Creating an Opportunity to Learn Environment: Rethinking Caring-Oriented Intervention for Systemically Labeled "At-Risk" Latina/o Students

by

Breanna Villena

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Daniel Liou, Chair
Adai Tefera
Veronica Vasquez-Robles

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ABSTRACT

This action research study (a) explored how institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students described their experiences in an opportunity to learn environment within an academic intervention program, (b) examined how these students experienced caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes, and (c) investigated how school leaders created conditions to further support these students' academic success on a larger scale. This action research study utilized a sequential phenomenological qualitative approach. Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Care theory served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. The blending of these theories worked to push Latina/o students' narrative reflections to emerge as constitutive and instructive voices speaking back against the inequalities in the educational setting, and offered counterstories about the caring dynamics of Latina/o students in the classroom. Participants included high school students identified as "at-risk" and in an academic intervention class.

This is for all of my students.
Thank you for all of the lessons you have taught me over the years.
May each of find success in your future ventures,
and make your mark on the world one day.

For those that agreed to be a part of my study,
please know that this would not have been possible without you,
and I am forever grateful for allowing me to tell your stories.

This is also for my boys, Jace and Avery.
Never forget how much I love you
and know that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to,
no matter what the odds may be.
I hope this work serves as an example to never give up
and to not be afraid of taking the harder path.
Doing so will make you a stronger and better person for it.
I love you both to the moon and back.

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"One of the largest and fastest growing minority group in the nation-Latinos-are performing academically at levels that will soon put the entire society at risk and consign these young people to permanent underclass."
–P. Gandara and F. Contreras (2010)

Public education in America is meant to serve as an equalizer for all children, and for the public to take pride in the fact that children, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to public schools (Growe & Montgomery, 2003). An access to an education can change the lives of individuals, their families, and their communities (Gandara & Contreras, 2010). Upon hearing the phrase *equal access,* many assume that this ensures all students are cared for and receive the same amount of funding, access to highly qualified teachers, and resources. However, the question of whether American school systems provide the same level of care for students from all walks of life still remains questionable. Most people would agree that children are sent to school because society wants them to learn and believe they should all be afforded the same opportunities. As Robinson (2006) discussed, education is meant to prepare and propel students into a future that we cannot fully grasp, with the intent of providing them the type of education and social mobility that will advance their lives in a positive manner. However in practice, in spite of these goals, we have not seen all students afforded this type of access, equal preparation, and positive progression in the American school system. Today, we can only say that public education is effective at providing a basic foundation for some groups of students, not all, which implies the educational system inherently takes care of some groups more so than others. This is especially true for one of the fastest growing minority group in America, Latina/o students (Gandara, 2009; Menchaca, 1997). This

study uses the term *Latina/o* instead of *Hispanic* because *Hispanic* is a term coined by the U.S. Census Bureau, which signifies uniformity, and is seen as race neutral; whereas, "Latina/o" is perceived as connoting racial differences (Gonzalez & Gandara, 2005). The term *Latina/o* encompasses people from various Latin-American countries yet strays from historical identity that focuses simply on the *Spanish* (i.e. Hispanic) or pan-ethic identity to one that is more racialized and representative of the struggles and discrimination that this group of people faces (Gonzalez & Gandara, 2005).

In 2012, Education Secretary Arne Duncan enthusiastically drew attention to the nation's 80% graduation rate, stating it was a "profound milestone" (Layton, 2014). However, research still indicates disparities continue to exist. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Latina/o students still have a four-year graduation rate below the national average at 73% respectively, whereas Caucasian students continue to have high school graduation rates above the national average at 86% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). Coupled with lower graduation rates, Fry (2005, 2010) highlighted that Latina/o students are also disproportionately more likely to attend large public high schools with high student-to-teacher ratios, and schools with higher percentages of students from low income families, compared to other ethnic groups of students. Studies also indicate schools with high populations of students of color and low socioeconomic status (SES) students are more likely to have less qualified teachers (Esch, Chang-Ross, Guha, Tiffany-Morales, & Shields, 2004; Haycock, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2002). In addition, students from minority groups, a low socioeconomic (SES) background, or whose parents are not directly involved in their education, are most likely to be labeled as at-risk students (Kaufman & Bradbury, 1992), and placed in remedial

programs. An at-risk student is generally defined as a student who has a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school (Kagan, 1988).

During my years of teaching, I have observed the common assumption among educators that high poverty levels increase a student's likelihood of being at-risk for low academic achievement. The debate about whether poverty causes low achievement or if high poverty students are marginalized by the industrial structure of education, making them more likely to attend low performing schools, is regularly discussed. This debate complicates how educators understand student achievement and failure. However, Gorski (2008) attempted to eradicate educators' assumptions that tend to normalize poverty as the cause of student failure. This complication emphasizes the need for educators to consider the expert voices of at-risk students.

Equally important, according to a report released by the National Center for Education Statistics, from the time states began to report comparative dropout rates in 1990 to its last year of released records in 2013, Latina/o students have consistently had higher dropout rates when compared to all other ethnic groups. The dropout rate for Latina/o students continues to remain higher than the national average of 6.8% and all other races at 11.7% (see Table 1).

Table 1

National Dropout rate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender as of 2013

	Gender		
Race/ethnicity	Male	Female	All
Latina/o	12.6%	10.8%	11.7%
African American	8.2%	6.6%	7.3%
White	5.5%	4.7%	5.1%

Funneling down to a more localized evaluation, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Arizona has the fourth highest Latina/o student population, coming in after New Mexico, California, and Texas at 43.3%. While the Latina/o high school graduation rates have increased in the past years in Arizona to a rate of 70.4% for the cohort of 2014, they are still well below the average graduation rate of 82.4% for White students (Arizona Department of Education, 2012) mirroring the existing national gaps. Although many people rely on the national reporting systems to accurately report such statistics as the ones stated above, some scholars argue that the dropout margins are a problem far worse than statistics indicate, and that many states and districts simply do not count those students who fail to receive diplomas as dropouts (Orfield, 2004).

Holistically, the Latina/o educational pipeline is in need of serious repairs. Out of every 100 Latina/o students entering elementary school, an overwhelming 54 of them will drop out, leaving only 46 that will finish high school. Seventeen will go on to attend community college, and nine will go to a four-year university. Out of the nine, only eight will graduate college with a four year degree and an even fewer amount will earn an MA,

Ph.D, or Ed.D (Choa Romero, 2012; Perez Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006; Yosso, 2006).

In response to these disparities stated above, various initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Race to the Top (RTTP) funding were implemented as a means to force schools to bridge the gap. As a result, many schools systemically label students as at-risk and develop various intervention programs meant to target and support these at-risk students. However as Delpit (2012) highlighted, with so much attention of teacher education focused on the research that links failure to socioeconomic status, cultural differences, and color, there is a tendency to lead to child-deficit assumptions that lead to teaching less instead of more. A study conducted by Oakes (1995) confirmed this tendency, finding that both African American and Latina/o students are more likely to be placed in lower-track classes that have less academically intensive curriculums than White or Asian students with the same test scores. Such practices create in-school segregation between advanced classes like honors and advanced placement verses lower-track courses that offer fewer learning opportunities and lead to lower academic student outcomes (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Mickelson & Everett, 2008; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

The most important lesson that these statistics and studies can teach educators is that we must begin to investigate how we can better address the unique needs of the Latina/o population, starting with how we care for them in the classroom. Numerous researchers have documented the importance of care in positive student-teacher relationships (Altenbaugh, Engel, & Martin, 1997; Bergman, 2004; Garza, 2008; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Garza, Ovando, & Seymour, 2010; Schussler & Collins, 2006).

Influential care theorist Noddings (1992, 2012) emphasized that the main issue with schools is their inability to promote caring relationships and that such relationships create a climate to best meet the individual needs of students.

Theory and research support that when a student feels cared for, he/she is more likely to experience a positive student-teacher relationship with a particular teacher, and tends to have higher levels of belonging in that classroom (Hallinan, 2008; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Higher levels of belonging are linked to higher levels of motivation, engagement, and stronger academic outcomes (Nichols, 2008; Osterman, 2000, 2010). On that same notion, when a student lacks a sense of belonging in a classroom, he/she has a higher probability to experience behavioral issues, lack motivation, and are more likely to drop out of school (Osterman, 2000, 2010; Rumberger, 2012). A vast majority of intervention programs for at-risk students often involve the fixation on a very narrow, dry, and remedial curriculum that can be perceived as lowering the expectations and operating from a lower level of care for the students. Such practices are counterproductive and only perpetuate the issues of the achievement gap. Caring/supportive relationships between teachers and students, combined with the high expectations care-oriented teachers have for all students are key factors that contribute to a student's ability to manifest resilience and circumvent school obstacles (Bernard, 1995). Therefore, it is essential that educators investigate different methods of structuring academic intervention programs for at-risk Latina/o students by creating caring classroom environments where students receive a quality curriculum and are more apt to be actively engaged in their education.

Local Context

The Elmount District is located in the southwest region of the United States. The district encompasses 140 square miles and educates more than 25,000 students a year. The district consisted of 19 elementary schools, four high schools, and one alternative program. In 2010 the Arizona Legislature enacted Arizona Revised Statute §15-241 (A.R.S. §15-241) creating the A-F Letter Grade accountability system that was adopted in June 2011 by the State Board of Education.

> The A-F Letter Grades are designed to place equal value on current year achievement and longitudinal academic growth, specifically the growth of all students as well as a school's lowest achieving students. (Arizona Department of Education, 2013)

The Elmount District was classified as an A district at the time this study was conducted, consisting of eight schools with an A label, all of which were elementary schools; 13 schools with a B label (10 elementary, 3 high schools); and two schools with a C label (one elementary and one high school).

Although the district has earned an overall A label, the high school graduation rates for three consecutive years were on the decline. According to the four-year cohort graduation reports released by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Elmount's graduation rate declined from 88%, to 83%, to 81%. With many surrounding districts having higher percentages exceeding 90%, and graduation rates becoming a substantially weighted component in the state's new accountability model, the Elmont District began to investigate ways to combat the decline. And although the district's graduation rate for 2014 jumped to 95.3%, the breakdown of the 4.7% of non-graduating students echoes the same message as the national data with Latina/o students accounting for 51.9% of the non-graduates, whereas White students only accounted for 35.2%. And 66.7% of the non-

graduates were on the free/reduced lunch program. These data further established the importance of seeking out expert voices of the Latina/o students in the district.

Arendelle High School opened its doors in the 1960s as the first high school in the Elmount Unified School District. Before the construction of the school, promoted eighth grade students were sent on tuition wavers to neighboring districts because the population did not justify the organization of a high school. Before the surrounding neighborhoods were fully established, numerous farming fields bordered Arendelle. Migrant Latinos worked the farming fields, many of which began to establish their families in the neighborhoods around Arendelle as they were built. During the early 1930s, migrant farm workers settled in the surrounding city on the west banks of a major city river. Mexican immigrants came to the town surrounding AHS to help build the canals and harvest the first crops. The town was founded in 1937 and incorporated in 1951. At the time of incorporation, the city was primarily a compact residential community. Until the recent population boom, the city had a small-town atmosphere. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the town grew from about 5,001 residents in 1990 to 32,607 residents in 2006. It is anticipated that the city will continue to experience growth in the next decades.

Even as the Elmount District began to expand and other high schools were built, the ethnicity makeup of Arendelle continued to consist of predominantly Latino students. Arendelle originally had four distinct signature programs: ROTC, automotive technology, woodshop, and child development. However, over time negative perceptions began to develop out of deficit public perceptions regarding the purposes of these signature programs. Sadly, people began to associate the child development program as a need specific to AHS student demographics and teen pregnancy, and the automotive and

ROTC programs were looked at as being more realistic and obtainable futures for the student demographic. Meanwhile, the three remaining high schools in the district have architecture, engineering, International Baccalaureate (IB), computer animation, culinary arts, and law enforcement. Where these programs are offered directly disrupts the feeding patterns from the elementary schools to the high schools. Furthermore, scholars argue the combination of district open-enrollment policies, the placement of magnate programs, and income disparities amongst households has led to an increase in racial segregation in public schools (Roda & Wells, 2013; Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, & Jarvis, 2004).

Even students who attend AHS have voiced their opinions about there being a negative stigma associated with attending the school. Somewhere along the lifespan of the high school, the concept derived of it being an old and ghetto school. As a former graduate of AHS, I too experienced the negative public perceptions and remember many people believing the campus atmosphere was rough, unsafe, and that many of the students lacked the intrinsic desire to care about an education.

During my first year at Arendelle as academic interventionists, the group of students I saw on a weekly basis were 10th grade students in the bottom 25%, and junior or senior students who have not yet passed the reading and writing AIMS exam. I saw a total of 113 students, 49 junior/seniors and 64 sophomores. A survey of my 113 intervention students was conducted as part of my back-to-school procedures, to ask about their perceptions towards being placed in an intervention program, and if they had been placed in some form of intervention program in the past. Example items included "How do you feel about attending an intervention class?" and "Have you participated in an intervention program before now?" Results indicated that 71% of my students had

been placed in some form of intervention program in the past. Seventy-six percent of them felt that intervention was not helpful, and an overwhelming 91% indicated that they were either upset about having to attend or did not care to attend an intervention class.

Using the results from the student survey, I conducted a focus group consisting of students who had former experiences in an intervention program. I asked a series of questions regarding their thoughts and feelings about their former intervention class experience, what about it/if it was helpful, and what changes or suggestions for improvement they had. Example items were as follows: “In your own words, what was helpful to you in your previous intervention class/program?” and “In your own words, what was least helpful in your previous intervention class/program?” and “What do you think needs to change?” During this conversation, students expressed that the previous intervention material was boring and unengaging. **Junior, A. Lopez,** stated, “I felt like I just kept having to do the same things over and over. . . . Read this story and bubble in the answer.” The repetitive structure and redundancy of the class clearly impacted student motivation. Students also stated on numerous occasions that they felt like the teacher did not care about them and that what they were learning was not helping them in their actual classes as illustrated in the following statement by **Senior J. Ruiz:**

> The teacher didn't know me, who I was, or what I was about. She never pushed me so I didn't see the point in trying. And it was like stuff I saw and been doing since elementary school; it wasn't nothing new or helpful.

This statement supported researchers’ findings regarding the importance of establishing student-teacher relationships and the value of authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) as well as Delpit's (1995, 2012) findings of remedial programs having a tendency to fixate on materials that are at lower grade levels than what the student is currently in.

Taken together, the evidence from personal observations and the preliminary data gathered from students suggested that my current intervention classes needed to undergo some type of innovational changes that would better serve the needs of my students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current study was to explore the impact of a tiered academic intervention program structurally designed to incorporate an opportunity to learn standards and ethics of care instructionally. The tiered academic intervention program emphasized relationship building, instruction, environment, and expectations. The ultimate goals were to understand how teachers at Arendelle could better meet the needs of institutionally labeled at-risk Latina/o students and to recognize the student voices as experts who could speak as to how to better care for them in the academic setting. The second goal was to explore/observe how and if deficit assumptions about these students' achievement abilities and educational capacities existed, and if so, to challenge these assumptions by capturing student voices and recognizing them as experts.

Research Questions

1. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experience of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?
2. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?
3. How can school leaders create conditions to further support institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o student's academic success on a larger scale?

Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

"We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs"
–L. Delpit (2012)

As Delpit (2012) stated in the quote above, we see the world through our beliefs. With this understanding, there are many different lenses through which to look at complicated issues. To better understand the problems of academic intervention programs often involving the fixation on a very narrow, dry, and remedial curriculum that can be perceived as lowering the expectations which only perpetuates the issues of the achievement gap, I drew upon literature regarding deficit thinking. In addition, in order to develop an innovation rooted in and supported by the literature, I also highlighted the literature related to the opportunity to learn, care, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the student-teacher relationship.

Deficit Thinking Model

Many theories exist that attempt to explain the school failure we see with the millions of low SES and minority students. Drawing specifically from Valencia, (1997), deficit thinking "refers to the notion that students (particularly those of low income, racial/ethnic minority background) fail in school because such students and their families have internal defects (deficits) that thwart the learning process" (p. xi). Scholar Menchaca elaborated on the historical events that created an environment conducive to deficit thinking here in America, beginning with the arrival of English pilgrims (Valencia, Menchaca, & Valenzuela, 1993). Menchaca explained that under British law the Native Americans did not hold a legal claim on the New World, and the pilgrims were the population with the political power to transform and shape America as open real estate.

Labels were started such as *savage* and *barbarian.* That established position of power forged the path that led to the removal of the Indigenous populations from their lands. Throughout history, we continued to witness that same relationship of power play out, coupled with the continued quest for profit and a racist discourse that promoted the enslavement of non-Whites.

The founding fathers decreed all men were created equal, and yet Native Americans were declared to be only three-fifths of a person; only free White immigrants had the right to citizenship, and doctors in the medical field began to propose that people of color had physical and intellectual differences, were culturally inferior, and a completely separate species from Whites altogether (Nott & Gliddon, 1857). Even after slavery was abolished, the same types of racist ideologies were used to deny people of color an education. To summarize, the roots of deficit thinking in America are inseparably tied to

> racist discourses that evolved from the early 1600s to the late 1800s . . . such deficit thinking was used to justify the economic exploitation of people of color and to deny them the social and political rights enjoyed by whites. (Menchaca, 1997, p. 37)

Valencia (1997) explained there are six characteristics of deficit thinking in the following context: (a) blaming the victim; (b) oppression; (c) pseudoscience; (d) temporal changes; (e) educability; and (f) heterodoxy. Blaming the victim is at the core of deficit thinking, and originates from author William Ryan published in 1971. It involves identifying a social problem, studying the differences between the advantaged and disadvantaged, identifying those differences as the cause of the social issue, and lastly the governmental intervention on behalf of the disadvantaged groups' differences/deficiencies. It is a change as to the victim, not the structural philosophy.

With this understanding of blaming the victim, deficit thinking as a form of oppression is a logical connection. In education, deficit thinking is seen as a power structure to keep a group of people in their place, specifically students of color. Examples include Compulsory Ignorance Laws, school segregation, and high-stakes testing.

Pseudoscience is the idea of false persuasion via scientific facades. We see this when the research is guided by the researcher's assumptions of deficit thinking, which the data on this subject is weak, flawed, or biased. By temporal changes, Valencia explained that deficit thinking is influenced by the spirit of time, meaning the general trends, thoughts, and feelings are influenced by characteristics of a particular time period. As the scholarly and ideological spheres of influence shift in society, deficit thinking evolves as well as its impact on shaping educational practices. Educability refers to the idea that emphasizes low-SES students of color have a set capacity for learning, which is dependent upon the presumed ability level of the student, not the quality of the learning environment that the student is exposed to. Heterodoxy refers to the existing tension between deficit and anti-deficit thinkers.

Other authors have also discussed the hindrances deficit thinking has had on the educational system. Johnson (1994) articulated that because deficit thinking involves labeling poor minority students and their families as *being disadvantaged* and *at risk,* it always results with the blame placed on the shoulders of the students and their families for their so called lack of readiness and interest in education. Delpit (1995) expressed a concern regarding the emphasis teacher education has on the research linking school failure to low-SES, cultural differences, and single-parent households. She contended that

with teachers receiving so much of this negative indoctrination, it only added to the potential for teachers to establish deficit assumptions about students.

Opportunity to Learn

In 1994, the Opportunity to Learn (OtL) standards were proposed as a component of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). The standards are intended to evaluate the amount and quality of resources, both human and tangible, that are accessible to students. Opportunity-to-learn standards can help ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all students in America. Advocates of OtL argued that this was necessary to ensure fairness for high-stakes testing and accountability. OtL policies are influenced by three different philosophies of equality: libertarian, liberal, and democratic liberal (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). According to Guiton and Oakes, some policymakers are striving to make sure OtL informs educational decisions and becomes an essential component of school accountability (p. 323).

As stated in the NCTE, Opportunity to Learn standards should do the following:

- Enable all students to achieve high content standards and learn to their full potential
- Be directly tied to students' learning and performance in content standards
- Consider the diverse, multiple ways students learn
- Enable all teachers to teach all students
- Be supported by the best classroom practice and research
- Include ongoing professional development of educators
- Be based on research on how effective schools use resources

- Address necessary conditions and resources for successful learning in schools as well as effective use of resources, including safe, secure environments free of prejudice and violence; attractive, comfortable environments that invite learning, risk taking, and problem solving; updated library media centers and technologies
- Consider opportunities for preschool and beyond school learning

According to Stevens (1993), the teaching methods of schools with a large high-poverty minority population often denies students access to grade-level core curriculum (p. 232). Stevens (1993) asserted there were four factors that influence effective teaching and learning environments: full coverage of grade-level core curriculum, duration and depth of curriculum exposure, degree to which content is emphasized, and instructional delivery (pg. 234). Stevens (1993) recommended administrators and teachers work together to incorporate cooperative and project-based learning into the school culture. Additionally, increasing time all students are actively engaged in critical thinking and constructing new knowledge has a major influence on improving the opportunity to learn.

Caring

The notions of care ethics is understood and defined from many different scholarly perspectives, and its acknowledged necessity as part of human existence and one's ability to thrive is widely accepted in the literature (Bergman, 2004; Gilligan, 1982; Karen & Kelehear, 2014; Noddings, 1984, 2012; Pimentel, 2011). In Gilligan's work (1982), she took a feminized stance and proposed that care

> contains the ideals of human relationships, the vision that the self and the other will be treated as equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be

> fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (p. 63)

The literature supports that a teacher's capacity to care, the students' perceptions and understandings of if/how a teacher cares for him/her, and the caring environment that is established in the classroom, are vital components in order for an educator to successfully meet the needs of all students (Beck, 1989; Noddings, 1992; Pimentel, 2011; Roberts, 2010; Roln-dow, 2014).

In addition to Gilligan, Noddings (1992) is another feminist scholar who criticized the educational system that encourages competition, overemphasizes academic achievement, and places such high values on standardized teaching and testing. Noddings (1984) developed a working definition of caring in social situations such as schools. According to Noddings, the most effective relationship is one in which the one-cared and the cared-for share the burden and benefits of cultivating reciprocal caring (p. 20). Without this reciprocal nature, the relationship cannot every truly grow. She further explained that the relation between the carer and the cared-for are most important, not the individuals or the organization to which they belong (Noddings, 2012). In addition, Noddings contended two individuals who care is not the same as nurturing a relationship of care.

In agreement with Gilligan, Noddings (1992) identified care as a practice, a process, and an ethic, and proposed four major components of moral education from the ethic of caring: modeling, dialogue, practices, and confirmation. Modeling involves the teacher demonstrating how to care for others through the caring relationships they create with students. Dialogue pertains to the open discussions and interactions between teacher and student to gain mutual understanding, appreciation, and respect. Dialogue is a

necessity in maintaining caring relationships. Noddings articulated the importance of students being provided the opportunity to practice and develop in the learning community. Lastly, confirmation of a student's ethical ideals is established through trust and consistency. Noddings made the relevant assertion that in order for students to learn, they must have a safe environment where the caring relationship can thrive and the cared-for wanting to be good moral citizens (2012, p. 777).

Although the work of Noddings is well known and revered for brining attention to the importance of a caring relationship in the educational setting, more recently scholars have challenged Noddings' traditional White feminist framework of caring, and argued her notion of caring is a colorblind ideology (Patterson, Gordon, & Price, 2008). By colorblind, the authors meant it was an ideology in which an individual's race is believed to be irrelevant to one's treatment in society, and colorblindness is a mere attempt to cover up the inequalities that continue to exist (Patterson et al., 2008). Patterson et al. (2008) asserted Noddings' model is one that can only apply caring on an individual nurturing basis, emerging from the mother-child relationship that is nested within White ideals of morality and ethics, stating that "Noddings' conceptualization of caring fails to account for institutionalized racism and structural inequalities that cannot be challenged on an individual level" (Patterson et al., 2008, p. 99).

Because a significant amount of research has identified the ethic of care, because the caring relationships between teachers and their students is a central component of academic achievement for students, because research demonstrates the types of caring relationships many teachers engage in with their Latina/o students, and because goals associated with school equity are unfortunately counterproductive, taking a color-

conscious stance with care is indeed necessary (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, & Cooper, 2009; Nieto, 2008; Pimentel, 2011; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

Black feminist scholars who critique colorblindness argued Noddings' individualized mother-child relationship assumes the home is a safe haven, but for many African Americans, the home is not always a space were values are nurtured in isolation of the outside society (Collins, 1990; Thompson, 1998). Instead, for many students of color the home becomes a place that cultivates the skills and knowledge needed to survive the realities of institutionalized racism in the world outside the home. Furthermore, unlike White theories of care that centralize the mother as the primary nurturer, the extended family and members of the community often play a significant role in caring for children in both Black and Latino communities (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2005; Thompson, 1998). For this reason, scholars such as Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) take a color conscious stance and suggest the notions of caring emphasize community.

This culturally relevant caring (Ladson-Billings, 1995) proposed by womanist Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) claimed that because progress as a people is dependent on the success of every member of the community, Black teachers working within their own community have a collective commitment to caring. The key components of Beauboeuf-Lafontant's model include embracing the maternal, maintaining political clarity, and an ethic of risk (2002). Embracing the maternal involves enacting the same standard of care and accountability for students as one has for his or her own children. Enacting a political clarity means teachers recognizing relationships exist that differentially structure the success and failure of groups of children. Consequently, teachers must prepare students

for the harsh realities of racism, sexism, and other "isms" that exist in the world. An ethic of risk involves acknowledging there are no clear strategies that can rectify the structural situation of inequity, but one must be willing to take the risk to care enough to take action, even though there are no guarantees of success. Beauboeuf-Lafontant's work (2002) highlighted the importance of culturally relevant caring that takes a color conscious stance. Given that this framework specifically targets Black teachers working with Black students, other scholars have suggested critical caring as a way for teachers of diverse cultures to enact political clarity and color consciousness with students of a different race than their own (Nieto, 2006, 2008; Rolón-Dow, 2005).

Nieto (2008) stated,

> I have seen numerous cases in which "nice" teachers expected less of their students of color, believing that by refusing to place the same rigorous demands on their students of color as they do on white students, they are making accommodations for the students' difficult home life, poverty, or lack of English-language proficiency. Such "accommodations" may unintentionally give students the message that teachers believe these students are incapable of learning. (p. 29)

Nieto explained that the type of *caring* described above does more harm than good for students of color, proposing instead that educators practice critical caring by rejecting the hidden curriculum about race and a student's ability level by expecting academic excellence, recognizing the socioeconomic inequalities, but avoiding making assumptions about a student's situation, and both believing in and confirming the talents/potentials of every student (Nieto, 2006, 2008). Nieto's work (1998/2004) also highlighted the necessity of both individual and institutional acts of care in the educational success of Latina/o students; explaining that simply changing the nature of the student-teacher relationship is not enough, school polices/practices also need to change.

Rolón-Dow's research (2005) explored the dynamics caring in an educational setting for a group of Puerto Rican female middle school students. This research called for school agents to adopt a color(full) critical care praxis. The major components of a color(full) critical care praxis are (a) establishing a historical and political understanding of the conditions faced by minority communities, (b) exploring how radicalized beliefs inform ideological standpoints, and (c) translating counternarratives to inform authentic relationships, pedagogical practices, and institutional structures.

Building upon the work of Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), Nieto (2008), Noddings (1992), and Roln-dow (2014), Harris Garad (2013) proposed a culturally relevant caring approach centered in spirituality. Harris Garad acknowledged that some people believe spirituality has no place in the educational setting; however, she contended it is the starting point that teachers can use to build their capacity to critically care for students of different racial backgrounds than their own. Motha (2011) described spirituality as "our intuitive sense of nurturing, what we know is right in understanding, combining the head (intellect) with the heart, right in intention and effort and virtuous in action" and went on to add spirituality is "an organic total integration of the individual, regardless of race, gender, culture or religion" (p. 70). Harris Garad contended if educators could begin to understand spirituality as inherently intuitive and unique to each individual, then they can begin to understand how a spiritually centered approach to caring could benefit from incorporating both the traditional and cultrually relevant caring frameworks (2013).

The key components of Harris Garad's spiritually centered appraoch are inquiry, dialogue, integrety of being, and critical affirmation (2013). Inquiry involves an individual recognizing how their past (recent and distant) influences their opinions and

epistemologies. This requires teachers to ask themselves who they are in relation to their students, and responses should involve color consciousness. Dialogue is the collective process of exploration, and it necessary in order to learn about oneself and others. Integrity of being refers to being humble, honest, and vulnerable to make an individual and their teachings validated. Critical affirmation involves having a political consciousness, and requires both praise and pushing back. Critical affirmation accounts for injustices and openly criticizes behaviors that perpetuate stereotypes by sharing counterstories (Harris Garad, 2013).

Drawing on the literature, I created a table to conceptualize care oriented and non-care oriented teacher-student interactions. The caring oriented and non-caring oriented characteristics each contain the following three tenets: instruction, relationship building, and classroom environment/expectations. Instruction refers to how the learning opportunities, activities, and teaching are structured in the classroom. Relationship building pertains to the personal interactions between the teacher and students, and how the students' personal and emotional needs are nurtured. Classroom environment/expectations refer to the climate and norms that are consistent within the classroom (see Table 2 below).

Table 2

Caring Oriented and Non-Caring Oriented Components

	Instruction	Relationship Building	Classroom Environment/ Expectations
Caring oriented	Warm demander (Bondy & Ross, 2008) High expectations (Valenzuela, 1999) Opportunities for reflection for teacher and student (Harris Garad, 2013) Multiple learning avenues and opportunities (Oakes, 1987) Problem solving/critical thinking opportunities (Freire, 1970) Values students' funds of knowledge (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012) Models curiosity (Engel, 2015) Culturally relevant ties (Roln-dow, 2014)	Offers help to solve school-related and personal problems (Valenzuela, 1999) Reciprocal dialogue (Harris Garad, 2013; Noddings, 1992) Reciprocal respect (Bergman, 2004) Interested in students' outside of classroom (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Taylor, 2006) Moral support (Valenzuela, 1999) Invites counterstories (Harris Garad, 2013; Roln-dow, 2014)	Sensitive to students' personal needs (Noddings, 1992) Fair discipline (Delpit, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999) Established safe space (Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999) Empowers students (Nieto, 2008; Roln-dow, 2014) Holds all students accountable (Nieto, 2008) Shares life experiences/stories (Harris Garad, 2013) Invites curiosity and accepts imperfections (Engel, 2015) Uses nonjudgmental speech (Harris Garad, 2013)
Non-caring oriented	Unequal opportunities (Richard R. Valencia, 1997) Differing expectations (J. Oakes, 1990; Richard R. Valencia, 1997) Disseminating content area information (Freire, 1970)	Highlights students' negative behavior (Delpit, 2012) Apathetic listening (Noddings, 1984) One-way conversations (Noddings, 1984)	Ignores students' personal needs (Noddings, 1992) Unfair discipline (Delpit, 2012) Patronizes student efforts (Delpit, 1995, 2012) Sterile environment (Karen & Kelehear, 2014) Dictates learning avenues (Delpit, 1995, 2012)

Table 2 continued on next page

Table 2 (continued)

Caring Oriented and Non-Caring Oriented Components

	Instruction	Relationship Building	Classroom Environment/ Expectations
Non-caring oriented (continued)	Lacks personal connection (Cooper & Miness, 2014)	Demands respect (Delpit, 2012; Freire, 1970)	Blames student/parents for lack of learning (Richard R. Valencia, 1997)
	Disengaged students (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012)	Lacks academic related discussion	Accountability to learn is on the student (Delpit, 1995)
	One mode of learning (R. Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008)	Disembodies students' personal/emotional needs (Delpit, 1995, 2012)	Excuses student behavior (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012)
	Remedial activities (Delpit, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Walker, 2010)	Impersonal demeanor (Noddings, 1992)	

The literature supports that care-oriented instruction consistently includes clear and high expectations for all students, and the teacher pushes every single student to excel in a warm supportive manner (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Cooperative learning is embedded into the classroom activities to cultivate social relationships (Valenzuela, 1999). The students need to be provided with opportunities to reflect on their learning in order to make it personal; mistakes should be welcomed and highlighted as learning opportunities (Garza, Ovando, & Seymour, 2010; Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008). Students should have multiple avenues of learning, and have multiple learning opportunities built into the instruction to meet diverse student needs. All students need to engage in problem solving and critical thinking, and the instruction should tap into the students' family, community, and cultural funds of knowledge.

Care-oriented relationship building involves the teacher offering help to solve school-related and personal problems (Valenzuela, 1999). Reciprocal dialogue, respect, and two-way listening take place with every interaction (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 1984, 2012). The teacher shows a genuine interest in the student's well-being outside the walls of his/her classroom; involvement may include sports, clubs, and other events the student participates in (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Taylor, 2006). The teacher shows moral support for all students, and actively seeks student feedback to inform their teaching practices.

A care-oriented classroom environment/expectations are sensitive to the personal needs of the students (Valenzuela, 1999), and help students develop social emotional skills by establishing a safe space for sharing (Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008). Discipline is administered as necessary, is fair, and free of favoritism (Delpit, 2012). All students are held accountable to learn, but the teacher also acknowledges his or her own personal responsibility in holding the students accountable (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012). The students are empowered and given an active voice in the classroom learning outcomes and activities (Noddings, 2012).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, non-caring oriented instructional practices have unequal opportunities and privileges (Valencia, 1997). There are differing (lowered) expectations for some students; some students are consistently given remedial activities or taught remedial skills while others engage in higher level thinking (Delpit, 1995, 2012). The content is disseminated upon the students (Freire, 1970) and the instruction lacks opportunities for students to make personal connections with their learning (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Students are allowed to disengage from classroom activities and

assignments (Delpit, 1995; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012). There is only one avenue or mode for learning, and re-teaching is repetitive in nature (Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008).

Non-caring oriented relationship building involves apathetic or inattentive listening, when the teacher and or students are listening to respond rather than to understand (Noddings, 1984). One-way conversations take place, and respect is assumed by establishing a clear position of power in the classroom (Delpit, 2012; Freire, 1970). Some students' negative behaviors are highlighted with the teacher, publicly drawing attention to the student in the classroom (Delpit, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999; Walker, 2010). Little discussion about student grades, progress, or means of improvement takes place; and the students' personal and emotional needs are disembodied from instructional practices.

The classroom environment and expectations also paint a very different picture in a non-caring oriented classroom. Students' efforts on activities or assignments are patronized. The discipline is unwarranted and/or unfair, meaning some sets of students have different rules to abide by. The teacher has a dry, cold, and impersonal demeanor with the students. The learning environment is sterile and also impersonal, giving off a business-only vibe with minimal student work or graphics displayed. The teacher dictates the only appropriate learning avenues for all students, and blames the students, their family, and culture for their lack of understanding (Delpit, 1995, 2012).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Various researchers have continued to highlight the necessity for educators to develop and implement culturally relevant curriculum and instructional practices for all students of color in the K-12 setting (Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings,

1995). After conducting a three-year study of eight different classrooms teachers in a predominantly African-American, low-income elementary school district in North California, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed the grounded theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Findings of this study indicated that the students in these eight classrooms did achieve academic success as measured by a standardized assessment, but not at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being. Ladson-Billings observed all eight teachers encouraging the academic success of their students through cultural competence; the teacher recognized the existence of social inequities and their causes, and seeing themselves as members of the community as existing commonalities among the teachers.

CRP Grounded in Three Tenets

Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to an "ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of sociopolitical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Academic success refers to the intellectual growth a student experiences as a result of the classroom instruction. Cultural competence is the teacher's ability to help establish an appreciation for the student's own culture while simultaneously building knowledge of another culture. Sociopolitical consciousness refers to the teacher's ability to implement classroom instruction that is relatable to the real world and involves building students' problem-solving/analysis skills (Landson-Billings, 2014).

In her most recent work, Landson-Billings (2014) articulated that she is in agreement with other scholars who have started to build upon her original work to push forward new ideas that are designed to better meet the needs of all students. Landson-

Billings expressed that the theory of CRP must make necessary changes over time, just as culture is ever changing, CRP must also change, because "scholarship, like culture, is fluid" (2014, p. 2). This more recent concept is referred to as *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012).

Paris argued that from the stance of relevance or responsiveness, as Ladson-Billings (1995) used, there is a possibility to "be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in a student's repertories of practice" (p. 95). With culturally sustaining pedagogy, Paris proposed that teaching practices need to become "more responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (2012, p. 95). In order to truly maintain a pluralistic society, pedagogy needs to be open to sustaining cultures of color (African American, Latina/o, Asian American, Pacific Islander American, and Indigenous American) in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by the younger generations of today.

The Student-Teacher Relationship

Relationships, both positive and negative in nature, can have significant effects on an individual's life. Studies support that a person's well-being is directly tied to the personal relationships they form (Lansford, Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takahashi, 2005; Vanzettie, 1996). Benefits of positively natured relationships include establishing a sense of belonging, providing reassurance of self-worth, and the validation of our thoughts and

actions. In contrast, relationships deriving from a negative nature can result in depression, anxiety, and poor self-conduct (Lansford et al., 2005).

Considering the impact relationships can have, the student-teacher relationship is significantly important for this study. Hamre and Pianta (2006) defined the student-teacher relationship as "emotions-based experiences that emerge out of teachers' on-going interactions with their students" (p. 6). A teacher's ability to connect with his/her students is a significant attribute of cultivating positive student-teacher relationships. Additionally, Strahan and Layell (2006) noted the importance of "establishing a learner-centered environment that featured warm, supportive relationships with students," (p. 153), a concept supported by the literature about care (Noddings, 1992, 2012).

According to Liu (1997), a close positive emotional bond between a student and a teacher can lead students to associate school as a home away from home; and if a student believes a teacher is dedicated to their growth, they are more likely to meet the school's academic and behavior requirements. Another study found that students who reported having positive student-teacher relationships also had a greater sense of belonging, and felt more academically efficacious (Midgley & Urdan, 1996). Furthermore, Koplow's study (2002) proposed that positive student-teacher relationships work to establish students' self-confidence and classroom engagement.

To summarize the literature, on average, students spend 1,260 hours a year in school classrooms. The relationships they establish during those hours greatly impact their educational outcomes. The student-teacher relationship plays a significant role; however, deficit assumptions and aesthetic caring relationships have detrimental consequences, especially for minority students. Given that students tend to make learning

a higher priority and work harder for teachers whom they establish reciprocal authentic caring relationships with (Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999), a holistic opportunity to learn environment must also include the students' voices and options about their educational setting and the relationships formed in it.

Theoretical Framework

To address the research questions that served as a guide for this action research study, I drew upon the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory, critical pedagogy, and care theory to support the exploration of institutionally labeled at-risk Latina/o students' experiences in an academic setting as it relates to this study. The following sections discusses each theory, its relation to this action research study, and their theory connectedness.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The development of critical race theory (CRT) as a framework is attributed to the legal field when scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman sought out a method to more adequately address and speak to racism in America during the 1980s. This was accomplished by challenging the ways race, racial power, and racial relationships were established and used through the eyes of the law. Later, scholars such as Boykin and Noguera (2011); Ladson-Billings (1995, 2005); Yosso, Villapando, Bernal, and Solorzano (2001) applied the tenets of CRT to the field of education to function as an analytical framework in educational research.

Critical race theory primarily consists of the following five tenets: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice within education, (d) the importance of

experiential knowledge, and (e) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tate & Iv, 2014; Yosso et al., 2001).

The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination in education originates from the idea that race and racism have become natural and permanent characteristics of society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This tenet is important because racism encompasses multiple faces, voices, and experiences; and it emphasizes that race and racism are mechanisms found at work within educational settings. CRT challenges the dominant ideology of the educational system that claim educational opportunities and experiences are equal among all races. CRT theorists argue that the self-interest, power, and privileges of the dominant groups of people in American society are simply camouflaged (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), supporting Valenzuela's concept of authentic verses aesthetic care (1999).

CRT commits to social justice and offers a transformative response to oppression Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explained social justice in education as curricular and pedagogical work that concerns itself with the elimination of racism and the empowerment of minority groups, supporting the importance of this study's focus on Latina/o students. This theory also recognizes the experiential knowledge of students of color as a central element to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination by explicitly capturing and drawing on the lived experiences of the students through family histories, narratives, and *cuentos*, to create counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Lastly, CRT challenges the unidisciplinary focus of analyzing race and racism by using the trans-disciplinary knowledge of ethnic studies,

history, law, and other fields to form a better understanding of racism and classism in and out of the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004).

With all five tenets working together, this framework allowed me to place the student voices at the forefront of the study. It is not just the telling of their experiences or the representation of their voices on the page that matters, but rather through CRT their narrative reflections emerge as constitutive and instructive, working to combat the inequalities in the educational setting.

Critical Pedagogy Theory

> The theory of critical pedagogy, described by Paulo Freire in 1970, explains how education can help us to understand the world we live in and can make us better prepared to transform it, but only if we deeply connect education to the larger realities in which people live, and to struggle to alter those realities. (Palmer, 2001, p. 130)

Freire argued that the education system suffers from "narration sickness," where a teacher explains a topic only in attempt to "fill" the student with the intended knowledge, thus turning education into a "banking system" in which teachers are the depositors and students the depositories (Freire, 1970). Instead, teachers must progress to "problem-posing" educators, presenting information to their students for consideration and investigation. "The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the logos" (Freire, 1970, p. 81). Problem-posing educators create critical thinkers; banking system educators merely transfer information from one deposit bin to the next.

Freire (1970) also argued learning is dialogic in nature, and "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there is no true education" (pp.

92-93). He explained that human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words. Dialogical, problem-posing educators work with students to attempt together to learn more than what they know individually. Working in conjunction with Freire's concept of the dialogical educator, Harris Garad's (2013) emphasis of dialogue and Nieto's (2008) discussion about the importance on incorporation of the talents/strengths students readily bring to the classroom are essential components of a caring teacher-student relationship. With this framework, I worked to challenge the structures of the dominant intervention program that excessively focuses on remedial and lower-level skills and merged with CRT to offer counterstories about the caring dynamics of Latina/o students in the classroom.

Care Theory

According to Valenzuela, caring is a major component of the teacher-student relationship and, thereby, greatly influences instructional effectiveness. Many teachers perceive themselves as being caring individuals. Valenzuela (1999) asserted, however, there are two types of care: aesthetic and authentic. Aesthetic caring focuses on the tangible outputs of education such as test scores, whereas authentic caring puts the emphasis on cultivating the student as a whole person (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela further argued that care is restricted in reciprocity when students believe the teacher aesthetically cares about the status of test scores and performance levels rather than authentically caring about them as individuals. Valenzuela (1999) boldly stated, "An obvious limit to caring exists when teachers ask all students to care about school while many students ask to be cared for *before* they care about" (p. 24). It addresses the need for pedagogy to follow from and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher

and students (Valenzuela, 1999), suggesting that before meaningful learning takes place, the teacher must establish authentic reciprocal relationships that are dialogic in nature (Freire, 1970; Noddings, 2012).

Methodological Approach

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose"
–Z. Neale Hurston

The methods used for this action research study are described in the following section. In this section, I provide a description of the study's setting and participants, the role of the action researcher, present the innovation, describe the data collection instruments and procedures, and describe the procedures for data collection and analysis.

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate how systemically labeled at-risk Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers; to explore the effect an opportunity to learn within a tiered academic intervention program has on students' thoughts and feelings; and to recognize the student voices as experts who can speak to the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. This section describes the methods I used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experience of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?
2. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?

3. How can school leaders create conditions to further support institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students' academic success on a larger scale?

Action Research

I engaged in action research to implement the Opportunity to Learn Environment model in an intervention program for at-risk students and gather data regarding whether or not the innovation made an impact on the participants in any capacity. Action research involves the systematic inquiry of an individual's workplace to gather information, reflect on current practices, and identify a need. The outcome of such investigation into one's own practice results in the implementation of some type of action, with the goal of making an effective change in the specified setting (Mills, 2014).

Action research contains multiple cycles and its design requires the practitioner to balance research with work, resulting in a researcher-practitioner who actively conducts a research investigation within his or her own practice (McNiff, 2008). Because my job as an academic interventionist was a newly established position developed in my local context, the internal investigation into one's practice was warranted. Herr and Anderson (2015) stated that the "practitioner researchers see research as a way to deepen their own reflection on practice toward problem solving and professional development, as well as a way to generate knowledge of practice from the inside out" (p. 38), making the researcher and practitioner one and the same.

As a practicing educator looking to improve my pedagogical practice and workplace, action research's process of deep inquiry into one's own practice in pursuit of opportunities for improvement (Riel, 2011) lends itself as an appropriate match. As Huang (2010) emphasized, action research always includes practitioners as partners in the

work of knowledge creation. With the voices of the Latina/o students in this study, I planned to meet what Anderson and Herr (1999) referred to as one of the explicit goals of action research, contributing to the academic conversations and practices within my local context and beyond.

Research Design

Action research can incorporate one of three different methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Plano Clark and Cresswell (2010) stated quantitative research works to explain a problem, relying on the collection of quantifiable data, and inquires in an unbiased and objective manner. Quantitative research data uses measurable and observable variables that are statistically analyzed; and reporting results can describe trends, compare groups, or relationships among variables. Qualitative research asks general and broad questions while seeking to explore a problem while relying on the views of participants and the understanding of their experiences. Qualitative research data analyzes textual evidence for themes, reports results in a descriptive manner, and inquiries are subjective and reflexive in manner (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2010). A mixed methods approach integrates qualitative and quantitative data.

Phenomenological research seeks to answer research questions of several individuals' lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon in a descriptive manner (Creswell, 2013). This study focused on capturing and describing the common experiences of systematically labeled at-risk Latina/o students. Creswell (2013) explained in phenomenological research, "the inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (p. 76).

This action research study utilized a sequential phenomenological qualitative approach. As a researcher, I was mainly focused on understanding Latina/o students' perceptions, understandings, and feelings about the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship as it relates to care. As Haung (2010) explained, action research is exploratory by nature and qualitative research tends to address research problems requiring exploration and understanding.

Action Researcher Postitionality

According to McNiff (2008), the action researcher collaborates with participants and also facilitates the design of the study. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) discussed how a researcher's bias could potentially threaten the validity of a study. In order to remain as transparent as possible, I discuss my own academic background, history with the research context, and positionality as an action researcher as it relates to this study.

Growing up, I was not a stranger to watching my parents make sacrifices to make ends meet. None of my family members graduated college and academics were not a stern focus in our household. I was expected to attend school, stay out of trouble, and take care of my two younger brothers. I was accustomed to living in an extended household and moving from house to house. High school was the first time I spent four consecutive years at a campus.

My passion driving this study comes from being a former student and product of the Elmount School District, a fact I am very proud to share. I attended one of the feeder elementary schools of AHS, lived within walking distance, and went on to graduate from Arendelle. I grew up in the surrounding neighborhood, and am very attached to the community.

In my high school regular classes, it was common to see my peers sleeping in class, horse playing in the room, and more chatting than working taking place; I understood this to be the norm. A counselor noticed I would frequently roam the hallways during instructional time, and he brought me into his office, looked up my grades and had a very pointed conversation with me about my future. It was the first time college was ever mentioned to me or a teacher inquired about my own interests and opinions. During our conversation, I shared that I wandered the halls because I was bored in my classes. He switched me to honors classes the following semester and it was then that I realized that different classrooms had different norms, expectations, and students were cared for differently.

Being split between regular and honors level classes, I witnessed these split environments. In one setting I found I was more likely to experience a healthy amount of struggle with my coursework, my thinking was challenged, and I was pushed to do well. While in the other, some teachers were content with students just not causing trouble, turning something in at the end of the hour whether it was completed or not, and were quiet during lectures. The interactions I had with my teachers impacted how I chose to respond in the classroom. For example, my English honors teacher took the time to understand who I was outside of her classroom, but also never accepted anything less than my best work. I worked diligently in her classroom, and an A from her was a significant accomplishment in my eyes. It was these types of teacher interactions that pushed me to a successful college pathway. While in a different class, where I was usually mistaken for a Brittany instead of Breanna, I would shut down for most of the lecture. Feeling frustrated, I would attempt to answer problems that typically led me to

follow suit with what everyone else was doing—copying the answers from the back of the book and turning the assignment in for an easy A. However, the classrooms were not the only place I noticed contrasting environments and viewpoints.

During my sophomore year, the district opened a second high school. It was then that I noticed the varying perspectives people had about the type of students each campus had. AHS was the old, run down campus, with ghetto kids, and across town was the sparkling new high school with the more affluent population, which was somehow a better place to be. I became accustomed to being asked why I chose to stay at AHS and found myself frequently involved in conversations about the type of students we actually were.

I knew in high school that I enjoyed teaching and helping others through my experiences as a tutor in the Teacher Cadet program and Child Development classes. I made the decision to pursue my undergraduate degree in Secondary Education at Arizona State University, and in that program came to the realization that schools like my high school, with high populations of students of color and low SES, have difficulty retaining highly qualified teachers. With further reflection on my own educational experiences, I realized that not every student encountered the positive caring relationships that made a meaningful impact on their future. This realization saddened and frustrated me; it also solidified my decision to return to my former district and give back to my community in the best way I knew how, caring for and teaching students.

In my English classroom, I would share my personal experiences as a student of the district and my educational pathway after high school. I made it a personal goal to make an impact on every one of the students who entered my classroom. In many ways, I

believe teachers cannot expect their students to care about learning content without the teachers first proving to their students they care about who they are and what they learn. I believe it is the teacher's responsibility to fully support all students by fostering positive caring relationships in the educational environment. In my six years as a classroom teacher, I realized that many teachers believe they appropriately care for their students, but remembering my own personal experiences I knew this was not completely accurate. From my student experiences as well as educational observations, I know that the most important voices are also frequently left out of the discussions surrounding education, which is why I focused my research on capturing the students' voices.

Innovation

The innovation is a multifaceted design, aimed to support students' academic progress and help them develop/improve their college/career-level entry skills by structuring opportunity to learn standards and communicating ethics of care instructionally within a tiered academic intervention and supporting student success program. Taking into account both the scholarly literature and student responses from a previous research cycle, the innovation focused on the cyclical relationship of opportunity to learn standards and ethics of instructional care around the following three aspects (see Figure 1):

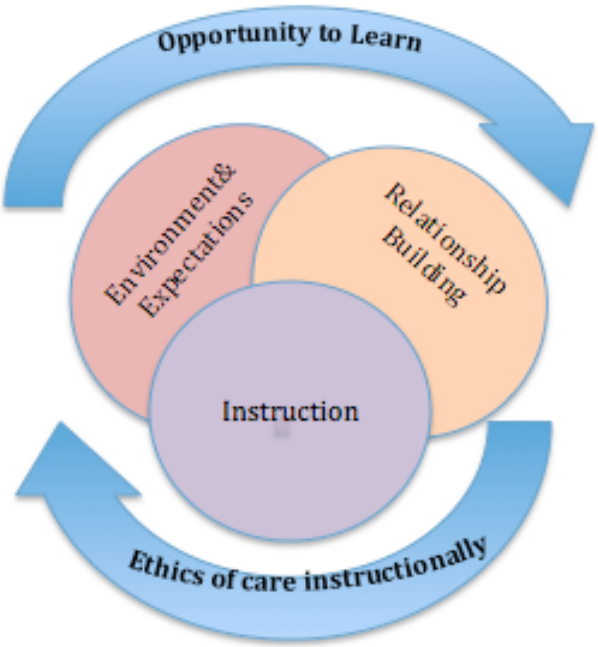

Figure 1. Ethics of care instructionally

These three aspects, instruction, relationship building, environment and expectations are the same three components previously defined and discussed in the care literature review. Aspects of each are detailed in the caring oriented and non-caring oriented discussion. The innovation spanned 16 out of the 19 weeks of the fall semester.

Tiered academic intervention. The tiered instruction and intervention program at Arendelle consisted of three different tiered instructional levels. Tier I is the key component of tiered instruction that involves all students in a classroom receiving high-quality instruction that has established known targeted outcomes. Tier I is delivered by teachers as to the content area in their individual classrooms. Tier II involves immediate and powerfully targeted group interventions systematically applied and

monitored for every student who is not achieving (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 88). This level incorporates core instruction plus more intensive small group instruction and takes place within the classroom with the content area teacher and/or an academic intervention teacher. Tier III is designed to accelerate a student's rate of learning by increasing the frequency and duration of individualized academic interventions based on the progress monitoring of interventions provided within Tier I and Tier II. Tier III involves the academic intervention teacher pulling the targeted students from an elective course to receive short-term, intentional, and focused interventions that are based on data gleaned from the Tier I and II interventions to address a specific skill the student has yet to gain mastery in. To be clear, this tiered intervention program explained in the innovation section and the way it is structured at AHS is separate from the school's RtI process which is a district designed approach used for the identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs.

Support for student success. In addition to the tiered academic intervention, bi-weekly academic conferences were held. The conferences involved students checking, discussing, and reflecting on their progress in their classes. The purpose behind the academic conferences was to empower the students to take control of their academic outcomes. These conferences were sensitive to the individual student's needs (Noddings, 1992) by celebrating their triumphs, no matter the scale, and maintain high expectations via goal setting (Valenzuela, 1999). In conjunction, after-school tutoring sessions were offered and held on a weekly basis for students with a 69% or lower. The rationale behind the tutoring sessions is supported by the care literature in holding all students accountable.

Connecting the pieces. As an academic interventionist, my efforts were focused on Tiers II and III and the supports for student success. These two tiers incorporated the opportunity to learn standards and ethics of care in a multitude of ways. First, each academic intervention session was tied to specific content area standards in the subject area(s), in which a specific skill was below mastery. Each session incorporated multiple methods for students to learn and provided multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery, with the goal of enabling each student to achieve at the same high level expectations and content area standards as their peers. Opportunities for reflection were built into the instructions of Tier II and III sessions, the student conferences, and tutoring. Environments were established as safe spaces for students to take risks and make mistakes. I planned to accomplish this by being a problem-posing reflective educator (Freire, 1970), co-constructing the classroom norms with my students, and incorporating classroom activities that require higher depths of knowledge levels (DOK). Additionally, because an opportunity to learn environment requires reinforcement by research that supports best classroom practices, the use of effective resources, and because Arendelle does have the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, various AVID methods such as critical reading strategies, WICOR, and Cornell notes were incorporated when and where applicable within the tiers and after-school tutoring sessions.

Setting

This study took place at Arendelle High School (AHS) located in the southwestern region of the United States. Arendelle was one of the four public high schools located in the Elmount Unified School District. AHS was classified as a Title I

school at the time of this study with 70% of the students on free and reduced priced lunch. There were 1,581 students enrolled in the school with 902 males and 679 females. The ethnic distribution of the student body is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Ethnicity Composition of Arendelle High School

Ethnic group	Percent composition
Latina/o	54%
White	30%
Black or African American	.09%
Asian	.02%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	.02%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	.004%
Two or more races	.03%

Arendelle's school label at the time this study was conducted was a B (Arizona Department of Education, *Arizona Report Cards,* 2014), which was a successful increase from its former C label spanning from 2011 to 2013. Since 2010, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) used the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) reading and math scores of a high school's 10th grade student population as part of the calculation for a school's label. In March of 2013, Governor Brewer signed House Bill 2425 into law, which erased AIMS as a graduation requirement. The State Board of Education has adopted a new statewide assessment, the AzMerit assessment, for third through eleventh grades that is aligned to Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards (AZCCRS). According to ADE, "These standards significantly raise the bar for our students, and focus on critical-thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills" (2010).

At the high school level, freshmen, sophomores, and juniors took the new reading, writing, and math assessment known as Arizona's Statewide Achievement Assessment

(AzMERIT) in the spring of 2015. During the timeframe this study was conducted, the State Board of Education had not yet indicated how the AzMERIT would play into the calculation of a school's label on a yearly basis; however, Arizona Revised Statute §15-241 mandated that failing schools are reported to the public. Therefore, for the first year of AzMERIT testing (2014-2015), schools with scores in the bottom 25% were assigned a letter grade of F. The district's expectation for Arendelle was to continue to increase on the school-label scale and not to fall in the bottom 25%.

Because Arendelle was resting at a C label for a three-year span, the school was under a lot of pressure from the district to implement changes that would result in higher test scores and gain a more positive increase in student growth as well as graduation rates. Over the years, some of those changes included the creation of Standards Based math and English classes that only serviced junior and senior students who had not yet passed the AIMS, and an increased emphasis on PLCs to collect and access student data. In 2012, Arendelle adopted the Cambridge Curriculum as part of the Move on When Ready program, for 9th and 10th grades in English, math, science, and social studies. The curriculum was designed to help students build:

- Foundational knowledge and confidence for further study
- Learning skills to be able to read, write, and speak clearly and accurately
- Critical thinking skills to observe, interpret, and analyze information
- Problem-solving skills to consider and solve problems, interpret and communicate results

Move On When Ready is a performance-based high school education model that offers students adaptive educational pathways, and the option to earn a Grand Canyon

diploma (Center for the Future of Arizona, 2013). The purpose of this was to offer students additional educational pathways and to provide a richer curriculum to the students. However, with the current structure of the Cambridge program at AHS, only the students enrolled in the honors program or those students identified as likely testers in multiple content areas participated in the end-of-year assessment, that if passed made them eligible to earn the Grand Canyon Diploma, systematically excluding non-honors students (the majority) from the full benefits of this opportunity.

Arendelle was also the only high school in the district during the course of the study that offered Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID is a system that was developed to train teachers in the practices that will prepare students for success in high school and future college and career endeavors. Specifically, the program targets students that are traditionally underserved in attaining higher education. Through teaching strategies and behaviors conducive to success with rigorous coursework, and the structured network of support from peers and teachers, AVID strives to develop the skills needed for all students to gain access to higher educational opportunities and foster individual determination. AVID's mission is to "close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society."

Developed by Mary Catherine Swanson in 1980, the program has grown to impact the lives of over 800,000 students throughout the United States and 16 countries/territories. With a focus on developing critical thinking, math, and literacy skills, AVID uses WICOR (writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) strategies in the development of all curriculum materials and lessons. Although the AVID strategies were developed for use in all classes offered within a school, only specific

students are selected for the AVID elective course. The ideal AVID elective student is characterized as a student in the middle, with average grades and a lack of ample support or training, but one who possesses a desire to make his or her college dreams a reality. Sadly, the vast majority of intervention students do not fit within these margins to qualify for the elective, serving as another instance in which students are marginalized.

Another initiative was the implementation of Project Graduation. This initiative was implemented during the 2014-2015 school year, which involved labeling incoming eighth grade students as provisional ninth graders based off of their elementary testing data. Students who did not score an Approaches or Higher on a comprehensive district benchmark in math and English are placed on the provisional pathway. This pathway involves a double block of either eighth grade English or math for which the student does not earn high school credit.

An additional change was the creation of Academic Intervention Specialists at the high school level. This position was created with for following purposes:

- To support the students' academic progress and pathways through high school.
- Help students develop/improve their college/career-level entry skills and academic coping skills needed to be successful in and after high school.
- Assist struggling students in creating academic success plans.
- Monitor student progress and develop intervention plans when needed.

Academic intervention specialists work with the at risk student population. The Elmount District used the following criteria to define an at-risk student:

- A student with frequent truancies and in jeopardy of credit loss.
- A credit deficient student during 10^{th}, 11^{th}, or 12^{th} grade.

- Freshman and sophomore students in the bottom 25% of their cohort based off of district benchmark testing data and elementary AIMS reading, writing, and math exam scores.
- Any students of cohort 2015 and cohort 2016 who had not earned a passing score of Meets on the AIMS reading, writing, or math exam.

I was hired as an academic interventionist during the second year Arendelle was implementing the intervention program. At that time, there was a total of four academic intervention specialists at AHS, two math and two English. I was one of the English interventionist. During the second week of the school year, the intervention team compiled student data and identified the at-risk students based off of the indicators set forth by the district. Adhering to the criteria stated above, a total of 355 students were identified for academic intervention classes. As displayed in Table 4 the Latina/o demographic composition of Arendelle was 55%. However, the percentage of Latina/o students identified as at-risk and in need of academic intervention was a greater than 55%, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage of Latina/o Students Identified for Academic Intervention

Grade	Total number of at-risk students	Number of Latina/o students	Percentage of Latina/o students
9th	100	54	54%
10th	112	70	63%
11th & 12th	143	98	67%
Total	355	222	63%

With 63% of the students being Latina/o, this affirmed the necessity of this study narrowing in on capturing the voices of the Latina/o student population.

Participants

In this study, I used convenience criterion sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, and as Plano Clark and Cresswell (2010) explained, it means the researcher uses subjects that are available and easily assessable to the researcher. Because only two of the four high school campuses in the district had academic intervention specialists, and each individual high school structured their academic intervention programs differently, the convenience sampling was suitable for this study. Utilizing convenience sampling in this study meant limiting the population down to AHS students who were referred to academic intervention. Criterion sampling means "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2001, p. 238). The student participants had to meet the following criteria: identified as an at-risk student, referred for academic intervention, and be a Latina/o student, specifically of Mexican descent.

Creswell (2013) indicated one of the defining features of phenomenology is that the exploration of the phenomenon is with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon, and recommended a heterogeneous group, ranging from three to 15 individuals. Following this guideline, I extended an invitation to participate in this study to a total of 16 students, eight males and eight females. Of the 16 students who were invited to participate in the study, 11 agreed. Because I wanted to capture the student voices and perspectives, pseudonyms were used in place of the phrase *student participant* in the following sections. In addition, the pseudonyms provided confidentiality to the students who participated in the study.

Description of Participants

To familiarize the readers with the student participants, I utilized introductory vignettes. Vignettes are defined as short descriptions or accounts that focus on one moment or provide trenchant impressions about individuals, with the main purpose being to explore participants' subjective beliefs and attitudes (Hughes, 1998; Renold, 2002). Vignettes can be created from a range of different sources, including research (Hughes, 1998). I generated each student vignette using poetic transcription: "the creation of poem-like compositions from the words of interviewees" (Glesne, 1997, p. 202). One of the most significant advantages of utilizing poetic transcription was that it helped me to bring the rich and meaningful lived experiences of the students to life in their own voices (West & Bloomquist, 2015). This poetic representation of the research data honors the students as co-collaborators, in which their lived experiences take center stage, which aligns with both the action research and phenomenological structure of this study (Creswell, 2013; Huang, 2010; Richardson, 1992). Drawn from the transcription of each individual

student, using a conversational tone and emphasizing different words from the transcript, each vignette attempts to transmit the emotions, speaking style, and beliefs of each student. The following table provides an inventory of the students who agreed to participate, followed by 11 individual vignettes that serve as an introduction of each student.

Table 5

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade Enrolled	At-risk qualifiers indicators
Angelica	Female	11th	• Bottom 25% of cohort • Credit deficient
Arabella	Female	9th	• Elementary attendance rates • Elementary grades/benchmarks • Disciplinary record
Brian	Male	9th	• Elementary grades/benchmarks
Chavez	Male	9th	• Elementary grades/benchmarks
Francisco	Male	9th	• Attendance record • Credit deficient
Junior	Male	10th	• Attendance record • Bottom 25% • Credit deficient • Disciplinary record
Lucy	Female	9th	• Elementary grades/benchmarks
Olivia	Female	9th	• Elementary grades/benchmarks
Omar	Male	10th	• Attendance • Bottom 25% of cohort • Credit deficient
Sophia	Female	11th	• Bottom 25% of cohort • Credit deficient
Raymond	Male	11th	• Bottom 25% of cohort • Credit deficient

Student Introductory Vignettes

Angelica

I was not born here in the states.
And I was not in school when we were traveling here to Arizona.
I have two brothers and an older sister.

I was scared to start high school.
Because my sister was like,
"You better pass the classes and not mess around
because this is not what you think it is."

I'm an in-between student.
My grades have went up and down.
I know I am a talkative one.
I talk and get distracted.
Especially in really crazy classes when everyone is all over the place.
But when there is stuff I understand I do the work and take good notes.
I just want to get stuff done, turn them in and then just get good grades.

My freshman year I failed, but I took summer school for some classes.
Then I got myself straight.
Because freshman year I actually messed around instead of getting myself straight.
But I really want to graduate and go to college.
So I need to stay focused.

But what is hard is that they made tests 60% of the grade.
Because sometimes I can do the work, but when it comes to tests I forget everything.
I get freaked out.

My family always tells me to focus on school, not on my friends.
Because I'm not always going to have friends all the time.
But I will have what I learn.
They always push me to do harder.

Arabella

I live with my mom.
She doesn't speak a lot of English.
It's been us for a while.
We don't always get along.

I don't like to be at home.
But I don't like to always be at school.
My mom wants me to be at school.

And she gets really mad when I get in trouble and they suspend me.
I don't like it when they suspend me.

But it's hard to like stay paying attention in class.
I'm just loud and get into trouble with the teachers.
I don't like getting into so much trouble.
But teachers don't really like me since elementary school.

I don't get a lot of good grades.
I can take good notes in class. And I can do a good job sometimes in class.
I just want teachers to be nice to me. To know how to talk to me.
It's sometimes hard.
School is hard.
I just like to be with my friends.
I sometimes like science and English. It will just depend on the teacher and how the class is.
I think I might graduate.

Brian

I have an older brother. He comes to school here too.
I did okay in elementary school.
My grades were not all that bad or all that good.
And I didn't really get in trouble a whole lot.
I think I got suspended only two times.

My parents want us both to finish high school and do good.
I know I am going to graduate and get a diploma.
But I don't know about college yet.
Maybe community college or something.
But that is far away to think about it.

I thought high school would be a good time.
It's cool be able to have different classes and to sit wherever at lunch with your friends.
I want to get Bs and Cs in all of my classes this year.
I know how the teachers say it's different in high school.
How you don't get credit if you get an F in a class. It's not like elementary.
So I don't want to lose any credits.

I think if I study and try hard I can do it.
I get a little worried about the classes I'm not good at though.
I have to do a better job of getting all my work done and doing homework.
But I think I can make high school good as long as I try to.

Chavez

I've lived around the school for a while now.
I'm have two brothers...I'm the middle child.
My dad had to go back to school for his GED, but my mom is a teacher.

I'm going to college for sure.
My mom wants me to go to ITT it's called I think.
But I want to go to an art school for producing, and writing, and stuff like that.
They want me to succeed in school.
Just not get in trouble...like I used to be back in elementary.

Back in elementary:
I was lazy I guess...
It was not a good experience at all. So I hope high school is.
We had no teacher for about 3 or 4 months for reading or science.
That happened a lot back then...Having no teacher.
It made me nervous about how I will do in classes here.
If I could start school all over, from Kindergarten, I would, but that's not a choice.

My brother told me freshman year is the best because it's a new start.
So far high school is better because I have all my teachers and no subs.
I kind of like everything about school.
I just think it's cool, you know?
It keeps me out of trouble; gives me things to do.

But I think I'm doing good this year.
I think I'm a good student.
I mean, I could pay attention a lot more than I do now, but otherwise I don't think I'm bad.
Because I'm going to motivate myself. You know?
I'm just going to keep my standards high.

Francisco

I lived:
- On a reservation called Ak-Chin.
- With my step-parents because they adopted me.
- When I was 14 we got evicted, and that's how we moved out here.

But I:
- Did some bad things to get into a group home.
- That's why I'm over here.

High school:
- Was going to be pretty fun.
- It was going to be a new experience,
- because I got to meet new people.

But it would be like working.

When the teacher told me to drop out,
I didn't come back to school.
If she never told me that,
I would have been a junior already.

I'm not a fast learner.
But I would get it if you teach me multiple times.
They say education is the key,
so I'm trying to learn more.

Academically I would want to be at a B or a C average.
Hopefully an A.
I'm going to join basketball.
I like to play basketball, to listen to music, to draw.

After high school:

I want to be a mechanic.
If that don't work, I want to be a computer technician.

My family:

They really want me to go to college.
They say none of us went to college, so they want me to do that.
They want me to basically be successful.
I want to go into life and be successful.

Junior

No one in my family has graduated from high school yet.
My older brother should graduate in a year or something.
But he had to go to a different high school, to take computer classes and catch up on credits.
I think I might have to do that too.
It might be better to be in a different place and have small classes.

Last year I stopped coming to school.
I had too many hard classes and I couldn't do the work so I didn't want to be here.
This year I don't know how to do a lot of the stuff in class because I dropped out last year.
It's hard to be here.

Sometimes I just feel like graduating ain't no big deal.
My teachers, a lot of them don't get I don't know to do the things they want me to do.
But if I try the work and they tell me it ain't right then I don't wanna do it anymore.
I don't know how to just look at my notes and then do the work.
I don't have anyone here for me at this school. Only my girlfriend and a few homies.

I don’t know what I want to do after high school.
I just want to live my life and do my thing.
I don’t feel like college is a place for me.
I’m not smart enough, I don’t think, to go to college.
I’ll just get a job and work probably after high school.
I don’t know though. It’s just so hard. Everything in my life is just always really hard.

Lucy

What should know about me?
I have two brothers and a younger sister.
My parents were born in Mexico and that makes it hard sometimes.
I like to listen to music because who doesn’t like music?
My favorite color is purple and I love llamas.

High school:
At first, I though high school was going to be really fun,
but then it just really sucks for me because it's just so different.
It’s high school.
It’s not middle or elementary anymore.
I was really overwhelmed.

I don’t interact with people that much.
I get really shy and awkward.
I’m just really quiet.
So I don’t like to ask questions in class.

I want to get good grades and maybe always get straight As or Bs,
and to study every night so I can keep that information I learned and not forget them.
But some of the lessons that we’re learning and trying to memorize in all the subjects it’s hard.
When it comes to a quiz, you just forget everything you were learning.
It takes me a while to progress something I’m learning.

But my parents tell me to do well and don’t get in trouble at school.
So I do my work to get it over with.
And try not to let anyone stop me.

Oliva

There are four kids, including me.
I have moved a lot and been to a lot of different schools.
My mom and dad didn’t finish high school.
And my older brother, he dropped out junior year.
They don’t want me to be in the place or position that they were in.

They don't want to see me in drugs and all that.
I know it'd be good for me to be the first to finish high school.

At first, I was nervous about starting high school because I thought I'd feel lost the whole time.
It feels normal. Just like elementary in a way.
I want good grades so I can get up out of here.
All As and Bs and maybe a C, no Ds or F.
After high school I want to go to college to be a doctor.
I want to work in the ER.

I guess as a student I can be funny and annoying.
I talk a lot.
At first, I start off good in my classes.
Then towards the middle, my grades get down low.
But I'd pick it back up usually by the end of the year.

If I learn about something I didn't know about,
and I actually get it, I feel good about it and have a lot of motivation to do the work.
I don't like when I learn about something and I don't get it.
I get down and frustrated.
But if my teachers know I can do it, I will try harder to do it.

Omar

I:

Have six siblings,
am 15, am the oldest.
Grew up in Phoenix.

My mom cleans houses.
My dad sells cars.

I have to help out with the kids a lot at home.
I don't really like to be at home. I like to be out, but not at home.
My parents want me to go to college I think… I don't really know.
I want to play football in college.

I'm expected to get As and Bs
But I get like B, C, D.
Cus I don't work hard enough.
I don't know why.

I don't know what I find enjoyable about school, but the work is hard I guess.
I'm not the best student.
I'm not always on task.
But I'm not the worst student.

I'm like in the middle.
I'm not like those kids at the front of the class who answers questions.
But my teachers treat me like I'm at the bottom of the class.
But I want them to teach me.
I guess I got to try.

Sophia

My parents are from Mexico and have no high school diploma.
I was not raised there.
My parents have five kids.
My parents, well they expect me to at least get my GED and to like not drop out.

I was excited and scared to start high school.
Excited because it's only four years and then I graduate.
But then it's like, oh my God, I'm going to be in high school!

I want to pass all my classes with at least a C.
After high school I want to go to college to be a pharmacist.
I want to have a good career and not struggle for money like we do now.

I'm a very loud and talkative student.
But I do my work when I want to.
But I talk if the teacher lets me.
If I know what to do, I want to do my work.
If I don't know, if I just don't get it, and if it's too hard that's when I talk.

I think my teachers they think I'm the type of student that if I want, I will work.
But sometimes I get lazy.
I get lazy when I don't know what to do. When things aren't clear.

My dance class is where I can be who I am.
But it is hard to get good grades in all my classes.
It's always been hard for me.

Raymond

I grew up in Old Mirage.
I have three brothers and one sister.
I'm the third oldest, in the middle.

My parents didn't graduate high school.
My mom didn't graduate because she was taking care of my cousins.
She is a stay-at-home mom.
My dad is a chef at Olive Garden.

They don't say I have to go to college, because they didn't go.
But they say I could. Because it's a better life for you.
Maybe I will go to community college and after that, university.
But it'd cost a lot of money that I don't have.
It's expensive.

High school:
I was not sure about it...Thought it'd be easy.
It was easy, it was too easy...But I didn't pass my freshman year because I wasn't trying.
And I just thought "Eh, it's a waste of time."
My freshman year I would mess around, goof around.
I was disrespectful.
I was a freshman.
Now I'm not.
But now I up here again in the same classes.

What is a challenge with high school is when something bad happens so you are not at school.
And you have all this work.
And fall behind.

But what is enjoyable now is meeting friends.
And passing all of your classes.
And knowing that you could graduate and maybe go to college.

As evident in the 11 student participant vignettes created above, each student comes with their own individualistic outlooks, aspirations, and history. I wanted these vignettes to help readers see beyond the student's "at-risk" label and to have an understanding of how they see themselves. Sadly, there are some students who have had damaging experiences that have thwarted their outlooks or confidence levels. However it is also important to recognize although many of them recognize their academic struggles, they have goals beyond high school, want to be successful, and have supportive family members who stand behind them.

Participating Teachers

After the student participants were finalized, I approached each content area teacher of the students who agreed to participate in the study. A total of 13 teachers agreed to participate in the study. To protect their anonymity, teachers were assigned a letter of the alphabet. The following table provides an inventory of the teacher participants.

Table 6

Teacher Participants

Identifier	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience
Teacher A	Female	Latina	5-10
Teacher B	Female	Caucasian	0-4
Teacher C	Male	Caucasian	16-20
Teacher D	Male	Caucasian	0-4
Teacher E	Female	Caucasian	16-20
Teacher F	Male	Latino	0-4
Teacher G	Female	Mixed	0-4
Teacher H	Female	Caucasian	0-4
Teacher I	Female	Caucasian	5-10
Teacher J	Female	Caucasian	16-20
Teacher K	Male	Caucasian	0-4
Teacher L	Female	Caucasian	0-4
Teacher M	Female	Caucasian	0-4

To summarize, the participants of this action research study included 11 students, 13 teachers, and me, the action researcher.

Methods of Data Collection

To develop answers for the research questions proposed in this study, I used various qualitative data collection tools. The following section provides a description of the data collection tools. The data collection took place during the first semester of the academic school year, from August to December. Interventions began during the third week of school, the week of August 16 through 22, and continued until the week before final exams, December 7 through 11. After calculating for school holidays, the overall timeline consisted of 16 weeks. An inventory of all six tools is presented below in Table 7.

Table 7

Data Collection Tools

Instrument	Description	Inventory Detail
Observations	Individual student observations conducted in the participants' content area classes.	• Biweekly • Weeks 2-15
Observation-elicitation interviews	Questions specifically asked about an event the researcher witnessed during the class observations.	• Ongoing • 2 observational events per student
Student semi-structured interviews	One-on-one student interviews, conducted as an initial and culminating interview. Topics included student background, perceptions of school, expectations of success, student-teacher relationships, and care.	• Week 3 and 15 • One on one
Teacher semi-structured interviews	1:1 interviews of participating content area ninth grade teachers. Questions topics included teacher expectations, student success, relationship building, and care.	• Weeks 2 and 15 • One interview per teacher

Table 7 continued on next page

Table 7 (continued)

Data Collection Tools

Instrument	Description	Inventory Detail
Student journal responses	Journal responses assigned in intervention class.	Week 3, 5, 7, 9
Photo-elicitation	Students given a prompt and asked to draw a response. The image then used in an interview.	• Week 2 & 15
Researcher Journal	An electronic journal reflective in nature to document the researcher's thoughts and actions.	• Ongoing • Study reflections, memos, advisory summaries

Observations. Creswell (2013) noted that observations are "one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research" (p. 166). Observations are described as "the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer" (p. 166). The purpose of the observations in this study was to capture firsthand eyewitness accounts of the students' daily classroom interactions. This included capturing the physical setting, activities, interactions, and conversations the students were involved with. The observations were scheduled to take place on a biweekly basis, in the students' core content area classrooms (i.e. English, math, science, social studies). Each observation was approximately 45 to 55 minutes in length, and were guided by an observation protocol (see Appendix A).

Observation-elicitation Interviews. Out of all of the observations I conducted of the student participants in their content area classrooms, I selected two events that I observed in the classroom. Next, I created questions surrounding that event to investigate the students' feelings and perceptions about what occurred. The intent was

to understand how the students connected these events that occurred in the classroom as to their student-teacher relationships.

The purpose of the observation-elicitation interview (Appendix B) was to record how student participants made meaning of their interactions with their teachers. During classroom observations, I identified significant moments that occurred in their (student) content area classes. To qualify as a significant moment, the following criteria must have been met:

- Direct one-on-one interaction between the participating intervention student and the content area teacher.
- The interaction must have been an extended moment, more than a question being posed and responded to with a "yes/no" answer. More than the teacher delivering a single simple direction (e.g., "Take your seat," "Your assignment is . . .")
- For the interaction to be considered an extended moment, it must have consisted of a minimum of three consecutive verbal exchanges, or have been a verbal exchange over the same topic/behavior that was revisited/addressed three or more times during the same observation.

This method differed from situational interviews in that the participants are asked to elaborate on their thoughts and actions they experience during an actual situation that took place in his/her class; whereas, situational interviews ask participants to respond to a specific situation they may experience in a given situation. A behavioral interview is a technique used to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors to determine an applicant's potential. The questions during a behavioral interview typically start with questions like, "Tell me about a time when . . ." and follow up with "Lead me through

your decision process during that moment . . .” The observation-elicitation interview differs in that the researcher will have actually witnessed the interaction and heard the verbal transactions that took place; whereas, in a behavioral interview, the respondent could potentially make up a fictional scenario to satisfy the question. Because the interviewer did not witness the situation firsthand, there is no way to prove the interviewee is telling the truth.

Student semi-structured interviews. As I explained in the research design section, this is a phenomenological action research study meant to capture the voices of Latina/o students. The semi-structured interview protocols were designed to elicit responses that could inform all three of my research questions. Plano Clark and Cresswell (2010) explained open-ended questions allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences regarding a phenomenon. The interview questions were open-ended, and included a variety of follow-up questions that were meant to probe more deeply into the respondents’ replies. I intended to conduct an initial interview and a culminating interview with each teacher and student participant (Appendix C and Appendix D). The interviews took place during Weeks 3 and 15 of the innovation. I recorded each interview on two different audio sources for transcription.

Teacher semi-structured interviews. I planned to conduct one-on-one interviews with the content area teachers (English, science, math, social studies) of the students participating in this action research study. The interviewees consisted of the content area teachers whose classrooms I conducted observations in. The interview protocol (Appendix C) was used to understand the teachers’ expectations of students and their successes, the structure of the learning environment, the dynamics of their student-

teacher relationships, and perceptions of care. Phenomenological action research seeks to understand the lived experiences of its participants (Creswell, 2013) and CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of students of color as a key element to understanding racial subordination by capturing those lived experiences to create counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). I sought to comprehend the teachers' perceptions because they were a part of the students' lived experiences; and in order to create meaningful counterstories, it was important to establish a deep understanding of how the students' perceptions aligned with and diverged from their teachers' line of thinking and ways of understanding the learning environment.

Document collection. This open-ended data collection tool had the potential to inform all three of the research questions in this study. On a scheduled basis, I asked the students to respond to a journal prompt. The journal prompts were open-ended questions, and they offered students time to consider their own beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about their classroom environment and educational experiences. To maintain their journal responses, each student was given a spiral notebook, which was kept in the student files in my classroom. The journal responses were not shared outside of my classroom, but the students were given the option to share their responses verbally.

Photo-elicitation. This data collection tool worked to inform how Latina/o students perceived and experienced their classroom environments. Schwandt (2007) indicated this method can help researchers evoke memories and examine perceptions of their participants. At the beginning of the innovation, students were asked to create an image of a caring classroom environment and a non-caring classroom environment (see Appendix E). In the final week of the innovation, the students were asked to create an

image that captured one of their content area classroom and their intervention classroom. The students could either draw the image, or gather images from the Internet or magazines to construct their final product. The students were asked to write a brief paragraph description of their image. During a short one-on-one semi-structured interview, I asked the students questions, prompting them to explain any patterns, comparing and contrasting evidence, and any personal meanings they saw or related in the images.

Parents of the students who participated in this research were asked to sign a consent form allowing their child to participate (Appendix F). The student then signed an assent form showing they agreed to participate (Appendix G). In addition, teachers who participated in this research also signed a consent form (Appendix H).

Researcher journal. On an ongoing basis throughout my data collection, I maintained an electronic researcher journal using an application called Evernote. The journal served multiple purposes. With it, I documented my ideas about any casual conversations and observations I had in the field. I also reflected regularly on my personal interactions with students. Lastly, the journal provided me a workspace to record and work through any concerning issues, forming hypotheses, and concluding ideas.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) warned that unchecked researcher bias could compromise the validity of a study; therefore, it was important to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of this study. Qualitative research is interpretative in nature, so it is important that a researcher establishes strategies to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the findings (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985)

explained trustworthiness established when the findings of a study reflect as closely as possible meanings described by the participants, and the following four characteristics were met: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In the following sections, I depict how I addressed these four areas in the design and implementation of my study.

Credibility. To address the credibility of the study, which means determining if the study actually measures what it is indented to (parallel to internal validity), I used triangulation of the data, member checking, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation in qualitative research involves corroborating evidence from multiple sources of data, in this case, interviews, observations, and document collection, to shed light on a theme or a perspective (Creswell, 2013). Schwandt (2007) stated triangulation is necessary because "research is a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action or event can be best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points" (p. 299). Additionally, triangulation leads to the development of converging lines of inquiry, which Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explained as establishing more accurate conclusions when more than one source supports a researcher's findings, which also further develops the construct validity of the findings of a study.

Member checking. Member checking involves soliciting feedback from the research participants regarding the findings the study yields (Schwandt, 2007). After conducting data analysis, I shared the introductory vignettes and developed themes with my participants. This process gave my participants the opportunity to confirm or

challenge the accuracy of meanings and assist in countering threats of bias, contributing to the accuracy of the study (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2010).

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the process of utilizing trusted and knowledgeable colleagues as sounding boards during the research process as the study unfolds (Schwandt, 2007). During data collection and data analysis, I engaged in monthly peer debriefing with the other doctoral students in my learner scholar community. In the sessions, we shared excerpts from our data and engaged in a group analysis of the perceived emerging codes and themes. This process helped to increase the validity, dependability, and address thoroughly any potential flaws in the research study (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2010).

Research journal. I maintained a research journal during the data collection and data analysis process of this study. The contents of the journal contained both procedural and analytical memos. Schwandt (2007) maintained researchers could use memos to capture their thoughts, record processes, and comment on the meaning of emerging codes. By utilizing the research journal, I was able to engage in constant self-reflection and use it to contest any bias.

Dependability

The second characteristic of trustworthiness**,** dependability, is parallel to reliability, and is "focused on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). The research tools previously mentioned, such as member checking and peer debriefing, helped to ensure the dependability of the data collection. In addition, the sampling techniques I used in this study worked to ensure the reliability or dependability

of the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Lastly, the data analysis process of compiling, organizing, and analyzing the data from the interviews, observations, and document collection worked to ensure the process was well documented.

Transferability

The transferability of a study deals with the issues of generalization, is parallel to external validity (Schwandt, 2007), and is also an important element of ensuring the trustworthiness of a study. Generalization refers to the wider relevance of one's inquiry beyond the researcher's own specific context, and involves moving from specifying patterns/relations discerned from the data about a specific event to a more general and abstract understanding of the aspects of the human experience (Schwandt, 2007). Because this is a qualitative study with an emphasis on a small number of participants, statistical generalization cannot be established; however, it is possible to provide opportunities for transferability to other similar situations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To establish transferability for this action research study, as the inquirer, I provided sufficient descriptive detail about the study as well as integrated the literature in the data collection and analysis stages (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007).

Confirmability

Lastly, confirmability (parallel to objectivity) is concerned with establishing the data and interpretations are not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination (Schwandt, 2007). To establish confirmability of this study, I discussed my positionality and utilized triangulation to reduce the impact of any potential researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). In addition, the member checking and peer debriefing procedures worked to ensure the integrity of the results and to increase the confirmability of this study (Schwandt, 2007).

Data Analysis

Schwandt (2007) described qualitative data analysis as the process of the researcher making sense of, interpreting, and theorizing data; it is undertaken by means of a variety of procedures that involve working back and forth between data and ideas. In the following section, I explain the steps, procedures, and methods I used during the data analysis process of this phenomenological action research study.

I used Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method of data analysis as the procedural analysis for the data collected in this study. This data analysis method consists of seven procedural steps. The following table outlines the seven procedural steps.

Table 8

Procedural Steps of Colaizzi's Phenomenological Method of Data Analysis

Stage	Procedural Steps
Stage 1	Transcription of the audio-recorded interviews.
Stage 2	Extract significant statements from each transcript.
Stage 3	Formulate meanings as these emerge from the significant statements.
Stage 4	Organize formulated meanings into clusters of themes.
Stage 5	Integrate the results into an exhaustive description of the topic being studied.
Stage 6	Formulate the essential structure of the phenomenon.
Stage 7	Validate the descriptive results by returning back to the participants to confirm if this analysis describes their experience.

Following the steps outlined in Table 8, I audio-recorded all interviews from both students and teachers, which were transcribed by a professional transcription company and verified by myself for accuracy. To work through the procedural stages, I coded by "theming the data," which was achieved by creating an extended phrase or sentence that identified what a piece of data was about and/or meant (Saldana, 2009). The deliberate choice was made to use phrases, such as *caring is, caring means, non-caring looks like,* as well as employing In-Vivo coding, and descriptive coding (Saldana, 2009). Themes were identified at the manifest and latent level that pertained directly to how institutionally labeled at-risk Latina/o students described their experiences in academic intervention and caring relationships with teachers. DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) proposed "a theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and

unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (p. 362). In alignment with the phenomenological structure of this study, the manifest and latent level themes served to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Saldana, 2009).

I compiled all of the significant statements on to a central document, physically cut and sorted them into groups of similar ideas to formulate meanings (Shosha, 2012), and organized the formulated meanings into clusters of organized themes. I validated each cluster by referring back to the original transcripts to ensure no data were left out or added to (Mackenzie, 2009). Using significant insight, I developed an exhaustive description of each theme cluster. By an exhaustive description, I mean "a comprehensive description of the experiences as articulated by participants" that was "developed through a synthesis of all theme clusters and associated formulated meanings explicated by the researcher" (Edward & Welch, 2011, p. 165). To facilitate the analysis process of the data, I used HyperRESEARCH ("HyperRESEARCH," 2015) to electronically code and work through the initial phases of the analysis process.

Student journal responses. The student journal responses were prepared for analysis by individually typing each response into an Excel spreadsheet. Excel was purposefully chosen to assist in the data analysis process by horizontally providing a visual of each individual student's responses. Vertically I was able to look at any commonalities that existed for each question. As I transferred each journal response over into the Excel spreadsheet, I corrected any spelling errors; however, to avoid diminishing the value of each student participant's voice, no other corrections were made in terms of grammar and sentence syntax. In addition to following the coding steps stated above, one

tool I used to help make sense of the student's journal responses was an online tool called Word It Out. I copied student participant responses for each particular prompt into Word It Out to produce a visual of their reflections.

Photo-elicitation. To analyze this data source I first made photocopies of each image and wrote my initial codes physically on each one. I then scanned an electronic copy of each original image and imported them into HyperRESEARCH for further analysis and theme comparison. I took the written descriptive paragraphs that the student participants wrote to accompany each image and typed them into a Microsoft Word document. I then compared the photos and photo descriptions to the student journal responses and interview transcripts for a richer analysis.

Semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place at different intervals. The student interviews took place during the first two weeks of the data collection period and the culminating interviews took place during the last two weeks. The teacher interviews took place over the entire course of the data collection period, both before and after school or on teacher prep periods. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by a transcription company. The transcriptions were secured on my personal computer, off school grounds, and were password protected.

Observations. The observations were collected on an ongoing basis, as scheduling allowed throughout the fall semester. I used a printed copy of the observation protocol and took all observational notes by hand. During the observations I documented the conditions, interactions, expectations, and instruction in the classroom. Immediately after an observation I would write a reflective memo, using the observation protocol as the guide, and used bracketing to separate my own comments and feelings from what was

observed. This data source was first analyzed by hand and then compared to the student journals, interviews and photos for richer analysis.

Research journal. The journal entries took three different forms: audio recordings, typed notes, and pictures of handwritten notes. All were stored on my personal computer using Evernote. I returned to the research journal regularly during the data analysis process to inform the study's development.

Results

This action research study employed a sequential phenomenological qualitative design with the goals of recognizing at-risk Latina/o student voices as experts who can speak to the caring dynamics of student-teacher relationships, to explore these students' experiences in a tiered academic intervention program, and to investigate how school leaders create conditions to further support their academic success on a larger scale. The results of my data analysis are discussed in the following sections. These results were based on analysis of eight qualitative data sources: student journal responses, student initial and culminating interviews, teacher interviews, photo-elicitation, observations, and notes from the researcher's journal. Data sources included transcriptions from four different journal prompts, 21 student interviews, 9 teacher interviews, 10 student generated photos, 24 observations, and the researcher journal. I begin by presenting a holistic inventory of the data, followed by a description of the analysis process used to develop the emergent themes. Table 9 gives a succinct summary of the data inventory.

Table 9

Inventory of Qualitative Data

Data source	Word count
Student journal responses	10,686
Student initial interviews	35,123
Student culminating interviews	31,003
Teacher interviews	41,013
Photo-elicitation paragraphs	359
Research journal	5,124
Total	122,949

Themes. Using Colaizzi (1978) process for phenomenological data analysis, 449 significant statements and phrases were extracted from the qualitative data sources. These statements were organized on separate sheets and coded based on their source, page, and line numbers. Meanings were then formulated from the significant statements and phrases. Table 10 provides examples of the significant statements and phrases that were identified and their formulated meanings.

Table 10

Examples of Significant Statements and Phrases

Significant statements	Formulated meanings
"I like that there are not a lot of kids in intervention. That works better for me. And there are not a bunch of kids up walking around or on their phones being loud so I can keep focus better. I work better when I can focus on the work." (Brian)	The student likes the smaller class size provided in intervention and that the environment is well structured and managed, resulting in fewer distractions and a more productive work environment for the student.
"I feel smarter in that class because I know what to do. And like I know I can learn it. The teacher says it's okay if we don't get it the first time and how no one can get everything the first time. But we will get it at different times. And to me that makes sense because I know I learn different than other kids and other kids learn different from me." (Angelica)	Feels smart and capable of learning. Understands it is okay to have to work to gain understanding.
"What I think is a caring environment classroom would be kids paying attention during class, not being disrespectful towards the teacher when she/he says something you don't want to hear. What I see as a non-caring classroom would be talking when the teacher is. Saying disrespectful stuff about other students. That is what I see as a caring and non-caring classroom would be like." (Francisco Image)	In a caring environment students are engaged and are active listeners. They have respect for the teacher and one another. In a non-caring environment students talk during instructional delivery and verbally disrespect one another.
"In my perspective the school could have teachers who let all of the students to take the Cambridge tests at the end of the year so we can try to graduate early if we want to try that. Because there may be some who want to do that to start work or to go to college sooner." (Lucy)	The student considers the teacher as the gatekeeper that either grants or denies access to Cambridge exams and the path of early graduation.

Following the formation of the meanings, I began to group them into categories of like theme clusters. Theme cluster were reflections of like visions and were incorporated together to form four larger emergent themes that reinforced the four assertions discussed in the following sections. Table 11 displays grouped meanings within theme clusters and the emergent themes.

Table 11

Example of Connectedness Between Meaning, Clusters, and Themes

Examples of formulated meanings	Theme clusters	Emergent theme
• The student likes the smaller class size provided in intervention and that the environment is well structured and managed, resulting in fewer distractions and a more productive work environment for the student. • Intervention is considered a positive thing and the student feels comfortable to engage in asking questions as well as feels productive. The teacher's positive demeanor resulted in the student feeling happy to go to intervention.	Intervention environment Productivity	Positively-benefited structure
• Feels smart and capable of learning. Understands it is okay to have to work to gain understanding. • The experience of academic success leads to feelings of confidence and a sense of pride in ability. • Student feels comfortable to admit when he does not know the content but will put forth the effort to understand the content.	Capable of learning Confidence in academic abilities	Shifts
• The student actions in a caring classroom include collaboration and cooperation in the learning. • In a caring environment students are engaged and are active listeners. They have respect for the teacher and one another. In a non-caring environment students talk during instructional delivery and verbally disrespect one another. • In a non-caring environment, both the teacher and the students disengage in the learning process. • Team building and trust are evident in a caring classroom.	Need for collaboration Need for mutual respect Need for full engagement	Convergent and divergent caring environments

Table 11 continued on next page

Table 11 (continued)

Example of Connectedness Between Meaning, Clusters, and Themes

Examples of formulated meanings	Theme clusters	Emergent theme
• Students feel specific tutoring should coincide with credit recovery. • Students feel after-school tutoring needs to be more than just a test-retake opportunity, but also an opportunity for re-teaching. • The student considers the teacher as the gatekeeper that either grants or denies access to Cambridge exams and the path of early graduation.	Identification of challenges Identification of lacking opportunities	Educational barriers and differential supports

As a result of this analysis process, my overarching findings included positively benefited structures, shifts, convergent and divergent caring environments, and educational barriers and differential supports, which are further discussed and explained in the following section.

Findings

"There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after."
–Thorinn II Oakenshield in *The Hobbit, Over Hill and Under Hill*

Very much like the introductory quote to this section, as I immersed myself in the data analysis process and sifted through each and every data source, I was unsure of what I would discover. As researchers most commonly do, I most certainly found *something* in the voices of my participants. This section discusses the findings that were gleaned from the comparison of the results, which originated from the analysis of the qualitative data collected. A total of four findings are presented in order, which respond to the following research questions:

1. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experience of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?
2. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?
3. How can school leaders create conditions to further support institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students' academic success on a larger scale?

The first two findings, positively-benefited structure and shifts, respond to Research Question 1. The second finding, convergent and divergent environments, responds to Research Question 2. Educational barriers and differential supports were in response to the third research question. With each finding, a discussion is framed around the supporting evidence and reinforced with theme-related components and quotes from and images created by participants.

Finding 1: Positively Benefited Structure

Students described their experiences in academic intervention as positive and the program as a beneficial support structure. The academic intervention program was a multifaceted design aimed to support students' academic progress and help them develop/improve their college/career-level entry skills by structuring opportunities to learn standards and communicating ethics of care instructionally. As a reminder, the intervention program consisted of three tiers. Research Question 1 focused on exploring how the students described their experiences in Tier III of the program, which is discussed in-depth in the Innovation section. This finding responds to my first research

question: “How do institutionally labeled “at-risk” Latina/o students describe their experience of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?” Initially at the start of the semester, some students expressed feelings of hesitation about having to attend Tier III of the academic intervention program, “I didn’t understand why I was here, I thought I got in trouble or something” (Junior, student interview, November 2015). However as the semester progressed, students described their experiences in academic intervention as positive and noted it as a structure within the school they described as helpful, “I feel good in intervention cause I know I can get help” (Junior, student interview, November 2015).

Some initial codes that led to the theme of positively benefited structure included in-vivo codes (*works better for me* and *focus on work*), the descriptive codes (*comfortable* and *helpful*), and the themed data codes (*intervention looks like small group* and *intervention feels like support*). As the relevant initial codes were compared, modified, and described, three theme clusters emerged as this theme’s central properties. The theme cluster components that substantiated the positively benefited structure theme and its corresponding finding were (a) students felt the small group environment was a structure that helped them, (b) students had multiple learning opportunities and modes of learning, and (c) students felt helped, supported, and expressed positively connoted feelings about the environment. The remaining portion of the discussion regarding this finding is organized according to the sequence of the theme cluster components stated above.

Students commented frequently on the small group structure and the opportunity to engage with the intervention teacher one on one. For example, Omar stated, “What’s good about intervention is working in not a big class. I can get the teacher to be with me

more if I need it" (Student interview, November 2015). It appears a smaller group setting to Omar was important and allowed him to experience a more personalized education. Similarly Arabella said, "Like when you sat with me for like five minutes to teach that paragraph thing, that's all I needed. After that I got it and did the rest" (Student interview, October 2015). Having those five short minutes gave Arabella the clarification she felt she needed to complete the full task on her own. Brian shared,

> I like that there are not a lot of kids in intervention. That works better for me. And there are not a bunch of kids up walking around or on their phones being loud so I can keep focus better. I work better when I can focus on the work. (Student interview, December 2015).

The smaller learning environment was much more conducive, and to Brian a certain sense of order also contributed to his ability to focus on the tasks at hand. Intervention typically did not have more than 15 students in a class period. From there it was quite common for small groups to be formed for instructional delivery. These smaller group sizes were a purposeful decision on the part of the intervention teachers. These statements not only highlighted the fact that students took notice of the student-to-teacher ratio, but also emphasized their level of satisfaction. Equally important, the student accounts supported the finding that given the right environment, these "at-risk" students formerly described as unfocused, can, in fact, exhibit quite the opposite behavior in a proper setting, both challenging the dominant ideology and demonstrating importance of experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Tate & Iv, 2014; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Students recognized that although they often received the same content in intervention that was covered in their content area classes, the delivery methods were different as well as modes of demonstrating mastery and understanding. Manipulatives

and active engagement strategies such as individual whiteboards, response cards, and puzzle writing structures, were often incorporated into the lessons in intervention. In addition, students were presented with different organized station activities meant to deliver, reinforce, or expand on a particular skill, topic, or concept.

For example, some students were introduced to a specific paragraphing structure in their content area class. After students reflected and self-identified this as an academic focus of concern, I organized a stationed lesson to support their learning. Station 1 had students reconstruct exemplar paragraphs in the correct format using the sentence stems provided. Station 2 required students to read example paragraphs and interact with the text by either identifying and explaining how or why the paragraph contained all required components or identifying and adding any missing components of the paragraph structure while still adhering to the writing style of the example. Another station asked students to use information gained from either reading a text or listening to an informational video clip to write a multi-paragraph response adhering to the proper paragraph structure. The student-centered activities permitted students to guide, peruse and track their own levels of learning, and were also aligned with Oakes' multiple avenues of learning (1995).

Journal Prompt Number 4 posed the following question to the student participants: “How did receiving support from academic intervention impact you as a student?” The following is what Brian wrote:

> And it was a good help for biology because I could learn the same stuff but different like when we build formulas but we had color index cards to put them in order. And it was fun to when we had to make the formula but build it with other students at the front of the class so that way we could help each other out and make sure we all had the right answer. That stuff helps better than just having the PowerPoint and to take notes on the worksheet or in our notebook because I don't remember a lot that way. (Brian, student journal entry, November 2015)

Brian felt the different environment and instructional delivery not only aided him in his understanding, but also felt this method of learning was fun. Additionally, he highlighted having the opportunity to work collaboratively with his peers and practice peer-accountability for learning as beneficial pieces of the learning environment (Nieto, 2006). Angelica's journal response also called attention to the differentiation of instruction and her feelings of it being more conducive to her learning style.

> And we would go over things that we were learning in class but it would be different. Like they way it was explained was better because we would do different activities or just get one piece at a time. (Angelica, student journal entry, November 2015)

Angelica exhibited similar feelings with Brian and also believed having the content delivered in smaller chunks helped her understanding. Another student, Junior, spoke about how the minor change of writing on the desks with expo markers was beneficial for him. "I could work it all out better, all of my thoughts when I write on the desk sometimes. I don't know why, but I can just rework it if I need to" (Student interview, December 2015). In alignment with the Opportunity to Learn literature and standards, student participants recognized and felt academic intervention considered the diverse and multiple ways students can learn, and noted it as beneficial to their learning.

As noted previously in my data analysis discussion, one tool I used to help make sense of the student's journal responses was an online tool called Word It Out. I copied student participant responses for each particular prompt into Word It Out to produce a visual of their reflections. Figure 1 shows the visual word cloud that represent the words that emphasized all the students' responses to Journal Prompt 4: "How did receiving support from academic intervention impact you as a student?"

As seen in Figure 2, the words *help, learn, try,* and *good* are emphasized in the student responses about intervention, exemplifying students' feelings towards the environment academic intervention provided. Student participants were shown Figure 2 and asked to share their initial thoughts about it. Sophia took note of the word *help* first, and said, "Yeah, intervention is like helping to learn, so that's what I see" (Student interview, December 2015). Raymond said, "Intervention is different than class you know? And that's a good thing because not all classes work" (Student interview, December 2015). Here the student made a comparison between intervention and his content area classes, and expressed his belief that not all of his classes were settings that supported his learning.

Another key point taken from the Figure 2 is the amount of words with positive connotations noted overall. Twenty-five positively charged words and phrases, ranging from *support, confident, encourage, cool, better, felt easy,* and *can-do-it* affirmed words students used to speak about the intervention program and what they felt it did for them as learners. In support of the visual representation (Figure 2) of the student journal responses, Lucy stated in an interview, "It's good in intervention. I feel like I can ask questions and we get a lot done in there. And the teacher always seems happy to see us, so I am happy to be there" (Student interview, November 2015). Lucy felt comfortable and supported enough to ask clarifying questions in intervention. In that same interview when asked about whether or not she asked questions to help aid her understanding in her other classes her reply was, "Not really, I'm shy and quiet so I don't always get seen a lot" (Student interview, November 2015), expressing her awareness of her introverted

personality, which she believed caused teachers to overlook her in the classroom. By the same token, Sophia shared,

> I know there are some of my friends that want to come be in intervention. They had it last year and said it helped them. It's been a help for me so I don't mind that I have to go. I mean I would still like to be in Dance, but at least I know that it won't waste my time with things and I will learn something. That does not always happen in other classes I have where I get super bored. (Student interview, October 2015)

To Sophia, she felt attending intervention supported her learning and therefore was a productive way to spend her time. Her statement, "I will learn something," was equally, if not more important, as it exemplified her own stance on learning and her education. Contrary to what a large majority believe about "at-risk" students and their deficit assumptions regarding the outlook on their education, Sophia's statement served as proof that "at-risk" labeled students have not given up on their own education and do, in fact, not only want to, but expect to learn while at school.

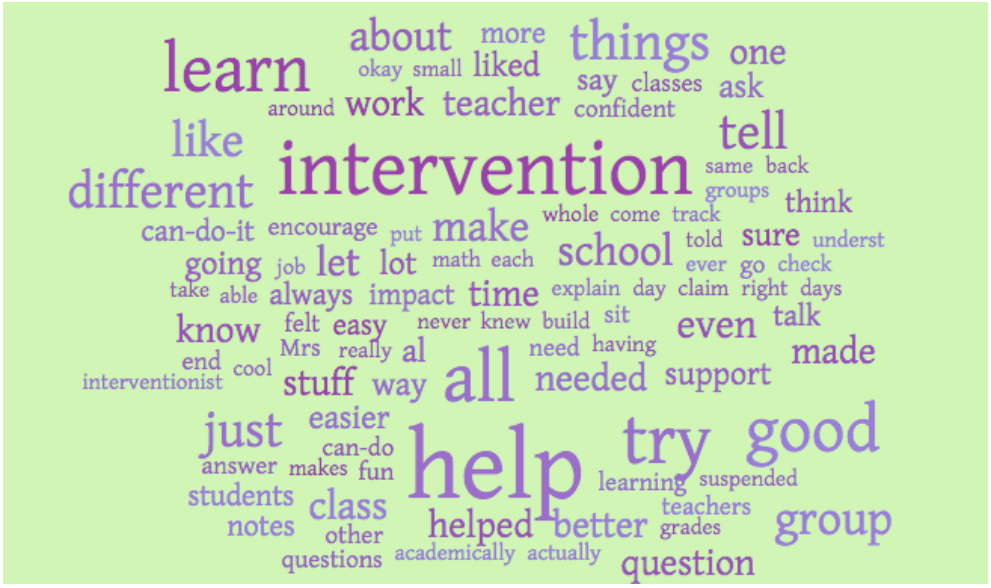

Figure 2. Word It Out student journal responses to Prompt 4

Taken together, three related components of the theme positively benefited structure emerge as students participated in and described their experiences in academic intervention structured to create opportunities to learn. Specifically, the students expressed that they felt helped and supported, that the small group environment was a positive attribute that also contributed to more opportunities to engage in one-on-one instruction and felt their diverse learning needs were met.

Finding 2: Shifts

As students experienced success in academic intervention, their perceptions of their academic self-efficacy and mindsets shifted. This finding also responded to my first research question: "How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experience of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?" Some initial codes that led to the theme of *shifts* were in-vivo codes (*I feel smarter, I will try,* and *I can learn*); descriptive codes (*pride* and *confidence*), and the themed data codes (*intervention means I am going to learn* and *intervention looks like helping other students*). As the relevant initial codes were compared, modified, and described, three theme-related components emerged as the theme's central properties. The theme-related components that supported the theme of shifts and its corresponding assertions were (a) students began to express confidence in their own abilities, (b) students learned to develop a level of comformability with questioning and attempting difficult tasks, and (c) students expressed mindset awareness and differences.

At the start of the innovation, I noted in a journal entry that many students shared and expressed the common sentiment of having to be in intervention because they were not smart or inferior intellectually in some capacity. I wrote the following:

> Today was the first day with kids. Things went well. . . . Successfully made it through introductions, expectations, and procedures. They were not as resistant as I initially thought they would be, or at least they didn't express it. But as we discussed the purpose of intervention a lot of the students were quick to make comments like, "I'm here because my teacher thinks I'm dumb, huh" and "I've never been good at this." One kid even laughed out loud when I stated I was confident in their abilities and that they should be too. I'm going to have to make a conscious effort to model/address positive self-image. (Researcher journal entry, September 2015)

This conscientious effort involved implementing Nodding's (1992) ethics of care approach involving modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Additionally, one of the many components of incorporating Opportunity to Learn Standards within the academic intervention program was enabling all students to achieve high content standards and to learn to their full potential. Although the focus and goals of this study did not intentionally target academic self-efficacy and mindset, both concepts did align with the Opportunity to Learn Standards, and findings indicated that students frequently discussed or examined attributes of their individual academic self-efficacy and mindsets. "Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief that they can successfully achieve at a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal" (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001). Mindset refers to the beliefs an individual has about their most basic qualities and abilities. Dweck's (2006) work discussed two types of mindsets, fixed and growth. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe qualities like intelligence are fixed traits; whereas, individuals with a growth mindset believe qualities like intelligence can be developed if effort is put forth.

An activity students engaged in while in academic intervention was goal setting. All students set at least one long-term (semester) goal, and individually specific short-term goals were set depending on student need. The individual goals ranged from making up a test by a specific date, to signing up to speak to their counselor about their classes and credits. Schunk and Pajares (2001) pointed out the connection goal setting has to with academic self-efficacy, in that when students believe they can attain or experience success in meeting a goal they viewed as challenging, powerful influences on their academic attainment are made.

Setting goals was not a new notion the students were asked to partake in, as Omar readily shared in class, "Can I just use the same stuff I said I'd do in my English classes?" (Omar, September 2015). Other students like Olivia expressed feelings of doubt in having to set goals to begin with. "Are we even gonna do anything with these like ever again" (Olivia, September, 2015). Students clearly expressed a been-there-done-that attitude and were used to goals falling by the waste side after being set, which is to be expected as Schunk and Pajares (2001) highlighted how environmental factors such as peers and school have significant levels of influence on self-efficacy; with that, the level of consistency or inconsistency a student formerly experienced with goal setting would affect a student's belief in not only the purpose of setting goals but also any potential benefits. However, once it was established that setting goals and tracking their progress would be a consistent part of the program, the students' take and value of them changed as demonstrated in the following quote. "I was like oh, okay, she is actually gonna check up on my goals, so I better set real ones I wanna do" (Raymond, student interview, November 2016).

With the established expectations of setting goals, students began to use their former goals as a means to gauge progress, and expressed confidence in their own abilities. For example, one student, Brian, stated, "I'd set good goals like study for the test on Tuesday, go to tutoring Wednesday, and retake the test on Thursday and I'd actually do it and it worked! I got a better score" (Student interview, December 2015). To Brian, his specific goals were a way to see his individual progress, provided him a level of satisfaction, and created the right conditions that allowed him to express his enthusiasm with his accomplishment. Additionally, experiencing success on performance outcomes can lead to higher levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Another student, Francisco, set the goal of retaking a biology quiz he recently failed, which was also causing him to have a failing grade in the class overall. The goal was a result of a conversation between him and myself that was sparked after I completed his reoccurring grade check and discovered his only failing grade was in biology, the subject Francisco shared was his favorite. Francisco said,

> When you had me to go retake that biology test instead of letting me go home, I was gonna just go home, but you're like, "You can thank me later in life." If I would have never took it, it would have been an F. But I knew you would check up on me and I could do better if I tried to. And I passed it and could tell you about it. (Student interview, September 2015)

For Francisco, the combination of having a warm demander and a focused goal provided him with the motivation he needed to retake and outperform his previous test score. He spoke about knowing he could accomplish more if he put forth the effort and expressed a sense of pride in being able to share his achievement.

A different student, Arabella, expressed her feelings of accomplishment after returning to school from a suspension and how her goal setting helped to get her back on

track and overcome the sense of hopelessness she had been feeling because of the amount of coursework she needed to complete. Arabella explained the following:

> I had too much work and I didn't understand it. I was like I'm gonna fail. But we talked about one thing at a time, turning in something, and got organized with what to do and I did something. I did what I knew I could do and even went to tutoring. I turned some things around. (Student interview, December 2015)

Arabella had accepted failing when she felt overwhelmed with the workload and was contemplating not attempting her makeup work at all. However, once she felt organized and had an understanding of where to start, she was willing to put for the effort.

In addition to students expressing a more confident outlook in relation to their goal setting, students voiced similar statements as a result of their experiences in the intervention classroom. For example Angelica wrote, "I feel smarter because I know what to do here. And like I know I can learn it" (Student journal, October 2015). For Angelica, the intervention classroom environment was a space she knew learning would take place, resulting in her feeling a greater sense of accomplishment with herself and her learning abilities. Sadly, her statement also supported that not all of her content area classes provided her with the same type of environmental components that supported her to experience and express that same level of accomplishment. Another student, Sophia, discussed how she even has the opportunity to help other students in intervention and the impact it had on her own perspectives of her academic ability. "Intervention classes help me out because I feel smart in there. I get the right answers and on the things I do really good on the teacher has me to help other kids to teach them how we can do it" (Student interview, November 2016). Being provided the opportunity to teach and lead her peers aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of problem-posing educators and learning being dialogic in nature, but also exposed her peers to vicarious experiences that can lead to

increased levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Likewise, Lucy said, "When I get the problem right I just smile because it makes me really happy and proud to know I have it right and I want to actually share my answer" (Student interview, November 2016). These statements shared by students like Lucy and Sophia are prime examples that speak against the deficit assumptions currently in existence regarding the educability of these "at-risk" students. These statements also support the need to investigate not how the educational system can change the student to make him or her more apt to learn, but should instead examine how the structure should be adapted to make learning capable for all students.

Students felt comfortable to ask questions to aid in their understanding and to attempt tasks they viewed as challenging or difficult. As students increased their level of security within the intervention classroom, they began to describe it as a safe space to attempt tasks they perceived as difficult to do and were willing to ask questions to aid in their understanding. The following was written by Olivia:

> Intervention class never makes me feel dumb. Like I know I can ask about things I don't understand, and it's okay and the teacher will always answer me. At sometimes with some things I don't know at first how to do it or the answer, but I know I'm going to try to get it because I can't not try. The teacher is always saying how trying is learning and we all have to do it. (Student interview, December 2015)

Olivia's statement about her never being made to "feel dumb" in intervention class is a fundamental issue Valenzuela (1999) highlighted in her work. She found that many Mexican American youth were made to feel they were not "smart enough" to achieve academically in school. As a consequence of these students being made to "feel dumb," they stop participating in class. When coupled with educators with deficit

mindsets who are quick to associate students' lack of involvement as an ability issue, the cycle is perpetuated (Hatt, 2007; Oakes, 1990; Valencia, 1997).

As evident in her statement, Olivia felt encouraged to ask questions in intervention and established a certain level of security she felt was needed to not only ask questions, but to also engage in trying to learn something she may not have initially understood. As Hatt (2007) emphasized, educators need to consider the ways smartness is socially constructed within schools that can be "especially harmful for racially, ethnically, and economically marginalized youth" (p. 148). It is through their experiences with the educational discourses provided within a school that allows students to value intellectual development and shape their self-awareness as learners. Students who struggle to acquire the perceived artifacts of smartness (grades, test scores, GPA) have limited exposure to environments they feel support questioning, lack opportunities to engage with problem-posing educators, and experience a schooling institution that is working to socialize them under the perception that smartness is a concept out of their reach (Freire, 1970; Hatt, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999).

An equally important component supporting the theme of shifts is that students also expressed that not fully understanding a concept initially is not an indicator of how smart you are. "The teacher says it's okay if we don't get it the first time and no one can get everything the first time. So that's why we ask questions" (Omar, Student interview, December 2015). Like many students, Omar looks to the teacher first to model and form an understanding of how to make meaning of situations when he does not fully understand a concept the first go-around. How students respond to academic challenges

and regard the practice of re-teaching to gain understanding largely depends on the manner, attitude, and approach of the teacher.

Students also had opportunities to engage in questioning and trying to work through tasks with their peers in inquiry pairs. This structure provided students the opportunity to collaborate and demonstrate how questioning and a healthy level of struggle are a part of the learning process in alignment with the notion of problem-posing education (Freire, 1970). After an inquiry-paired assignment Angelica commented, "But we will get it at different times. And to me that makes sense because I know I learn different than other kids and other kids learn different from me" (November, 2015). In her statement above, Angelica demonstrated indicators of a growth mindset, highlighting her opportunity to focus on improvement rather than viewing the idea of *different* as a hindrance. I initially thought the inquiry pairs would be a structure the students would shy away from and resist; however, students responded very well to the structure a lot more than I anticipated as I wrote in one of my researcher journal entries:

> We have only done the inquiry-paired activity a couple of times and the students are coming in asking if we are going to do it today. They really do a great job working together and helping one another through the problem. They even police each other pretty well. One pair even suggested today if we could try turning it into a game every once in a while where the pairs can win candy and bragging rights. (Researcher journal entry, September 2015)

As the semester progressed, there were more frequent occurrences of students expressing how they can learn and grow if they did not allow themselves to give up, as seen here in Raymond's statement:

> Actually it's been pretty good in intervention. I know I am going to learn. I know I can learn what the lesson is in there because we all have to do it. We have no choice not to, but like we want to do it. (Student interview, December 2015)

A dynamic of teachers who are warm demanders are that they insist on all students meetings high expectations and establish the necessary supports to ensure all students learn (Bondy & Ross, 2008). This combination of warmth and nonnegotiable demand for student effort increases student engagement in an environment that might otherwise allow students to learn less than they should. Raymond expressed such confidence in regards to learning while in intervention and shared how he responded to the dynamics of having a warm demander as a teacher. Another student, Francisco, explained what learning was like in intervention, stating, "It's like training for a new job. Just train and try and go hard" (Student interview, November 2015). Francisco compared learning to training, displaying alignment with having a growth mindset about his ability to learn (Dweck, 2006).

As illustrated through the students' statements, three related components of the theme *shifts* emerged from students describing their experiences in academic intervention structured to create opportunities to learn. Specifically, the students displayed confidence in their own abilities, developed a level of comfortability with asking questions to aid their own learning and attempting difficult tasks, and expressed mindset awareness as well as differences.

Finding 3: Convergent and Divergent Caring Environments

Students viewed and built caring and non-caring relationships based off the systems and culture orchestrated by the teacher of the classroom that lead to either convergent or divergent actions within the environment. This finding is largely based on the analysis of the student-created images, classroom observations, and student interviews and works in response to my second research question: "How do

institutionally labeled “at-risk” Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?” Some initial codes that led to the theme of convergent and divergent environments included in vivo-codes (*carelessly acts* and *team building*), descriptive codes (*action* and *disrespectful*) and the themed data codes (*caring looks like a cooperative classroom* and *non-caring classrooms lack expectations*). As the relevant initial codes were compared, modified, and described, three theme clusters emerged as this theme’s central properties, which substantiated the theme and its corresponding assertions. These theme clusters included (a) students acknowledged the significance of collaboration, trust, and teamwork, (b) students recognized the harm of low rigor, expectations, and being unorganized, and (c) students placed significant onuses on their own actions and peer actions; however, students looked to the teacher as to what were deemed acceptable classroom morals and practices.

As previously stated, images created by the students were essential data that supported this finding. Students were asked to complete the following image elicitation prompt: Create an image of what you believe a caring classroom environment and a non-caring classroom environment looks like. You may draw the image, or gather images from the Internet or magazines to construct your final product. Write a brief paragraph description of your image and attach it to your work. Due to visual quality, I have typed the student’s written paragraph descriptions of their images in following sections and included each original image in the appendix section.

By and large, the students’ images embodied Valenzuela's (1999) notion of Mexican youths’ definition of caring being embodied in the word *educación.* The concept

of *educación* refers to the family's role of instilling a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. Based off of the students images' and discussions about their work with this finding, I asserted that students were extending the idea of family as used in the concept of *educación* to include the students and teacher within a classroom who are responsible for establishing person-orientation as apposed to object-orientation of caring (Valenzuela, 1999).

Figure 3 (Appendix I) below displays the images Chavez labeled as depictions of caring classrooms. Chavez wrote the following as the accompanying description:

> In the first picture it shows students helping one other student. The five students work together to help one another learn and finish their work. Yet they all work together to help that one student. Showing a caring environment. In the second picture it shows a teacher and a student working together and the teacher is helping the student. The teacher seems happy and enjoys helping the student learn. The student also seems satisfied and looks like he is learning. This is showing a happy caring environment. (student photo description, October 2015)

This work associated both teacher-student collaboration as well as peer-to-peer collaboration as contributing factors of a caring environment that help students learn: a representation of the whole group, the family taking a person-orientation of caring to work together to help one student. Additionally, the conditions Chavez described aligns with the care literature in that the community, which in this case is the teacher and students, have a collective commitment to caring because progress is linked to the success of every member in the classroom community that has been formed (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). He also used positively connoted words in his description such as *happy*, *enjoys*, and *satisfied*. These feelings work to establish a sense of belonging, as supported by the following comment Chavez made when discussing his image: "Of course everybody wants to be happy and to enjoy class and to feel cared by their teacher"

(Student interview, October 2015), confirming the student's predisposition of wanting the teacher to first confirm they are cared for to establish a complete reciprocal relationship (Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). Chavez's image and description support the concept of reciprocal care, which is largely on the part of the teacher to cultivate a classroom environment that supports such an egalitarian context (Karen & Kelehear, 2014).

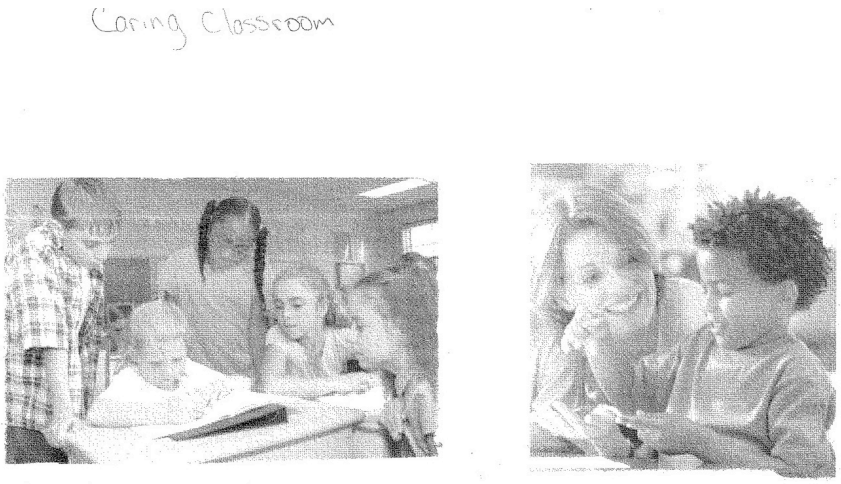

Figure 3. Chavez's caring classroom image

Many of the same attributes are seen in Figure 3 (Appendix J) created by Olivia below. The student wrote the following as her accompanying description:

> A caring classroom needs to include an enthusiastic teacher who is willing to help the students. It should include textbooks and supplies for student success. A caring classroom environment should encourage teamwork. The classroom should be a place for students to learn in a comfortable and safe environment. (Student photo description, October 2015).

Olivia implicitly stated that a caring classroom environment must have "an enthusiastic teacher who is willing to help the students." Her statement supported that many students of color believe teaching begins with the establishment of relationships between the teacher and the students (Delpit, 1995). Additionally, the content of the classroom does not mediate the development of the relationship; instead the content is only one of the

many aspects of the relationship, such as teamwork, level of comfort, and encouragement that work to develop and maintain the relationship between the teacher and students.

Again, the importance of collaboration and teamwork are highlighted, demonstrating how the student actions within the classroom converge to create a caring environment. However, this concept of togetherness cannot take place without the direction and guidance of the teacher who is also responsible for establishing the desirable *safe* and *comfortable* place for students to learn. Olivia also mentioned textbooks and classroom supplies as components of a caring classroom. During the discussion about her image she explained, "When we have all the stuff in class that we need, there are no reasons why we can't get the work done. But some classes have low books or no paper so kids just sit there" (Student interview, October 2015). As Olivia noted, classrooms with insufficient materials and supplies allow divergent-caring behaviors to arise such as unengaged students. Part of establishing a caring environment means eliminating situations where students might try to opt out of learning, such as instances where there are either not enough materials/supplies or the student arrived to class lacking the necessary materials. Incorporating Opportunity to Learn standards works to provide equity of materials, which are the school and its teachers' responsibility to provide.

Figure 4. Olivia's caring classroom image

With Figure 5 (Appendix K), a different student emphasized elements of reciprocal respect as actions converging to create a caring classroom environment. Arabella wrote the following about her drawing: "This is a caring classroom because the students are listening to the teacher. The teacher is not having any problems with anyone. Students want to learn" (Student photo description, October 2015).

Students listening and behaving accordingly are both actions students are accountable for; however it is the teacher's responsibility to incorporate necessary classroom management strategies that work to guide students' conduct in such ways that develop and support a caring classroom environment. Additionally, Arabella wrote that students want to learn in this type of well-managed classroom where reciprocal respect is established. Research supports that many times teachers misconstrue students' lack of

engagement and classroom disruptions as indicators of students not caring about their education, when in fact these same students are actively engaged and on task in other classrooms because of the structure of the environment provided (Delpit, 2012; Dillard & Ezueh Okpalaoka, 2013; Madrid, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999)

Figure 5. Arabella's caring classroom

Sophia's work, Figure 6 (Appendix L), continues to focus on student actions and behaviors and also touches on how certain actions/behaviors allow for learning to take place while others take away from the learning environment. Sophia wrote the following description, "In the caring room everyone has something written on their paper. The ones in the front are happy because they can learn. The ones in the back are mad because they can't do whatever they want" (Student photo description, October 2015).

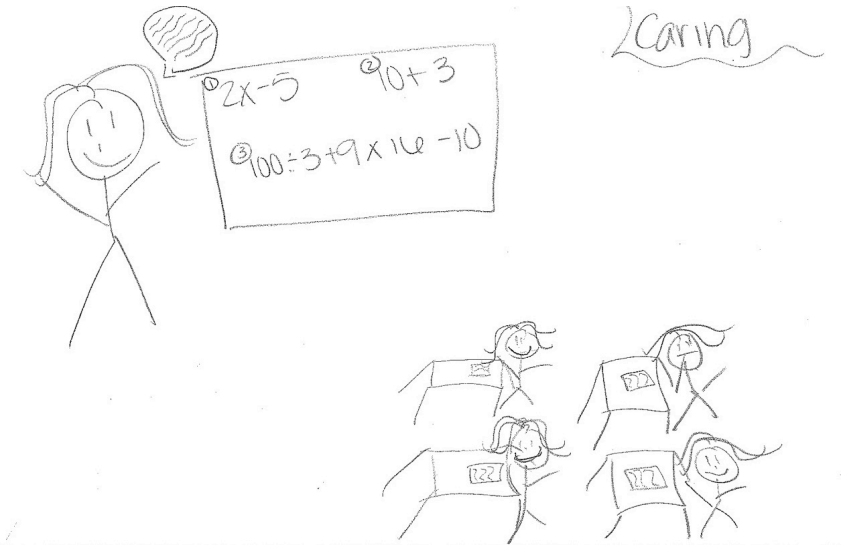

Figure 6. Sophia's caring classroom image

In both Arabella's and Sophia's discussions about their pictures, they emphasized students working, listening, and being happy to learn. Again, these are all student-based actions, but the actions students engage in are partially within the locus of control of the teacher, as Sophia reiterates with her comment about the students in the back of the classroom not being able to do whatever they want. Moreover, as noted in the care literature, given the students' weak power position relative to school personnel makes it incumbent that the classroom teachers be the role models and initiators establishing these social relationships and social interactions within their classrooms (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999).

Another student, Lucy, stated, "If we [the students] care it's because you do [the teacher]. You have control and we get things done. Figure 7 (Appendix M) below displays the juxtaposition she created in her image of a caring and non-caring classroom. Lucy wrote the following descriptions to accompany her drawing:

> A classroom environment should establish a warm caring atmosphere that the kids feel comfortable in. You'll need to build a circle of trust where the students can

> feel free to be themselves without worrying that classmates will make fun of them. Also, you'll need to have teambuilding that allows the kids to really get to know each other.
>
> A non-caring classroom environment that lacks academic rigor does not make it a compassionate classroom. Also by not making clear procedures and expectations for the students, they are going to feel like they can't amount to anything if you treat them like garbage. Giving the students worksheets and not teaching them on how to do it.

Yet again there is a certain level of onuses placed on the actions exhibited by the students when Lucy depicts students listening, picking up trash, and complimenting one another. In order for such an environment to successfully emerge, the teacher must be willing to relinquish some of the power and control over to the students of the classroom to develop a sense of empowerment. Unfortunately, this can be difficult for many teachers who see themselves as the forceful authoritative figure of the classroom, a factor contributing to a divergent caring environment (Karen & Kelehear, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999). However, you also see the opposite end of the spectrum with students bullying one another and trash the classroom, divergent behaviors that some teachers allow that subtract from the caring components of a classroom environment. Lucy also wrote how a non-caring environment lacks academic rigor. Her statement supports what the care literature indicated in that at times teachers' efforts to 'be nice' to their students by expecting less as an effort to accommodate for the students' difficulties can unintentionally project the message that teachers believe the students are incapable of learning (Nieto, 2008). In alignment with Lucy's image, Francisco stated, "A caring environment classroom would be all kids paying attention during class and not being disrespectful towards the teacher" (Student interview, September 2015). Francisco also said, "A non-caring classroom would be talking when the teacher is and saying disrespectful stuff about other students" (Student interview, September 2015). Lucy's picture and Francisco's comments truly

display how student actions can either all come together to create a caring learning environment, or how student actions can work to pull an environment apart resulting in what students feel is a non-caring classroom.

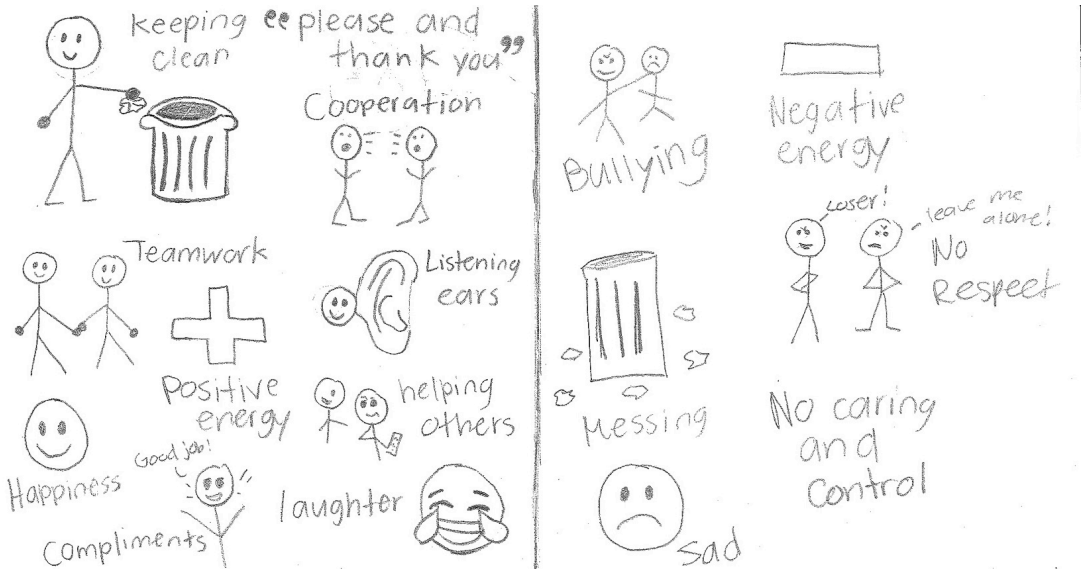

Figure 7. Lucy's caring and non-caring classroom image

When looking at how the students experience and descried non-caring environments, both teacher and student actions continue to play important roles. Chavez discussed how the students behave according to what expectations are set. He explained, "Some classes students get up and walk around and chat or girls be doing their makeup or charging their phones because we can do it. The teacher lets the kids do whatever" (Student interview, September 2015). To Chavez, having the freedom to do whatever they want in a classroom means that the teacher does not care enough to hold all students accountable to learn. Observational data supports Chavez's statement about some classrooms allowing some students to opt out of learning. The following example took place in Teacher M's classroom.

> Teacher M tells the class to take out their graphic organizers for their grit essays. Omar sits at his desk and does not take anything out. Five minutes pass. Teacher M tells Omar to take out his work. Omar responds with, "It's in my backpack at home." Teacher M replies, "Well the final draft is due today for credit." Omar shrugs his shoulders. Teacher M walks away. Omar spent the remainder of the class conversing with other students.

Raymond shared the same feelings as Chavez regarding students not being held accountable for their actions, "I get annoyed in that class. Kids get up and act all crazy. The teacher, she just be at her desk. She tries yelling at us, but she'll just give up and so we don't really have to listen" (Student interview, November 2015). The same feelings are reiterated in Figure 8 (Appendix N) found below.

To describe his image selections, Chavez wrote the following:

> In the first picture it looks like a teacher trying to help a student. Yet the student looks frustrated and annoyed, and so does the teacher. So the teacher looks like he is going to give up on the child carelessly.
>
> In the second picture, it looks like a student is annoyed and disappointed. Because of the way his class carelessly acts, it also seems like the teacher has no control over the students and how they act so careless. (Student photo description, October 2015)

For Chavez, feelings associated with non-caring classrooms are disappointment, annoyance, and frustration. These are feelings both students and the teacher can exhibit. It is essential for teachers to not underestimate how their own attitudes influence the tone of a classroom. With his description he also stated that if the teacher's actions are careless, the student's actions will follow suit, supporting the assertion of teachers being the responsible party who orchestrate the actions/behaviors that lead to either convergent or divergent caring environments. Another student image depicts many similar aspects previously discussed by other students when describing a non-caring classroom (Appendix O).

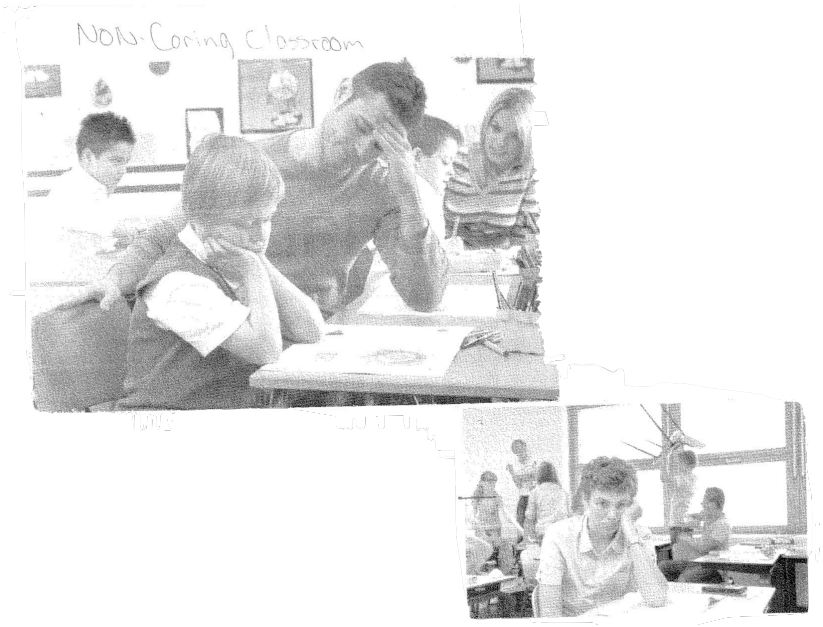

Figure 8. Chavez's non-caring classroom image

The following is Olivia's written description of her non-caring classroom image:

> A non-caring classroom would be a messy, unorganized room with no order. The teacher would not be genuine or compassionate towards the kids and would just sit behind their desk all day rather than teach. The kids would be having side conversations or sleeping. The classroom would be extremely unorganized and chaotic. (Student photo description, October 2015)

During the follow-up discussion about their caring and non-caring classroom images, all students were asked the following question: "Thinking about the classes you currently have and the images you created representing caring and non-caring classrooms, what environment do you feel exists in your classes?" Each of the 11 participants identified at least two of their current classes as caring environments. The intervention class was acknowledge as a caring environment by all 11 students as well. Students depicted and described various elements they perceived as contributing factors to either a caring or non-caring environment; however, the responsibility of orchestrating and conducting these elements are on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. A teacher can either plan

and make purposeful, strategic decisions to guide their students as well as their actions to converge and create/maintain a caring classroom structure and relationships or the teacher can check-out and allow divergent behaviors to pull the classroom apart resulting in a non-caring environment.

Figure 9. Olivia's non-caring classroom image

Finding 4: Educational Barriers and Differential Supports

Students and teachers voiced concerns about barriers within current school provisions/conditions and the need for differential support opportunities. This finding responded to my third research question: "How can school leaders create conditions to further support 'at-risk' Latina/o student's academic success on a larger scale?" Some initial codes that led to the theme of educational barriers and differential supports included in-vivo codes (*offer different tutoring, students who have problems,* and *life skills classes*), the descriptive codes (*gatekeepers* and *different*), and the themed data codes (*supporting means considering life outside of school* and *supporting looks like*

meeting kids where they are). As the relevant initial codes were compared, modified, and described, two theme clusters emerged as this theme's central properties and validated the theme and its corresponding assertion. The two theme clusters were (a) students perceived certain school provisions/conditions as being and/or having hidden barriers/challenges; and (b) students and teachers elaborated how students could benefit from having different support structures that could enhance the campus learning environment.

Figure 10 shows the visual word cloud created by Word It Out, which represents the words that emphasized all the students' responses to Journal Prompt 3, which asked students to respond to the following question: "What can this school do better or differently to care about you?" As seen in the figure, the words *help, tutoring, school, teacher, support, Cambridge, credits, rough,* and *life* are emphasized in the student responses, exemplifying students' feelings and opinions about the key elements they felt were essential starting points to consider when looking at where to implement changes in the academic environment to better meet their needs.

In support of the visual representation of the student journal responses in Figure 10, Raymond wrote, "I think that the school can offer some type of different tutoring program. A type of program that you can go to tutoring to catch up on credit" (Student journal entry, October 2015). With Raymond being credited deficient, he offered a different perspective on the tutoring program that was offered and felt he could better benefit from a tutoring program specifically geared for credit deficient students. Raymond's feelings directly connected to a point made by Reyes and Valencia (1993), that not all children have the same ways of knowing, thus schools should work to

comprehend and appreciate such diversity in order to promote better schooling. On that same topic of tutoring support, Brian wrote, "Offer or bring actual tutors to the media center. With doing that I can get more than just homework help but get help on the subject" (Student journal entry, October 2015). Here, Brian made the distinction between needing help on homework assignments and needing specifically targeted tutoring for comprehension on a particular subject area. This need he identified directly connected to the Opportunity to Learn Standards in that students need the resources made available to them to provide conditions conducive to enhance, expand, and strengthen their learning foundations (Porter, 1995). Another student, Francisco, stated,

> Some of us can't make tutoring after school. Like some kids have jobs or gotta watch their brothers and sisters or get them from school. Or I have to have permission to stay from the group home. But teachers are like if you don't stay for tutoring after school on this day then it's a zero. It'd be better if we had some time for tutoring during the day because all of our lives are different with struggles, you know? (Student interview, November 2015)

Francisco's statement demonstrated how barriers worked against his efforts to gain access to a resource meant to help support his learning. He also presented what he perceived as a structural change that could work to better meet not only his needs, but also other students who face the same type of obstacles. It is important to consider Francisco's statement given that an estimated 1.3 million children are involved in some type of caregiving/family obligations, in which research supports that minority students are more likely to have such obligations than White students (Young, Lakin, Courtney, & Martiniello, 2012). Additionally, single parent and/or low-income household students have the greater responsibilities to shoulder.

These students' statements expressed their ideas of how the school's current tutoring structure could be improved to better meet their needs by expanding the program

to offer specific supports for students in need of credit recovery as well as specific content area tutors for re-teaching support verses a retesting environment. The quotes also draw attention to how the current tutoring structure was seen as a barrier for some students who had various circumstances outside the four walls of the classroom that restricted their involvement as to whether or not they could take advantage of the school's current tutoring structure. Additionally, as Reyes and Valencia (1993) noted, with many reform movements calling for an increase in the demanding sequences of basic courses, it is vital that students already deemed "at-risk" have equal access to resources that are meant to help support students' academic success to increase passing rates and decrease the number of course repeaters.

Cambridge was a word emphasized in Figure 10 and students spoke out about Cambridge testing being an opportunity they felt they were not given full access to. Lucy wrote the following:

> In my perspective the school could have teachers who let all of the students to take the Cambridge tests at the end of the year so we can try to graduate early if we want to try that. Because there maybe some who want to do that to start work or to go to college sooner. And to care better maybe just tell us how you care about us and why it is important for all of us to do good and to ask us questions like this about what we like and our ideas about how to make school better. Just listening to us helps.

Lucy's journal response provided great insight about her perspective of her teachers having the power to decide which students were permitted to take Cambridge exams. She directly connected the exams to having the opportunity to graduate early and the possibility of being able to gain further progress by pursuing college and/or career opportunities. Working to eradicate these feelings of alienation within a school system are particularly important given that such feelings are associated with increasing the

likelihood of a student dropping out of school (Young et al., 2012). Additionally, Lucy highlighted the importance of teachers vocalizing positive reinforcement as well as inviting all students to share their feedback about the progress of learning in the classroom. Implementing such practices aligns with the concept of problem-posing educators who work with students to generate knowledge as well as the literature's emphasis on dialogue pertaining to care (Freire, 1970; Harris Garad, 2013; Noddings, 1984).

Another student, Angelica stated, "I don't know why I had Cambridge last year and now I have regular classes. What all is the point? I wasn't even in the class that got to take that test" (Student interview, November 2015). Here Angelica distinguishes between a Cambridge class and a regular class, and believed the class she was placed in had less meaning because of it being a non-testing class. Such perceptions created by the school structure need consideration as research supports students exhibit lower levels of motivation if both value and relativity are not associated with coursework or classes (Hootstein, 1996; MacMath, Roberts, Wallace, & Chi, 2010; Scheel, Madabhushi, & Backhaus, 2009). These findings indicated a need for proper equity and acknowledgment of gatekeeping practices that frequently deny the same students from various opportunities.

Both students and teachers expressed ideas about what the school could offer as differential support systems for those who might need it. The following was shared by Teacher C:

> I still like the idea of I think there should be a conflict management class on campus. I think that there should be life skills class that would help the students . . . but you can't overload those classes. You might have to hand-select them, and

> they need to be small and intimate, and maybe just one semester, not for the whole year. Not trying to kill the kids with that sort of thing, but those could be utilized. (Teacher interview, November 2015)

In addition, another teacher stated,

> Life skills or study skills or school skills, whatever you want to call it, colleges now require all freshmen to take the same type of readiness course and if it's beneficial at that level then it will be beneficial here too" (Teacher M, teacher interview, December 2015).

Teacher A said, "I never understood why we removed the Frosh Focus class we required all freshmen to take. I thought it was beneficial and helped students get through that transition from eighth grade to high school" (teacher interview, October 2015). Clearly teachers recognized the need for the school to offer additional supports to aid in student academic success.

Students also voiced their ideas about the differential supports they believed would help support their academic success. Chavez wrote, "I think they [the school] can also have a therapy program not only for me but for the other students who are having problems" (Student journal, October 2015). Francisco shared, "We get different counseling in the group home. Not just talking about grades like the counselors here only talk to you about. That's a helpful thing for all kids, just having someone to listen" (Student interview, September 2015). Junior spoke for himself and others when he explained, "Life is harder for some of us. Some of us need a place to get help like you would at home but maybe don't get. School classes leave out dealing with the hard stuff. And life is hard" (Student interview, December 2015). The commonality evident in these statements is the focus on the development of the whole child, not just solely focusing on tangible academic outcomes.

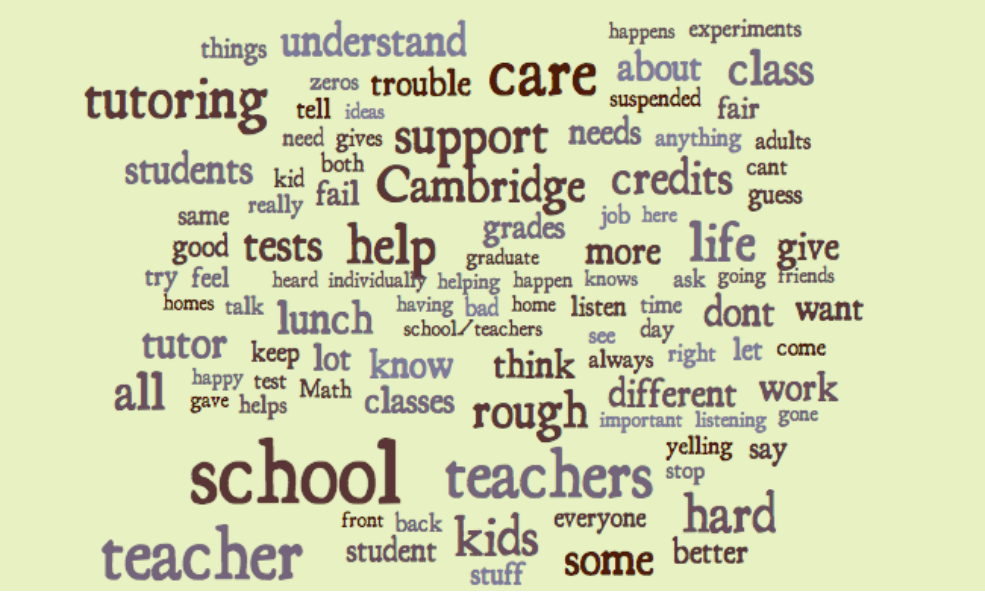

Figure 10. Word it Out student journal responses to Prompt 3

Conclusion

> *"One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding."*
> –P. Freire

For me, as the teacher-researcher, Freire's words stated above rung deep as I formed the guiding structures of this study and recognized that although there are discussions being had on the topic of at-risk students and what should be done, a significant amount of those discussions fail to consider the views and voices of the very individuals the discussions are indented to help. The purpose of this action research study was to explore the impact of a tiered academic intervention program structurally designed to incorporate opportunity to learn standards and ethics of care instructionally. The tiered academic intervention program emphasizes relationship building, instruction, environment and expectations. The ultimate goals were to understand how teachers at Arendelle could better meet the needs of institutionally labeled at-risk Latina/o students

by recognizing the student voices as experts who could speak to how to better care for and meet their needs in the academic setting; aligning with Freire and allowing me to advocate for improvements on behalf of my students. The second goal was to explore/observe how and if deficit assumptions about these students' achievement abilities and education capacities existed; and if so, to challenge these assumptions by capturing student voices and recognizing them as experts.

To focus the purpose of the study, I framed this study with the following research questions:

1. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experiences of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?
2. How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?
3. How can school leaders create conditions to further support institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students' academic success on a larger scale?

The following sections present a culminating discussion of the findings in relation to the purpose of the study. Additionally, I discuss implications for practice and research, the limitations of the study, my personal lessons learned, and conclude by offering a closing word.

Discussion

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, *How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students describe their experiences of tiered interventions structured to create opportunities to learn as part of an academic intervention program?* The findings of this study established that students described their experiences in the academic intervention program as positive, felt that they benefited from the support structure created for them, and as they experienced success their self-perceptions shifted. The students communicated how they found the small group collaborative nature of the intervention class to be very conducive to their learning. The students' communication supports Paris' (2012) recommendation for educators to seek to provide pedagogical and curricular interventions and innovations that work to move teaching and learning away from deficit approaches and Gthompson's (2010) conclusion that we should not be so quick to blame students for their failure to thrive in many school environments.

Comparatively, the students also felt that the manner in which the instruction was delivered in academic intervention supported their learning. The students often spoke about the struggles they felt when obtaining knowledge in other classroom structures that took a lecture-and-notes-based approach and pointed out how they felt they made more gains academically when the content was presented in a more hands-on, interactive environment. An interactive environment not only supports the importance of building in multiple opportunities to learn within a high quality curriculum to engage students, but also negates the deficit approaches to teaching these students, which involves remedial

assignments with limited opportunities to interact based on the assumption that these students cannot perform otherwise (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

Moreover, the institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students in this study largely expressed statements that exemplified shifts in their perceptions of their own abilities and mindsets as a result of their experienced achievements in the intervention classroom. Their shifts were largely evident with statements such as "I feel smarter," "I get the right answers on the things," and "But we will get it at different times. And to me that makes sense because I know I learn different than other kids." These positive expressions model the significance classroom experiences have on the formation of students' self-efficacy and mindsets. However, it is important to note that the teachers play a significant roll in creating the conditions students experience in a classroom, as Freire (1970) articulated with his concept of banking and problem-posing education. Additionally, students exemplifying these shifts aligns with research that posits how smartness is defined within a structure that fosters low academic performance to poor and ethnic minority students (Hatt, 2007).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, *How do institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students experience caring relationships with their teachers in an opportunity to learn environment when compared to their other core academic classes?* This study demonstrated that students viewed and built caring and non-caring relationships based off of the systems and culture orchestrated by the teacher of the classroom, which lead to either convergent or divergent actions within the environment. All of the students in the study identified various aspects of collaboration, trust, and teamwork as elements they

believed could either work as synchronized units to build and establish caring relationships and a caring environment, or felt that without these elements such an environment could not be established. This finding directly connected and supported Valenzuela's (1999) argument of Mexican youths' definition of caring being embodied in the word *educación.*

Educación refers to the family's role of instilling a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning; only with this finding, students were extending the idea of family to include the students and teacher within a classroom who are responsible for establishing this person-orientation of caring as apposed to an object-orientation of caring (Valenzuela, 1999). The students identified the aspects of collaboration, trust, and teamwork largely as actions exhibited by the students themselves; however, the teacher of the classroom is the vital influential leader responsible for orchestrating these student actions. Thus when teachers consciously or unconsciously deny students the opportunities to engage in collaboration, establishing trust, and building teamwork, they simultaneously invalidate the definition of a caring environment that most of these young people embrace.

Moreover, the students identified lack of rigor, low expectations, and disorganization as damaging elements that work to create a divergent caring classroom. These elements aligned with what Valenzuela (1999) discussed as being dynamics of a subtractive schooling framework. Also, these elements that the students spoke strongly about are all components within the locus of control of the teacher. Accordingly, research has found that Latina/o students' sentiments towards schooling are strongly related to their experiences with their teachers (Darder, 1995; Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, &

Greenfield, 1999). Given that establishing the classroom environment is a social responsibility facilitated by the teacher, the students identified a caring or non-caring environment largely based off of the exchange-relationships that occur.

Lastly, all of the 11 participating students voiced that the environment established in the academic intervention classroom was one that embraced convergent actions that worked to build caring relationships and a caring classroom. In addition, students expressed they experienced both convergent and divergent actions in their various content area classes. However, it is especially important to emphasize the underlying shared belief of the students that the teacher of a classroom sets and conducts what are deemed acceptable classroom morals, practices, and actions. These exchange-relationships (collaboration, trust, teamwork) identified by the students enable the dynamics of a caring classroom that cannot be attained individually; caring is a social responsibility, starting with and stemming from the teacher.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, *How can school leaders create conditions to further support institutionally labeled "at-risk" Latina/o students' academic success on a larger scale?* Student participants expressed their concerns about structural barriers they felt worked against their academic success and how they felt there was a need for differential supports. Research supports that the inequitable schooling structures Latina/o youth face on a daily basis are often plagued with lack of funding, overcrowded remedial classrooms, and underrepresentation in advanced programs that hinder these students' access to knowledge and opportunities (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Gthompson, 2010;

Yosso, 2006). These barriers work against the popular promise that all students can receive an equal formal education, allowing for social mobility and economic progress.

One of the barriers perceived by the students were teachers being the gatekeepers who granted students the full benefits of Cambridge. Because students at Arendelle High School who passed the Cambridge exams would earn a Grand Canyon Diploma, a strong message was delivered to the student population when students were not offered the opportunity to take the Cambridge exams. Even though AHS transitioned away from limiting Cambridge testing to those students enrolled in honors courses, allowing teachers to hand-select students from other classes based on student data still worked against many students labeled "at-risk" because of the underlying deficit assumptions associated with at-risk students and their abilities (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 2005; Yosso, 2006).

Additionally, the students identified the school's tutoring program as having built-in barriers that denied them from reaping the full benefits intended by the program. The students expressed the need for tutoring to include more re-teaching opportunities rather than re-testing opportunities, supporting Valenzuela's (1999) argument of schools needing to focus less on tangible outputs and more on cultivating the student as a whole. The students also expressed frustrations about how the timeframe in which tutoring was offered conflicted with students' life obligations outside of school, and how they were often made to feel that the only resolution was for the students to change the conditions of their lives outside of school so as to acclimate to the structures within the school.

In order for school leaders to create conditions to further support the academic success of these students, the findings in this study suggested school leaders first begin by acknowledging the existence of institutional barriers and recognize the voices of the

students as experiential knowledge experts who speak to these issues (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Furthermore, the student participants in this study spoke strongly about the need for the school to offer additional supports, such as counseling that goes beyond having academic discussions regarding grades and transcripts, but also addresses as Chavez stated "life problems" (Student journal, October 2015).

Implications for Practice

Given that action research is based on the premise of improving some aspect of practice, a discussion of the implications for practice is warranted. The purpose of this action research study was to explore the impact of a tiered academic intervention program structurally designed to incorporate opportunity to learn standards and ethics of care instructionally. In this section, I offer several implications for practice derived from my reflections of the innovation and the findings of this action research study.

Regarding the first and what I considered the most precedent implication for practice, I would like to direct attention back to the student participants' voices regarding what they expressed supported their learning and progress within the innovation classroom: small groups, collaboration, trust, a warm demander, team building, varied instructional deliveries, and multiple opportunities to learn. Sadly, none of these ideas are new to the field of education. The following was noted by Valenzuela:

> Rather than students failing schools, schools fail students with a pedagogical logic that not only assures the ascendancy of a few, but also jeopardizes their access to those among them who are either academically strong or who belong to academically supportive networks. (1999, p. 129)

With this and the voices of the students in mind, I recommend that teachers at Arendelle receive professional development training specifically geared to address the gaps and

areas the students identified. As Boykin and Noguera (2011) asserted, in order to build the capacity for schools with large numbers of high poverty minority students, the staff needs appropriate training to learn to meet the needs of their students. The professional development should incorporate growth mindset, educators as warm demanders, and classroom engagement.

Both the findings and the literature support a classroom teacher has an influence over how students understand and identify the concept of smartness and how certain mindsets are more conducive to helping all students achieve. Growth mindset training would work to build the teacher's understanding of how to approach learning differently within their classrooms. Teachers as warm demanders are central to gaining and sustaining academic engagement in high-poverty, high minority schools (Bondy & Ross, 2008). The classroom engagement component needs to focus on moving away from the notion that engagement means how much time the teacher spends on instruction devoted to a particular subject, but how much time students are actively and progressively involved in the learning process. An emphasis on a more three-dimensional classroom engagement, interweaving behavioral, cognitive, affective engagement would work to accomplish this shift (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Such engagement is linked to more favorable learning outcomes for minority students identified as at-risk of academic failure.

Connecting the care literature with what the students identified as elements that either work to create convergent or divergent caring classrooms and to work to sustain the implications stated above, an additional implication for practice is to consider changing the teacher evaluation system. Teacher accountability measures in Arendelle

included evaluative pieces combined with student test scores. Given research supports that positive caring relationships between teachers and their students are connected to more desirable academic outcomes, I recommend the teacher evaluation system move away from its heavy focus on student test scores and, instead, incorporate the voices of the students regarding the classroom environment and relationships teachers cultivate in their classrooms with the understanding that with quality teaching, curriculum, and proper caring environments desirable academic outcomes will follow. Valenzuela noted,

> Positive social relations at school are highly productive because they allow for the accumulation of social capital that can then be converted into socially valued resources or opportunities (e.g., good grades, a high school diploma, access to privileged information. (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 27)

To work to accumulate the type of social capital stated above, school systems need to begin to investigate what supportive components they are lacking, which students are continually allowed to fall behind, and how they can work to influence these outcomes. Allowing the students' voices to have a meaningful impact could be one of the missing elements.

Implications for Research

Future research is warranted based on the lessons learned from this study and as Riel (2011) explained, action research is an iterative process consisting of multiple cycles, with each cycle leading to a deeper understanding to improve one's practice. Various questions surfaced as a result of this action research cycle that warrant further consideration.

Future research should address the following questions: How and to what extent do the observed mindset and self-efficacy shifts transfer with the students into their content area classes? How could classroom teachers effectively investigate the caring

dynamics of their own classrooms to improve the learning outcomes for all students? How can Arendelle High School best collaborate and incorporate the voices of its at-risk Latina/o population to enhance students' learning? What outcomes would result from specifically addressing students' perceived barriers at Arendelle High School and how might it influence the caring dynamics of the school? How would students be able to evaluate and voice their understandings as to the caring and non-caring dynamics of their classroom environments that influence their academic experience? How can we teach at-risk Latina/o students to interact with teachers in a manner that might get the teachers to learn how to produce classroom environments that better support students' learning needs? And finally, what would be the best way to replicate the supportive classroom structures students identified as beneficial components of academic intervention into other content area classrooms?

Limits of the Study

As with any type of research, this action research study has some limitations that warrant discussion. Although every content area teacher of each participant was extended the opportunity to participate in the study, some teachers did not accept the invitation. Therefore, one limitation of the study was not having access to conduct observations of each student participant in all four of his/her content area classes. The role of the researcher as one of the intervention teachers for the student participants presented the potential for bias. In an effort to decrease this threat, I documented my thoughts and reactions throughout the data collection and analysis process in a research journal. In addition, member checking was utilized during the process of creating the student introductory vignettes and development of the findings.

Prior to starting this study, I identified the novelty effect as a possible threat to validity that has the potential to weaken the overall findings. The novelty effect can jeopardize the validity of a study when/if participants feel singled out as a result of being selected to participate, resulting in a tendency for participants to initially improve their performance when the new innovation is introduced because of their increased interest in the "newness" of it all (Smith & Glass, 1987). To minimize the potential influence of the novelty effect, I explained to participants that all students in the intervention program would receive the same structure, instruction, and exposure as part of the innovation. Additionally, public discussion of who was or was not a research participant did not occur.

The experimenter effect was also a concern in this study. Because of the duality of my role as researcher and teacher studying my own students, students may have felt obligated to give responses they thought I wanted based upon my unconscious or unintentional verbal or non-verbal signals. To maximize validity, I used member checks to cross check codes, themes, and findings. Throughout the study, I wrote rich descriptions in my field notes and researcher's journal to also provide documentary evidence of the steps and procedures I took in relation to my study.

Personal Lessons Learned

As a result of this study and this doctoral program, I carry several personal lessons I have learned into practice and research in the future. The most important lessons pertain to (a) the value of conducting action research and (b) the importance of grounding a study with theoretical frameworks.

The Value of Conducting Action Research

Conducting action research (AR) was apart of this doctoral program's requirements, and speaking honestly, even as I read the literature all about AR I was not initially 100% married to the idea of it. However, after actually engaging in my first full cycle of AR, I was able to fully appreciate its value as a researcher-practitioner. With the goals of AR working to make effective changes in a specified setting (Mills, 2014), I began to view AR as a way I could further give back to my local community and school in addition to teaching in the classroom.

Engaging in AR helped me to see my own context in a new light and supported my growth as a leader. Having to implement an innovation challenged my way of thinking and reshaped how I approached problems of practice. I learned to value and trust the transformative process that was very much a valuable part of conducting AR. Lastly, I gained a deeper appreciation for reflecting in both my professional, educational, and personal life.

Grounding a Study in Theoretical Frameworks

In the initial planning phases of this action research study, I remember feeling very overwhelmed by how broad my area of interest and identified problems of practice were. I was wary of where to begin and did not consider looking at the matter with a particular framework in mind. Being a student of color and a former student of the district where I intended to conduct my research, I was aware of my very strong and passionate belief system and my desire to highlight the voices of the students from the neighborhood where I grew up.

After being exposed to theoretical frameworks and establishing an understanding of their purpose in relation to conducting research, I realized that with theory I could further narrow my topic and use it to underpin my research design as well as a lens to view my investigation. It took me several iterations of sifting through various frameworks along with the guidance of my dissertation committee before I arrived at critical race theory (CRT), critical pedagogy, and care theory and was able to form my own understanding of how I could use these three theories to conceptualize my own work. However, once I was able to fully understand how to apply these theories to guide the development of my data collection and formulate meaning out of the results, my study became much clearer. I learned about the power theoretical frameworks have in shaping and guiding a research study. Finally and more importantly I learned selecting a proper theory takes time and care because theories not only guide your work, but also aid in how your work grows and flourishes.

Personal Reflection

Taking a step back and removing my action researcher hat, I would like to offer a personal reflection to discuss how this work impacted me as an educator and to offer a brief summary about how teachers might begin to duplicate this work and create convergent caring environments in their own classrooms.

As an educator, this work has confirmed for me something I always knew was important but now feel I have a much greater appreciation for, the funds of knowledge and cultural wealth my students bring to the classroom. I feel that I am only at the beginning stages of being able to tap into the value of what my students bring with them to the classroom and harnessing it in ways that lead to a more caring student-centric

environment that works to benefit the class not only instructionally but also impacts the connectivity of the relationships formed in the classroom. Additionally, because the findings of this work support the importance of creating the proper environments conducive to learning, I have learned how essential it is to be adaptable as a teacher. Because without adaptability and my own willingness to alter how things are conducted on a student need basis, any efforts to reach all learners in a classroom will fall short.

For educators that might want to begin to duplicate this work by establishing or strengthen convergent caring environments in their own classrooms, it is critical to understand doing so is a collective process involving the students and the teacher. As the teacher, the conductor responsible for orchestrating and brining together all of the various components that run a classroom, we cannot allow any of our students to fall behind the rest. We need to acquire growth mindsets and implement teaching practices that allow our students to socially construct and understand smartness in ways that build them up instead of putting them down. We can begin to work at combating the fixed mindsets about a particular student's ability level and practices that perpetuate the achievement gap by addressing the toxic discourses that often insinuate there is a capacity to which a student can learn when in fact the truth is there is only a capacity to which particular environments and structures can educate students.

Closing Thoughts

Returning back to public education in America, being meant to serve as an equalizer for all children, regardless of their backgrounds, raising the educational attainment of Latina/o youth should remain a key priority in educational reform movements (Growe & Montgomery, 2003). Additionally, given that Latinos are not only

the fastest growing minority group in our nation, but are also performing at academic levels that will cosign these young people to a permanent underclass, the nation cannot continue to push the same educational reform efforts that have not produced substantial outcomes (Gandara & Contreras, 2010; Gandara, 2009), nor can it continue to ignore the voices of the same group of people whom the reforms are meant to help. It is time to look inward at the systems and structures of our nation's education system and start to re-conceptualize the frameworks that subtract rather than unleash the potential of its Latino youth. Therefore, it is important to continue to examine and consider the perspectives of at-risk Latina/o students as a means of co-constructing new innovative ways to support their educational attainment.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date: Time:	**Room #: Teacher:**
Subject Area:	**Topic:**
Student Participant:	**# of students in class:**
Posted Classroom Objective:	
Depth of Knowledge of Objective:	

Classroom Environment

***** *Student participant* ↑ *=Hand raised* ↓ *=Teacher called on whose hand wasn't raised*
? *= Question asked* ***R****=teacher responded to student* ***I*** *=student called out*
A *= student answered question/comments* ***NA*** *= student could not answer question*

Selective Scripting

Time	Teacher	Student
Codes		

Environment

1) Describe the wall décor in the room.

☐ Student work ☐ Academic related material ☐ Motivational ☐ Entertainment	☐ Other ☐ Personal teacher material ☐ Rules/norms ☐ College decor

The researcher will note whole group expectations, relationships, and interactions. Followed by noting any individual student differentiations

Expectations

1) What types/kind of behavior does the teacher allow and now allow? (encourage, discourage, not acknowledge) Is it the same for all students?
2) How does the teacher progress monitor?
3) What are the assignment expectations?
4) Who is held accountable in the classroom, and how so?
5) How does the teacher reinforce classroom expectations?

Relationship Building (Teacher-Student Interaction)

1. How do the students enter the room? How are they greeted?
2. How does the teacher show personal interest in students? With whom?
3. How does the teacher respond to student questions? (Dismissive vs. validating)
4. How does the teacher acknowledge student effort and lack of effort?
5. How is respect established and shown?
6. How does the teacher provide feedback to the students?

Instruction

1. What are the activities for the day?
2. How is the information presented? (teacher-centered v. student centered)
3. How is the activity arranged? (whole group, small group, individual, structured)
4. How are students given opportunities to reflect/process information?
5. What does the teacher model for the students?
6. What AVID strategies are incorporated in the lesson?
7. How does the activity/task connect to the standard? What is the DOK level?
8. How does the teacher provide multiple avenues of learning?
9. How does the teacher respond to students having difficulty with the activity?

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION-ELICITATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Observation-Elicitation Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my research study. As you know, I have been conducting observations in one or more of your content area classes. During this brief interview, I am going to ask you questions about a particular incident that occurred during an observation. This interview will take about 30 minutes. During the interview, you have the right to decline answering any questions that you are uncomfortable with. I will be recording our conversation for the purpose of generating data for my research. Your response is completely confidential and I will use pseudonyms in my report to guarantee your confidentiality. Do you have any questions before we start?

Student Name:_____ Student Code:_____
Date:_____ Time:_____ AM or PM Gender: M F
Location:_____
Pseudonym:_____
On (date) in your (content) class, I observed:

1) Now that I have told you what I witnessed, can you give me a brief summary of your own recollection of the incident?

2) How did you feel during that event? Why?

3) How do you think your teacher felt?

4) What do you think was the teacher's point/purpose of addressing you?

5) What was your point/opinion/thought you were trying to address?

6) Can you explain to me what led you to say (quote from observation)?

7) Tell me how the teacher saying (quote from observation) made you feel.

8) Overall, what impact/influence, if any, did this incident have on
    a. Your classroom interactions that day?

    b. Your interactions with that teacher?

    c. Your perception of the teacher?

    d. Your relationship with that teacher?

9) In terms of your perception about the care you receive from (teacher name), what impact, if any, does this event have?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction:
Thank you for supporting my research project. The intended purpose of this interview is to learn from your experiences as a teacher, the relationships you establish with students, and the caring dynamics of your classroom. The interview will take about 45 minutes. During the interview, you have the right to decline answering any questions that you are uncomfortable with. I will be recording our conversation for the purpose of generating data for my research. Your response is completely confidential and I will use pseudonyms in my report to guarantee your confidentiality. Do you have any questions before we start?

Teacher Name:_____ Teacher Code:_____
Date:_____ Time:_____ AM or PM Gender: M F
Location:_____
Pseudonym:_____

Interview Questions

A. Teacher Background

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up and go to school?
2. What led you to become a teacher?
3. How long have you been a teacher?
    a. Probing: How long have you been teacher at this school? Where else have you previously taught?
4. What is the surrounding community of the school like?
5. What aspects of teaching in this community do you find enjoyable and find challenging?
6. What are the students like in this school?
7. Describe the kind of student you have in your classes.
8. What do you consider enjoyable and challenging about working with the students you have in your classroom?

B. Expectations and Success

1. What are your expectations of your students?
    a. How do you express those expectations?
    b. How are they the same and how do they differ from student to student?
2. How do you express that you believe in your students' success?
3. How often do you discuss grades with your students?
4. How do you provide feedback to your students regarding their progress in your class?
5. How is discipline handled in your classroom?
6. How do you engage students during instruction, and what do you do about the students who are unengaged?

7. How do you provide yours students with opportunities to learn?
8. To what extent do teachers play a role in student success or lack of success?
9. Which students do you feel are the most successful students in your classroom? Why?
10. With those who are doing well in your class, what do you think they will need to do in order to have higher level of academic achievement?
11. How do you convince a high academic achiever that she or he is capable of higher level of achievement?
12. Which students do you feel are the least successful in your classroom? Why?
13. With those who are struggling in your class, what do you think they will need to do in order to catch up with those who are doing well?
14. How do you convince a low academic achiever that she or he is capable of higher level of achievement?

C. Care and Student-Teacher Relationships

1. What do you think is the value of a teacher getting to know about a student both inside and outside of their classroom?
2. Can you describe for me the types of relationships you establish with your students?
    a. Probing: Do you establish different relationships with different student? How so?
3. In what ways do you build these relationships with your students?
4. Do you feel that you establish a relationship with every student you have?
5. In your opinion, in what ways does/can the relationships you establish with students impact them?
6. In your opinion, what teacher actions/interactions do you think students identify or perceive as caring?
7. In your opinion, what teacher actions/interactions do you think students identify or perceive as non-caring?
8. Do you feel that all of your students need the same level and type of care from you as their teacher?
9. In your opinion, what ways do you show you care for/about your students via your:
    A. instructional delivery?
    B. classroom environment?
    C. expectations?
    D. student interactions?
10. To what extent do you think/feel caring about students is part of your teaching responsibilities?
11. In what ways do you feel that the leadership team on campus supports or hinders teachers' abilities to establish positive caring relationships with students?
12. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share during this interview?

APPENDIX D

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Initial Student Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my action research project. The purpose of this interview is to learn from your experiences as a Latina/o student in the classroom. This interview will take between 45-60 minutes. During the interview, you have the right to decline answering any of the questions you are uncomfortable with. I will be recording our conversation for the purpose of generating data for my research. Your responses are completely confidential and I will use pseudonyms in my report to guarantee your confidentiality. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Student Name:_____ Student Code:_____

Group:_____

Date:_____ Time:_____ AM or PM Gender: M

F

Location:_____

Pseudonym:_____

Interview Questions

A. Student Background

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?
2. Tell me about your family. Do you have siblings? Who do you live with?
3. How do you feel about starting high school here?
    a. Probing: Have you heard anything about this high school or what its teachers are like from former students?
4. What are your expectations for yourself socially and academically while in high school?
    a. Probing: Clubs? Sports? Specialty programs?
5. What do you want to do or see yourself doing after high school?
6. What are your family members' expectations for your academic achievement and life after high school?
7. Describe what kind of student you are and explain why.

B. Student Perceptions about School

1. In general, what do you find enjoyable about school and what do you find challenging?
2. Now that you have been in high school for a few weeks, can you describe for me what a typical day looks like for you?
3. What are the students like here?

4. What are the teachers like here?
5. What are the interventionists like here?
6. What are the administrators like here?
7. What is it like to be a Latina/o student here?
8. What are your favorite and least favorite subjects? Why? What are your grades typically like in these classes?
9. What classes are you in, and how did you end up in those classes?

C. Student Perceptions of Expectations and Success

1. What do you think is the value of a teacher getting to know about you both inside and outside of their classroom?
2. What are your expectations of your teachers?
3. What are your teachers' expectations of you as a student (academically and socially)? How do you know?
4. Do you feel that your teachers believe you can succeed in their class? Do you think that want you to be successful?
5. How can teachers help you to be successful?
6. To what extent do teachers play a role in your success or lack of success?
7. Which students do you feel are the most successful students at this school? Why?
8. Which students do you feel are the least successful at this school? Why?
9. What type of student do you think your teachers believe you are?

D. Student Perception of Care and Student-Teacher Relationships

1. In your opinion, what ways can teachers build positive relationships with students?
2. In what ways does/can the relationship you have with a teacher impact you as a student?
3. In your opinion, what are ways teachers show they care for/about students?
4. What are ways teachers show they do not care for/about students?
5. Tell me about a time when you felt cared for by a teacher.
6. Tell me about a time when you did not feel that a teacher cared about you.
7. Do you think/feel that caring about students is part of teachers' responsibilities? Why or why not?
8. In your school experiences, do teachers care for/about all of their students the same?
9. Tell me about a time when you were or when you witnessed a student being cared for/about differently.
10. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share during this interview?

APPENDIX E

PHOTO-ELICITATION PROTOCOL

Image Creation #1 Assignment

Directions: Create an image of what you believe a caring classroom environment and a non-caring classroom environment looks like. You may draw the image, or gather images from the Internet or magazines to construct your final product. Write a brief paragraph description of your image and attach it to your work.

APPENDIX F

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Parent Consent Form

My name is Breanna Villena. I am an Academic Interventionist who works with your student at_____ High School. I am also a doctoral student studying the effects of creating an opportunity to learn environment: rethinking caring-oriented intervention for Latina/o students Arizona State University, Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Liou from the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College to conduct this dissertation study. Your child is invited to participate in a dissertation study to explore the connections between the caring teacher-student relationships and the classroom environment. I am asking for permission to include your child in this study because s/he is a student in academic intervention.

Total estimated time to participate in this study is 15 weeks in the Fall of the 2015- 2016 school year during your child's regular school day class. I will be investigating what is happening in the classroom during regular instruction, so no additional time outside of the regular school day will be needed.

If you allow your child to participate, I will observe him/her as s/he participates in classroom activities, collect student work, and interview your student about his/her classroom experiences. Because audio and video recordings will be a primary data source, your child's participation in classroom activities may be audio or video taped. Students who agree to participate in the study will participate in class activities as usual. Students who choose not to participate will remain in the classroom and participate as usual but they will not be included in research data.
Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your child's participation at any time for any reason without penalty. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty.

The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life. Your child may feel uncomfortable being recorded at first, but this risk is minimal. There are no benefits for being in the study. Information learned from the study will be used to help improve instructional activities related to academic intervention classes.

Any information that can be identified with your child will remain confidential. Your child's responses will not be linked to his or her name in any written or verbal report of this research project. All data will be kept in a password-protected database and a locked office. Data will be coded to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Names of participants will be replaced by pseudonyms and transcribing of video and audio recordings will only use these pseudonyms. Recordings will only be viewed by the researcher and will not be used in publications or presentations.

If you have any questions, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your child's participation at any time, call the researchers conducting the study: Breanna Villena (623-760-6625).

Statement of Consent:
☐I give permission for my child _____to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Parent/Legal Guardian	Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at 480-965-6788. *You may keep a copy of this consent form for your records.*

APPENDIX G

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Student Assent Form

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to stop being in the study, just tell your teacher.
The study will investigate how students understand the teacher-student relationship and perceive an opportunity to learn intervention environment. You will be asked to do the following things for this dissertation study:

- Participate in class as usual while Mrs. Villena observes. Mrs. Villena will write notes, use audio and video recordings, and take pictures/photo copies of the objects you design to record what happens during class. Mrs. Villena will record what happens in the whole class and she will record some groups as the work in their groups.

- Allow Mrs. Villena to conduct observations of you in other content area classes.

- Participate in interviews. You will be asked to talk to the researcher (Mrs. Villena) about your academic experiences. Interviews are confidential and audio recorded.

- Respond to journal prompts, and collect classroom work/assignments.

Signed Assent

I agree to be apart of this dissertation study. This study was explained to my (mother/father/ guardian) and (she/he/they) gave permission for me to participate. I understand that my participation is confidential; the only people who will know about what I say and do in the study will be the researcher in charge of the study.

I understand that being in this study is voluntary. I do not have to be in the study if I do not want to. I will not get in trouble with my teacher or anyone else if I do not want to be in the study. I have read this page and I agree to be in the study. I know what will happen during the study. I know that I can quit the study any time I want. I know that my name and any identifying information will be kept confidential, and my name will be replaced by a pseudonym.

Signature of Student	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

APPENDIX H

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Teacher Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Breanna Villena, Doctoral Candidate at Arizona State University. This action research pertains to the subject of her dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a freshman content area teacher who also has intervention students in class. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Latina/o students' perceptions of care. The study will be conducted over a 16 week period in the fall of 2015. Over the 16 week period, the researcher will observe the 8 to 10 academic intervention students participating in this study in their content area classes to see how he/she interacts in the academic setting.

As a researcher, I am asking permission to conduct these observations in your classroom. These observations do not involve video or audio recordings, only observational field notes. I will not interact or interfere with you or your students during the observations. The data collected from these observations are to inform my dissertation study.

Periodically over the course of the 16 weeks, I might ask you to respond to and/or reflect on a scenario I saw taking place in your classroom. To honor your time, these reflection responses do not require a sit down interview. Instead, using your personal email information I will create a shared Google sheet and use this space to pose my questions and for you to write your responses.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may decide to discontinue at any time without explanation. All efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality. All of the observational field notes will use pseudonyms or numbers, rather names. All of the data will be stored in a secure location in my private residence. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will receive a $25 Starbucks gift card at the end of the 16 weeks to thank you for your cooperation and contribution to this study.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Breanna Villena (Main Researcher)
Doctoral Candidate at Arizona State University
Email:_____
Phone:_____

Consent and Signature

Printed Name:_____

Signature:_____

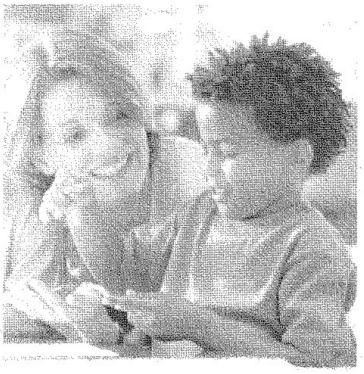
Date:_____

APPENDIX I

CHAVEZ CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

Caring Classroom

In the first picture it shows students helping one other student. the five students work together. To help one another learn and finish there work. Yet they all work together to help that one student. Showing a caring enviornment.



In the second picture it shows a teacher and a student working together, and the teacher helping the student. The teacher seems happy and enjoys helping the student learn. The student also seems satisfied and looks like he is learing. This showing a happy caring enviornment

APPENDIX J

OLIVIA CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

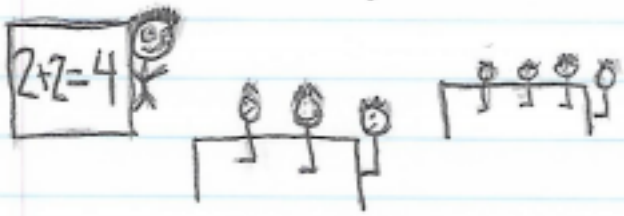
CARING CLASSROOM

A caring classroom needs to include an enthusiastic teacher who is willing to help the students. It should include textbooks and supplies for student success. A caring classroom environment should encourage teamwork. The classroom should be a place for students to learn in a comfortable and safe environment.

APPENDIX K

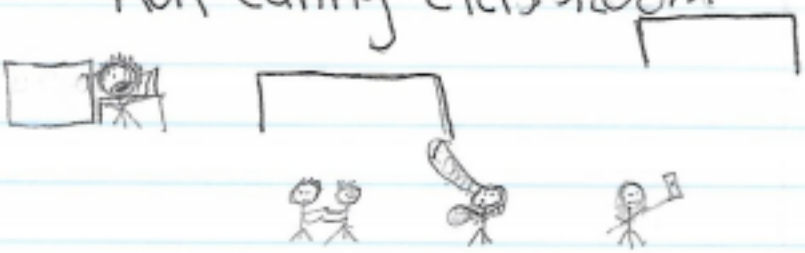
ARABELLA'S CARING AND NON-CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

Caring Classroom



This is a caring Classroom because the students are listening to the teacher. The teacher is not having any problems with anyone. Students want to learn.

non-Caring Classroom



This is a non Caring Classroom because the kids are not participating and the teacher is on the phone and not caring. The kids aren't learning nothing.

APPENDIX L

SOPHIA'S CARING AND NON-CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE


Caring
① 2x-5
② 10+3
③ 100÷3+9x16-10
Non-caring
① 2x-5
② 10+3
③ 100÷3+9x16-10

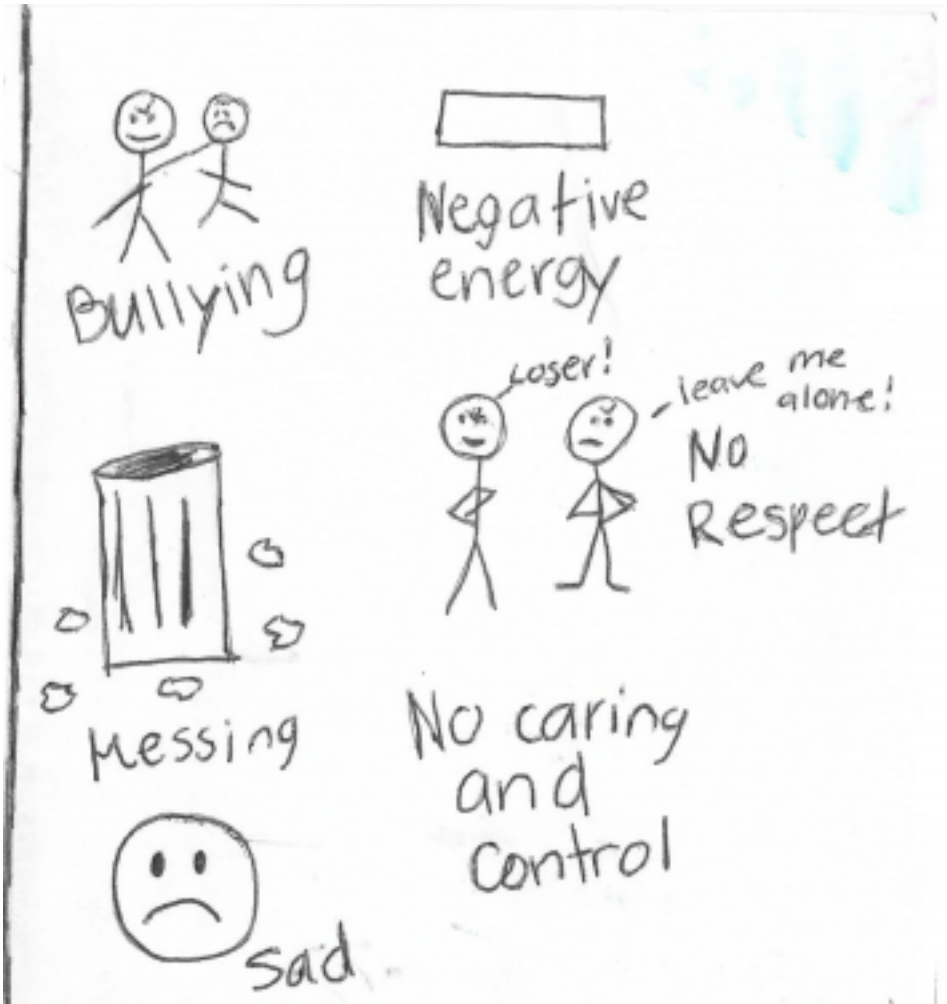
In the caring classroom enviroment everyone has something written on there paper. Not all of them are happy. The ones in front are happy because they can learn. The ones in the back are mad because they cant do whatever they want.

In the non-caring enviroment the teacher is talking less. The kids in the front have less notes on there paper. Also the kids from the back have NO! writing on there paper; And all of them are on there phone texting and talking.

APPENDIX M

LUCY'S CARING AND NON-CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

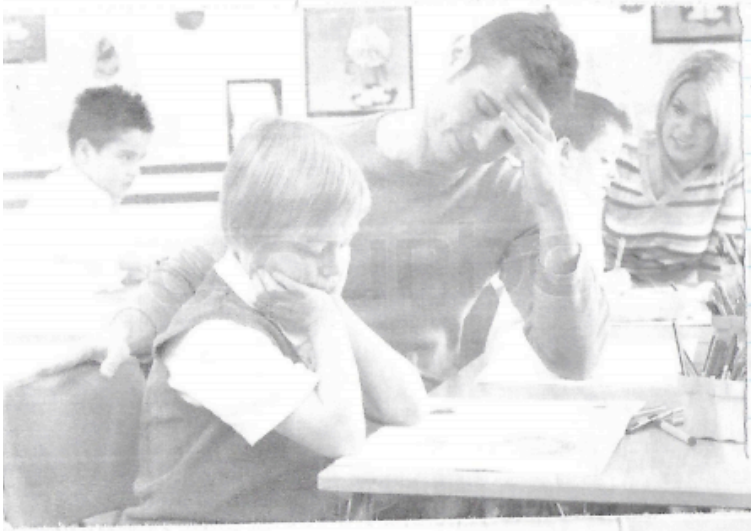
A classroom envioronment should establish a warm and caring atmosphere that the kids feel comfortable in. You'll need to build a circle of trust where the students can feel free to be themselves without worrying that classmates will make fun of them. Also, you'll need to have team-building that allows the kids to really get to know each other


Bullying
Negative energy
Loser!
leave me alone!
No Respect
Messing
No caring and control
Sad
A non-caring classroom environment that lacks academic rigor does not make it a compassionate classroom. Also by not making clear procedures and expectations for the students. They are going to feel like they can't amount to anything if you treat like garbage. Giving the students a worksheet and not teaching

APPENDIX N

CHAVEZ'S NON-CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

NON-Caring Classroom



In the first picture it looks like a teacher trying to help a student. Yet the student looks frustrated and annoyed, and so does the teacher. So the teacher looks like he is going to give up on the child carelessly.

In the second picture it looks like a student is annoyed and disappointed. Because of the way his class carelessly acts. It also seems like the teacher has no control over the students and how they act so

APPENDIX O

OLIVIA NON-CARING CLASSROOM IMAGE

NON-CARING CLASSROOM

A non-caring classroom would be a messy, unorganized room with no order. The teacher would not be genuine or compassionate towards the kids and would just sit behind their desk all day rather than teach. The kids would be having side conversations or sleeping. The classroom would be extremely unorganized and chaotic.