience, an emergence that is congruent with qualitative research. In this chapter, I show how I interpreted and completed the research design.

Data Collection

“Qualitative data occur in a variety of forms: There is not a single type” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 4). “Data are nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment” (Merriam, 1998, p. 69). The determination of whether to consider information as data becomes the decision of the researcher. The following section discusses the use of interviews, observations, and document analysis as methods of collecting qualitative data.

Limitations will always occur in the data collection process, and it is necessary to be aware of problems that may occur prior to the beginning of data collection. In this proposed study, there were four limitations that I encountered, and it is those that I would like to describe.
Limitations

In order to collect the data systematically and consistently over a period of time, it was necessary for the participants to remain in the program, and at times the family moved from the area. Another limitation involved changes that occurred in the family schedules, creating an incompatibility for arranging meeting times, requiring changes in partnerships and thus in relationships. The third limitation was the interviews with the family members in Spanish, and from past experience, I knew that transcribing is difficult in the native language, to say nothing of the possibilities for error in a language not one’s native tongue. A fourth limitation involved the noise level in the homes where I conducted the interviews, often causing the tape to be unintelligible. The last limitation was that grammar, spelling, and word choice errors occurred in the transcripts of the interviews with the students and the Latinos, and in the student documents.

Return to the homeland. Although the entire case was comprised of participants throughout five semesters, the intense data collection for the individual cases occurred during one semester. The families were not bound to stay to complete the semester, and life changes occurred beyond my control as the researcher. When a family moved, the study of the relationship was terminated and could not be resumed.

Schedule changes. Several of the family members lost their jobs and had to seek other employment. Hours changed and the students were not always flexible due to their class load. Sometimes it was impossible for the students and the families to find a time to meet, resulting in reassignments for the students. Although the change worked for the class, it destroyed the continuity necessary for examining the development of a relationship over the period of a semester.

Translation and transcription difficulties. “Researchers need to be concerned when making translations and take care in presenting the intended meanings rather than the literal ones” (Uttech, 1999, p. 75). In the translations included in this study, I try to maintain the register and tone of the original words, which at times necessitates a translation of meaning rather than words.

Some of the Latinos whom I interviewed are from rural areas in Mexico and Honduras, and I had to adjust to their vocabulary and accents. When I first began interpreting for them, I frequently asked them to repeat, but now I am fairly accustomed
to their speech patterns. I feel quite confident about my fluency in Spanish, but
sometimes I fear that my confidence might cause me to think that I understand by context
when in fact I have missed a subtle meaning.

_Taping difficulties._ Since I conducted the interviews with the Latinos in their
homes, there was frequently enough noise to make both the taping and concentrating on
the interview difficult. When I conducted interviews with the Latinas for another
ethnographic study (Tilley-Lubbs, 2000), I found they were often shy about talking into
the microphone, so at first I laid the microphone between us on the couch, hoping they
would forget its presence. Unfortunately, I found that their voices were often so soft that I
had to listen numerous times to try to transcribe the conversation. There were times when
it was impossible to understand, and I had to leave that part of the conversation blank.

This same situation occurred during the interviews I conducted for this study,
despite the precautions I took to check that the tape recorder was working correctly at the
beginning of the interview and even during the interview. Since there were infants and
children in all the households where I conducted interviews, there was also constant noise
and distraction in the background. Often, the television was on and I would ask if we
could move to another room for the interview, but the noise would often still be present. I
did not feel comfortable asking that they turn off the television, particularly since they
were doing me a favor by permitting me to interview them. I was able to verify certain
information with the Latinos or the students once I realized what was missing, but there
are still sections of tape that are unintelligible and I am not sure what was the context.

_Errors in the documents and the transcripts._ I did not alter the student documents
or Latino transcripts except for issues of clarity. For example, when the students referred
to an author by the incorrect gender or they omitted the page numbers in citations, I
added brackets to indicate my additions for the sake of clarity. Also I sometimes added
brackets to denote the speaker. However, I did not correct any spelling or grammar errors
or the use of an incorrect word, such as the use of _forage_ instead of _forge_, nor did I
correct the omission of the hyphen in the term _service-learning_ since it is an accepted
alternate spelling, despite the effect on consistency. Likewise, I did not correct any
incorrect grammar that occurred in the transcripts of the students or the Latinos. Their
voices are heard in as natural a form as possible.
As the interpreter of the data, I am the filter through which it passes, placing me in the position of being a cultural mediator (Wertsch, 1991) as well as a linguistic interpreter. I know that I brought many hunches to the project, and I had to guard against seeing the data through a filter that was preset with certain preconceived notions. I knew from the outset that there would be possibilities of error in language, culture, and interpretation; hopefully my awareness of the inherent problems caused me to exercise extra caution.

The Interviews

“Stories are a way to knowledge and understanding” (Seidman, 1998, p. xviii). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) say that qualitative research is intended for people who like to talk to people, and that is probably why it appeals to me. Seidman says, “It is a privilege to gather the stories of people through interviewing and to come to understand their experience through their stories” (p. xxi). Interviews fill in the gaps when the answers to questions cannot be observed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Formal taped interviews. During the course of the semester, I conducted three semi-structured, formal taped interviews with the family members and one with the students, using open-ended questions to guide the interviews (see Appendixes A, B, C, and D). According to Merriam (1998), the semistructured interview is a combination of some more-structured questions juxtaposed with some less-structured questions. As the interviewer, I kept the questions open-ended enough to give the participants the opportunity to shape their own responses, but at the same time, I followed the structure closely enough to maintain the focus of the interview (Seidman, 1998).

The guides for the second and third interviews emerged from the preceding interviews with the Latinas as well as from the data collected from the students up to that point in the semester. Each interview served a purpose by itself, but at the same time, each was part of a series; each iteration provided ideas for the next (Seidman, 1998). I conformed to the basic themes of the interview guide, in part to avoid asking leading questions and also in order to keep on track enough to discover the information I sought. I followed Seidman’s advice for conducting a three-interview series.
Initially, I interviewed all eighteen students and seven of the Latino families. With each succeeding interview, I narrowed the focus until by the final iteration, I only interviewed the individuals who formed the dyads I decided to examine.

**Informal interviews.** I conducted formal interviews with the students at the beginning of the semester, but I held informal interviews with them constantly throughout the semester, sharing many casual conversations that took place in my office, my garage, or at the families’ homes. The formal interviews with both groups were taped and transcribed; the informal interviews were documented by written notes, giving me the opportunity to investigate the expectations and the formation of the relationships longitudinally.

Seidman (1998) cautions against interviewing one’s own students, and for that reason, I was hesitant to do additional taped interviews with them. I knew from past experience that their written documents and the class discussions would produce ample data without the necessity of additional formal, structured, prearranged interview sessions.

My experience has shown that richer data are obtained from informal interviews when the participants are relaxed and engaged in conversation. At times, I felt that formal taped interviews produced data that were more stilted. I always carried my journal, and all the participants, were accustomed to seeing me grabbing my journal out of my bag to jot down a note.

**The Interview Process**

**Collaborative process.** When I conducted interviews, the process was collaborative. All the participants knew I considered them as partners in the research process. I prepared the informed consent forms both in English (see Appendix F) for the Internal Review Board (IRB) and the university students and in Spanish (see Appendix G) for the Latinos. From past experience in my ethnographic project (Tilley-Lubbs, 2000), I realized I needed to explain the interview process and questions to the Latinas rather than relying on their reading the document and signing it. They have been signing forms in my presence since I first began interpreting for them, so they tend to trust me
implicitly and sign anything I hand them, but I felt better knowing that I had explained thoroughly their rights and the purpose of the interview.

I explained that they held knowledge I could not obtain from any other source, and I chose them for their ability to articulate their thoughts and for their commitment to the program. I explained why I felt this study is so important for promoting understanding among peoples who are from different backgrounds. I shared with them that the students had been writing extensively about their feelings for the families, and now I wanted to have the opportunity to hear what the families felt about the students. I encouraged them to share honestly, assuring them of the confidentiality of any information they might give me. I told them I would share the findings of the study with them. They all begged me to write up the findings in Spanish so they can read them for themselves, but at this time, they are satisfied with having them read aloud in Spanish.

Ever since the program’s inception, I had been constantly checking with the families to find out how things were going with the students, so these questions probably did not seem out of the ordinary to them. My experience has demonstrated that the women feel honored to be interviewed. They have commented that they did not realize they had anything important enough to say for other people to want to hear it. They were astonished to know that my students and friends are fascinated to hear their stories. Because of the close relationships I have with most of the women, I feel that the problems of status and hierarchy are reduced, but because I am who I am and they are who they are, an implicit hierarchy is inevitable. I feel comfortable being myself with these women, answering questions candidly and expressing emotion freely (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 65). No matter how long we talked or what was discussed, however, I never lose the sense that they filter what they say to me, both from innate politeness and from a desire to please me. Their affection for me is so strong that I am afraid they would hesitate to say anything negative for fear of hurting my feelings.

Interviews with the Latinas. The individual interviews of the Latinas were conducted in their homes, a context which added an extra dimension to the information they shared. I have been to their homes often, and they are used to having me there, so it was easy to establish a relaxed atmosphere. Also, being in their homes afforded me the opportunity to once again experience their lives, a fact that brings their stories to life for
me. As I sat on the sagging springs of Isabel’s couch, I could envision the visits that Kathy and her friends or brother made twice a week. I could see Kathy’s brother sitting at the kitchen table with six-year-old Janeth, separated from the living room only by a metal strip in the floor between the broken tiles in the vinyl floor in the kitchen and the worn carpet in the living room. As he helped Janeth with her homework, Kathy sat on the same couch, struggling to help Isabel figure out the bills that continued to arrive from the hospital after baby Irma’s birth. As I smelled the tortillas from dinner and strained to listen to Isabel as she whispered to avoid waking her husband Paco who was sleeping in the bedroom on the other side of the thin wall, I could better understand the relationship that grew amidst the noise of the television blaring the cartoons on Univisión.

Interviews with the students. The individual interviews I conducted with each student at the beginning of the semester took place in my office where the students love to come and spend time relaxing in my big recliner or collapsible camp chairs. They love to lounge in the deep recesses of the soft shapeless chairs, telling me about their lives as they munch on the candy that I keep in my office just for them, so the interviews were one more opportunity for them to share with me. Although they are native speakers of English and could easily read the informed consent forms, I asked if they had questions. The main purpose of these initial interviews was to collect data about the backgrounds of the students since that does not always come up in the class discussions.

With both the Latinas and the students, I stressed that they were in no way obligated to participate in the interview. I explained clearly why and how I was conducting the research, and that they did not have to answer any questions they preferred not to discuss. I asked permission to tape the interview, assuring them that the tapes would be destroyed after they had been transcribed. I also asked permission use the information they shared for future written work and presentations, promising anonymity. I asked them to choose a pseudonym by which they would like me to refer to them when I shared the information. I assured the students that their grades or class performance would in no way be affected if they chose to not participate. I promised the Latinas that our friendship would not be affected if they chose not to answer or to withdraw from the study.
Confirmation of Data

Member Checking and Triangulation of Data

As Merriam (1998) states, “Because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews” (p. 203). As suggested by Merriam, I verified information by doing constant member checks throughout the data collection period. At each interview, there was considerable repetition of some of the information from the previous interview(s). In that way, I was able to verify information as well. In analyzing the documents and the transcripts, there was constant triangulation of data. My method followed the postmodern member checks that Merriam (2002) described as taking “your tentative findings back to some of the participants (from whom you derived the raw data through interviews or observations)” and asking “whether your interpretation ‘rings true’” (p. 26).

I constantly checked the information I obtained from transcribed interviews with the Latinas to check for accuracy and to make any changes they deemed necessary. They could make any changes they wanted, whether to eliminate or add information. I promised to give each of them a copy of the tape and the transcript at the conclusion of the study. As I read the transcripts, I marked anything that I needed to have clarified, and I asked the interviewee for clarification, whether it had to do with understanding the language or the concept. This allowed me to see if I needed additional information as well.

I had the opportunity to observe most of the Latinos who participated in the program interacting with each other and with most of the students when we held our final fiesta in my church fellowship hall at the end of the semester. I had the chance to talk to them individually and in groups, and I was able to reflect on my impressions of the relationships I observed and experienced. In addition, I constantly reported the findings to the Latinas as I conducted the interviews, seeking corroboration about the findings. Prior to writing up the findings of the study, I did have an opportunity at one of the meetings of
the Latina Women’s Support Group (LWSG)\(^5\) (see Appendix J) we held in the spring semester to report the findings to each of the Latinas individually and in the group for final verification.

Since I did not plan to tape any interviews but the first with the students, I shared orally and by email my findings with them for member checking. My contact with the students was constant and ongoing, providing multiple opportunities for member checking. Our class meetings provided ample time and opportunity for me to constantly reaffirm my understanding of the data with the students.

In a similar fashion, during certain class sessions with the students, I presented the findings as they emerged, soliciting dialogue and verification. I designed in-class journal writing activities and discussion topics that stimulated discussion of the findings, and I was able to examine the results of those sessions. For the final member checks, I presented a PowerPoint slide show at the end of the semester, soliciting constant verification of the findings. The students became quite involved in the process and provided additional information I had missed.

I did additional member checking with Kristine, Amy, and Kimberly. Their feedback about the Latinas and their feelings about the students were invaluable. We had numerous conversations in which we discussed the observations we had about the class and the relationships that were or were not forming between students and families.

One of the most rewarding sessions we had was on a snowy evening in February when Amy and Kimberly went by Juana’s house and picked her up to bring her to the Chinese restaurant near my house. We were meeting to plan the LWSG that had its roots in the class, and since Juana is our Latina consultant for the planning and implementation of this venture, she was included in the meeting. We were especially grateful to be together because inclement weather had postponed our meeting more than once, and the time was approaching for the group to begin.

After we all loaded up our plates, we sat at the table, speaking in Spanish as the family behind us spoke an Asian language, while the family across the way spoke English, making us feel as if we were in a cosmopolitan city rather than in southwest

\(^5\) With grant money, in the spring semester following the semester I intensely collected data, we began weekly meetings with the Latinas, the Latina Women’s Support Group (LWSG). For further information, see the Afterword on starting on page 258 of this document.
Virginia. Although the discussion mostly revolved around the activities and details for the group, the conversation constantly veered toward Bradley, the student with whom Juana’s family was partnered in the fall, and all that he does for her family. Then she would talk about Jim, the student from the current semester who was at her apartment taking care of the baby so she could meet with us. She was not talking about students in a university program; she was referring to her friends. Other similar casual conversations provided much rich data in the course of the study.

*Participant Observation*

“The distinguishing characteristic, then, of being a participant-observer is that it demands a shift in attention” (Ely, et al., 1991, p. 44). The continuum of participant-observer ranges from full participant, or living in the field among the people, to being a mute observer. My role changed according to the occasion, not being fixed by time or place.

Merriam (1998) refers to Gold’s (1958) work, defining four stances of participant observation, ranging from being a “complete participant” to being a “spectator” (p. 100). She describes the complete participant as being a member of the research group being studied, with her identity as a researcher hidden in order to avoid disturbing the natural setting. She characterizes the participant as observer as an active membership role, involved in the setting in an active role, but without fully being committed to the group’s values and goals. The observer as participant is also known to the group, but participation is secondary to gathering information. The complete observer is at the opposite end of the continuum from the full participant, unknown to the group because of either a hidden location or a public setting that provides anonymity. She adds a fifth stance, that of collaborative partner, in which the researcher is known to all in the group. She places this stance closest to the role of the full participant, but with the exception that the investigator and the participants are equal partners in the research process, including defining the problem, collecting and analyzing data, and writing and disseminating the findings. Feminist researchers or action or participatory researchers often adopt this last stance (pp. 101-102).
Changing Roles.

Viewed in the light of this continuum, I place myself as moving between being a participant as observer to being a collaborative partner with limitations. When I was in the community functioning as an interpreter, I was actively involved in the health care of the patient. I was there as the cultural and linguistic mediator, and my role as a researcher definitely was secondary to my role as interpreter. When I was in the classroom, with the official designation of teacher, I was first and foremost the facilitator for the group. Once again, my role as researcher was secondary. In both of these situations, I was the participant as observer.

However, when I discussed the research with the students or the Latinas, I crossed into the stance of collaborative partner. I constantly included them in the research process, making them aware of what I was doing and why I was doing it. Both students and families knew I was always open to suggestions. I always wanted to have their input. I would not go so far as to say that we collaborated on the research design or on writing and disseminating the findings due to issues of scholarship, but I would certainly affirm that I included the participants in the collection and analysis of the data. I would not place myself at the end of the continuum, but there are definitely aspects of my research that approach the collaborative partner stance.

Community Participant

At sometimes more than others, I was a participant observer in the actual Latino community. The human setting of the Latino community is more or less closed because it requires considerable negotiation to enter it (Jorgensen, 1989). Because of my extensive work in the community, my situation is unique in that I am allowed into physical and emotional places that not all outsiders can access.

In small groups, I feel accepted and respected by friends, a true participant observer. I feel as close to being a part of the community as is possible under the circumstances, mainly that I do not live in the Latino community per se. However, in large social settings, such as when I go to birthday parties for the children, I feel a greater gap between my life and culture and theirs, and become more of an observer participant, with my participation limited by my own reticence. When we are relating as a group of
women, I more as if I were just another woman in the group, but my implicit position of power due to my membership in the dominant culture means that I can never truly be a peer in any group when the rest of the members are Latinas. I am also bound by the fact I am not Latina, so implicit barriers will always exist in any relationship between the Latinos and me. When I am at a party, I find myself sitting on the sidelines observing and thinking. I converse with people, but I never leave the role of observer participant. My personhood that shapes me and alienates me to an extent, regardless of the warmth with which I am welcomed in Latino environments, especially with other women.

Feeling acceptance in the community helps me to go beyond the confines of statistics and stereotypes into the realm of imagery so that I am able to interpret objects, people, experiences, and events (Becker, 1998). My interpretations cannot be completely accurate, because, of my status as an Anglo whose native language and culture are situated in the English-speaking world, but they demonstrate greater accuracy than would be possible were I a complete outsider. As I examine the Latino world through my White, middle-class, Anglo lens, I run the constant risk of assuming that what looks reasonable to me may not look reasonable to the Latinos with whom I interact. Becker (1998) states that “we are not those people and do not live in their circumstances” (p. 14).

Understanding my role in the community is vital to understanding why the students are working in the Roanoke Valley, approximately 50 miles from the university campus. When students and colleagues ask me why I do not place the students in families in the Blacksburg area, I explain that I know only two families of Latinos in Blacksburg. Through my intensive work with the Health Department in the Roanoke area, I know a certain group of families intimately. Since I have been available for the Latino families at all hours of day and night, they know they can rely on me. Erickson (1986) talks about the importance of “developing a collaborative relationship with focal informants” and he goes on to stress that it is essential for the informants to have a “non-coercive, mutually rewarding relationship with key informants” (p. 142), a perfect description of my relationship with these women. Because of the trust and relationship that I have built up in the last four years, I am able to match the students and the families as far as personality and interests. Most importantly, I am able to feel that the students are safe in the homes of my friends who will respect them and treat them as extended families. Because of my
work at the Health Department, I am in constant contact with the families, by visits and phone calls, so I keep a close eye on the project. I remain a central contact person, and the families know that I am always available by telephone should any problems occur.

Fieldnotes and Other Sources of Data

Fieldnotes

I kept fieldnotes as journals and as weekly reflections I posted to the group email, recording thoughts that I had about the class, the community, and the interactions that I observed. I recorded my feelings and reactions to the context, the actors, and the action as I conducted the case study.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) build on Schatzman and Strauss’s (1973) suggestion of jotting down a single word, knowing that it will help to remember a string of images that will in turn recreate an observed scene, which was often the case. It is important to record as much data as possible, because even though they are not understood at the time, they might turn out to be important later as the researcher expands and develops the data into extensive notes (p. 178). In my fieldnotes, I often included photographs and sketches, programs for events, souvenirs from baptisms and birthday parties. I tried to make my descriptions as rich as possible, but sometimes time restraints produced a series of jottings that could be reconstructed into a vivid scene.

“Writing fieldnote descriptions is not simply a matter of passively copying down ‘facts’ about ‘what happened’” (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 8). Writing fieldnotes involves interpreting and sense-making, filtering and selecting. Referring again to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), during the early days of a research project, the scope of the notes is apt to be wide, and the researcher will be reluctant to emphasize certain aspects. As the research continues, however, themes will emerge and the notes will become more restricted and focused (p. 180). This was this case as I took fieldnotes during the course of the study; I tried to include interpretation, feelings, thoughts, and analyses.

After reading Emerson, et al. (1995), I realized that my approach to writing fieldnotes needed to be more systematic and orderly, concentrating less on description and more on analysis, but I recognized the importance of “intuitively selecting, highlighting, and ordering details and beginning to appreciate linkages with or contrasts
to previously observed and written-about experiences” (p. 100). I tried to keep my journals in a methodical fashion, but I still like Uttech’s idea of weaving the threads together rather than separating them into individual strands. I included my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the situations, using the fieldnotes as a means of making sense of all I was observing and experiencing.

**Portraiture**

As I created the written tapestry of the study, my goal was to create portraits with words (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), recreating the setting in such a way as to relive the situation as I interpreted it. Portraiture is a “method of inquiry and documentation” that combines “systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor” (p. 3). Portraiture is especially appropriate for this study because of the opportunities it offers of presenting the cases as narratives rich in detail and experience.

In creating the portraits of the relationships, I provide an account of the way I gained entry to the setting, followed by descriptions of my relationships with each of the participants. These portraits also highlight the unique qualities each participant brought to the study. By presenting the backgrounds of the participants, I attempt to make the reader aware of biases that might have existed prior to the initial meeting between the students and the community members. By giving a brief autobiographical account of my own history in the Latino community, I attempt to establish my own biases and presence in the study. The study “resonates with echoes of [my] own autobiographical journey—those aspects of [my] own familial, cultural, developmental, and educational background” that I can relate to the “intellectual themes of the work” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95).

**Case Studies and Vignettes**

The case studies provide an opportunity to witness the interactions and relationships as they formed between the participants. By presenting detailed vignettes that describe certain characters or scenes, I endeavor to provide a means for the reader to become immersed in the setting and to feel present in the study. By including excerpts
from interview transcriptions and student documents, I allow the voices of the participants to be present. (D’Onofrio, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Documents and Artifacts**

“In judging the value of a data source, a researcher can ask whether it contains information or insights relevant to the research questions and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner” (Merriam, 1998, p. 124). Although Merriam is referring to documents found in libraries or online, she continues by saying that documents can be rich in description and reflection, an interpretation that certainly fits the reflective documents the students generate for me. The bulk of the data that I collected from the students was in the form of written documents, reflective pieces that served the purpose of journals.

Moon (1999) proposes that the purposes and possibilities of journals are varied. For many journal writers, the primary purpose is to record experience, but for others it is to reflect on the recorded experience. She refers to Smyth’s (1989) assertion that journals promote the raising of social consciousness. Moon also describes journals as bringing knowledge that is “out there” into the ownership of the writer (pp. 41-42). In CTB the reflective journal writing achieved the purpose of raising social consciousness and bringing the knowledge into our ownership.

In elaborating on the use of reflective journaling in the service-learning class, Morton (1996) refers to Hutchings and Wutzdorff’s (1988) definition of reflection as the ability to step back and ponder one’s own experience and to relate it to other experiences (p. 285). He continues by discussing journals as a means of focusing on social problems, as well as on social justice and injustice. I would like to extend this definition by adding that the students also used the weekly reflection papers, which served the purpose of journals, to reflect on their relationships with their families within the context of the social injustice they suffer. Each student wrote thirteen journal reflections with the following topics:

- The meaning of service-learning
- Looking at ourselves as the Other
- Border crossings and the life left behind
Many of these topics led the students to deep reflection about themselves, their families, and social justice, contextualized in the academic readings. The reflective journals and the transformation papers (see Appendix K) shaped the service-learning experience into one of academic rigor coupled with social change. They commented consistently that the readings gave them a much better understanding of what it means to be a Latino living in the United States.

In their final transformation papers, the students analyzed their reflections and synthesized their journeys and transformations from the beginning to the end of the semester (see Appendix K). They examined their early expectations about the experience and reflected on how the lived experience compared with the anticipated one.

The Latinas agreed to keep journals during the semester in order to record their feelings about the students, but only one person did so and her journal entries simply answered the questions I had asked to prime her thought processes; there was little reflection. When I presented the journals and pens to the women, I presented them with a guide for writing in the journals (see Appendix L). The questions were open-ended, but I thought they would help them to think about what they did when the students came to their homes and about how they felt about them, but my hope that they would be consistent in keeping journals was not realized. I collected such an abundance of data through interviews, informal conversations, and observation that I do not consider the absence of journals to be an obstacle. When I gave the journals to the Latinas, I actually did not feel at all confident they would write in them, due to busy schedules and many
responsibilities, so I planned for that eventuality by employing other means of data collection.

For a final presentation, the students prepared PowerPoint presentations, some with a partner, and some alone. For the final presentation, most students worked in groups (view PowerPoints at http://www.fll.vt.edu/lubbs/Service_learning_ppt.html). They took photos of the family members and themselves and added narratives that synthesized what the service-learning experience had meant to them. The students provided rich data that articulated their feelings, thoughts, and relationships with the families.

For the preliminary study, I did not ask the students to sign confidentiality statements. With the progression of the class, such a pact (see Appendix M) became necessary in order to protect the privacy of the participants in the class. Many of the topics or problems for which the students offer assistance concern private matters such as birth control, abusive husbands, resident status, and financial matters. As Erickson (1986) states, the researcher is wise to negotiate strict protection of the participants at the outset of the study. Erickson also talks about protecting the particular interests of especially vulnerable participants in the setting. Since many of our families know one another, it is particularly important that the students not share information among themselves that they in turn share with their families.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (p. 157). According to Erickson (1986), the data analysis and reporting allow the reader to “experience vicariously the setting that is described, and to confront the instances of key assertions and analytic constructs.” Additionally they allow the reader to “survey the full range of evidence on which the author’s interpretive analysis is based (p. 145).” Lastly, they “allow the reader to consider the theoretical and personal grounds of the author’s perspective as it changed during the course of the study” (p. 145). This study represents a multiple case study, dependent on
within-case analysis which treats each case as a comprehensive case, followed by cross-case analysis, which builds “a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though each case varies in details” (Yin, 1994, p. 112).

One problem that I avoided by planning was the management of the amount of data that was generated by the students and the families. I knew I needed to be extremely organized from the outset of the data collection period if the data were not to become overwhelming. Also, I realized that I must stay close to the data, reading and rereading the reflective journals, the taped transcripts, and the fieldnotes.

I had to exercise caution to not depend on description alone to present the findings of the study. Merriam (1998) refers to LeCompte and Preissle (1993) who advise researchers to not rely on description alone to draw conclusions. By so doing, the researcher runs the risk of misinterpretation on the part of the reader. I attempt to present the findings of the case study in a well-organized way, replete with interpretations and analyses.

The Special Features of Analyzing Case Studies

Following Merriam’s (1998) description about conveying an understanding of the analysis of data in case studies, I was searching for patterns or significance through direct interpretation. I was trying to find consistency within certain conditions, and trying to understand behavior, issues, and contexts. I needed to review the data constantly and repeatedly, reflecting and looking for triangulation.

“Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Merriam predicts the disparate, incompatible, contradictory nature of the vast amounts of information gleaned from a case study, as well as the problems associated with managing all the information from all the sources. In order to make sense of the data, she recommends consolidating, reducing, and interpreting. For the multiple case study, such as the one I conducted, each case had to be examined as a comprehensive case before proceeding to the cross-case analysis. Since I examined three different cases, with each comprising a comprehensive case, the amount of data was especially unwieldy, and organization and management
were crucial and at times difficult to maintain.

*Consolidating the Data*

According to Merriam (1998), the first step in data analysis, is to bring all the data together, organizing it to be easily retrievable. She draws on Yin (1994) to call this organized material the “case study data base” and on Patton (1990) to refer to it as a “case study record” (p. 194). Yin’s use of the term data base suggests a logical organizational method to me, but I also like to think of all the data as providing a record of all that has transpired in the course of the study.

I interpreted the data by generalizing patterns in the descriptive data gathered from the students and the families (Erickson, 1986). By using matrices, I attempted to show the formation and development of the relationship between the two groups. I also sought the salient issues that factored into the mutually beneficial relationship and how they changed over the course of the semester. I studied the expectations of each person involved in the study and how those expectations changed over the course of the study. Lastly, I examined the role the service-learning class played in the development of these relationships. I looked for themes indicated by the data and not the data itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Since I was looking at a multiple case study, my next step was to do a within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis. I looked at one of the cases, or the data collected from one dyad of students and from the family, and started the analysis there. I attempted to reach across multiple data sources (journals, transformation papers, posters, PowerPoints, and transcribed interviews) to condense them so that they are accessible to the reader (Merriam, 1998). At the same time, I triangulated the data collected from each participant, checking to see that the information was consistent across the sources. As a final step, I looked at all the cases and made generalizations about the relationships that had emerged as a result of the service-learning class.

Uttech (1999) refers to this analytic procedure as seeking to “find emerging themes, patterns, or concepts that cut across the data. This step facilitates the procedure of uncovering the relationships among the themes winnowed” (p.96).

These units of data, or bits of information, were organized into categories. Here
Merriam (1998) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985) to describe the two criteria that a unit must meet. “First it should be heuristic—that is, the unit should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information” (pp. 179-180). Second, it is necessary that a unit be “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself—that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out” (p. 180). Each category reflected the purpose of the research (p. 183).

This categorization was an ongoing process. As each new set of data came in, I analyzed it and made notes. As Uttech (1999) says, the data management and analysis are practically inseparable, both reflecting necessary steps in the analytical process. She says the emerging patterns and relationships must be comprehensive, and “because they stem directly from data, they become grounded” (p. 95).

Interpreting the Data

According to Erickson (1986), the interpretive commentary that follows the description is necessary to guide the reader to perceive the analytic type exemplified by the instance. By including interpretive commentary the reader focuses on those details that are salient for the author, and to the “meaning-interpretations of the author, thus allowing the reader to see through the author’s eyes” (p. 152).

Merriam (1998) suggests that the researcher move through the levels of analysis, from the most basic to the most complex. The first level organizes the data chronologically or topically. Data are presented at this level in a narrative that is largely descriptive. At the second level, the researcher moves from the concrete level of description of observable data to the more abstract level of using concepts to describe phenomena. This level includes classifying data into schema consisting of themes or categories. The third level involves making inferences, developing models, or generating theory. She refers to Miles and Huberman (1994) who speak of moving up “from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape” (p. 187).

My first step in interpreting the data involved reading the student reflection journals as they were generated. Each week as I read them, I made notes about the
emerging themes Similarly, I read the transcripts of the first interview and began to categorize the data referring to the backgrounds of the participants. By the time I conducted the second interviews with the Latinas, I had reviewed the data from the first interviews, and I used that information to shape the questions that guided the second interview.

As I continued to read the reflections and to listen to and participate in the class discussions, I interpreted the themes that emerged as the students began to reflect more deeply on their relationships with the families as well as on the readings and their relevance to their families. I continued to make notes about the relationships as I saw them developing.

After the semester ended and I had conducted the last interviews, my data collection was complete, and I began to search for the deeper meanings implied in the voices of the participants. I classified data into themes, making inferences about the relationships that had developed within the context of the service-learning relationship. As I categorized the themes, I found certain similarities, such as a desire to hone linguistic skills and to deepen cultural knowledge, but I also found disparities in the dispositions that emerged from the voices of the participants. For example, all four students moved from the role of teacher to friend and advocate, but Kathy, Carol, and Bradley moved to a position of solidarity and unity with their Latino friends, whereas Liz continued to use vocabulary that placed her in a dominant position in the relationship. The case studies present an opportunity to examine these themes by hearing the participant voices and reading my analyses and interpretations from the stance of researcher.

**Presenting the Case Studies**

I present four case studies that are different in depth and length as well as in personalities and circumstances. Each case study contains a history of my relationship with the participants and a description of the previous semesters in the program where appropriate. These earlier experiences provide a background for the events of the semester when I collected data for the case studies. The case studies are framed in examining relationships among disparate groups.
Through referring to the myriad documents, interviews, and observations, I feared joining those who “drown the poem of the other with the sound of our own voices, as the ones who know, the ‘experts’ about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for meaning means” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi). Still following Lather and Smithies’s model, I organized the section where the case studies are presented by including quotes from student and Latino writings, quotes from interviews and class discussions, informal conversations and observations, and my own journal reflections in order to “provide a glimpse of the vast and intricate network of the complexities of cultural information” (1997, p. xvi). Just as Lather and Smithie described, there are changes in register, perspective, and voice as I wove all these pieces together.

**Trustworthiness**

Uttech (1999) stresses the importance of consulting multiple sources of information for triangulation of data. She recommends the use of more than one data source and for the researcher to “be alert for responses that are contradictory” (p. 96). It is necessary to triangulate sources in order to check for accuracy of the findings. In analyzing my data, I observed certain steps to check for trustworthiness. With each participant, I checked across the data sources to search for any discrepancies or inconsistencies in the information reported. I cross-checked the data from both members in the dyads to search for any discrepancies or inconsistencies in the information reported. I checked with the members to verify the findings. I checked with Amy, Kimberly, and Kristine to verify the data and the findings. This participatory or collaborative mode of research helped me to see if my findings concurred with the perceptions of the participants in the study. I left an “audit trail” that will enable others to replicate or approximate the research and the class (Merriam, 1998).