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Latino students' experiences in comprehensive and continuation high schools

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LATINO STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

IN COMPREHENSIVE AND CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Maria Rosa Navarro
San Francisco
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Latino Students' Expeiences in Comprehensive and Continuation High Schools

Educational Studies in the U.S. continue to show high dropout rates for Latino students. While the root cause of academic underachievement has often been blamed on the shortcomings of students, this study discloses that underachievement is generated by school-wide policies, as well as high poverty rates found in many of the students' families. Through transformative dialogues, aimed at revealing why some Latino students benefit from schooling while others become increasingly disengaged from the school environment, ten Latino students explained how their educational experiences dictated the quality of their academic achievement.

A participatory research process allowed students participants to describe their educational experiences and explore the roots of their academic underachievement in both comprehensive and continuationahigh schools. They talked about the most important educational experience for them which was having a friendship relationaship with a teacher who helped them and impacted their motivation and learning. However, throughout the dialogues they described more negative than positive perceptions of their high school experience. They began by addressing the ways secondary schools alienated them: curriculum that invalidated their home languages and cultures; teachers having low expectationas for them; and obstacles of standardized testing such as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). They described how the education they received in both comprehensive and continuation high school did not prepare them to pass the CAHSEE

or prepare them for employment in the future. The participants claimed that they received unequal treatment in the schools and that they were reacting to a system of unjust and inadequate education. The participants felt that every high school should provide students with a meaningful education with consistent and on-going support.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's

dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee

has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of

Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented

in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Maria R. Navarro   1-27-2010
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Isabel Navarro Robles for encouraging me to study and travel and whose life of hard work has been an inspiration for me. It is also dedicated to my dearest niece, Juanita Navarro, an outstanding teacher, who by example inspired me to pursue my highest dream.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Background and Need for the Study

Education is the instrument not just for the individual
to succeed, but for us as a community to succeed.
(Valenzuela, 1999, p. 72).

By the year 2008, Latinos accounted for 42 % of California's (K-12) students,

becoming the largest single ethnic group that attended public school (Noguera, 2002).

By the 12th grade, Latino students average only an 8th grade reading level and are more

likely to drop out of high school than all other groups. Based on 2000 U.S. Census data,

of 100 Latino students who enter elementary school, only 46 graduate from high school;

26 go onto college, 9 enroll in four-year college and 17 enroll in community college.

Only 8 completed their four- year degree and 2 earned a graduate or professional degree

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Historically dropout rates in urban schools where poor and Latino students have

concentrated far exceeded the national level. In the year 2002, the California school

dropout rate for Latinos was 30%, Blacks 13% and Whites 7% (California Department of

Education, Educational Demographic Unit, 2002). Thus Latinos remain with the lowest

formal education rates in the U.S. They continue to leave school earlier and receive

proportionately fewer high school diplomas than any other American (Noguera, 2002). A

disproportionate number have rejected the school culture, become alienated,

disempowered, and reluctant to attend school regularly.

What these students experience as structural barriers that promote cultural

subtraction in their schooling process has been labeled as "subtracting schooling" by

1

Valenzuela (1999). Valenzuela described a procedure at a high school in Texas that

contributed to the degradation of Latino students' culture:

1. Modification of surnames to facilitate pronunciation by the dominant group.

2. Curriculum that failed to involve students' knowledge and their histories.

3. Being labeled as ELLs "Limited English proficient," rather than "Spanish

   dominant" or "potentially bilingual".

4. Inaccuracy of students' handbooks:

    a. Printed in English only

    b. No reference to English as a second language acquisition program.

    c. No explanation of how to enter the honors' program.

                                                    (Valenzuela, 1999, pp. 172-175).

Education has historically been the path to upward occupational, economic and

social mobility in this country. Noguera (2002) writes that education is the way for

Latinos, as well as other groups, to escape poverty, yet high school graduation rates for

this particular population have continued to spiral downward. According to Suarez-

Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001), with a Latino population having approached 36 million,

and a majority of student population in some of the largest districts, Latino students have

dropped out and not succeeded in U.S. schools.

Statistical data provide an undeniable reality concerning the educational

attainment of Latino youth. In a study of youth from non-English language backgrounds,

Conrath (2001) noted that although dropout rates have declined in recent years among

Blacks and Whites, the Latino rate has gone the opposite direction. Moreover, the

dropout rate is not an absolute figure; but compounded by the fact that while most White

students drop out by the 11th grade, many Latinos have dropped out earlier by the 8th

grade. In fact, in 2004, 40% of the total number of Latino dropouts had left school by the

eighth grade (General Accounting Office, 2004).

Figure I

Dropout Rates in the United States

October 2004
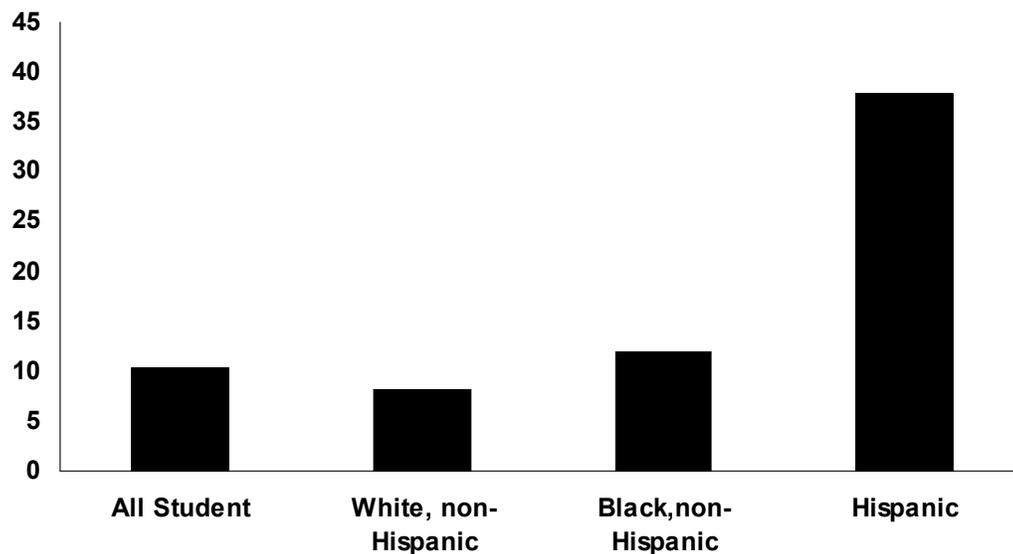
While information associated with academic performance can be gleaned from

census data, standardized tests, case studies, and qualitative research, scholars (Nieto,

2004; Stanton- Salazar, 2001) have addressed what Freire (1998) calls the "culture of

silence" (p.12). Freire explains the "theme of silence" adapting and accepting the

overwhelming force which has dominated the oppressed. Education can involve the

unconscious indoctrination of ideology and power relationships, which "contributes to

the domination of some people by others" (p.1). Freire pinpoints unequal education as one of the factors that maintained this inequality which is a reality for Latino students in their schools.

As Nieto (2004) states, "discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect, students" (p. 39). Have students been given ample opportunity to voice their own beliefs and concerns about the direction of their intellectual and social development as they approached adulthood? Since these students have been the individuals experiencing the phenomena of success and failure, are they not in the best position to determine where the problems are located? Countless hours have been spent trying to determine why some students do or do not succeed in American schools. What are the school experiences that contribute to the academic achievement or underachievement of Latino students? How can the schools help them in their quest for academic attainment? These are the questions that are addressed in this study.

Educational institutions have failed to find a solution to the issues of slow student achievement, retention, excessive students' absences, overcrowding and diminished educational opportunities, which have caused students to drop out. The challenge has been for schools to provide consistent and ongoing support to all students. Schools need to change organizational structures and practices while also transforming adult attitudes and behaviors to be more compassionate and nurturing toward high-risk youth

(Valenzuela, 1999). Schools need to ensure that all students have access to high quality curriculum. They should guarantee that all students encounter a curriculum that is demanding, interesting and engaging and that involved students' knowledge and histories. Schools, especially high schools, need to provide personalized programs and services that work for Latino students. Where schools continue to ignore the Latino dropout problem, devastating personal, social and civic consequences will accrue. This nation cannot afford nor tolerate the persistently high rate of Latino student dropouts. Serious efforts should solve this problem, which have been an important part of the country's national agenda on education (Flores-Gonzales, 2002).

The Latino dropout rate in the U.S. has consistently remained between 30 and 35 % (Secada,1998). This consistent disparity in school completion rates cannot diminish on its own without major changes in our schools and society. Secada (1998) states "it will be a disaster if a large percentage of the U.S. labor force does not have a high school education. An uneducated and under skilled Hispanic workforce is harmful not only to Hispanics, but to the American economy as well" (p. 23). Hence, the strength of this nation has been based on the quality of the workforce. In today's service-oriented, globalized economy which has required well-educated and well-trained employees, we simply cannot afford to lose the potential contribution of these students. As schools fail to realize the potential of students and to address the Latino students' dropout phenomenon, the quality of the state and nation's workforce and productivity has decreased, weakening our principles of freedom, equality and justice upon which this country was founded.

The two institutions that have directly affected virtually all youth have been

school and the family (Ada, 1993), (Spring, 2002). Schools have been critically important because education has been the means by which individuals from economically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds can build the skills needed for successful adult roles in mainstream U.S. Life. Moreover, schools have been the most important focal point for dropout prevention. For schools to remain a dynamic agent within our society, they must maintain the faith and support of all their students. This support can be carried forward only if the intellectual and psychological needs of all students have been adequately served (De La Rosa, 1998).

Experiences in Comprehensive and Continuation High Schools

Historically many Latino students who attended traditional comprehensive high schools have not been successful. They have experienced limited or no academic success. Large numbers of these students have been disenchanted with the comprehensive high schools and reluctant to attend school regularly. Comprehensive high schools have failed to provide these students with a supportive environment and an engaging curriculum (Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002). Historically most of these traditional comprehensive high schools have existed as cold, impersonal and hostile institutions that do not provide Latino students with a culturally appropriate education (Valdes, 2001). However, Latino students believe that effective schooling practices could empower them, keep them from dropping out and help them accomplish their educational goals (Nieto, 2004).

In the last decade continuation, alternative and small high schools have grown in importance for the Latino community, as more Latino students have transferred from

comprehensive to any of these high schools and graduated (De La Rosa, 1998).

Continuation high schools were first developed to serve students whose needs could not

be met in the comprehensive high schools (Emmett & Scheffelin, 1991). Many of them

offer the students an alternative method of education with a personalized program of

instruction, special support services, and a variable credit system. (Emmett & Scheffelin,

1991). However, some of these continuation high schools look like dumping grounds for

students of color who are often the majority of the school's population. Some students

stated that they do not feel challenged by their teachers (Navarro, 2009).

Alternative high schools have provided an alternative educational opportunity for

students 16 years of age or older. Generally their programs include supplemental

instructional services and a science and technology partnership program where students

produce and explore the visual, media and performing arts. Alternative high schools have

not had geographic boundaries and any student throughout the city can apply. Small high

schools provide small school settings and offer educational programs designed to meet

students' individual needs. Students are taught in small classes and supportive services

are provided by community based organizations. Students who attend these high schools

come from a variety of backgrounds: low socioeconomic, English language learners and

others.

In the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), where I work, students

have been referred to any of these high schools by two departments: The Dropout

Prevention Office (DPO) and the Student Placement Committee (SPC). Students referred

by the DPO have been chronic truants whereas students referred by the SPC have had

discipline or safety issues. Students who enter any of these three high schools must have been at least 16 years of age or must have completed two years of high school (Conley, 2002). Oftentimes these high schools function as counseling-oriented as compared to the subject matter orientation of the typical comprehensive high school. Students claim that they are treated with respect and warmth in these alternative settings and that the personnel provide them with consistent and on-going support (Hemphill, 2003).

There has been a great need for more forms of alternative instruction and educational programs to meet the educational needs of these students. Many educational programs have provided opportunities for intellectual and social advancement for students. However, while some programs offer prosperous futures for a few, they have left other students reaching adulthood plagued with social and economic difficulties from inadequate preparation. Valenzuela (1999) tells "how schools themselves are organized to perpetuate inequality"(p.12), noting the blatant inconsistencies in educational programs. Kozol (1996) explains that public education in the U.S. is not synonymous with an equitable schooling system, especially in regards to poor students.

This research study examined the educational experiences of Latino students who transferred from comprehensive to continuation high schools. In the San Francisco Unified School District, for example, continuation high schools asserted that student development occurred most effectively when students participated in democratic-decision making (Hemphill, 2003). In these high schools disciplinary issues were dealt with by shifting the responsibility from the teacher to the student-parent-school community, and attendance issues were dealt with in terms of a democratically derived and maintained school "social contract" (Conley, 2002). These school communities tended to be

perceived by students as far more cohesive than traditional school environments. The students benefited from a secondary educational experience that convinced them that completing their high school education was a worthwhile endeavor that they were both capable and worthy of achieving (Kaufman, 2002).

However, since the year 2000 to the present, most continuation high schools in San Francisco have been closed down. Two decades ago SFUSD had at least 12 continuation high schools but currently only two are left. Monetary, rather than pedagogical, judgment has been the deciding factor for the closure of these type of high schools. Shutting down continuation high schools can exacerbate the drop out problem of Latino students. Without continuation high schools to attend, students' educational choices lessen. Not attending school and unemployed, oftentimes these students have gotten in trouble with the police and ended up in juvenile detention centers, which have been over represented with minority youth (Maclard, 2001).

Education and Prisons

According to the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Report (2005), juvenile confinement and an increasingly disproportionate detention of the City's Latino youth worsened considerably in 2005. Latino youth comprised 12% of the city's entire juvenile population placed in detention. This is due to the impact of a gang injunction, a civil court order that bans members of a gang from congregating in certain areas. According to San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera, this gang injunction is necessary for public safety. However, community activists (Hernandez, 2007) alleged that Latino youth living in the area with no gang affiliation or criminal record were being indiscriminately stopped and harassed by the police. They claim that this injunction lacks clear and fair

criteria, was based on racial profiling, and has increased the arrest rate of Latino youth and police misconduct in the Mission District.

Education and prisons have been closely correlated. Studies by Siegal and Senna (1985) found that juvenile delinquency is linked to chronic underachievement in school. These researchers asserted that school failure is a strong predictor of anti-social behavior. Grier (2000) found that " a tracking system keeps certain students from any hope of achieving success, thereby causing lack of motivation and rebellion which may be fertile grounds for anti-social behavior and a tendency to drop out of school" (p.5). More than two million of the people in California's prisons have been youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18 years (Maclard, 2001) and the state continues to more jails and juvenile detention centers. Not only have young people been locked up in great numbers, but incarceration of male and female youth of color has been on the rise in California.

Furthermore, this research was needed in order to examine continuation high schools, their ethical components, educational programs, and ways to improve them. Historically these programs are not appropriately funded. By closing down these high schools, there has been a danger that more students will become dropouts and unconnected to the schools (Spring, 2002). A disproportionate number have become victims of a widening academic opportunity gap, relegating them to the unemployment lines, working in dead-end, low-paying jobs, or being pushed into the juvenile justice system.

Statement of the Problem

What are the educational experiences that have contributed to the academic achievement or underachievement of many Latino students? How can educators help

these Latino students in their quest for academic attainment? Educational studies have shown that Latino students continue to reflect the highest drop out rates of any other ethnic group in the United States (Nieto, 2004). If population trends continue as expected, and with Latinos becoming the largest minority group in the country, the need for a closer look at their educational achievement is urgent.

<p align="center">Purpose of the Study</p>

This study is based upon the notion that the explanation of educational experiences can best be attained via the voices of Latino students themselves. Without these key contributors, studies can only make ineffective attempts at designing educational practices that would ensure academic success. Moreover, this study investigates the perceptions of Latino high school students who transferred from comprehensive to continuation high schools regarding these issues: (a) Obstacles and successes that they encountered in their educational experiences; (b) Comparison between their experiences at home and in schools that contributed to their academic achievement or under- achievement; and (c) The value of education to their future employment opportunities.

The purpose of this study was to offer 10 Latino students the opportunity to tell the stories of their educational experiences while attending comprehensive and continuation high schools in California. These biographical narratives provided introspective testimony in regards to the themes of equity and justice. It was my hope that while engaging in the process of research, education, action and reflection, participants would develop a critical perspective regarding their educational experiences. By developing a critical perspective, Latino students explored the forms of instruction and

educational programs that worked and met their educational needs. The dialogues with participants were undertaken with three research questions as stated below:

Research Questions

1. What have been the educational experiences of Latino high school students who participated in both comprehensive and continuation high schools? These experiences included:

   a. obstacles, achievements, successes and failures

   b. positive and negative perspectives

2. What were the experiences at home and in school that contributed to the academic achievement or academic underachievement of Latino students in both comprehensive and continuation high schools?

3. What connections did Latino students make between educational attainment and future employment?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on Paulo Freire's (1973) theory of empowerment and Critical Race Theory. Freire's theory of empowerment used the popular knowledge of the people in a process of empowerment whereby the people took action toward ameliorating their life situation. It also used dialogue with critical reflection, and reflective action in a critique of society within a historical and cultural context. Such transformative dialogues provided opportunities " for the oppressed to use their intellectual power to be critical and innovative so that they can fashion a world freed of domination and exploitation" (p.15). Through transformative dialogues the participants

began to name the world for themselves, and in the process began to critically reflect on its cultural and political realities, resulting in "enlightenment and awakening" (p.20). By listening to the voices of students, we as educators can learn first hand about their experiences in the schools, how social and educational structures affected their learning, and what we can do to provide high quality of education for all students.

In his discussion of student empowerment, Freire (1973) explained how the school agenda should enable students to draw upon their own histories, voices and cultural resources in an effort to create new skills and knowledge. "It (empowerment) also means teaching students to take risks, to struggle with power relationships, and to use the knowledge that they possess to start changing their lives" (p.7). This study provided Latino students an opportunity to share their educational experiences. The flexibility and adaptability of the participatory research method allowed this study to be a transformative educational experience for all these students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the historical and contemporary realities of race and racism. This theory was originated in the late 1980s by a group of legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and others, challenging race and racism in the U.S. legal system and society (Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT is also dedicated to advance a social justice agenda in schools. It views education as a tool to eliminate all forms of subordination and empowers oppressed groups to transform society. CRT scholars in education have theorized, examined, and challenged the ways race and racism have shaped schooling structures, practices and discourses (Solorzano, 1997). CRT questions approaches to schooling that have pretended to be neutral or standardized while implicitly privileging White, U.S. born, monolingual,

English-speaking students. CRT examines racialized layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, languages, phenotype and accents.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited by the population, which included 10 Latino high school students who were attending Riverside Continuation High School. The study depended heavenly upon the cooperation of Riverside Continuation High School students returning the completed questionnaires and attending the scheduled meetings. A secure, safe and collaborative environment was created to instill an atmosphere of trust, which helped ensure students to truthfully answer all questions. The questionnaire and all scheduled meetings were student driven which ensured that the students' experiences were highly relevant and meaningful.Following the philosophy of Paulo Freire (1973) students dialogued, reflected, acted, and hopefully transformed their reality.

Significance of the Study

This participatory research study may provide educators at all levels with a deeper understanding of the educational experiences of Latino students as heard through the voices of the students themselves. The findings show that Latino students lack the proper support to succeed. The U.S. society must come to believe that the education of Latino students, as well as other marginalized groups, is fundamental for the survival of a democratic nation. If the rate of academic failure in the schools continues unabated, the U.S. stands to risk its future as a country that professes equality in education and justice for all.

More relevant and meaningful studies that comprise the struggles of Latino students in continuation high schools are needed. Research needs to address the often contradictory realities that comprise the daily experiences of Latino students in the United States. It is of paramount importance to focus on Latino students' voices and their cultural and linguistic needs, in an effort to identify those factors that hindered their academic and social advancement.

Many of the conflicts faced by Latino students are related to their lack of acceptance in the U.S. culture. Most Latino students start school with positive attitudes about their home culture. Most belong to a closely-knit family nucleus, whereby maintenance of beliefs and values of the home culture was strongly emphasized. When school culture conflicts with what students learn at home, oftentimes it produces a rejection of students' original culture in an effort to find comfort in school (Cummins, 1998).

In order to reverse the drop out rate of Latino students, schools need to transform their curriculum and incorporate into their discourse that reflects the culture, languages and diversity of these students. As Druian & Butler (2001) noted, "Only when culture and ethnicity are introduced as the centerpiece of the discourse on educational policy will the daily school lives of students of color become both meaningful and empowering" (p. 24).

Most public schools have existed as hostile institutions with respect to the cultural identity of Latino students (Reyes, 2001). Schools have failed to prepare these students with the knowledge and perspective needed to participate effectively in a multi-cultural global society. Latino students must learn about their multi-cultural heritage. More than 35 million Latinos live in the U.S. The mixed heritage of these people makes the Latino

child of today the inheritor of an extraordinary diverse culture, with indigenous, African and Spanish roots which have contributed achievements in all areas of human endeavor (Ada, 1993). Teaching and sharing the richness of the global cultures to all students should be a responsibility of every school. Schools and teachers should empower all students with an understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of their history and culture to help them develop empathy, compassion, and commitment to humane and democratic changes as well as to prepare them to meet the challenges of today's global society.

It is my hope that this study will encourage schools to transform their curriculum in ways that would address alternative educational practices. Further understanding of these elements may provide evidence to combine transformational educational practices with a learning process that will help Latino students achieve academically. This study may also be beneficial to educators who are seeking alternative and innovative strategies to teach successfully and to adequately meet their student's needs.

With a greater depth of knowledge regarding the reasons why Latino students drop out of school, interventions that encourage adolescents to stay in school or continue their education in an alternative way, may be developed. Again, it is my hope that this study may provide better understanding of the continuation high school programs and may help educational stakeholders to modify and expand these programs to better meet students, parents and community needs. Nieto (2004) asserted that all students can learn in settings where the goal is reachable and the appropriate levels of support, assistance, structure, and conditions for learning are present. Therefore research is necessary when trying to create significant educational programs to serve at-risk students more equitably and efficiently.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study were defined as follows:

a. Continuation high schools-Secondary schools which offer programs of individualized instruction designed to meet the needs of students who were generally unsuccessful in the comprehensive high schools. Continuation high schools receive students by a referral system from one or more comprehensive high schools. Students have an opportunity to earn a regular high school diploma.

b. Alternative high schools- Provide alternative educational opportunities for students who are at least 16 years or older. Alternative high schools do not have defined geographic boundaries. Students have an opportunity to earn a regular high school diploma.

c. Comprehensive high schools-Traditional high schools with over 900 hundred students. Their graduation requirements meet university prerequisites. Their programs include full inter-scholastics, honors, advance placement courses, and college planning.

Small high schools- Small secondary schools with fewer than 500 students. They incorporate the philosophy of many continuation high schools. In small high schools students are grouped in teams and usually stay with their teacher throughout their high school careers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to understand the issues associated with the educational experiences of Latino students, this chapter provides an overview of critical factors intended to reveal the complexities involved in helping curve the dropout rate of Latino high school students. In identifying such factors, it is important to understand the historical events that have impacted the schooling of Latino students, as they aspire to finish high school, become educated, and improve their circumstances (Yosso, 2006). The literature review consists of four sections.

The first section begins with a historical account of Latinos in the U.S. This section will examines the historical account of Latinos in the U.S., population projections, immigration and socioeconomic background. The second section explores reasons why Latino students drop out of high school. The effects of school alienation, student disempowerment, academic tracking, and its impact on academic performance will also be discussed in this section.

The third section reviews the role of continuation education and its characteristics. The issues of curriculum, student population, and teachers are interwoven throughout this section. The final section of the chapter discusses successful educational models that effectively educate and meet the academic needs of Latino and other students. The intent of the literature review is to provide a more comprehensive picture of continuation education programs and the role they play in the academic achievement of Latino students.

Demographics of Latinos in the U.S.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, at least 35.3 million Latinos/as resided in the United States and accounted for about 13% of the total U.S. population. People of Mexican descent comprised an estimated 66% of the total Latino/a population. The remainder of Latino/a population included Central and South Americans (14%), Puerto Ricans (11%), Cubans (5%), and other Latinos/as (7%), (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Population projections indicated that Latinos/as represented the youngest and largest population in the U.S. They were about one of every ten Americans in 1990 and may be one out of five in 2050. Latinos will make up 18% of the U.S. population by 2050.

Latino youth are the most rapidly growing student group in the United States. In January 2000, the Census Bureau released data of alarming statistics concerning the nation's Latino youth. The dropout rate for Latinos in the U.S. is 40% and only 55% of Latinos 25 or older have completed high school compared to 84% of Whites and 78% of African Americans. While the dropout rate for other school age population has declined over the last 25 years, the overall Latino dropout rate has escalated and has remained between 35 and 40 per cent during the same time period (General Accounting Office, 2004). The federal government has not adequately monitored, measured or coordinated programs and research to benefit Latino children and their families, despite the rapidly growing Latino population in this country. Latinos vary greatly in socioeconomic background and cultural traditions. Some, like the first immigrant wave of wealthy Cubans, have found economic success in the U.S. Others like Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans and a large proportion of 2nd and 3rd wave of Cuban immigrants, often live below the poverty level (Ramirez & De la Cruz, 2002).

Figure 2

**Population Projections for Latinos
in the U.S. from 1980-2050**
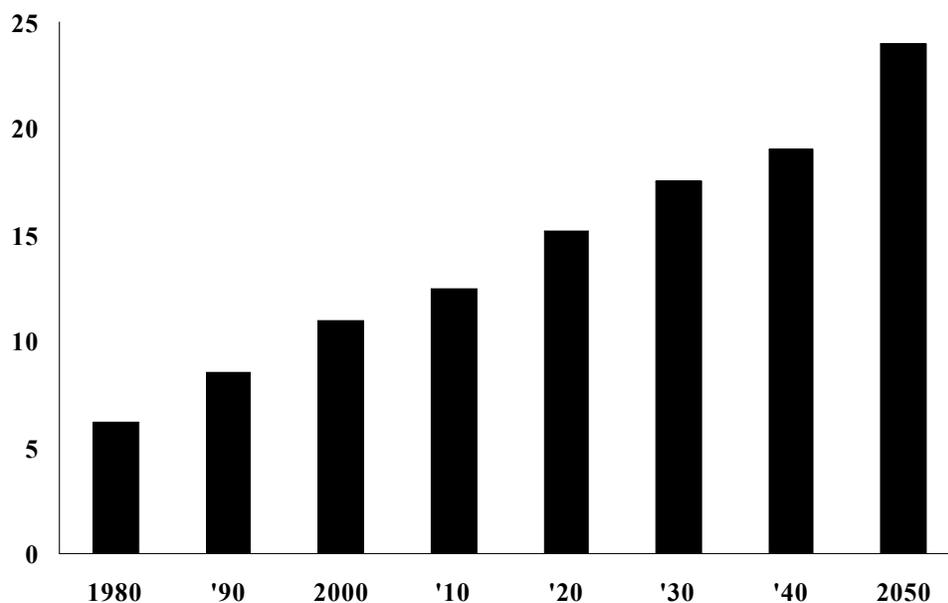
Why Do Latino Students Drop Out of High School?

Latino students have altered the educational and cultural balance of our nation (Flores-Gonzales, 2002). They have fast become the majority in many school districts, and their percentage will continue to increase in the future. In California alone Latino students accounted for 40 per cent of all kindergarten through twelve graders, which made Latinos the largest ethnic group attending public schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). However, most of these students have struggled educationally against all odds. Their drop out rates have been more than double those of other Americans at every income level, and in some places, the rate has been as high as 18 percent (Reyes, 2001). Many Latino students live in heavily segregated neighborhoods plagued by endemic violence, lacking health care and attending under funded schools with the lowest-level

curriculum (Mathews, 2000). Two in five Latino children have lived in poverty--twice the poverty rate for all children in the U.S. (Kozol, 1996).

Figure 3

Poverty Rate
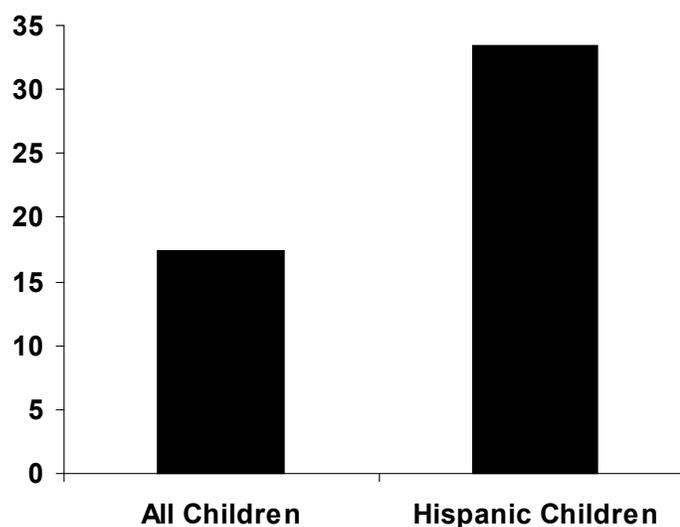
This section examines some of the educational structures and practices that shaped these outcomes. High schools have tended to reflect many patterns of structural inequality faced by Latino students daily. In urban communities in the U.S., Latino students have usually attended racially segregated, over- crowded high schools equipped with unequal resources and housed in dilapidated buildings with an insufficient number of functioning bathrooms (Mathews, 2000). This information associated with the structure of schooling, academic performance and research studies which involved ethnographies, case studies, and interview approaches can be gleaned from educational research scholars (Katz, 1999, Nieto, 2004, Noguera, 2002). Latino students are often

enrolled in classes where under trained, uncredentialed teachers attempted to teach with a shortage of updated textbooks, library materials and desks. In predominantly Latino high schools, many classrooms feature long-term substitute teachers year-round, and the schools heavily rely on IQ testing and other standardized tests offered in English, without an appropriate Spanish-language exam. Additionally these schools regularly mislabel Latino students as Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR), and place them in special education classes (Noguera, 2002).

Even when Latino students comprise the numerical majority of students at a particular school they remain significantly underrepresented in honors and Advance Placement (A.P.) classes (Yosso, 2006). The few honors and Advanced Placement classes available in low income urban schools contrast with the large number offered in more affluent schools. Latino students continue to be tracked into courses of study that are remedial or vocational. They rarely gain access to courses that would provide the minimal requirements to enroll in a four year college. Moreover, Latino students who comprise the majority of the school population tend to receive discouraging advice about pursuing college. High school exit exams increasingly prevent these students from earning their high school diploma and further discourage them from reaching higher education pursuits. It is not surprising that many of these students drop out of school before they graduate, and those who persevere often choose one of the few options available the military which consistently conduct recruitment activities on Latino high school campuses. These actions are supported by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(NCLB) which require all high schools to give military recruiters access to students'

records (Page, 2002).

The number of Latino students enrolled in the public schools continues to rise and

many Latino students attending comprehensive high schools continue experiencing

limited or no academic success (Conley, 2002). Comprehensive high schools have failed

to provide Latino students with a supportive environment and a curriculum that is

demanding, interesting, and engaging (Valenzuela, 1999). School curriculum should be

rooted in students needs and experiences. It should equip students to pose essential and

critical questions about their social realities. It should strive to include the lives of

everyone in society and to critically examine their histories and interconnections

(Noguera, 2002).

Eurocentric Curriculum

When looking closely at the curriculum used by most teachers in high school, it is

transparent that it alienates Latino students from schooling. These students have a hard

time finding themselves or their communities in it. Latino students and other students of

color often study a curriculum based on Eurocentric cultural values, norms, and

expectations that form the dominant culture (Bell, 2004). This type of curriculum is at

odds with the needs of these students. This is evident in reference to the lives and

lifestyles of these students and their families. The life of the school is separate and

distinct from the life of their community. Teachers and students seldom share the same

neighborhood, similar cultural backgrounds, or life experiences. It is no wonder that

teachers often do not see the student's strengths, competencies and areas of expertise

(Buendia, Ares, Juarez & Peercy, 2004).

Most teachers in these schools are White and middle class and lack understanding

of the working class student's world. They lack understanding of the fact that many of these students do not eat three meals a day, and that most of them help support themselves and their families by working until midnight in fast food restaurants which saturate their communities (Anguaiano, 2004). Then they have to get up early to make it to school the next morning. According to Spring (2002), the emphasis of this educational system is to make the poor and working class student conform and accept middle class values. There is little or no attempt on the part of the schools to use the experiences that Latino students bring from home. The present educational system perpetuates the sharpening division between Americans of different races and incomes, instead of producing knowledgeable and compassionate human beings (Yosso, 2006).

As Emery and Ohanian (2004) asserted, education in this country is used as an insidious vehicle for institutionalizing elite values and for indoctrinating students into unconsciously maintaining these values. In schools, students have learned about the ability to maintain a materialistic culture that denies the spirit and reinforces the idea that humanity's capacity for greed, competition and violence exceeds its capacity for sharing, cooperation and love. American schools have attempted to provide the same or similar educational experience to all students regardless of their cultural differences. Hence, students of color learn early in their academic experience that what goes on in school is frequently irrelevant to their lives and reflects a different often imposed reality. Nieto (2004) stated the major reasons for Latino students leaving school is their perception that the school curriculum is not connected to their lives.

Curriculum has been defined as the organized environment for learning in a classroom and in a school (Martinez, 2000). But the curriculum that most students of color receive represents what is thought to be important and necessary knowledge by

those who are dominant in the society. Decisions about what is important for students to learn are generally made by those furthest from the lives of students, namely, central and state Boards of Education, with little input from teachers, parents or students (Bell, 2004).When many students see themselves in the curriculum, it is often through the distorted lens of others (Noguera, 2002). Mexican Americans read of the "Westward expansion" with no mention or indication that their ancestors were already living in the land onto which the Europeans had expanded; Native American students read about themselves as "savages"; African Americans read sanitized versions of slavery; females may be left wondering how is it that half of humanity has consistently been left out of the curriculum (Spring, 2002).

Textbooks, an important component of the curriculum, also reinforce the dominance of the Eurocentric perspective and sustain stereotypes of any group perceived to be outside the mainstream (Yosso, 2006). This situation is not new. In a study by Sleeter and Delgado, (2004), textbooks used in Grades 1 through 8 were examined and the following was found: 1. Textbooks contained very little about contemporary race-relations or the issues that most concerned people of color; 2. Whites have consistently dominated textbooks; 3. Whites have received the most attention and dominated the story line and lists of accomplishments in most books.

Sleeter and Delgado (2004) found that although textbooks have included more people of color, they continue to legitimate the status of White people. A similar situation has been found in most children's literature which until recently had omitted or stereotyped the lives and experiences of African American, Mexican American, Puerto

Rican, Asian, American Indians and other groups (Noguera, 2002). Research on the

inappropriateness of the school curriculum to the lives of children has demonstrated that

it alienates many students (Sleeter and Delgado, 2004, Valenzuela, 1999, Yozzo, 2006).

In a study of four highly diverse public schools in California, Oakes and Lipton (2003)

found that students frequently reported being bored in school and saw little relevance to

what was taught in their lives and for their future. The authors also argued that students

became more disengaged as the curriculum became more standardized. Although young

people believed that cultural diversity was valuable, they also learned that in school it

was not as valuable as the dominant culture.

Most school curricula historically leaves little room for student involvement and

initiative. They encourage a passivity in the students that is reinforced by fragmented, test

driven lessons and discourages students from taking more responsibility for their own

education (Acuna, 2004). Students needed to be involved in explicit discussions and in

the development of their school's curricula. Freire (1998) stated that expression of respect

for what students know was especially relevant to the youth. "Why not establish an

intimate connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and

knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of all students as individuals?" (p. 40).

The schools and the curriculum must motivate students to develop their

democratic capacities to question, to challenge, to engage in real discussions, and to solve

problems collectively (Turck, 2004). Schools must design curriculum that teaches and

helps students to trust and care for each other. They must design a curriculum that teaches

Latino students and other students of color to draw inspiration from historical and

contemporary efforts of their leaders and heroes who struggle for justice and equality

(Moreno, 1999). Latino students should be allowed to learn about and feel connected to their legacy. From the Aztec Piramids, The Inca city of Machu Pichu, the California Missions to Literature-Garcia Marquez, Jose Marti, Gabriela Mistral, Nicolas Guillen, Pablo Neruda, Jose Luis Borges, Lola Rodriguez de Tio, an all Latinos who have contributed to the world's culture. Should be part of the educational experience of these students.

Schools must address the values, history, current reality and power relationships that shape student's cultures. They must present their culture not only in the present but in the past. They must nurture each student's self-identity within the context of their group identity. Historically, most curricula in U.S. schools have alienated and discouraged students from attending and finishing high school instead of preparing them with the knowledge and perspective needed to survive and participate effectively in a multicultural global society (Nieto, 2004).

Educational indicators suggest that Latinos have made progress at alarmingly slow rates from pre-school through grade school, middle school, high school and on to higher education (Cuadraz, 2005). In *Our Nation on the Fault Line* (2002), by President Bush's Advisory Commission for Hispanic Americans, it was stated that the educational achievement gap between Latino students and non-Latino students persist, and recurring problems have not changed. The magnitude of the crisis was unparalleled according to the report. The indicators identified by the commission include the following: (a)Latino students dropped out earlier and at unacceptable high rates, (b)Latino students were segregated in schools that were resource poor, (c) Less that 15 percent of all Latino children participated in pre-school programs, (d) More than twice as many Latinos as

on-Latinos were enrolled below level (Simmons, 2002).

This commission (2002) portrayed a crisis situation and characterized the educational experience of the Latino students in the U.S. as one of neglect, isolation, inappropriate standardized testing and assessment, tracking into vocational programs, inadequate resources, poor curriculum and linguistic ostracization. The commission generated a set of recommendations to try to alleviate the educational neglect of Latino students in the nation's schools. The following is a partial list: ensure adequate funding for bilingual education programs, end school segregation for Latino children, train teachers to deal effectively with multicultural children, improve programs and effective strategies in pre-school education, improve dropout prevention and student motivation, and increase the school graduation rates for Latino students. In spite of federal recommendations and solutions designed to improve the Latino student educational progress and equity, the net result in the educational pipeline has been the continuous loss of many Latino students particularly in the middle school (Yosso, 2006). Many of these students who were unable to keep on track to graduate from a Comprehensive high school, transferred to continuation high schools for the opportunity to complete the required academic course of instruction there and obtain a high school diploma.

<div align="center">Continuation Education</div>

Continuation education has been in existence in California since 1919 (Emmett & Scheffelin, 1991). At that time a part-time education law was enacted which required high school districts to establish part-time classes for youth over 14 and under 18 years of age, who did not attend school full-time. It was the intent of the legislature that continuation education high schools be established and maintained in order to meet the needs of young people who were forced by economic conditions to leave full-time school

for part-time jobs. The continuation high schools were to offer a flexible program of individualized instruction that emphasized occupational orientation, work study, and intensive guidance as well as to provide an opportunity for students to complete the academic courses of instruction and graduate from high school.

<p align="center">Characteristics of Continuation High Schools</p>

Continuation high schools are schools that receive students by a referral system from one or more regular comprehensive high schools. Students who were newcomers to the country or the state or who were just released from Juvenile Hall may also attend these schools (Conley, 2002). These schools were known to be humanistically oriented, and a total scope of their program has attempted to develop students secure in themselves through an open and sensitive curriculum and instruction.

The characteristics of continuation high schools were delineated and made specific in *A Study of Continuation Education in California*, (Conley, 2002).

1. Individualized and flexible instructional program that have emphasized a study schedule or occupational orientation.

2. An intensive but informal guidance program stressing the uniqueness of each personality and its problems and adjustments to school, employment as well as society.

3. A staff carefully selected for possession of the guidance point of view for their interest in students as persons rather than for their interest in a particular subject.

4. A curriculum with a variety of course offerings to meet the needs of all types of students.

5. The centering of the program in activities rather than books (p. 10)

An aspect of the continuation high school philosophy was to provide a much more individualized approach to instruction and learning than was possible in the

comprehensive high school. Hemphill (2003) defined individualization in more personal terms as providing "attention" to each student. This attention, he stated, enabled the student to develop a sense of personal worth that may have been lacking in the anonymity of the comprehensive high school. Continuation high schools with their unusual opportunities and friendly atmosphere have a philosophy that appealed to many students.

Curriculum

The curriculum requirements for continuation high schools were specified in the *Education Code* (1999) and included a basic curriculum and several guidelines listed below:

1. The content should have been chosen because of its relevancy to the

background, interest and motivation of each student.

2. Student involvement and interest in learning must be developed and

encouraged.

3. The structure of the curriculum should be flexible so that a student may enter and begin

meaningful work any time in the school year.

4. All activities should broaden the student's interest and perception of his

environment and increase his feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (p. 69).

Recognizing that success, involvement and achievement were the most effective motivators in the planning of a curriculum, the continuation high schools curriculum required students' participation and decisions on the part of the staff as a whole, and the

teacher as an individual (De La Rosa, 2002). Guidance was the heart of the continuation education curriculum. From the time students enrolled in the program until they withdrew or graduated, they needed continuous guidance in all phases of their programs, home lives, and job situation. Guidance was very valuable in helping the students adjust to their home, job and schools so that they became more effective workers and better citizens. A 2004 study of continuing education conducted in the San Francisco Unified School District cited the importance of guidance counselors as a keystone to the curriculum (Conrath, 2001). Their program set up several counseling models. One was for orientation of new students to the school; another for students with extensive attendance problems; and still another for the student identified as potential dropout. Group, individuals, and vocational guidance activities supported the counseling models.

Students Attending Continuation High School

The one common factor that students attending continuation high school had was that they were behind in credits and had a history of severe truancy (Conrath, 2001). The student who was assigned to a continuation high school many times came from a background so disjointed that his self-concept, emotional well-being, and academic accomplishments were significantly diminished. Some of these students were potential dropouts, who had weak self-images, and lacked motivation. Others were high academic achievers, who typically became truants out of boredom, had tendencies to resist school authorities and were pushed out of the comprehensive high school by the administrators as a consequence of their negative behavior (De La Rosa, 1998). Hemphill (2003) alleged that many students in the comprehensive high schools displayed one or more of these characteristics, but the continuation high school student displayed them generally more

frequently and to a greater degree.

In his study Maclard (2002) found that most students who attended continuation high school had attended multiple high schools before attending continuation high school and many of them had been arrested by authorities for a full range of reasons. Kratzer and Kratzer (1991) found in their studies that many youth referred to continuation high school held either full or part-time jobs to support themselves and their families. Other types of student referred to continuation high school were pregnant girls and students who had excessive truancy. They were potential dropouts. Another type was the student returning from juvenile hall. To most of these youngsters, continuation high school was their last stop.

Teachers in Continuation High Schools

Continuation high school teachers subscribed to the following philosophy of

> Accepting the student where he/she is and helping him/her
> develop into a contributing, autonomous citizen
> highest level possible within the limits of his/her ability
> and personality (Conley, 2002).

The basic quality of a continuation high school teacher has been his/her genuine concern for, and desire to, work with students at-risk. The teacher had the ability to develop and maintain rapport and good relationships with all students as well as possess strength and standards. The function of the teacher was to see worth in each individual student and activate his latent drive for growth and self-improvement. De La Rosa (1998), in a study of continuation high schools, indicated that a teacher must be characterized by "mature judgment, missionary spirit, and a warm, friendly, attitude toward students" (p. 20). Teachers must pay much attention to feelings as they do to facts. The day is past when educators could define their task wholly as that of training the

minds of their students. Cruz (2001) alleged that the goal of education must be seen in the actualization of the student. To achieve this end, she believed teachers must concern themselves with both the person and the world-the learner and the subject.

Successful Models

The successful educational models described below emphasized a culture of high academic expectations for all students, student 's learning facilitated by "caring relationships" (Valenzuela, 1999), and social relations and networks between adults and youth in the schools. These schools used intervention strategies such as personal academic plans, teaching teams, mentoring, intensive reading instructions and extended learning time. The schools' curriculum was multicultural, believing in the fact that learning must be based on prior knowledge (Freire, 1999).

These model schools recognized that students want schools that are caring communities where they could feel safe and respected and where they could enjoy active rather than passive learning environments. They wanted reliance on teachers rather than textbooks for learning. These students wanted to work in small groups and enjoy an environment where cultural differences are valued rather than feared (Nieto, 2004). The aim was to humanize education (Freire, 1973) made it meaningful for all and to embraced the philosophy that every student, everyone can learn.

Hence, the discussion of school retention and completion showed how deeply these issues have been tied to the social, economic and school life of students. But the problem was hardly hopeless and the growth of continuation, small and alternative schools in the United States seems to have been steady. These schools fostered authentic, equitable learning that led to improved educational opportunities for students who were poorly served by comprehensive schools. Below are highlights of some successful model

schools, which had a specific purpose of retaining students until graduation, schools that became an effective strategy for urban education reform.

One of these successful educational models is Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School (PACHS). PACHS was founded in Chicago in 1972 as a response to the high drop out rate that Puerto Rican students were experiencing in the public high schools in that city. Historically, the drop out rates among Puerto Rican urban high school students in the U.S. have ranged anywhere between 45% and 65% (Alicea, 2001).

Originally this alternative high school was established to address the educational needs of its mostly Puerto Rican student body. There was a combination of high academic expectations and meaningful student-teacher interpersonal relationships at this school, with the objective of helping the students transform their lives and their communities from critical perspectives through cultural and political affirmation (Pedraza & Rivera, 2005). Historically there have been students of Mexican, African-American and other Latino ethnicities enrolled at the school. The school curriculum placed emphasis on three components: Identity, Cognitive Skills and Action. These components dealt with students analyzing their social realities, reflecting on the traditional public school curriculum and learning and reflecting action classes that encourage hands-on experiences such as video production, journalism and community service. What followed was a comment of a Puerto Rican student, a senior at the school, who stated that her previous high school experiences were culturally irrelevant and that more high schools should include courses that specifically addressed the subjugated historical and political realities of their students.

> I did not know my history. I had no idea of who the poets and heroes of Puerto Rico were. My Puerto Rican-ness was challenged when they asked me, 'You are Puerto Rican, right?' Then I was told that I should know about this stuff. But none of that was ever taught to me. I think that public schools should have different kinds of history classes like African history, Latin American history, and history of Native Americans. Stuff that isn't normally taught.

(Gonzalez, 2002. p.33).

This senior student expressed her desire that schools radically transform their curricula in ways that would address every students' needs. She also felt that it was important for teachers to care for all students and have a passion for teaching (Hemphill, 2003).

Another successful model is El Puente for Peace and Justice Continuation High School located in Brooklyn, New York. El Puente opened in 1993 as a New York public high school under the auspices of New Visions for Education, a non-profit initiative founded to create a critical mass of small, effective schools that equitable serve a full range of children in New York City (Pedraza & Rivera, 2005). This high school developed a curriculum that connects the content to student's lives and incorporates students cultural capital. It integrates global studies, English and the fine arts and has been organized around the essential questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?'. Students explored poetry, art and cultural histories that addressed personal identity and the diasporic history of communities of color. They link English, global studies, biology, dance and visual arts to an exploration of the historical and commercial connections between the Caribbean and Brooklyn. Other curriculum projects are organized around themes of the garment industry, biodiversity, media literacy and self-determination. Students presented individual portfolios of art projects, writings and research about themselves and their family histories.

El Puente's students described the ways in which the Academy curriculum and pedagogy was relevant to their lives and provided them with important historical knowledge grounded in their identities. A senior described the significance of the "Who I Am Book," and how he was engaged through lessons on the Taino indigenous people of the Caribbean:

> In global studies, we are exploring ourselves. We are learning about the Taino--the indigenous people of Cuba, The Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. We are learning about our roots.The teacher brought in some Taino artifacts. Here at Puente High school teachers find a way to teach you and have fun at he same time. In all the classes we learn about who we are and then we try to write a book on the topic including our own experiences. Something I never did before.

<div align="right">(Pedraza & Rivera,2005).</div>

Both Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School and El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice's curriculum were organized in ways to respond to society's diverse population and to serve all students in the school. Both high schools emphasized that the educational engagement was related to high expectations and a high level of support placed on the students by their teachers. The social organization and pedagogy in these two schools generated a culture of students' academic engagement.

In both PACHS and El Puente high schools, the staff transcended the boundaries of traditional schooling and created social conditions and relationships that were aligned with students' cultural orientation and which overlapped with extended family life. They believed that education must respond to society's diverse population and must serve all students. They also believed that students learned better when they had real purpose and made connections to real life (Pizarro, 2005). A sophomore student born in the Dominican Republic expressed that El Puente was a caring school because of the sense of family and community that his teachers fomented.

El Puente's a very good school because the teachers really treat you like a family.If you got a problem, If you do something bad, they all sit with you and have a meeting with the principal and they try to help you. They sit with you and talk to you like it was a parent to a son.

(p.12)

Because he felt cared for by his teachers, this student did not see school as a place where teachers focused narrowly on academic content and routines or where he must be guarded and distrustful of authority figures that would punish or suspend him. A 2001 PACHS graduate considered her teachers to be caring because they were willing to be learners with their students and she did not see a hierarchical power division between students and teachers.

The teachers did not have the aura of being superior because they were faculty or administrators. For me, the teachers acted like co-students. They cared because they were there to work and learn with you. It was a different feeling than what I got at the comprehensive high school I attended (Flores-Gonzales, 2002, p. 27)

This student's comment points to the educational philosophy of critical pedagogy pioneered by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1999). This philosophy was grounded in the beliefs that the purpose of education in an unjust society was to bring about equity and justice, that students must play an active part in the learning process and that teachers and students are both simultaneously learners and producers of knowledge. Therefore, schools and teachers worked to ensure that the barriers to student achievement were removed and that schools promoted cross- cultural dialogue and respect (Nieto, 2004). Schools should be the place where students can analyze the forces which maintain injustice and develop the knowledge, the hope and strategies needed to create a more just society for all.

California is the only state that mandates continuation education (Emmett & Scheffelin, 1991). In the San Francisco Unified School District, a number of continuation

high school have been successful with some Latino students. These high schools offer the students an alternative method of education that was a personalized program of instruction (Conley, 2002). These continuation high schools assumed that student development occurred most effectively when students participated in democratic-decision making. In these high schools the discipline issues were dealt with in terms of a democratically derived and maintained school "social contract" (p. 20).

A successful small high school model was the Talent Development Small High School (TD)located in Baltimore, Maryland. This high school was initially designated as one of the two worst schools in the state until it was developed as a talent development small high school by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), a collaboration between John Hopkins and Howard Universities (Shellard, 2002).

The TD was based on research in the area of student motivation and teacher commitment that used a school within a school approach. The TD small high school focused its initial implementation by creating small learning communities, enacting curricular reforms, and providing professional development for teachers. They utilized inter-disciplinary teams of teachers responsible for 150 to 180 students, had longer class periods, and used employer advisory boards to help design curriculum and provide internship opportunities. During their evaluation they found that (a) in terms of attendance the school had moved from the second worst to the second best, (b) the percentage of students completing the core academic curriculum increased from an average of 43 to 56 % after implementation--about three times the level for similar schools in the district, (c) the teacher's perceptions of the school changed dramatically.

The increasing success of this small high school model was demonstrated in a significant increase in academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates (Shellard, 2002).

Another successful small high school program also located in Maryland was Cities in Schools. This small high school program was run by the Communities in School (CIS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children succeed in school and prepared for life. The purpose of the Communities in School (CIS) program was to help students stay in school until they graduate (Shellard, 2002). Partnerships were formed between the school and community agencies. The intention was to bring the community agencies to deliver full services to the students. The services included: mentoring, tutoring, counseling with a high level of student support, career guidance exploration, community service and after school or in school programs. An evaluation of the CIS program reported that the findings on effectiveness included: Of the half of student with a history of high absenteeism before entering the CIS program, 68 % improved their attendance, 60 % of the students improved their GPAs in the first year and more than half of the programs studied showed higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates.

Summary

Positive school experience and self-identity has played an important role in the academic success of at-risk students (Valenzuela, 1999). Students who learned to take pride in and feel satisfaction with their culture were more likely to find a comfortable adjustment in school. An acceptance of their identities needed to take place for students to be able to define their role within our society, their future experiences, and their educational attainment. At-risk students were at a crossroad in their attempt to define their cultural identity and established their place within the American mainstream.

Parents, teachers, and other school personnel had central roles in supporting this nation's youth in completing school and acquiring the necessary skills to become contributing members of our society.

Comprehensible instruction (Valdes, 2001) and culturally relevant curriculum that connected to all students' lives opened the door to new experiences beyond the devastating effects of frustration, delinquency, and school desertion. There was a great need for new forms of instructions and educational programs with culturally relevant curriculum that connected to all students' lives. Schools must reflect the world in which students live. They had a vital role to play in shaping the nation's future, especially in adapting to the changing world and the global economy (Fernandez, 2002). Schools must adequately prepare all students to feel part of a multicultural global society where they saw themselves as members of a global community with shared economic, cultural and environmental interest. Schools must keep up with changing educational needs and help all students become well rounded individuals prepared for the jobs of the 21st century and to be the leaders of tomorrow. Schools must stop producing academically ill prepared students, who speak only one language and have a mono-cultural perspective of the world in which they live, based on incomplete and inaccurate information about its complexity and diversity (Fernandez, 2002).

Schools had a great responsibility in helping curb the educational crisis that has affected Latino students in disproportionate numbers (Secada, 1998). The glaring achievement gap between Latino students and their counterparts along with the resulting economic marginalization will jeopardize this country's economic prosperity (Yasso, 2006). To under-prepare this growing student population for the workplace in the coming

centuries is a recipe for disaster (Collier and Thomas, 2001). Students who dropped out of school were not adequately prepared for his or her implied role in society. As Nieto (2004) stated, dropping out of school invariably meant dropping out of society. Educators and administrators needed to put emphasis on new forms of instruction and on high quality interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. They must identify what worked best for Latino students and change the educational settings to mirror the needs of this fastest growing student population.

As Oakes & Lipton (2004) stated, the most extreme manifestation of disengagement from schooling was the high dropout rate. Dropping out of school forecloses a lifetime of opportunities. This has been a great loss for the whole country's economy. For business, this meant a loss of high skill employees, and for communities this meant a risk of civil breakdown. In the economy of the 21st century, economic success will increasingly depend on human capital (Grier, 2000). If this country wants to maintain its standard of living and a place of leadership in the world, it must rise to the challenge and see to it that every student gets a quality education. Dropouts drain the country's economy. They represent a tremendous waste of human potential and productivity and they reduce the nation's ability to compete in an increasingly global economy. Schools must break with tradition, reverse the high dropout rate, and enable everyone to contribute to build a vibrant future in this democracy.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

> Within the context of participatory research, dialogue encourage
> people to look at the "whys" of their lives. Why do problems exist?
> What causes these problems? Participatory research assumes that
> reality and history are human created, thus knowable.
>
> (Freire, 1970, p.134)

According to Freire (1970), the function of participatory research is both cognitive and transformative: "it produces knowledge and links it simultaneously to social action" (p. 23). The reliability of the findings in participatory research is dependent upon the authenticity of the dialogue,what Freire (1970) called living knowledge since much of the social injustice characteristic of modern society is tructural in origin, participatory research " acts as catalytic intention in the social transformation processes" (p. 30).

Choosing a methodology that provides an opportunity for Latino continuation high school students to share their experiences concerning their formal education was of vital concern for this study. Through the use of participatory research, this study provided a forum for destroying the ideological base of current structures of power by giving a voice to those who have lived in the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1998, p. 32). The function of participatory research is that "it produces knowledge and links it simultaneously and intimately to social action" (Park, 1989, p. 18). Maguire (1987) points out that in traditional research it is not integral to ask why, while in participatory research it is ess*ential:*

> In problem posing education people develop their power to perceive critically
> *the way they exist in* the world with *which* and in *which* they find themselves,
> they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in
> transformation.

> (Park, 1989, p. 64).

Participatory research uses the popular knowledge of the people in a process of empowerment whereby the people take action toward ameliorating their life situations. This knowledge is normally dismissed by the dominant society (Ada & Beutel, 1993). Ada and Beutel explained the focus of participatory research:

> To transform the world. To amplify the voices of those who are rendered voiceless by the dominant society. To inscribe with them their words and wisdom, creating written histories, and then to read the world with one another. To provide the stage where women and men, children, the elderly, and the disenfranchise minorities and communities become the protagonists in their own life stories. These are the intentions of participatory research (p.7).

Through the use of participatory research, this study draws attention to the participants' voices in their efforts to " critically appropriate knowledge that exists both within and outside their immediate experience" (Giroux, 1989, p. 24)

This section addresses the basic constructs of participatory research. The method of inquiry generally involve the participants in an emerging research design (Creswell, 2003; McIntyre, 1997). The appropriateness of the participatory approach to this study is emphasized by these tenets: "(1) an emphasis on the lived experiences of human beings, (2) the subjectivity and activist stance of the researcher, and (3) an emphasis on social change" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 21).

<div align="center">Entry into the Community</div>

The issue of authenticity and building a solid and authentic connection with the research community is especially important in participatory research (Ada & Beutel,1993). This research was undertaken at Riverside Continuation High School in San Francisco, California. I taught reading and math at this school site for almost 12 years. Close ties with the study's community were maintained because I have lived and worked in the neighborhood and other local schools for decades. I often encountered my

students and their families at local stores and businesses. Many times I have been invited to their homes for birthday parties, quinceaneras, baptisms, baby showers, funerals and informal visits. I have lived in the immediate neighborhood of many of my students. The cultural sharing and living within the same physical boundaries as the participants formed a "solid connection" with the community (Ada & Beutel, 1993).

I often entered my students' homes for a scheduled appointment, for example an opportunity to drop off homework or to deal with students' problems with parents, on an individual basis, which was often requested by parents. These experiences were described as "totally sensory", making this study one that did not "allow the intellectual analysis to disconnect us (participants and researcher) from the emotional aspects of our humanity" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 22). The dialogues occurred in Spanish and English. All participants identified themselves as bilinguals in English and Spanish. Entry into these communities will be relatively easy. It is essential to create an atmosphere and a willingness to share experiences and insights within the framework of dialogue and retrospection.

In 2008-2009, Riverside Continuation High School had a population of 249 students (grades 9-12). Over 75% of the student enrollment was identified as Educationally Disadvantaged Youth (EDY) based on qualifications for free or reduced lunch, residence in public housing facilities, receipt of public assistance and/or text scores below the 40th percentile (Conley, 2002). The students' ethnicity percentages were as follows: Latino 34.6, African American 34.2, White 8.1, Chinese 3.8, Filipino 6, Korean 0.4, American Indian 1.1, other 10.4. The gender breakdown was male 56.5 per cent and female 43.3 per cent (p. 31).

Most students were referred to RSHS by the district Dropout Prevention Office because they ceased attending school or were severely truant. All of the students at RSHS had been placed there because they had been largely unable to fulfill the expectations of their former comprehensive high schools. Riverside Continuation High School represented the last chance for any of these students to finish school and graduate. Riverside Continuation High School had the responsibility to meet the needs of this severely at risk student population by offering an educational experience that enabled them to engage with school, find meaning in learning, and achieve academic success.

Riverside Continuation High School followed a model of project-based learning as its instructional delivery system. In small, closely-knit teams and with an emphasis on real world connections, project-based learning challenged students to practice critical thinking, develop communications skills, contribute to their communities- through community service work-and working collaboratively. The students used a variety of resources for learning and engaged in learning experiences beyond the textbooks and the classroom.

Some of the curriculum and instructional strengths of project based learning are:

1. Integration of technology into the curriculum
2. Relevant, student centered learning
3. Small class-size
4. Individualized instructional learning
5. Emphasis upon student choice of project
6. Variety of innovative teaching strategies within the projects
7. All teachers are also advisors
8. All special education students are mainstreamed

(Kaufman, 2002)

An increase in graduation rates in the last years was attributed to increased

student buy-in since implement the integrated project-based program. In 2008 the school was commended by the Superintended of Schools for graduating the highest number of African- American students in the entire district. Hence, these school communities tended to be perceived by students as far more cohesive than the comprehensive schools. The students benefited from a secondary educational experience that convinced them that they were both capable and worthy of achieving (Kaufman, 2002).

Identifying Participants

Snowball sampling is a type of purposeful sampling where the researcher asks for recommendations until the participants are selected . (Creswell, 2003) This was the procedure used for identifying participants. I looked for Latino students who had transferred from comprehensive to continuation high school and who were willing to talk and share their life experiences. I asked teachers who work at Riverside Continuation High School to recommend Latino students who had transferred from comprehensive high schools. Two teachers recommended several students and I asked four other students to join the group. Afterwards the students were invited to a general meeting in which the project was discussed in detail. At the end of the meeting, each student was provided with my phone number. Those students interested in participating were asked to contact me by a specified date. However, those students who did not respond were contacted to reaffirm their final decision.

We met in small groups to determine if the students were genuinely interested in sharing their experiences. After talking and expressing an interest in participating in the research project, 10 potential participants were selected from a group of 20. The students who were not selected were those who didn't want to commit themselves to the length of

time the project would require or who had no experience with the continuation high school (because they had just entered the school that semester). At our first individual dialogue, I gave them an informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and a Research Subject's Bill of Rights (Appendix C).

Portrait of the Participants

The population for this study were 10 Latino students who attended Riverside Continuation High School in San Francisco. There were no age or gender specifications, although among the 10 students, five were males and five were females. The participants' portraits include moments that *were* seminal in their development, all centering around their upbringing, changing environment via moving, and relationships with classmates and teachers. To protect the identity of the participants pseudonyms are used.

Ana was 17 years old and born in Nicaragua. She came to the U.S. at the age of two. She lived with her mother and four brothers and sisters. She transferred from Oceanic High School. She spoke English well and wanted to go to college and become a pediatrician.

Carmen was 18 years old. She was born in Mexico and moved to San Francisco five years ago. She lived with her aunt and three small cousins. Her father was deceased and her mother lived in Mexico with two of her sisters. She transferred from Regional High School.

Ernesto was 16 years old. He was born in Honduras and was seven years old when he came to the U.S. He lived with his mother and five siblings. He transferred from Oceanic High School.

Guadalupe was 18 years old and a senior. She was born in Mexico and was 10 years old when she came to the U.S. She lived with both her parents and three brothers. She transferred from Regional High School.

Gustavo was 17 years old and was born in El Salvador. He came to the U.S. when he was five years old. He lived with both parents and had five younger siblings. He transferred from Oceanic High School.

Jose was 18 years old and a senior in high school. He was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. at the age of two. He lived with his mother and is the oldest of five siblings. He attended Wilson High School before transferring to Riverside.

Juan was 17 years old. He was born in Guatemala and came to the U.S. at the age of 10. He was a senior at Riverside Continuation High School. He transferred from Regional High School. He lived with both his parents and four siblings.

Juana was 17 years old and a sophomore in high school. She was born in Honduras. Besides her mother and father, Juana lived with two brothers and one sister. She was the oldest child and came to this country when she was two years old. She spoke Spanish and English without an accent. She attended Webster High School before transferring to Riverside Continuation High School.

Maria was 18 years old and a senior. She was born in Mexico and lived with her mother and four siblings. She was the oldest in her family and came to this country when she was five years old. She transferred from Webster High School.

Miguel was 18 years old and was born in Nicaragua. He lived with his mother and two younger sisters. He came to the U.S. when he was 10 years old. He transferred from

Monroe High School. He loved to draw and wanted to be an artist.

Protection of Human Subjects

The procedures of the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects was adhered to throughout this study. I made every effort to keep the identities of the participants confidential by using pseudonymous whenever I referred to them and storing their research materials such as audiotapes and transcriptions in a locked file.

Restatement of the Research Question

As previously described, participatory research leads the researcher and co-researchers through an investigative process. In this study, the transformative dialogues evolved around three research questions:

1. What were the educational experiences of Latino high school students who participated in both comprehensive and continuation high schools? These experiences included:

    a. obstacles, successes and failures

    b. positive and negative perspectives

2. What were the experiences at home and in school that contributed to the academic achievement or academic underachievement of Latino students in both comprehensive and continuation high schools?

3. What connections did Latino students make between educational attainment and future employment?

Questions to Guide the Dialogue

Dialogues are different from formal interviews, which usually have a set protocol

for delivering questions even if the questions themselves are unstructured (Creswell, 2003). According to Noddings (1992):

> My use of the term *dialogue* is similar to that of Paulo Freire (1970, 2001). It is not just talk or conversation. Dialogue is open ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. Dialogue is common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. (pp.22-23).

In participatory research, questions to guide the dialogue "provide the space for critical reflection and analysis about the issues that concern the participants" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p.70). I developed the research questions and presented them to the student participants (as a group) for modification and final approval. Ada & Beutel explained that the research questions are "open" and subject to changes during the course of the project.

Afterwards the participants were invited to generate questions to guide the first dialogue. The main objective of these questions was to invite participants to engage in a reflective manner in order to voice issues that are presented in this study. I also asked the participants for their input about potential topics to discuss in future meetings. In general, participants determined the direction of the dialogues. The reciprocal nature of dialogue was be respected and the participants helped guide the path (Ada & Beutel, 1993; Noddings, 1992). "The questions should be formulated with the community and the participants assuring that the research is controlled by those who are researching their reality with you (the researcher)" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p.71).

In the initial meeting participants were trained as co-researchers. They learned about the methodology of participatory research used in this study. They learned that this methodology uses a process of dialogues or reflections involving everyone from initiation

to conclusion. They learned to prepare and review themes, to critically reflect and evaluate information, and to assist in the transcription of the dialogues.

The second dialogue focused on the participants' historical past: (a) family background, (b) childhood experiences in the home and during formal schooling, (c) progression to high school and different high school experiences (challenges and triumphs), and (d) reflection on discrimination in school and society. These areas were considered as the starting points in the dialogue and were not restrictive.

The focus of the second dialogue expanded on the themes found in the initial dialogue The information was transcribed with the assistance of the co-researchers, and everyone had the opportunity to review the themes prior to the taping of the second dialogue. The questions that guided the dialogues are listed below:

1. What have been your positive experiences in comprehensive and continuation high schools in regards to the following areas? a. classes, b. teachers, c. counselors, d. other areas

2. What have been your negative experiences in comprehensive and continuation high schools in regards to the following areas? a. classes, b. teachers, c. counselors, d. other areas

3. What are your educational goals?

4. Did you feel you were provided with adequate choices regarding your future?

5. Has the education you received in high school prepared you for employment, or for admission to college? Explain.

6. How does it feel being a Latino student?

7. Did you feel discriminated against in the U.S. society? Explain.

8. What experiences in school have helped or harmed your life as a student?

9. What experiences at home helped or harmed your life as a student?

10. Was there a person who had a positive or negative influence in your life as a student?

11. How did that person impact your life? Describe the experience.

Data Collection

This participatory study consisted of four meetings: one meeting was training students to be co-researchers, two meetings were focus groups with all 10 co-researchers, and one meeting was individual dialogues arranged with each co-researcher. At the first meeting the researcher will trained the participants to be researchers. We met at our high school at a room and time determined by the participants. The meeting was audiotaped. The researcher provided step-by- step guidance to students about the participatory research process and its significance.

The participants were involved in data analysis. They learned to critically reflect and evaluate information, and practiced writing research objectives and questions. The participants discussed the relevance of research methods to their everyday lives. They learned that research is a problem solving technique that can be exciting and creative. The second meeting also was held at our school at a time and place determined by the co-researchers. This focus provided a safe and secure environment where co-researchers felt comfortable to honestly express their true feelings and experiences.

The purpose of the second dialogue was to reflect on their backgrounds and to view the personal challenges involved in transferring from a comprehensive to a continuation high school. I was interested in gaining an understanding of how the home and school foster or hinder the academic achievement of the co-researchers. In cases

where the co-researcher felt excluded or prevented from reaching his/her academic goals, he/she was encouraged to make recommendations as to how the school could address those concerns.

The co-researchers and I critically reflected on the information in attempt to locate possible solutions that address the issues. We also critically reflected on the generative themes discovered in this session. There were no limits placed on dialogues, although they ranged from one-to-one and a half-hour in duration. Afterwards the researcher and co-researchers transcribed and considered the themes generated at the second meeting along with new ideas, problems, and issues that emerged. After the group analyzed the transcription of the second meeting and helped facilitate the organization and presentation of the generative themes, the project progressed to the third dialogue.

The third meeting was also held at our school at after school hours and in a room determined by the co-researchers. Questions to guide the focus group were grounded in issues that emerged from the dialogues and the co-researchers' input from the second group meeting. The purpose of the third dialogue was to explore the thoughts or ideas that emerged from the second focus group meeting as well as to reflect upon the personal significance of the participatory experience. As noted in the participatory research process, the researcher and co-researchers reflected critically on significant issues regarding the educational system.

The fourth meeting was an individual dialogue with each co-researcher. The purpose of this dialogue was to explore thoughts or ideas that emerged from the focus groups, as well well as to reflect upon the significance of this participatory research experience. This exchange of new information had the potential of empowering and

moving both the researcher and co-researchers towards transformative action. This resonates with Freire (1973) whose legacy reminds us that as we challenge oppression through our daily actions we transform our world.

Data Analysis

Data for the project was analyzed according to the identification of generative themes, or those thoughts, expressions and experiences that were expressed during the dialogues. As co-researchers, the students helped facilitate the organization and presentation of the themes by separating them into three sections: (1) questionnaire, (2) dialogue, and (3) observations. This made it easier for them to generate questions for the next dialogue. They also critically reflected on the themes and issues regarding the educational system. According to Freire, 1970), thematical investigation should be undertaken as a human. "As a process of inquiry, of knowledge, and thus of creation, it requires the investigators to discover the interpretation of problems, in the linking of meaningful themes" (p.87).

Thematic investigation becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a "starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character" (Freire, 1970, p. 34). This investigation as earlier stated began with the fundamental generative theme of our epic oppression as expressed by Freire (1970):

> Generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular. This broadest epochal unit, which includes a diversified range of units and sub-units contains themes of a universal character. I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination*-which implies its opposite, the theme of liberation as the objective to be achieve (p. 89)

Role of Researcher

Maguire (1987) described participatory research as a process involving various activities among them educational, where the role of the researcher and the participants was to analyze the underlying reasons for the problem through group discussions. The entire group takes collective action as one body to promote social change. This study provide the researcher with an opportunity to involved the participants as co-researchers. During the first group meeting the researcher provided guidance to participants about the participatory research process and its significance. The researcher trained the participants as co-researchers. Throughout the study the researcher and co-researchers conducted interviews, collaborated in transcribing all the dialogues, reviewed the transcripts for validity, revised them according to feedback and verified their authenticity. Everyone participated in data analysis as an ongoing process, including critically reflecting and evaluating information, asking analytical questions, and writing notes.

Maguire (1987) noted that researchers who utilize participatory approaches must be willing to open themselves to personal transformation as a result of the study. They must play the role of a participant (p. 23). This is made possible through the use of dialogue. By engaging in dialogue the researcher and co-researchers gained a better understanding of their existence in the world, discovering that they " are not born in a vacuum without history or connection to all of humanity" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 32). Dialogue and participation created the possibility for the participants in this study "to think for themselves and to innovate, as well as to remember [or discover] their history and to revive their culture for the recreation of the authentic life" (Park, 1989, p. 17). This process made it both "educational and empowering" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 40).

Profile of the Researcher

I was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Bronx, New York. In 1961, my parents

emigrated to the Bronx from a small town in Puerto Rico. Both my parents worked in

factories there. Due to her memories of hard labor and an early exit from formal

schooling at the age of 12, my mother was committed to ensuring that her children would

seek an education. My physical world as a child was small, it consisted of an apartment

complex, however my social world was large consisting of the interaction of my extended

family members. I became an avid reader at a young age, allowing books to take me

places, and the world opened up when I left college. In 1974 I received a Bachelor's

degree from The City College of the City University of New York (CCNY) in Foreign

Languages. I worked as a teacher in the South Bronx for a couple of years.

The years that followed encompassed a great deal of travel and more education. I

lived in Europe for several years, traveling extensively throughout Eastern and Western

Europe. I completed a year of study in Italy and embarked on a year-long trip throughout

the then Soviet Union. I returned to the United States via California where I worked as a

bilingual teacher in San Francisco while completing my Master's degree in Education

Administration at San Francisco State University.

Needless to say, my world was transformed. However, there is not a day that I

haven't reflected on an experience from my past. Sometimes the memories are difficult;

As a student attending public school in the South Bronx, New York, where I experienced

first hand the effects of poor schooling and discrimination. I spoke only Spanish when I

entered the eighth grade and was confronted with the arduous task of learning a second

language while my developed native language was all but ignored. The U.S. system of education is historically built solidly on a multicultural Euro-American world view which tends to benefit White students who are socialized and oriented to believe that the Western experience, culture and worldview are superior and dominant. Meanwhile nonWhite students have been castigated whenever they attempted to express and validate their own culture and cognitive styles.

Many years later, I still remember the frustration, searching for English words because I did not know how to express thoughts I could easily express in Spanish. Equally vivid are memories of some teachers' expectations that my classmates and I would not do well in school because of our language and ethnic differences. In that school a common perception was that our culture and language were inferior. We learned to feel ashamed of who we were, how we spoke, what we ate, and everything else that was different about us.

From my personal experience, the consequences of a monocultural education and racism were pervasive and profound, perpetuated by a culture and institutions founded on racist policies and practices. Many students of color like myself experience conceptual separation from their roots. We are compelled to live our own experiences and history through the assumptions and language of other people. Often times, we lost our cultural identity and found it difficult to develop a sense of affiliation and connection to school, ending up dropping out. Benign neglect on the part of the schools has allowed the momentum of institutionalized racism to accelerate to the point of overt expressions involving totally unacceptable behavior and actions. As Katz (1978) alleged, racism is perpetuated by Whites through their conscious and/or unconscious support of a culture and institutions that are founded on racist policies and practices. School policies should

assert that racism is unacceptable and interventions and strategies to counter racism should be established in all public schools in the U.S.

As the population of students of color increased and our society became more culturally, racially and linguistically diverse, the need for teachers reflecting the distribution of students of color in the U.S. schools also increased. I saw my becoming a teacher as a pedagogical necessity. I believe students benefit from having teachers who reflect their social, racial and cultural identities. As a teacher I made a commitment to inspire and empower my students to become creative and caring members of a multicultural society, engage in progressive social change, and help create change where everyone is recognize and honored for their differences. I have been profoundly inspired and guided by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire whose philosophy is grounded in the beliefs that the purpose of education in a just society is to bring about equality and social justice. His philosophy states that all students must play an active part in the learning process because students and teachers are both simultaneously learners and producers of knowledge. Critical knowledge comes from reflection and action and from questioning what is right and just. Developing this critical knowledge involves learning to perceive economic, political and social contradictions and taking action to change the oppressive reality (Freire, 1970, 1973).

Schools and educators have a vital role to play in shaping this country's future, especially as we struggle to adapt to a multicultural world and the global economy. They need to help students become well rounded individuals with skills to compete in a changing world and contribute to our rich diverse social fabric. Schools must do a better

job of keeping up with changing educational needs and acknowledge that one-size-fits-all education does not work.

My personal experience in public schools has taught me that they need to reflect the world in which we live. Schools need to model cooperation, fairness, compassion, justice, democracy and celebrate diversity. If schools are in the business of educating, then they should be in the business of communicating truth and reality and of teaching the complete history of all human experiences. By leaving our history, culture, and ideas out of the curriculum, schools have falsified education for everyone. Public schools must have a continuing emphasis on the development of character and self-esteem which are essential to the achievement of genuine educational equity and social justice. They need to prepare all students for these challenges. I hope that my memories and experiences, both positive and negative will continue to help me rename the world and help me problem solve with other educators to move towards a more just world. For as Freire (1973) alleged we cannot attain "full humanity" as long as others in our society remain oppressed and disempowered.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the dialogues of Latino high school students attending both comprehensive and continuation high schools. These findings are based on three main research questions and the sub-questions that guided the dialogues.

The data included audiotape dialogues with 10 participants. Based on the generative themes that emerged from the data, the researcher addressed each component of the research questions separately with what the participants' own categories of positive and negative experiences as well as obstacles outside of school. Examples of raw data with participants' responses to illustrate the findings are presented throughout the summaries.

Overview of Findings

In the following section I present an analysis of the dialogues and emergent themes for each question. A number of generative themes emerged regarding the academic experience of Latino high school students attending both comprehensive and continuation high schools. Through the dialogues and identification of these themes, new issues and questions arose, creating a process of action and reflection of all the students involved. This section is follow by the researcher's reflection on the dialogical process and events with a summary of the findings although each participant had his/her unique identity and cultural background, Ana, Carmen, Ernesto, Guadalupe, Jose, Juan, Juana,

Maria and Miguel were very open to share their stories and expectations. Everyday most of these students have to endure inadequate education. Most of them attend large overcrowded schools and never received the benefit of small class sizes which in turn privilege most of their non-Latino classmates. The curriculum chosen by schools where Latino students predominate is not diverse. It is Eurocentric, and excludes their histories. Regarding the textbooks used in these schools, there is an overwhelming absence of people of color. When characters of color present, they are usually secondary or supporting figures. The heroes are always White persons, even when the story has a protagonist of color, he/she is rarely the clever problem solver.

The students also have to endure being taught by unqualified teachers, teachers without licenses, substitute teachers and in classroom that lack resources, which is common in the schools they attend. Latino students have been historically underserved by an educational system where administrative demographics, curricula, and school norms are guided predominantly by those who are linguistically and racially dominant and subscribed to the mainstream ideology. The current educational climate has not altered this trend and continues to perpetuate the educational hierarchy.

Additionally, most of theses students have to endure neighborhood violence and poverty. Their neighborhood lies in the middle of major gang "turfs". The rivalries existing among these gangs makes it very difficult for these students to participate in after school activities. The past two years have been exceptionally severe in terms of violent crimes in San Francisco deeply affecting a large portion of our student. Last year, one

student who attends our school, was sent to the witness protection program because a bullet intended for his older brother stuck his baby, who was being held in the arms of our student, resulting in the baby's death. This year, after four shootings in one week, some parents met with our staff stating that their children cannot come to school because the streets are not safe for them coming or going. The police confirmed that there is a huge shooting spree occurring in the neighborhood around this time.

Table 4 shows the group of ten participants at the time this study was conducted including ages, grades, and the number of years attending comprehensive and continuation high schools.

Table # 4

Characteristics of Participants

Participants	Age	Grade	Years in Comprehensive High School	Years in Continuation High School
Ana	17	11	1	2
Carmen	18	12	2	2
Ernesto	16	10	1	1
Guadalupe	18	12	2	2
Gustavo	17	11	2	1
Jose	18	12	3	1
Juan	17	11	2	1
Juana	17	11	1	2
Maria	18	12	2	2
Miguel	18	11	1	2

The majority of these students are poor. They are identified in schools as

Educationally Disadvantaged Youth (EDY) based on qualification for free lunch,

residence in public housing, receipt of public assistance, or test scores below the 40th

percentile. Many come from single parent families where the parent holds various jobs,

and where many times the family depends on the student's part time employment.

Throughout the dialogues the young voices of these students painfully reflected

on many of their educational experiences. In general, the students held more negative

than positive perceptions of the high schools. Below is each research question with their

positive and negative perception about comprehensive and continuation high schools.

Research Question # 1:

What were the Educational Experiences of Latino High School Students

who Participated in both Comprehensive and Continuation High Schools?

Positive Experiences in Comprehensive High School

Four participants said that their teachers encouraged and helped them in the

comprehensive high school. Carmen and Guadalupe had the clearest point of view about

their experiences. Carmen talked her experiences as an ELD students.

> Carmen: As an ELD student I needed a lot of help especially in writing
> and when I attended the comprehensive high school I was put in an ELD
> class and they helped me. I had a teacher who spoke Spanish and there
> was a paraprofessional in the classroom who also helped us. We hsd a
> lot of help.
>
> Researcher: Why ere you attending continuation high school?
>
> Carmen: I messed up. I started hanging out with the wrong crowd and
> stop going to class. Now, I regret it. My teachers were helping me pass the
> high school exit exam (CAHSEE). I wanted to go back to my old school.

Carmen felt that she was effectively being served by her comprehensive high school and was satisfied with the education she was getting there. As stated above, Carmen started hanging out with the wrong crowd and started cutting classes. She became a truant and was transferred to a continuation high school.

Similarly Guadalupe discussed her experiences with her classes and teachers in the comprehensive high school.

> Guadalupe: My regular high school was good. I liked my school. I just
> did not have enough credits to graduate and had to transfer
> to a continuation high school. I was already taking Geometry and
> I liked the class. I feel that I was more challenged over there.
>
> Researcher: How were your teachers?
>
> Guadalupe: My teachers were fine. They helped me. I felt I was
> being prepared to pass the high school exit exam (CAHSEE).

Jose commented about his experiences in the biology class.

> Jose: I liked my biology class. We did many experiments and once
> dissected a frog. It was interesting. I liked my teacher too.
>
> Researcher: Why did you transfer to a continuation high school?
>
> Jose: I had to. I wanted to graduate with my class and was missing
> credits.

Jose like many other students was passing his classes in comprehensive high school but Was short of credits and had to transfer to make them up and graduate with his class.

Juana discussed her experiences:

> Juana: I liked my history teacher. She had us work in groups
> and it was fun.
>
> Researcher: Why did you go to continuation high school?
>
> Juana: I was cutting other classes with my friends and flunked most of them.
> I just liked my history class because the teacher was nice.
>
> In these examples Carmen, Guadalupe, Jose and Juana talked about their

experiences and perceptions of their teachers and classes in comprehensive high school.

They liked some of their teachers and even felt that they could have achieved their

educational goals there. However, they admitted that they had failed. Some of them

would have benefited from effective counseling which would have helped them get back

on track at the comprehensive high school and remain there.

Negative Experience in Comprehensive high school

Teachers Did Not Care

Five of the participants' accounts portrayed their teachers' hostile behavior as a

demonstration of not caring. Gustavo furthered his definition of teachers' not caring by

describing a teacher who constantly got into arguments with his students in class.

> Gustavo: I had this teacher, Mr. Brown, I didn't think he liked to teach.
> He got into this noisy arguments with the students and sometimes it would
> go on and on until the class was over. He would fight with them over anything.
> Coming late to class, chewing gum. I mean anything. I didn't think he liked
> students. He argued with them, didn't teach them and we didn't learn anything.
> I really didn't care for the class and stopped going.
>
> Researcher: Did you or any other student try to complain about the situation?
>
> Gustavo: Na…the students just sat there and waited until he finished arguing.
> Sometimes they asked questions, asked him to explain the work better and
> sometimes he would explain it and we would just do the work.
>
> Researcher: How did that make you feel?
>
> Gustavo: Not good. I didn't feel like doing my work or even going
> back to class.

Gustavo's narrative illustrated the lack of supportive relationships students can

have with their high school teachers. He felt that the students were not getting the subject

matter knowledge in class.

Miguel discussed a similar experience:

Miguel: My history class was always chaotic. Students screaming,

changing seats and always throwing things around. The teacher wouldn't say anything. He just let them do it. I didn't think he cared.

Researcher: Why do you say that? Can you give an example?

Miguel: He was always yelling at the students and the students just yelled back at him and one day a student threw a book at him. He was not looking and he didn't know who did it. Everybody laughed. The students just didn't listen to him and he could not control that class. The students did what they wanted in there.

Miguel felt that the teacher's yelling at the students showed lack of caring and lack of control.

Another student, Juan, discussed his experiences with a teacher who yelled at him.

Juan: Mr. Clark always yelled at me and I always yelled back. I was always getting into fights with him. He always treated me wrong. And when I asked questions, he just made short and moved on.

Juan's account portrayed students modeling the same behavior of the teacher. In order to get an orderly classroom environment, teachers must set good examples and model the behavior that they expect from their students.

Ana commented on a similar experience:

Ana: My teacher, Mrs. Davis, did not care about her students. She did not explain the work even when we asked her questions. She would just ignored us and keep talking.

Researcher: How would that make you feel?

Ana: It made me feel like leaving school and never coming back. I tried changing classes but my counselor did not let me.

Ana's negative experience in comprehensive high school showed how the notion of teachers not caring can have detrimental effects on the student's academic growth.

Maria expressed her experience with an uncaring teacher:

Maria: I didn't like my algebra class. I did not understand it and I felt that the teacher was going too fast. She was impatience too. I think that she didn't like me to ask too many questions and would always tell somebody else to help me instead of her answering them. I felt that she did not care if I understood the work or not.

Maria's description outlined the lack of accountability inherent in the teacher display of not caring. She described how her teacher reassigned her responsibility to another student. This teacher's lack of caring can be very negative and can contribute to the academic underachievement of the student.

Invalidation of Home Language/Culture

Five participants reported that they felt alienated in school because their teachers always ignore their culture and language. Carmen, Miguel and Gustavo's narratives illustrated their perceptions of the teacher's blatant insensitivity and disrespect for their cultures.

> Carmen: My teacher always criticized me for speaking Spanish. I was angry and hurt one day when she yelled at me "we are in America, speak English." I was so embarrassed. I wanted to leave school, to disappear. I started hating that class. I speak Spanish. Spanish is my language. In another class, the English class, I felt that I needed help in writing and the teacher would get very annoyed when I asked for help. I needed ESL classes. I felt that many teachers didn't really care for Latino students.

Carmen's experiences with her teachers showed cultural bias and a lack of sensitivity on the teacher's part. Such negative attitudes from teachers often can have a detrimental effect on students' learning.

> Miguel discussed a similar experience:

> Miguel: Mi experiencia en la escuela secundaria fue bien dificil y negative. Me acuerdo cuando ingrese a la escuela que no hablaba nada ingles y no recibi mucha ayuda con el trabajo de la escuela. Y una vez mi mama vino a hablar con la maestra y esta le dijo a mi mama que hablara ingles en la casa. Yo me senti muy resentido y con mucho coraje nosotros ni sabiamos ingles en la casa, como lo ibamos a hablar? Mi mama se sintio indignada. Nos hicieron sentir mal.

> {My experience in regular school was very negative. I remember when I enrolled in school, I did not speak a word of English and I did not get much help with my schoolwork. And one time my mother visited the school and my teacher told her to speak to me in English at home. I was very hurt and angry. We didn't even

know English, how can we speak it at home. My mother got very upset. We were put through so much.}

Researcher: Como te sentiste?

{How did that make you feel?}

Miguel: Horrible. Yo me senti muy mal y ya no queria llegar a la clase. Ya nunca hablaba ni hacia preguntas. Por eso creo que los estudiantes van a las clases y tienen todas esas experiencias y no les gusta y dejan de ir. Las clases tambien estan demaciado llenas y muchos estudiantes de clases. ELD se salen de la escuela.

{Horrible. I felt very bad and I never wanted to go back to class. I did not Speak or ask questions in class anymore. That's why I think many students go to class, see all that, they don't like it and stop going. Also classes are too crowded and many ELD students just drop out of school.}

Miguel's description of his experience as an ELD student gave additional support for the systemic lack of cultural understanding and tolerance for Latino students by their teachers. Additionally, it showed that educational success is still elusive for Latino ELD students in U.S. public schools.

Jose commented on his experiences:

Jose: El primer dia que fui a esta clase la maestra me empezo a llamar Joe. A principio no me importo pero mis amigos se reina de mi me decian "ahi va el gringo Joe." Eso me molestaba.

{The first time I went to class the teacher started calling me Joe. At the beginning I didn't care but my friends laughed at me and Started saying "there goes the gringo." That bothered me.}

Researcher: Que hiciste tu?   {What did you do?}

Jose: Yo me senti un poco raro porque la maestra me habia cambiado el nombre. Ella nunca me llamo Jose. Pero yo no me atrevi a decirle nada.

{I felt weird because the teacher had changed my name. She never called me Jose and I didn't dare say anything.}

The experience of having his name changed to Joe was very painful to Jose who had to endured his friends making fun of him. He didn't like it, but remained silent. This

action showed a lack of sensitivity of the student's culture by the teacher. Educators

should not insist in changing the names the students bring to school. Instead they should

learn to pronounced and validate them.

Maria commented on her experiences with her teacher:

Maria: Carmen, Jose and I had the same class at different times
but with the same teacher. We work together and often got the
same or similar grade. When my teacher found out we were all friends,
he asked me jokingly just how close I was to Carmen and Jose.

Researcher: What happened, then?

Maria: I was always quiet but that time I yelled at her "can't we study
Together?"

Maria felt that her teacher thought they were cheating. In Mexico, teachers urge

their students to work together in groups. Here, Maria felt that her teacher disrespected

her culture.

Another participant Ana, talked about her experiences:

Ana: I had issues whenever I read in my class. My teacher always corrected my

accent. She would always stopped me and made me repeat what seemed to be every

word. It was very annoying to me. I wanted to learn how to pronounce the words, but I

liked my accent and I wanted to keep it.

Researcher: How did that make you feel?

Ana: Sad, angry, and insulted. I even stopped talking in class.

Researcher: Did you let your teacher know?

Ana: I just didn't read anymore and stopped participating in
class.

Ana felt frustrated and didn't participate in class anymore. She spoke only

Spanish at home. Rather than building on the student's cultural and linguistic knowledge

and in becoming aware of the student's incomplete mastery of the English language,
many teachers just demand that students embrace a process of linguistic eradication. This
creates problems for the students. Instead teachers should adjust their teaching strategies
to their students' limited English proficiency.

Positive Experiences in Continuation High School

Small Class Size/Family Feeling

Four participants articulated that transferring to a continuation high school had
been a positive experience. During an interview, Ernesto, Maria, Gustavo, and Miguel
fervently discussed their thoughts about the classes, the school and the teachers who were
very friendly and always offered help.

> Ernesto: I liked my continuation high school. I liked project based
> learning classes. They are small. It was like a family and the school
> was small too. It had less than three hundred students.
>
> Reseacher: What about the classes?
>
> Ernesto: I found the classes pretty easy and I liked them better than
> in my other school. We did projects about different cultures. I was
> doing one on Honduras and I was learning a lot about my country and
> about my roots. Where I came from and what my people have accomplished.
> Here, I went to class. One thing I didn't like though, was not having sports,
> because I like playing basketball.

Ernesto's impression of his continuation school was positive. He mentioned project-
based learning and the small class size which led to a major interest in the curriculum
and better attendance.

> Maria talked about her experiences with the teachers.
>
> Maria: The teachers are very nice and like to help us. I have Ms. Davis,
> She is very sweet and always ask us if we need help. I feel that I can
> talk to her about anything. She speaks Spanish and likes Latino students.
> On "El Dia de los Muertos" she put a big altar in her classroom and we
> all brought stuff to put on it. She asked everyone to help decorated it. She
> is one of the nicest teachers I've had.

Gustavo also talked about his experiences with his teachers.

Gustavo: Mr. Wright was my math teacher. He was a real good teacher and very understanding. He always helped us. He made sure we all understood the work. He kept asking and explained it until we got it.

Miguel also commented on his experiences in continuation high school.

Miguel: I like this school because it's small and in my project we get to do a lot of outdoor activities and go on many fieldtrips. I really like that because I like the outdoors.

Researcher: What about the classes:

Miguel: I like them too. I like project-based learning classes.

In their narratives, Ernesto, Maria, Gustavo, and Miguel revealed positive impressions about continuation high school. They were exposed to a better educational environment at this school. They liked the school, the project-based learning classes and had close relationships with teachers and students.

Negative Experiences of Continuation High School

Teachers had low Expectations for Students

Four participants stated that teachers in continuation high school had low expectation for students. Guadalupe fervently discussed her experiences with her classes which she felt were too easy.

Guadalupe: I didn't like continuation high school. I found my classes heck of easy, too watered down for me. In my other school I was already taking geometry. In continuation high school I was put in an integrated math class, I told my teacher that it was too easy for me. He didn't do anything. The history class was the same, easy. In the English class we did lots of dittoes. There was no science class. In fact they didn't even have a science lab. I didn't feel that I was being prepared to pass the high school exit exam. Very few students pass the CAHSEE in continuation high school.

Researcher: Talk about your experiences with the teachers?

Guadalupe: I felt that some of them asked too little of us is like they were already convinced that we couldn't do the work. I found out that many

teachers in continuation high school didn't have credentials in the subjects they taught, like math and science for example.

Researcher: How did that make you feel?

Guadalupe: Not good. Especially when the teachers were also your counselors. That's terrible. The school was also full of mainly Black and Latino students who were there because it seemed that they couldn't make it in any other school. This was like a dumping ground for misbehaving students who couldn't do the work in a regular high school. I just wanted to leave.

Guadalupe's narrative illustrated that she was not being challenged. She stated that the students were devalued and the teachers asked little of them with the belief that they were not capable learners.

Jose commented on his experiences:

Jose: I was not prepared to pass the CAHSEE.
I took it two times and still didn't pass it.

Researcher: Why do you think that happened?

Jose: I can't write English. I didn't learn how to write a good paragraph in my class. I don't know math either.

Researcher: How come you don't know those subjects?

Jose: I took them but I don't know them. The teachers made them easy and many times they would just give us dittoes and packet work and just let us do the work by ourselves.

Jose felt that he was not prepared to pass the CAHSEE. His teachers had low expectations for the class. Instead of giving the students rigorous work to enable them to pass the standardized exams, they just gave them packet work making the class easy.

Another student, Juan, discussed his experiences with his classes:

Juan: Yo necesitaba clases de ESL. Me sentia un poco perdido en mis clases no entendia nada. Me sentaba en la silla callado todo el tiempo y a veces me sentia humillado sin saber ingles.

{I needed ESL classes and there weren't any. I felt lost in my classes. I didn't understand anything and couldn't do the work.}

Juan felt isolated and needed help. He was not learning. The school was insensitive to the linguistic competence of ESL students and unfairly narrowed their educational opportunities. Instead, they should have made modifications to their program design and instruction and make the accommodations necessary to promote ESL students' learning.

Another participant, Carmen, discussed her thoughts about her classes:

> Carmen: During my first semester here, I was absent a lot. First, my ant got very sick. She suffers from Asthma and I had to go with her to the hospital several times. After that I got sick too. I missed more than half of the semester. My teachers gave me a grade and passed me.

> Researcher: How did you feel about it?

> Carmen: I thought that my teachers felt sorry for me and that's why they passed me. My aunt said the same thing.

Carmen felt that her teachers passed her without scrutiny. Teachers show that they have low expectations for students when they promote them without requiring students to master all subjects and skills they need to know to progress to the next grade level. Teachers should, instead, modified their curriculum and develop instructional programs for those students with dramatic and persistent patterns of absences.

In summary, the data for Research Question # 1 revealed more negative than positive responses regarding the academic experiences of Latino students attending both comprehensive and continuation high schools. Regarding comprehensive high schools, these schools were found to offers a myriad of academic classes and had all their teachers licensed but were overcrowded, inflexible, and taught a curriculum that was alienating to students.

Continuation high schools, on the other hand, offered an alternative method of education and a personalized program of instruction with project-based learning but failed to provide students with a rigorous curriculum, offered no ESL classes, and had

mostly unlicensed teachers. The participants found that both school models failed to offer

them an educational experience that empowered them, kept them from dropping out, and

helped them accomplished their educational goals.

Research Question # 2

What Are the Experiences at Home and in School that Have Contributed To

the Academic Achievement and Academic Underachievement of Latinos

in Both Comprehensive and Continuation high Schools?

Academic Achievement

Three participants described some positive experiences that contributed to their

academic achievement while attending either a comprehensive or continuation high

school. They talked about teachers showed that they cared about students by relating

the curriculum tot heir lives and by availing themselves outside normal class hours. Juana

talked about her science teacher in her comprehensive high school.

> Juana: I always remembered Mr. Oaks my science teacher. He explained
> things over and over again before moving on. He made sure everyone
> understood the lesson. I really liked that because I always got it and it was a good
> feeling. I was always able to do the work in that class.

Ernesto conversed about how he involved his family in his class project in his

continuation high school.

> Ernesto: I did a great project in one of my classes. I had to write a book about
> myself. I wrote a 30 page book about me and my family. I included pictures of
> my family and also my own drawings. I interviewed members of my family
> in both Spanish and English. I felt great doing that project. I did well in that class.
> I got a good grade.

Likewise Gustavo talked about a teacher in the continuation high school who

helped him after school.

> Gustavo: I liked Mr. Wright. He always offered to help me. I could go to his
> classroom after class and he always help me by going over stuff I didn't

understand or by going over homework. He always gave me good advice
about school and about staying out of trouble.

In all these narratives, Ernesto, Gustavo and Juana divulged that these experiences
in their classes and with their teachers provided them with a foundation of active learning
that contributed to their academic achievement. Theses students felt that good teaching
and learning took place in their classrooms everyday and they felt connected. They felt
that their classes offered them the opportunity to participate in learning that directly
applied to the real world.

<div align="center">Academic Underachievement</div>

Family Responsibilities

Although education is highly valued by most Latino families regardless of
economic background, three participants had experiences at home which contributed to
their own academic underachievement. Two of them helped support themselves and their
families by working until 11:00 or midnight while another served as a translator because
he was the only English speaking member of the family. These three families depended
on the students' help to be able to managed pressures of daily life dealing in the U.S.,
such as working multiple jobs, health issues, and lack of the language. For example, Ana
and Jose had commitments in the home and family conditions, which sometimes caused
conflicts. They both talked about their family obligations.

Ana was a student who held great responsibilities at home. Although she knew
that caring for her younger siblings was impacting her homework time and preventing
her from participating in extracurricular activities, she understood that her mother
needed her help. She talked about these responsibilities:

Researcher: What experiences at home and in school helped or harmed the
development of your life as a student?

Ana: Um..it's been hard for me going to both regular and continuation high school. I have to help my mother at home, up to this day. My mother is a single mom and has two jobs. She even works on weekend. She cleans offices and houses. I am the oldest in my family and have to take care of my younger brothers and sisters.

Researcher: Can you talk about your home experience. Is it helpful or harmful to you as a student?

Ana: It is hard. I can't hardly do my homework or participate in many school activities. I don't go out a lot either but I have to help my mother out.

Researcher: How do your manage your time?

Ana: I have to get up early in the morning, feed my brothers breakfast and take them to school. (pause) this is why I was late to my classes so many times. Then after I get out of school, I pick them up, bring them home and help my mother with dinner and cleaning up.

Ana felt that her family obligations impacted her school work by not allowing ample time for homework. The combination of family and school responsibilities also prevented her from participating in extracurricular activities. She had to constantly balance her responsibilities at school and in the home, not an easy undertaking for a high school senior.

Another participant, Jose, discussed his experiences:

Researcher: What experiences helped or harmed the development of your life as a student?

Jose: As a high school senior I have responsibilities at school but I also have responsibilities at home. I have to help my mother. She is a single mom, works extremely hard and is also very sick. She suffers from asthma.

Researcher: How do you do it?

Jose: Well I'm the only one who speaks English at home. When my mother and younger siblings get sick, I go with them to the hospital. I even have to call the ambulance sometimes for my mom. She gets very sick.

Researcher: How does it make you feel?

Jose: Well..both good and bad. Sometimes I want to go to school but I can't because I have to be at the hospital wither. But she is my mother. And she is a good mother. She also wants me to study and feels bad because I'm not in school. But I know that she needs my help. She doesn't speak any English and I'm not going to leave her by herself.

Jose suspected that this experience at home contributed to his academic

underachievement. He also knew that as the oldest in the family and the only one who

spoke English, he had the responsibility to help out.

Another participant, Gustavo, commented on his family responsibilities.

Researcher: Talk about your activities after school. What do you do?

Gustavo: After I get out of school I go to work. I work at a restaurant. I work most evenings and weekends. I've been doing it for two years now. It's hard working and going to school but I have to work to support myself and to help my family out. Sometimes I'm so tired that when I get home I just go to sleep. And sometimes I cannot get up to get to school on time.

Researcher: How are you doing in school?

Gustavo: Fine. I'm doing good. I just need to work on my lateness. This week I was late three times. I definitely have to work on that.

Gustavo said that he was doing fine in school and that he wanted to go to college but that

he needed to keep his job to help the family out. He had been talking to his parents about

his plans to attend college. He was doing well in school and was already gathering

information about college and attending college fairs. He said that his parents were proud

of him.

Gustavo: I want to do good in school, get good grades and get accepted to college to surprise my father and my mother.

Gustavo's mother confirmed his story in a conversation about him. As shown in my

journal, {the conversation went like this:}

"Quiero que Gustavo salga bien en la escuela. Estoy preocupada por sus tardanzas. El es buen hijo y trabaja mucho para ayudarnos. Creo que es por eso que tiene tantas tardanzas y yo quiero hablar con el sobre eso para que no trabaje tantas horas.

{I want Gustavo to do well in school. I'm worry about his lateness. He is a good son and works very hard to help his family. That's why he has those lateness but I'm going to talk to him about cutting down on his working hours.}

Both Gustavo and his mother wanted to work on a solution for his lateness. His mother was supporting his decision to go to college and wanted to discuss with him getting a more flexible work schedule.

Obstacles of Standardized Testing

Two participants, Jose and Ernesto, commented on standardized tests which they had taken more than once. They added that they had never taken the required classes which would have prepared them to pass these tests. Particularly the high school exit exam (CAHSEE).

Researcher: Has the education you receive in high school prepared you for the standardized test?

{Te preparo la educacion que recibistes en la escuela secundaria para estos examenes?}

Jose: No. He tomado el examen dos veces. Y no pase le parte escrita. Yo nunca habia escrito un ensayo de cinco parrafos en ninguna de mis clases de ingles.

{No. I took the exam twice and couldn't pass the written part. I have never written a five paragraph essay in any of my English classes.}

Researcher: Puedes hablar sobre esa experiencia. Porque no aprendiste a escribirlo?

{Can you talk about that experience? How come you didn't learn to write a five paragraph essay?}

Jose: No. Nunca escribi un ensayo tan largo. Nadie me enseno y por eso no pude pasar el CAHSEE. Si no lo paso no podre obtener el diploma de high school.

{No. I never wrote a long essay like that. No one ever taught me to write it and I couldn't pass CAHSEE the first time. If I don't pass it I won't be able to get a high school diploma. I won't graduate.}

Researcher: Is there any tutoring available for students?

{Hay tutoria disponible para los estudiantes?}

Jose: Si, la hay. Pero es para despues de la escuela y yo tengo que trabajar. El
unico dia que puedo es el domingo y no hay ese dia.
{Yes. But it is after school and I have to go to work. The only day I can make is
Sunday and there is nothing on that day.}

Jose felt frustrated because if he did not pass the California High School Exit Exam

(CAHSEE) it meant that he was not going to be able to get a high school diploma even if

he finished all the required course work.

Similarly Maria discussed her experiences with standardized testing.

Researcher: Can you comment on your experiences with standardized test?

Maria: I have taken the CAHSEE twice and still haven't passed. I failed both
parts-English and math. I really didn't take a lot of math classes in high school.
I don't have a good background in English. I really lacked all those skills and
I guess I don't know how to take those tests. I feel I need testing skills.

Researcher: How about tutoring? If the school offering tutoring?

Maria: Yes they are and I am going twice a week, hoping I pass this test
next time.

These students realized that standardized tests were very crucial and exerted a

powerful influence on most educational decisions that affect their lives. They identified

the lack of required skills and school support as the main factors that hindered their

opportunity to successfully pass the CAHSEE.

Maria felt bad about not having passed the CAHSEE, but she was attending

tutoring sessions to prepare for it. She was aware that she lacked test taking skills. Her

comment brought forth the importance for Latino students to learn specific test-taking

skills that would help them do well on these standardized tests. It was evident that not

being able to pass the CAHSEE created a stigma of not being intelligent and a sense of

low-self esteem for Latino students, which could also result in dropping out of school.

Another participant, Juan, about not passing the CAHSEE and how it was linked to the

high drop out rate of Latino students.

> Juan: Bueno la mayoria de nosotros no pasamos el CAHSEE y muchos se salen
> de la escuela pr esa razon. Los que completamos los requisitos de graduacion
> tambien nos salimos. Tampoco nos dan el diploma y para que quedarnos?

> {Well, the majority of us do not pass the CAHSEE and many leave school for that
> Reason. Those of us who finished the graduation requirements leave too. They do
> not give us the diploma either way so why stay?}.

> Researcher: Why does that happens?

> {Porque pasa eso?}

> Juan: Bueno si no pasamos el examen no nos dan el diploma. Nos dan un
> certificado y nos dicen que podemos regresar a repetir el examen. Y como yo
> quiero mi diploma si no lo paso regreso a repetirlo.

> {Well, if we don't pass the test, we don't get the high school diploma. They give
> us a certificate and tell us we can come back and repeat the exam. I want my
> diploma so if I don't pass it I'll be back to repeat it.}

Juan's comments illustrated the effects that standardized tests, particularly the CAHSEE,

have on Latino students, contributing to the high drop out rate in that community. He

stated that ever since it was required that high school students pass the CAHSEE before

graduation, many Latinos who did not pass simply left school.

High Drop Out Rate

A particular phenomenon that brought on varying levels of awareness in all

participants was the alarming high school drop out epidemic in the Latino community.

All participants agreed that not having a high school diploma resulted in little hope for a

descent future. They stated that dropouts were more likely to get in trouble with the

police and land in jail than a person with a high school diploma. They were concerned

with the fact that high school dropouts were more likely to live in poverty, get involved

with drugs and gangs, go to jail, experience chronic poor health, and depend on

government assistance.

Three participants, Juana, Ernesto and Miguel, commented on the drop out

problem in their communities. Juana talked about her experience with her brother who

was incarcerated.

Juana: My brother left school when he was in the 10th grade. He did not want to go back
even when my mother begged him to. He started hanging out with his friends and stopped
coming home. One day the police came to my house and told
    My mother that my brother belonged to Los Surenos" (gang) and was accused of
    killing someone. My brother is still in jail.

Juana's brother was the classic example of a student who drops out of school, hangs out

on the streets, and finds himself in trouble with the law and involved in gangs.

Ernesto commented on his experience with school dropouts.

Researcher: Can you talk about the Latino school drop out problem?

Ernesto: Well, my cousin Carlos was almost 18 years old and was suspended
from school for five days for getting into a fight. His mother said that the
suspension was too long. She was angry and wanted him back in school.

Researcher: What happened?

Ernesto: He just stayed home after the suspension and did not want to go back
to school. He said that he was not learning anything and complained that one of
his teachers-his history teacher-made him feel ashamed of his origin. We are from
Honduras and that teacher has gone there, was mugged and now talks bad about
the country. Anyway, my cousin just dropout of school . Later he started using
drugs, I think he was also selling them. One day he got arrested and was locked
up. He is out now but cannot get a job.

Ernesto agreed with the mother that suspending his cousin, Carlos, for five days was

excessive. This confirms that oftentimes school suspensions make leaving school an

inevitable outcome and logical choice for students who are at high risk of dropping out.

Ernesto also commented that the incident Carlos faced in his history class showed his

pride in his culture. He said that many times students leave school not because of their

inability to do work but because of learning environments and alienating curricula

combined with difficult conditions in their lives. Students who drop out of school are

headed for a life of poverty and underemployment.

> Another participant, Ana, explained, "The drop out rate for Latino students is too high. It is unacceptable. On any given day more Latino youth are in prison than at school or at a job. And there is a big problem. There are no jobs, we look for them and we can't find them." She also talked about the schools.

> Researcher: Talk about the school dropout problem with Latino students.

> Ana: It's huge. Many leave school because they have to work, girls leave because they get pregnant and others just hate school.

> Researcher: Why do you think that happens?

> Ana: School is boring. Even to me. But my mom is always there telling me to graduate from high school. I have to work and go to school and it's not easy. Coming from work tired at night and then having to get up early to get to school, it's hard. It is also true, classes are boring.

> Researcher: Can you comment on that?

> Ana: Well I would like to learn about my people, about Central America where I'm from. My history teacher just mentioned it for two seconds and moved on to someplace else. She did not even spend a day on it. I was really upset. I was waiting for us to get to it. And she just flew over it. I hated that she did that.

> Researcher: Did you let her know?

> Ana: Yes, she said to look at the class syllabus. What can I do? But I tell you these are some of the reasons why students just don't go to class. They want to know about their culture and heritage, not just what the teacher decides to put in the class syllabus.

Ana comments were similar to Ernesto who talked about alienating curricula. Ana felt

that the teacher should spend more time teaching culture.

> According to participants, schools must provide Latino students with solutions

that can work and can help them finish high school. They stated that schools must helped

Latino students who had already dropped out to return to school and get their diploma. They wanted schools to prepare Latino students to pass the CAHSEE and provide them with the same educational opportunities that other students enjoy instead of placing them in remedial or low intensive classes. "Asking little of us already convinced of our inability to achieve," exclaimed Miguel, adding that students must be taught with rigor to enable them to pass CASHEE.

In general, the data for Research Question # 2 revealed that the student participants had many obstacles and experiences in school and at home that contributed to their academic underachievement. Schools have failed to provide these students with a curriculum that was interesting, engaging and tht reflected their cultures. These students had received discouraging advice about pursuing college. Schools have tracked these students in courses that were remedial or vocational and failed to prepared them to pass the high school exit exam (CAHSEE). Additionally, schools failed to offer them supportive environments and these students dropped out at unacceptable high rates. It is important to note that students' responsibilities at home such as staying home to serve as translator for medical or legal appointments, helping with younger siblings or working to financially help the family, were mentioned as part of the experiences that contributed to their academic underachievement. The positive experiences that contribute to the academic achievement of Latino students occurred when the curriculum related to their lives, when their teachers offered to help them and when the teachers showed interest in them.

Research Question # 3

What Connections Do Latino Students Make between Educational

Attainment and Future Employment?

Correlation between Future Education and Future Employment

Future Employment

This was a problem area for everybody, nobody was happy with it. The participants who were more vocal about were Gustavo, Carmen, Maria and Miguel. They expressed frustration with the education they received in high school and said that it did not prepare them for good jobs.

> Researcher: Has the education that you received in high school prepared you for employment or for admission to college?

> Carmen: No. Not at all. I was a bilingual student and in my classes I did not learn to write or speak English well. I feel that the classes were watered down, made too easy for us because we did not know English. I really did not learn a lot in high school.

> Researcher: Why do you say that?

> Carmen: Because I feel that I did not get a lot of support from my teachers. They didn't teach me right or what I needed to know, like to pass the CAHSEE. They were not concerned. My guidance counselor was never there for me. She never gave me good advice about college or told me about careers. And even my family, they were too strict with me. My high school education was a waste.

> Researcher: How does it make you feel?

> Carmen: Bad. Real bad. Right now I can't write good English and have no math skills. I don't know what type of job I'll get. I don't feel I'm ready for a good job or even for college. I feel that I need skills. I should go back to high school.

Carmen described her experience in her high school. As an English language learner, she needed special support but did not get it.

Maria disclosed her thoughts about connections between educational attainment and future employment:

> Researcher: Do you feel you have been provided with adequate choices regarding your future?

> Maria: No. I never discussed career choices with my counselor and I feel that I did not get good training in high school. The classes I took were

mainly remedial classes. I did not take good science classes. I have never been in a science lab. In fact I don't know any science. I was given very few classes in math. I only took basic math.

Researcher: What are your educational goals?

Maria: I would like to be a hairdresser and later go to college and study business. Right now I have a job. I work at the Safeway. I have been working there for three years. This year they asked me to work in the cash register. My salary was going to go up, but I couldn't do it.

Researcher: Why not?

Maria: Because you need to know math and I'm not good at it. I was never good in math because I did not take many math classes in school. Now, I lost a great opportunity to make more money. So I can't say that the education I got prepared me for good employment. Right now I cannot be a cashier and get a better salary. In the future if I want a better job, I have to go back to school.

Researcher: How do you feel about it?

Maria: I feel bad. I feel that after going to high school for so many years I should have learned something. At least to be able to hold a good job after high school.

Maria commented on the fact that her high school education was poor and did not prepare her for future employment. She recognized the fact that she needed more training to advance at her present job.

Another participant, Miguel, discussed the connections between educational attainment and future employment.

Miguel: I want to join the army so I can go to college. The army will pay for my education and that way I can get a good job. Right now and even after I graduate from high school I don't feel prepared for a good job.

Researcher: Why is that?

Miguel: I feel that I don't have good skills. I still can't write good English. I make too many spelling mistakes and I'm not good in math either. So I'm not prepared for a job that will pay me good money yet.

Miguel wanted to join the army to be able to pay his college education. He felt that his

high school education did not teach him useful skills like math and English, needed in the

employment market.

Gustavo shared his experiences connecting education and employment.

Researcher: Talk about your experiences making connections between your
education and future employment.

Gustavo: I am working right now. I am a sales clerk at Home Depot. I have
been working there for a year and a half. Before that, I worked in the cash register
at a restaurant. I did good. I'm good in math. I like math. I need to get better in
my writing but I think I do good.

Researcher: How do you feel about your high school education?

Gustavo: I feel that the education I received in high school help me get a
good job. I think the job I have now is good but later on I want to go to college
and study business. I like to have my own business in the future.

Gustavo was the only one satisfied with the education he had received in high school.

The data for Research Question # 3 revealed mainly unsatisfactory responses for

the connection that Latino students make between educational attainment and future

employment. These responses were very explicit, describing how the education they

received in both comprehensive and continuation high school did not prepare them to

pass the CAHSEE or for good jobs. The data show that the schools needed reforms,

change in the curricula and more resources to help the Latino students pass the CAHSEE,

keep them from dropping out and get decent jobs.

Reflection on the Dialogical Process

The dialogical process allowed students participants to describe their educational

experiences and explore the roots of the academic underachievement of Latino students

in secondary schools. This process began by addressing the ways secondary schools

"push out" and alienate linguistically and economically marginalized students. Their

voices transformed the written word and reacted to a system of unjust and inadequate

education. As the dialogues gained intensity, the students claimed that they received

unequal treatment in the schools which contributed to their academic underachievement.

The students verbalized their experiences and concerns. It was as though they had

never been led to reflect on the environment of the schools. They shared their experiences

in continuation high school stating that going there was their last chance to finish high

school and graduate. The students criticized the fact that continuation high schools lacked

bilingual education and did not really prepared them to pass CAHSEE. However, they

found that the project-based learning classes and the personalized program of instruction

offered at these schools provided and educational experience that enabled them to engage

with school again and find meaning in learning.

Listening to each other helped to paint a more complete image of their

educational experiences. The dialogues served as vehicles of conceptualization for those

students who defined their resistance as truancy and withdrawing from classroom

activities. Clearly the students were reflecting on the past and present circumstances. The

dialogues let to further discoveries and possible solutions to the educational barriers faced

by the participants, such as not being able to pass the CAHSEE.

Summary of the Findings

This research was undertaking in the spirit of the educational philosophy of Paulo

Freire, as a vehicle to assist Latino high school students better perceive oppression, both

overt and covert, that has existed and continues to exist in the educational system. By

giving the participants an opportunity to define their past from a critical perspective, they

can better understand the present, and in turn transform the future. The focus of this

research was on the experiences of Latino students in comprehensive and continuation high schools.

This research was completed using the methodological framework of participatory research as a base for the belief that if disenfranchised people and communities can join with others in critically reflecting upon their situation and examining the social, political and economic structures in a historical context, they can perceive the inherent inequalities as systematic problems rather than personal problems. Participants learned that this type of research is a tool for social change in a society that is socially and economically stratified so that some benefit from the oppression of others. Additionally, they learned that to meet in a mutual undertaking of investigation, education, and action on issues of joint concern is empowering because it brings isolated people together, provides alternatives for common problems and avenues for social change.

Dialogic retrospection was used as a vehicle for assisting Latino students to reflect upon and understand their personal histories, in regards to oppression, education and language. The flexibility and adaptability of participatory research allowed this project to explore numerous themes which intersected, including obstacles of standardized tests, high drop out rates, invalidation of home language, uncaring teachers, family responsibility and various aspects of bilingualism.

The philosophy of participatory and emancipatory research, as explained by Freire (1970, 1973, 1994, 1997, 1998), Maguire (1987), and Ada & Beuterl (1993), established a directional impetus in this research toward critical knowledge as a combination of reflection and historical analysis of inequitable systems. The systematic

approach to personal and social transformation as explained by Maguire (1987) aims to develop a critical consciousness of both the researcher and participants, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures of power.

This research began with a review of literature which was divided into various sections: Demographics of Latinos in the U.S., Latino students drop out rate, School curricula, Continuation education and Successful high school models. The theoretical framework was based on Paulo Freire's (1973) theory of empowerment and the Critical Race Theory (CRT). Freire's theory of empowerment used the popular knowledge of the People in a process of empowerment whereby the people took action toward ameliorating their life situation.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the historical and contemporary realities of race and racism. It views education as a tool to eliminate all forms of subordination and empowers oppressed groups to transform society. The literature review revealed an intersection between the related topics of education, culture, second language acquisition, and bilingualism with the topic of oppression.

Ten Latino high school students participated in the study which took place in San Francisco. The dialogues were conducted as a group with some individual discussions, which lasted approximately three hours. The initial study helped defined the issues, problems and questions for the more intensive final dialogues which lasted over four hours. All of the study participants live in San Francisco and were born in Mexico and Central America. The specific topics under study were revealed during the first contact.

The participants recounted personal histories in relation to the research questions. The grouping of Ana, Carmen, Ernesto, Guadalupe, Gustavo, Jose, Juan, Juana, Maria,

and Miguel turned out to be a dynamic and well balance grouping. The rapport of the participants allowed for a natural and authentic interchange of experiences in a reflective and serious manner. It revealed the commonality of he experiences of Latino students attending comprehensive and continuation high school in San Francisco.

At times, humorous interchanges occurred, which diffused the intensity of the subject matter. The dialogues moved between the Spanish and English language. Each participant wrote their reflections of the dialogic process. Based on the participants' responses to the research questions, participants had more negative than positive thoughts of both comprehensive and continuation high schools. All of them recounted their negative and positive educational experiences and how those affected them.

All of the participants encountered examples of oppression in their educational experiences. The negative messages about being Latino inculcated in the dominant culture needed to be critically examined. Al of the participants found it was positive and important to better understand their personal histories. They recounted experiences which ranged from a culture of poverty to educational underachievement. The participants felt that the problem of underachievement occurred from inadequate schools and poverty. Additionally, the participants' home language of Spanish played a critical role as an organizer of their experiences, identity and concept development.

After a great deal of preparation which consisted of research, dialogues and personal introspection I went through a process that resulted in an examination of my innermost thoughts, feelings and reflections. I started rethinking my school site with a premise that schools have crucial obligations not only to students but their families and our society as a whole. Schools should be the laboratories of broad visions of educational achievement with a curriculum rooted on students' needs; academically rigorous and with

ESL classes as part of its component. Investigation into this areas could help my school

site design programs to meet the needs of alternative practices, ESL classes, parent

involvement, and cultural diversity. After completing this process of dialogic

retrospection and critical analysis, this dissertation concludes with proposing

recommendations for action in its final chapter. This is the final component of praxis,

which Freire (1970) defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform

it" (p. 23).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the educational experiences and perceptions of Latino students attending both comprehensive and continuation high school in California. This study focused on Latino high school students because as a Latina educator, I have been extremely concerned about the high drop out rate and the fact that many Latino youth do not receive diplomas at graduation with their peers and many of those who do are not prepared for competition in this global economy and are consigned to the lower paying jobs. Furthermore the incarceration rate for Latino youth (male and female) is skyrocketing. By engaging in transformative dialogues, participants shared their educational experiences.

The findings in this chapter show that participants: (a) had more negative than positive experiences in both comprehensive and continuation high school, (b) had very little academic success in both comprehensive and continuation high schools, and (c) were able to articulate solutions which would enable them to succeed in high school.

As a result of these findings, this study provides recommendations that might help to remedy the educational plight of Latino high school students. I discuss the findings in relation to the research literature, offer recommendations for further research and practice, and suggest a possible solution.

Discussion

Positive Educational Experiences

Three research questions were posed to guide the discussion of the experiences of

Latino students in comprehensive and continuation high schools. Each research question

Is discussed below.

Research Question 1: <u>What have been the educational experiences of Latino high school</u>

<u>who participated in both comprehensive and continuation high</u>

<u>schools?</u>

Dialogues from the participatory study, questionnaire and interview data form the

basis of the data collected to answer this question. The data reflects the positive and

negative educational experiences of Latino students in both comprehensive and

continuation high schools. Among the positive experiences participants talked about

having contacts with teachers who spoke Spanish and who helped and encouraged them

to pass their classes. They talked about how their teachers showed concern by relating the

curriculum to their lives, their history and languages. Yosso (2006) asserts that when the

curriculum relates to the students' lives their interest in school increases and it

contributes to their academic achievement.

In addition, participants discussed the positive impact of small classes which

enabled them to get the attention and the help they needed. This is consistent with the

research of La Rosa (2000) who stated that students excel academically when they are

exposed to small stimulating school environments and have close relationship with

teachers and students.

The most important positive educational experience for the participants was

having a friendship relationship with their teachers. These included teachers availing

themselves to help them outside normal school hours. Valenzuela (1999) stated that

students become more interested in school when teachers express caring for them. The participants commented that acceptance by their teachers was of critical concern to them.

The negative educational experiences that contributed to the academic underachievement of participants in both comprehensive and continuation high schools were: the lack of support and caring towards students and a curriculum that invalidated students' home languages and cultures, (a) poverty, (b) concentration in poor, inner-city (c) overcrowded, and (d) segregated schools,(e) enrollment below grade level, and (f) tracking in non-academic classes. This finding is consistent with the findings of Noguera (2002) who states that the kind of negative educational experiences created alienation, anger, and increases high school desertion among Latinos.

The most damaging educational experience expressed by the participants was the lack of friendship with their teachers. They evaluated the teachers' level of friendship by the time teachers dedicated to their students, their patience, how well teachers controlled and prepared their classes and how they made classes interesting.

This data suggested that positive experiences were intimately related to participants' educational achievement. What happens everyday in our classrooms both shapes and defines our students. As revealed in the findings, having a friendly relationship with their teachers was critical and one of the most important educational experiences for these Latino students. They stated that having a supportive teacher helped them succeed academically. Teachers must use the autonomy they have in the classroom to create a space that can profoundly affect their students' lives. They should create classrooms that are places where students feel significant and cared for by their

teachers and by each other. This action would inspire high levels of academic performance which would raise the educational achievement of all students.

These finding suggest that the relationship between students and teachers is more central to students' academic success in school than any method of teaching and can make a powerful difference in the live of students. Public school teachers need to encouraged Latino students consistently because this type of support may lead to increase in school completion and possibly reverse the dropout trends of these students. Those few supportive teachers that participants came in contact with could be among the reasons why they remained in school. This student-teacher relationship can lead to an increase in school completion and possibly reverse the dropout trends of Latino students.

Research Question 2: <u>What were the experiences at home and in the school that contributed to the academic achievement or academic underachievement of Latino students in both comprehensive and continuation high schools?</u>

The data from this study revealed the experiences at home that contributed to the academic achievement of the participants in both comprehensive and continuation high school. Parents always used verbal encouragement to motivate and support the students. They provided emotional and spiritual support, goal setting, and taught them respectable behavior. In addition, parents encouraged older siblings to serve as mentors to young ones. Many parents always tried to expose participants to the parents' jobs which they held because they lacked an education. This conveyed to participants the messages of the

hard reality of unskilled labor and encouraged them to focus on their education. As Ada (1993) stated the goal of Latino parents is to have a successful outcome for their children and to feel part of their children's education.

Among the participants, there were three: Ana, Jose and Gustavo who had experiences at home that contributed to their academic underachievement. They were experiencing family problems. Two of them had to work to help support themselves and their families while another served as a translator because he was the only English speaking member of the family.

The school experiences that contributed to the academic achievement of Latino students in both comprehensive and continuation high school were: (a) when the curriculum related to their lives, history, and culture, (b) ESL classes, (c) having small classes and (d) having friendships with caring teachers who affirmed them and were sensitive to their concerns. These findings are consistent with the finding s of Valdez (2001) who asserted that it is critical that students maintain and understand their history and culture. It is important that schools create curricula that reflect students' personal vision, cultural esteem and self-determination. All cultures in a school must be valued and recognized in order for all students to succeed. The experiences in school that contributed to their academic underachievement were the following: an alienating curriculum, lack of ESL classes, schools' failure to prepare students to pass the high school exit exam (CAHSEE), big classes, and unfriendly teachers.

The findings indicate that students participant had many experiences in school and at home that contributed to their academic underachievement. These students were

living in economically poor conditions and some were experiencing family problems.

They knew that the home obligations impacted their schoolwork but they had a

responsibility with their family. On the other hand, schools failed to offer them
supportive

environments and failed to prepared them to pass the high school exit exam (CAHSEE).

Research Question 3: <u>What connection do Latino students make between educational</u>

<u>attainment and future employment?</u>

The data from the study suggest a correlation between educational attainment and

expectation of future employment. The participants expressed frustration with the

education they received in both comprehensive and continuation high schools. They said

that the education they received was poor and did not prepare them for future

employment. They felt that their high school education did not teach them useful skills

like math and English needed in the employment market.This is consisitent with Secada

(1998) asserted that several interrelated factors contribute to the poor quality of education

that Latinos receive, among them: enrollment below grade level, nonacademic tracking,

large classroom sizes with little to no opportunity for individual assistance, low-quality

schools and lack of bilingual education.

Participants commented that they were not prepared for the job market and

needed to go back to school to learn skills. They talked about the fact that students with

low levels of educational attainment face poor economic conditions. The also stated that

low levels of educational attainment lead to high rates of unemployment and poverty.

The data suggest that an increase in the educational attainment of Latino students

is critical for their full integration in the U.S. workforce. The impact of graduating from

high school without skills will become critical to the labor force as these students make the transition from the classroom to the world of work. They will only be eligible for low-skill jobs, which are becoming scarce. As Emery & Ohanian (2004) stated Latinos as a group are concentrated in low-skill, low-wage jobs that tend to be vulnerable to major economic changes.

In fact, the U.S. economy is experiencing a transformation where basic education skills and even a high school diploma are not longer sufficient requirements for employment. An under-educated Latino student population has serious implications for the employment market. This educational disparity is troubling and would have long term social and economic consequence that will affect the development and stability of the U.S. economy.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

This study is focused on Latino students at a continuation high school in San Francisco, CA. It is recommended that this study be replicated in other California school districts with other ethnic student populations such as African-American, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans, to determine if trends in the data suggest the same implications for students' academic achievement or lack of educational attainment. In addition, a more in-depth study would include data on at-risk Latino students with histories of grade retention prior to entering a high school setting.

An additional area of study would be school-based guidance counselors' knowledge of the needs of Latino adolescents struggling in high school. Such information

would assist school districts in assessing the need for professional development for

guidance counselors regarding the Latino student population.

A mentoring program headed by the school guidance staff should be considered to

assist these students to achieve academically and help them finish high school.

Understanding the reasons why students drop out is a complex critical issue in the

education of students with limited economic and linguistic resources. Looking into urgent

solutions based upon dropout data requires more research. McLaren (2003) uses critical

theory to look deeper into the life of the student and to pay attention to the struggles

present among the marginalized:

> We need to remember that our students are not bodiless wraiths to be blown about
> the corridors by pedagogical rhetoric and sophistry; rather students are complex
> historical agents and they need to be able to read the multiple texts of their own
> lives. That is, they need to read the language in which they find themselves in
> order to reinvent themselves. Consequently critical pedagogy must not become a
> "privilege space" for academics but must be forged amidst the daily struggle of
> The oppressed themselves. (p. 296)

Only with the adoption of such critical theory can schools explore what is causing

students to fail at academics and who they are as individuals. The school's job is to

facilitate students' dreams so they become a reality by providing the necessary tools for

success.

Future research studies should focus on Latino students who succeed despite all

odds. Young people who have beat the odds while achieving academic excellence are the

students who attend classes, stay in school and graduate. These are the young people who

draw upon their inner strength to overcome the most daunting barriers. They have faced

overwhelming obstacles in their lives---poverty, violence, family breakup, abuse,

homelessness, substance abuse, and they have not only endured, they have thrived.

Feedback should be incorporated from their community, school advocates, and their

teachers. If their successful graduation rate can be replicated throughout the school

system, we might see a measurable change in the dropout rate.

More studies are needed on what works and what doesn't work in education when

focusing on Latino students and their issues of motivation. The approach to issues

connected to these students and their families needs to be revisited. Further studies

focusing on authentic home-school connections in the Latino community are needed. For

example, studies should explore the schools' attitudes towards Latino students' home life

and Latino parents' roles in the educational realm. Parents feel isolated and not

acknowledged when English is the only way to become accepted or valued as a citizen.

The role of parents cannot be overlooked; their voices are powerful instruments in the

education of their children. The simple act of opening the doors to dialogue is a powerful

transformative experience. Children then observe that their parents' important voices are

being included, and that their language and culture becomes visible and acceptable at

school as well as at home. Ada (1988) points this out in discussing her Pajaro Valley

research project.

> …parents should be make to feel that their opinions count and thus be
> encouraged to take part in their child's education. Indeed one of the
> assumptions of this program at Pajaro Valley is that the use of literature
> invited parents to participate freely, without fear of misspeaking or of
> betraying ignorance on a given point. (p. 138)

Sometimes the parents' attitude to stay out of the classroom arises from a cultural

convention and it is done out of "respect"; these parents see the teachers and the school as

the authority to educate and make good citizens out of their children.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) explains that the goal of the Latino parents is to have a successful outcome for their children and to have them function in this society by becoming fluent in English. However this becomes a negative issue, when the cost is losing their native language. Their children are quickly pushed to become part of an educational system that will most likely ignore their home language and culture, in order to assimilate them into the mainstream. She concluded that parents are empowered to feel part of their children's education when they are invited to have a voice in their child's education.

> In this study, the non-conventional activities validated the families' social and cultural experiences, which allowed them to feel a part of their children's schooling, and thus achieved a better balance of power and cooperation between home and school. (p. 181)

Latino parents want to get involved in their children's education as a top priority (Griego-Jones & Fuller, 2003). Yet many parents may not feel welcome to participate in classrooms where their children's cultural experience is not reflected in the academic environment and textbooks. This unintentional exclusion of poor, minority, and/or immigrant parents from school activities is expressed by Edwards (2004):

> With all the many families the school has to serve, they may not have the expertise to address the needs of all these families. Many poor, minority, and immigrant parents often feel that the school's activities are not culturally sensitive and do not address their concerns. Perhaps the activities do not address these parents' concerns because the school has not taken the necessary time to listen to these parents. (p. 43).

While some of the parents who we spoke with in this study were not always direct and forthcoming, they expressed the desire to be involved with the schools to help their

children. They were very worried about the high drop out rate among Latino students. Some parents felt that they were not even familiar with a typical school day. They knew that they have so much to share and contribute, but felt held back because of the lack of opportunity due to limited language, academic skills, and their limited time to contribute due to their multiple jobs. The empowerment that they feel at home when they are within their familiar surroundings, and speak their mother tongues, is not present in the school culture. Because of the importance of parent involvement for the academic success of Latino students, additional research on the role of parent involvement will be very important.

Additional studies are needed to look at the gap in achievement between English Language Learners (ELL) students and English-only students. Research is needed on students who come from Mexico and speak Spanish at home versus indigenous children who also come from Mexico, but whose main language may be one of over 20 known regional languages spoken in that country. It would be valuable to know how many ELL students, including students from indigenous dialects, continue to be labeled and misplaced because schools do not know where to assign them. Research is needed to understand why ELL students are not advancing as fast as educators want them to in some schools as compared to schools where improvement is visible for these students.

Recommendations for Practice

High schools should devote the first two weeks of school to human relation weeks and begin to build a community across campus. These human relation weeks should

begin by addressing the issue of relationships between students and teachers and invite students into the discussion. It should provide in-services to the school community dealing with topics like inclusion, developing empathy for students, how to deal with and recognize students who are showing initial signs of distancing themselves from school, equity in education, and communication with parents.

Both schools and Latino parents must develop authentic home-school connection whereby teachers and parents learn to work collaboratively. Latino parents must increase their understanding and reflect critically on their relationship with the schools. They must learn how the schools in this country operate and how to help them raise the level of their programs to the benefit of their children. They must rally for their children's intellectual development. Latino parents' involvement with the schools represents a potential avenue for bringing community culture, values and fundamental changes into the schools, contributing to the academic achievement of all students.

Further recommendations originating from the study include the following: comprehensive high schools should (a) develop curriculum that reflects the cultures of the school community, a curriculum that is multicultural and inclusive. The curriculum should reflect all students, regardless of their ethnicity, social class, language, sexual orientation, religion, gender, race, or other difference. It should permeate everything: the school climate, physical environment, curriculum, and the relationships among teachers, students and the community. It should be apparent in every lesson, bulletin boards and letters that are sent home, the textbooks and audiovisual aids used in classes and in the library, and even the lunch that is served. The curriculum should provide an organized,

challenging environment for learning. It must build upon the students' experiences in order to broaden their world. It should let students know that the knowledge they and their community value has prestige within the educational environment. It should be a process to help students recognize the potential benefits and power of knowledge in a democracy, (b) high schools must prepare students to pass the CAHSEE. After school support programs should be made available for students who need intervention. High schools should require that CAHSEE subjects are included in the alignment of the long range curriculum action plan. Every high school should have an accountability system in place monitoring the accomplishments of CAHSEE and the weekly teaching of the test subjects (English, reading, writing, math). High schools should report the CAHSEE's results and provide interpretation of the results to the student's parents and guardians. High schools should offer staff development to provide techniques and strategies for teachers to help students pass the CAHSEE.

Every high school should offer staff development on the languages and cultures represented in their student body. This staff development should incorporate social justice issues including attention to fairness and equity with regard to race, class, disabilities and sexual orientation. This staff development can improve teaching and learning, and therefore enhance the academic achievement of all students. High schools should prepare all students to go to college or get good jobs after they graduate. They should ensure that every student who graduates can demonstrate strength and competence in all academic areas. In addition to academic competency, other areas that should be included are:

multilingual and cross-cultural competency, technological literacy, communication skills, critical and creative thinking, and environmental responsibility.

High schools should develop a partnership with the parents, encouraging them to become true partners in the decision making of the school. These include involving parents in the curriculum, providing parent education , collaboratively working with parents to provide individual students services and having parents as active participants in parent conferences.

High schools should create staff development opportunities for teachers and parents as co-partners in the educational process to help schools design programs that would meet the needs of students, increase community involvement, and embrace cultural diversity. Teachers and parents, working collaboratively towards allowing everyone to have a voice in the decision making process can broaden the support base and provide for a successful school program.

An important component in pursuing knowledge of educational practices is viewing parents as key partners in the education process. Parents as partners can reduce distress among traditional educators who feel the pressure of seeing themselves as primary providers of knowledge to their students, rather than a more holistic approach with multiple facilitators of learning. In order to effect systemic change, professional development must incorporate all members of the community invested in the educational setting.

Staff development and parent education should be integral components of creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers, parents, and students should come together

to create an environment to enhance self-esteem, support academic achievement, and preserve human dignity among all groups.

All high schools should maintain working relationships with business and professional services in the community. Businesses have an investment in the education system in desiring future employees that possess problem-solving skills, academic knowledge and interpersonal skills conducive to a collaborative work environment. Building partnerships with businesses and the community allow individual schools to identify needs and build more partnerships among other schools and universities. Not only will such partnerships enrich the school system, they will benefit all participants. High schools must provide mentoring and internship opportunities for all students. They should provide college and career fairs where colleges and potential employers can participate and inform the students about current job openings as well as future career opportunities.

In general, high school should ensure that after graduation all students are prepared for the option of enrolling in college or university, getting a good job, and living a healthy life. In addition, every high school should offer small classes and large high schools should reorganize to become small learning communities or academies. Students should self select into these small learning communities which would have curriculum specifically designed to prepare them for college, a career or employment. The curriculum and instruction in these small learning communities should be designed to challenge all students by offering them real-world applications as well as core standards. Community service should be a component of the curriculum.

High schools should employ the latest technologies in the classes, using a curriculum that incorporates multimedia, hardware (equipment) and software (programs), as well as approaches and processes like e-learning, blogs, podcasts, webinars, and video streaming. Finally they should abolish the tracking system. They should develop alternative ways of grouping students that are not ability-based. Some alternatives to tracking can be cooperative learning, project-based learning, shared decision making with students, and multilevel teaching.

The following are the recommendations for practice for continuation high schools: (a) offer a rigorous curriculum with a coherent sequence of academic and technical courses that can prepare students for successful completion and mastery of the state academic standards, while supporting their transition to more advanced post secondary coursework related to a career or job of interest, (b) hire teachers with expertise in their subjects including a correct license or designated credential to teach standardized subjects, (c) offer monthly in-services and staff developments and bring consultants in to update the staff on current educational methodologies and resources, (d) prepare students to pass CAHSEE by providing morning, after-school or weekend supportive programs. Insure that CAHSEE s' subjects (English, reading, writing and math) are reviewed weekly in all classes, (e) offer ESL classes and assess the needs of these students and provide academic programs and support services that specifically address their needs. ESL classes must be designed and implemented with the objective to teach high levels of English language proficiency, appropriate levels of cognitive/academic development and adequate cultural heritage. Not offering ESL classes

effectively forecloses the students from meaningful education, weakens students' sense of

their own worth and lowers student aspiration.

Both comprehensive and continuation high school should consider as part of their school improvement plan creating support groups for their struggling students. A collaboration effort between school and the community should be organized to ensure successful academic achievement for every student that attends these high schools.

Conclusion

Latino students attending comprehensive or continuation high school are experiencing a high drop out rate. The educational system through certain acts has evolved in convincing students that the failure is due to their own shortcoming, thus relinquishing any responsibility on the schools. By implementing an agenda of miseducating rather than educating "underachieving students are labeled as deficient condemning them to a lifetime of struggle" (Valenzuela , 1999, p. 21).

Our mission as educators is to help stop this high student drop out rate presently engulfing the Latino community. Changes are urgently needed. Teachers have a tremendous influence in the life of students. In order to create an effective learning environment for these students and keep them in school, their academic motivation must be addressed. Teachers need to use curriculum in their classrooms that addresses diversity and involves the culture of every student. It is essential that teachers gain greater knowledge and understanding of students' home environment and home values and integrate them as part of their teaching. This includes students' prior knowledge and

the experiences they bring from home. This practice will benefit all students, but particularly Latino students. Only when high schools renew their commitment to helping every student maximize their potential and all students feel respected and validated as part of the whole school, will drop out rates decrease.

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