

Stayed in School or Dropped Out:
Negotiation of Organizational Structure and Supports

by

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ABSTRACT

High numbers of dropouts can be found throughout the country, but research has shown the problem to be most prevalent in minority communities. Although the majority of dropouts were Anglo, the highest event dropout rates were found among American Indians, Hispanics and African Americans. This descriptive study investigated how students negotiate school structure, social supports, and cultural identity to gain an insider or “emic” perspective on youth decision-making regarding whether to drop out or remain in school. Research was conducted in a suburban school district with a high school population of over 10,000 students in grades 9 through 12. Student selection was based on criteria developed through an analysis of district data of students that had dropped out of school over a three-year period from the 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 school years. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants of high school age. These participants were placed in one of three sample groups that fit the dropout profile. These groups were (1) students currently attending high school, (2) students who dropped out prior to completing graduation requirements, and (3) students who had graduated. The findings in this study will benefit the educational community as it relates to K-12 education and students leaving school (dropping out). Educators and administrators will be able to evaluate the findings of the study to review current practices and policies within their organization. The data will also give administrators the opportunity to develop and implement programs that can assist students in staying in school.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. I really appreciate those days of encouragement through phone calls from California or family reminding me how proud they were of me. They have supported me through the whole process, even when I missed out on family functions. I want to thank my family for understanding when dad had to work long hours, because without all of your support, this would not have been completed. And finally, this is dedicated to my wife who encouraged me to receive my doctorate and I would not have been able to do this without her.

I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. - Philippians 4:13

Don't be afraid to get out of the boat....

CHAPTER 1

Background

Introduction

This dissertation examined why and how students decided to drop out of high school, or remain in high school and graduate. This descriptive study investigated student negotiation through school structure, social supports, and cultural identity. As a participant observer, the researcher evaluated previous student dropout data to identify seven high school students who made up three interview groups: dropouts, graduates, and current enrollees. The interview responses were analyzed individually and grouped according to influencing factors.

National Significance

An alarming number of high school students drop out each year. From 2005-2008 more than 1.7 million US students in 9th through 12th grades dropped out (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Common Core Data (CCD) defines a dropout as,

...an individual who was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved education program; and does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program;

temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or death.
(Stillwell, 2010. p.24)

In 2005-2006, the NCES reported more than 500 thousand students dropped out at an event rate of 3.9% (Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). The *event dropout rate* is defined by the NCES as,

...the proportion of students who drop out in a single year. The rate is the number of students who drop out of a given grade divided by the number of students enrolled in that grade at the beginning of that school year.

(Stillwell, 2010, p.1)

From 2005-2006 to 2006-2007, the number of dropouts increased to 617,948 students and the event dropout rate rose to 4.4% (Stillwell, 2009). In 2007-2008, the event dropout rate held steady at 4.1% with the number of dropouts totaling 613,379 students (Stillwell, 2010).

Escalating dropout rates demand further examination: when, why, and how are students deciding to leave school? Reports compiled from 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 by NCES have shown that more seniors drop out of school than any other grade. According to the NCES report in 2007-2008, as shown in Table 1, students in 12th grade had an event dropout rate of 6.1%, compared to 3% in 9th grade, 3.6% in 10th grade and 4% in 11th grade (Stillwell, 2010). This senior pattern was not an anomaly. In the 2005-2006 academic year, which begins July 1st and ends on June 31st, seniors dropped out at an event rate of 5.5%, compared to 3.1% in 9th grade, 3.5% in 10th grade and 3.9% in 11th grade (Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). In 2006-2007, the 12th grade event dropout rate was at its

highest at 6.5% with the next highest rate of 4.2% represented by 11th graders (Stillwell, 2009). Across the United States, populations such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic levels are affected by student dropouts.

In 2006-2007, the dropout rate for males was 4.9%; a year later, it dropped to 4.6% while the dropout rates for females were 3.8% and 3.5% respectively (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010). Although dropout rates were higher for males, female dropouts had a greater unemployment rate, which decreased their earning potential. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) the unemployment rate in 2008 for women without a diploma was 9.4%, compared to 5.3% for women with a high school diploma. Women older than 25 without a high school diploma earn on average \$85 per week less than men with the same education (USDOL, 2010). The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) data found women without a diploma earn a weekly median salary of \$400 compared to \$485 a week earned by men.

Table 1

Number of Dropouts and Event Dropout Rate in Grades 9-12 by Grade and School Year

	2005-2006		2006-2007		2007-2008	
	Dropout	Event Rate	Dropout	Event Rate	Dropout	Event Rate
9 th Grade	126,196	3.1%	129,428	3.4%	126,057	3.0%
10 th Grade	129,086	3.5%	128,803	3.7%	135,244	3.6%
11 th Grade	127,860	3.9%	133,361	4.2%	139,144	4.0%
12 th Grade	166,888	5.5%	190,768	6.5%	203,630	6.1%

Source: Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008

High numbers of dropouts can be found throughout the country, but the data in Table 2 shows the problem was most prevalent in minority communities. The data indicate that, although the majority of dropouts are Anglo, the highest dropout rates are found among American Indians, Hispanics and African Americans (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). As shown in Table 2 in 2007-2008, the event dropout rate was 7.3% for American Indians, 2.4% for Asians, 6% for Hispanics, 6.7% for African Americans, and 2.8% for Anglos (Stillwell, 2010). These numbers clearly show a discrepancy between the various minority groups. Although American Indians have the smallest population, they continue to have the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates in the country.

In 2005-2006, the American Indian dropout rate was nearly double, at 6.9%, the national dropout rate of 3.9% (Stillwell, 2009). Historically, as shown in Table 2, the dropout rate for American Indians has been higher. From 2006-2007 to 2007-2008, American Indians posted national event dropout rates of 7.6% and 7.3% while the national dropout rate held steady at 4.4% and 4.1% respectively (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). The Bureau of Indian Education did not submit graduation data for 2005-2006 or 2006-2007, but from 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 more than 35 thousand American Indian students left school without graduating; this number has risen annually (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008).

Similarly, dropout rates have been climbing in Hispanic communities. In 2007-2008, more than 160 thousand Hispanic students left high school at an event rate of 6% compared to the national rate of 4.1% (Stillwell, 2010). In 2008, the unemployment rate among Hispanics with a high school diploma reached 6.2% compared to the national rate of 5.7%, but that statistic climbs to 8.2% for those who did not have a diploma (USDOL, 2006). According to Crissey (2009), Hispanics over the age of 25 without a high school diploma earned, on average, \$5,000 less annually than those with a high school diploma, and \$12,000 less than those with some college education. Although these data showed Hispanics generally earned less based on their educational level, those who drop out of school earned less over their lifetime compared to someone with a diploma (Crissey, 2009). Research shows Hispanics in the third quarter of 2010 earned a lower median weekly salary of \$522, compared to Anglos at \$759, and African

Americans at \$611 (USDoL, 2010). Research shows that, across the races, those who drop out earn less and are more likely to be unemployed (USDoL, 2010).

Table 2

Number of Dropouts and Event Dropout Rate in Grades 9-12 by School Year and Ethnicity

	2005-2006		2006-2007		2007-2008	
	Dropout	Event Rate	Dropout	Event Rate	Dropout	Event Rate
American Indian/ Alaska Native	9,976	6.90%	122,993	7.60%	13,003	7.30%
Asian	15,698	2.40%	16,059	2.60%	16,576	2.40%
Hispanic	148,515	5.80%	156,026	6.50%	163,389	6.00%
African American	124,636	6.30%	136,311	6.80%	159,407	6.70%
Anglo	195,079	2.60%	219,474	3.00%	234,121	2.80%

Source: Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008

Like Hispanics and American Indians, African Americans also had significant dropout rates. From the 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 academic years, more than 400 thousand African American students dropped out of school (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). The event dropout rate of African Americans for those same years was 6.3%, 6.9% and 6.7% respectively, while the national rate maintained at 4.5 % or lower. The average African American freshman graduation rate was 61% in 2007-2008 (Stillwell, 2010).

Research continues to show that those without a high school diploma have a decrease in prospective earning capabilities and increase in their potential of becoming unemployed (USDoL, 2006). The data show the cost of dropping out of school and not acquiring a high school diploma may manifest itself in many forms: decreased earnings, increased unemployment, and poor health (Pleis & Lethbridge-Çejku, 2006; USDoL, 2006). According to Pleis and Lethbridge-Çejku (2006), the highest percentage of people older than 18 who had “feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or that everything was an effort” were those without a high school diploma (p. 42). These results were also found in families with a yearly income of less than \$20,000.

According to Crissey (2009), as shown in Table 3, individuals who received their high school diploma earned a median salary of \$26,894 a year compared to \$19,405 for those without a high school diploma. Those who attended some college earned a median salary of \$32,874. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) people older than 25 and no longer in school – but with no high school diploma – had a median weekly earning of \$449 compared to \$622 for those who graduated. Those with a high school diploma earned more than a dropout, and college graduates earned even more, with a median salary of \$1,158 per week.

Table 3

2007 Median Earnings for Workers over Age 25 by Education Attainment and Ethnicity

	No Diploma		High School Diploma		Some College	
	Earnings	Margin of error	Earnings	Margin of error	Earnings	Margin of error
All Workers	19,405	84	26,894	52	32,874	82
Asian	19,640	447	24,539	347	32,160	277
Hispanic	18,804	125	23,836	197	30,801	162
African American	16,163	197	23,322	225	30,034	193
Anglo	20,192	86	26,894	99	32,874	92

Source: Crissey, 2009, p. 9

The cost of dropping out can be demonstrated on a smaller scale by using a state such as Arizona. According to the Arizona Department of Education (2010), “if Arizona high schools graduated their students ready for college, the state would save \$103.7 million a year in community college remediation cost and lost earnings.” The Arizona Department of Education (2010) also stated,

...the lost lifetime earnings in Arizona for that class of dropouts alone total nearly \$6.2 billion. Arizona would save more than \$265.4 million in health care costs over the lifetimes of each class of dropouts had they earned their diplomas.

Not only was there a discrepancy in earnings between dropouts and students who graduated, there was also a discrepancy in unemployment. Individuals over 25

years of age who have not graduated have a higher unemployment rate than graduates. In 2008, students who dropped out of school, have an unemployment rate of 9.0% compared to 5.7% for high school graduates and 4.6% for students who completed some college (USDoL, 2006).

The previous data has shown how individual economic capital was affected by not earning a high school diploma. Capital can also be found in the form of cultural and social capital. Coleman (1988) stresses that social capital “is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure” (p. 98). Social capital is developed within the social structure of “family, community and religious affiliation” and creates opportunities for individuals within the structure to access resources available that were unavailable to others outside of the structure (Coleman, 1988, p. 99). Data show a large number of minority students dropped out of school and were unemployed, which would decrease the chances of these individuals interacting with others that may be able to increase the social capital necessary to succeed outside their current social structure (Coleman, 1988; USDoL, 2006).

According to Coleman (1988), “like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. 98). It is the interaction between the two components of social capital, as defined by Coleman (1988), which determines the amount of social capital an individual possessed within a structure. Individuals outside of

the structure did not have the same resources available to them because they were not affiliated with the majority population that possessed the necessary capital needed to navigate the system. The mismatches found between systems and individuals was exemplified in a study of parent involvement in elementary school that showed that “the same high level of educational expectations in poor and nonpoor families was associated with lower achievement among school lunch program participants than among nonparticipants” (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 212). The data showed an increase in achievement among both groups with high educational expectations but “effects of parents’ educational expectations for their children were moderated by lunch program participation” and showed weaker results (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 209). Lee and Bowen (2006) offered a possible explanation by stating the “difference may reflect generally lower levels of human, cultural, and social capital in lower income homes” (p. 212).

High minority dropout rates raised questions about whether there were specific needs these students had that were not being met. Problems related to satisfying the needs of minority populations has occurred for many years and is entrenched in history, beginning with the deculturalization and establishment of English-language schools in Pennsylvania in 1727 (Spring, 2004). During this time period, the area was settled by “religious minorities from Scotland, Ireland, England and Germany” (Spring, 2004, pg. 21). The English settlers were concerned with the increased population of Germans to the area and the law “required all German immigrants to swear an oath of allegiance to the British

Crown” (Spring, 2004, pg. 21). According to Spring (2004), language schools were

a good example of how colonial policy viewed education as a means of establishing the superiority of one ethnic group over another. Here the language used in the schools was thought to be the means by which one ethnic group could gain cultural ascendancy. (p. 21)

With the introduction of this law, education was “viewed as a means of countering and suppressing the expansion of the German culture” (Spring, 2004, p. 21).

History has shown that Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans also fell subject to these practices and education has been the tool utilized to Americanize populations to establish a common culture (Spring, 2004). Through the devaluing of the native culture to the Americanization of the dominant culture, Valenzuela (1999) believes there is,

...strong evidence of the cultural subtraction that schooling promotes.

Besides fueling misunderstandings and intolerance between first generation and later generations of Mexican youth, the systematic undervaluing of people and things Mexican erodes relations among students, as well as between teachers and students. Cultural distance produces social distance, which in turn reinforces cultural distance. (p. 20)

As students navigated the educational structure of high school, barriers affect their progress that may not be academic in nature, causing them to leave school without graduating (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Valenzuela (1999) expresses

“students’ social capital is jeopardized by institutional policies and practices which subtract resources from them” (p. 29). She later expands the notion that tracking of students in schools creates a separation of higher and lower educated groups that introduces barriers for the non-dominant group (Valenzuela, 1999). Within this context, Valenzuela (1999) gives the example of the immigrant youth from Mexico and the lack of mobility created by a system that unfairly tracks a group of students. Many students also lack the social capital needed to acquire vital support in school even when student support was readily available through staff. To decrease the number of students dropping out, students must be assisted in attaining the necessary behaviors to succeed (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

The following section examines identity and the factors identified in research as predictors of students dropping out, such as social capital, family support, and grade completion. As the focus of the study narrows to understand how students negotiate structures and supports, a framework that examines the interactive factors that influenced school persistence and how these factors impacted individual opportunities and accomplishments was used. While the implications were addressed, the methods utilized for data collection and the levels of analysis will become evident.

Factors That Lead to Dropout

Research has associated a variety of factors with student achievement and dropping out of school. Factors such as student identity, school structure, and social support are further investigated within this chapter. Culture is the negotiated processes and practices of an individual or group based on a collective

view within or outside the group. Culture was expressed as “shared knowledge – not a people’s customs and artifacts and oral traditions, but what they must know to act as they do, make things they make, and interpret their experiences in the distinctive way they do” (Holland & Quinn, 1987, pg. 4). This cultural view was developed, modeled, and transferred by individuals or groups and created an established identity within the social order that becomes the basis of cultural identity. It is during this pivotal time in the student’s academic career that their developed cultural identity may guide decision-making. This becomes evident when students try to navigate school academically and maintain their culture (Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994). How these students interact at school may not be the same as how they interact at home. According to Mehan, et al. (1994) in a study of Latina and African American student ideology and performance found that,

...while some...students submerged their academic identity entirely, most students maintained dual identities, one at school and one in the neighborhood....At school, they were free to compete academically; at home in the afternoon, they would assume a different posture. (p. 106-107)

Although the students in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs “newly acquired academic identity posed problems for AVID students who had many nonacademic friends...students resolved this dilemma by managing dual identities” (Mehan et al., 1994, p. 112). The AVID program’s focus was “to motivate and prepare underachieving students from

underrepresented linguistic- and ethnic-minority groups to perform well in high school and to seek a college education” (Mehan et al., 1994, p. 98). It was through the students’ ability to navigate between two cultures and the support system within the program that assisted in their success (Mehan et al., 1994). Although students in the previous study were successful in managing a dual identity, a study conducted by Harris and Sim, (2002), shows students of multicultural ethnicity backgrounds may change the racial identity group based on their location. Students within this study were asked the same questions regarding with which racial category they identify themselves. The data showed discrepancies in their identity selection based on whether they were at school or at home. As an example, forty-six percent of the students within this study who identified themselves as being Native American/Anglo at home identified themselves as only Anglo at school (Harris & Sim, 2002).

Every day teachers have the opportunity to support students within the structure of school, however, according to Malecki and Demaray (2006) teacher support was most likely to be related to student GPAs. In urban impoverished areas, with low socioeconomic environments and high minority populations, there were fewer white teachers and the classroom environment was structured by “achievement groups and child-directed activities...” (Fram, Miller-Cribbs & Van Horn, 2007). Schools with high numbers of minorities may have teachers with less experience and lower levels of certification than schools in affluent areas (Fram et al., 2007). Students of high and low achievement felt the support received from teachers in controlling their behavior was connected to success in

their achievement. The data also showed teachers who connect with students and held them to high standards may make a significant difference in student achievement (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman & Smith, 2000).

Family support has also been found to play a pivotal role in student success. In a study conducted by Lee and Bowen (2006), a sample of 415 public education students in 3rd through 5th grade was studied to examine the impact of parent involvement on student achievement. The focus of the study was to look at the impact of five types of parent involvement while analyzing three demographic variables that were predictors of school performance as measures for the study. The variables were race/ethnicity, poverty, and parent educational attainment. Based on the study, African American parents' educational involvement at home, such as helping with homework, discussing school and discussing schoolwork, had a positive association with academic achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The findings of this study have not shown these results to be consistent with all ethnic backgrounds (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parent-student discussions have also been shown to have significant results in regards to course selection, school interest, and class discussions (Stewart, 2008). More notably, the effects of parental involvement vary in relation to different racial groups. Social supports for one group may not be as effective as in another. Frequency of parent-to-child interaction in some areas has been key to positive student achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Lee and Bowen (2006) found that educational parent-child discussions were positive with Europeans and Americans but negative with Hispanics and Latinos. Both groups were similar at low levels of educational

discussion but with increased educational discussion came a separation in results (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Lee and Bowen (2006) offer an explanation by stating that it “is more likely that Hispanic/Latino parents engage in parent-child discussions of school primarily when their children are not doing well in school” (p. 212). These negative results for Hispanics and Latinos need further investigation to gain a deeper understanding of the high dropout rate. African American students who had an increase in frequency of homework help from parents performed better academically (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Some significant dropout factors identified within the school were the amount of time a student was absent from school (Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 2000; Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007); the transition from middle to high school (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008); time spent among peers with a college-going culture (Suh et al., 2007); and school size (Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Research has shown that attendance is a strong predictor of students dropping out of school. When comparing different groups based on factors such as ethnicity or gender, and the amount of time a student was absent from school, the dropout rate was higher in one more than another. Based on attendance records, African American and Anglo females drop out at a higher rate than Anglo males, while Latina females were the least likely to drop out over all (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Absences as a dropout predictor are not only exhibited when looking at various ethnic and gender groups, Suh, et al. (2007) also found attendance problems to be reflected in GPA and suspensions, and by students’ families’ socioeconomic status (SES). The transition from middle

school to high school can be affected by a number of predictors that occur during the 8th grade year and carry over into high school although the effect may not show until later in high school (Neild et al., 2008).

Students with a high number of D and F grades have increased odds of dropping out of high school while the number of Fs in the 9th grade was a strong predictor of dropping out as well (Neild et al., 2008). Not only have academic factors been found to predict student dropout, but also peer interaction has shown a significant connection. Suh, et al. (2007) found the percentage of those planning to go to college significantly increased as students increased their interactions with peers that planned to attend college; this is in addition to the benefits of being able to share their problems with peers. This would also suggest that student interactions with peers not planning to attend college might also decrease the likelihood of making a decision to attend college. While students interact with peers at school, the size of their school environment may be a significant predictor (Suh et al., 2007). According to Lee and Burkam (2003), large schools of 1,500 to 2,500 had a higher dropout rate compared to small schools of 600 or fewer students. Students faced academic difficulties as they fell behind in credits, had low grade point averages (GPA) due to low academic performance, and failed classes in core subject areas (Neild et al., 2008). Student behavior and school suspensions have also been recognized as factors associated with dropout rates (Janosz et al., 2000). While behavior and academics are strong predictors of dropping out, low academic performance can lead to student retention in school and dropping out (Janosz et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1995).

The number of core subject areas classes failed, such as math, has also been connected to dropouts (Neild et al., 2008). Although low GPAs were predictors of dropping out, Suh, et al. (2007) found when SES was a constant, “the two most important predictors of dropout...were GPA and optimism” where optimism referred to the students’ perspectives of the future (p. 200). According to Suh, et al. (2007) suspensions were strong predictors of dropping out but this was more evident among students with medium to high GPA than students with a low GPA. Some groups of students appeared to be affected more than others in relation to school discipline. According to Stearns and Glennie (2006), African American males were more likely to drop out of school in grades 9 through 11 for disciplinary reasons. Stearns and Glennie (2006) also found that Latina dropout rates in grades 9 through 11 to be almost non-existent until they reached 12th grade when their dropout rate surpasses all ethnic groups.

Retention was a predictor that must also be addressed as it relates to student achievement and discipline (Janosz et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1995). When students miss school because of disciplinary action, they may be falling behind because they are not in class to receive the necessary instruction. If this occurs on a consistent basis, students may be retained which may cause them to drop out. According to Rumberger (1995), 8th grade students who have been retained were “11 times as likely to drop out of school than students who were not held back” (p. 604). The findings of Janosz, et al. (2000) concurred with retention as a main factor, and girls with low achievement seemed to be more affected than boys.

For many years the family structure has been noted as having multiple factors associated with student dropouts, such as the “number of household members” (Suh et al., 2007); educational background of the parent (Janosz et al., 2000; Suh et al., 2007); parent involvement (Rumberger, 1995); single parent households (Janosz et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1995; Suh et al., 2007); socioeconomic status (SES) (Neild et al., 2008; Rumberger, 1995; Suh et al., 2007); ethnicity (Rumberger, 1995); and student mobility in moving from school to school (Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Suh et al., 2007).

In the study by Suh, et al. (2007) more than 20 variables were compared to three models consisting of strong predictors of dropping out of school: (1) grade point average (GPA), (2) suspensions, and (3) socioeconomic status (SES). Of all the significant variables connected to dropping out, family size was one of eight significant predictors across all three models. Family education was also a significant predictor across all three models, which was also consistent with the Janosz, et al. (2000) study where four types of dropouts were examined. The four models consisted of the quiet, disengaged, low-achievers, and maladjusted dropouts. The study showed how family experience, which in this case was educational level, had a significant connection with all four types of dropouts. Family level data were also studied by Rumberger (1995) who focused on the individual and institutional level perspectives examining the odds of 8th grade students dropping out of school. The study showed that students from single-family homes had a higher chance of dropping out of school. This was also significant in the study by Janosz, et al. (2000) although in comparison, the

significance was the same as the number of family members, education level, and frequency in moving.

The research has also shown parent involvement to be significant in a student's choice to dropout. The study by Rumberger (1995) indicated that students were less likely to drop out when their parents participated in the educational environment by doing things such as "PTA and act as volunteers in school" (p. 603). Although parent involvement was shown to be significant, Rumberger (1995) found SES to be one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out, while the results from Suh, et al. (2007) connected GPA as one of the most important predictor associated with SES as it related to student dropout. Although SES was significant in both cases, education level as it related to GPA has also been connected with low earnings in previous research. Research by Rumberger (1995) regarding ethnicity and the odds of dropping out was historically within the minority population. The study showed American Indians, Hispanics, and African Americans had higher odds of dropping out of school while Asians had the least.

Student mobility was another factor that has been shown to contribute to decisions to leave school early, and Rumberger and Larson (1998) utilized National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data from participants surveyed in 1990, 1992, and 1994 to focus on mobility and completion status. To investigate mobility, students were questioned to establish "how many times they switched schools... and changed residences" as well as "when the students were enrolled in eighth grade ...and when students should have been enrolled in twelfth

grade” (p. 13). Questions for completion status focused on earning a diploma or alternate certificate and if students were in school or had dropped out. The study found that students who changed schools between their 8th and 12th grade years were more likely to drop out of school. Suh, et al. (2007) also found mobility to be a significant factor although non at-risk students were more likely to drop out due to frequent school change than at-risk students. Other factors influencing students dropping out involved the intrinsic beliefs of the individual about their future (O'Connor, 1997; Suh et al., 2007). Suh, et al. (2007), found that “optimism about the future was a more important characteristic for the general high school” student as compared to students that were suspended or at-risk due to SES (p. 201). In O'Connor’s (1997) work, the ability of individuals to remain optimistic regardless of the struggles they encounter was a factor to succeeding in life. These were all factors that have been identified as contributors to student dropout and must be further investigated.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the “emic” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95) or insider perspectives of a select group of youth on their experiences with the support systems, organizational structures, and cultural identity that influence their decision to stay in school or dropout before graduating high school. Seven students were selected from a group of youth based on a profile developed from three years of demographic data of students that had dropped out of school based on the sample data collected. The research question guiding this study was: How do high school students who have graduated, dropped out, or

were currently attending school negotiate social supports, organizational structures, and cultural identity in their decision making to staying in or dropping out of school?

Interactive Influencing Factors on Schooling

The conceptual framework of this study investigated the various cultural interactions affecting how decisions are determined; the framework was built around three components in the development of cultural identity. First was cultural negotiation, which was established through developmental norms learned and passed down from generation to generation. Second was experiences encountered and negotiated throughout individual and group interactions. This was well noted by Stetsenko and Arieivitch (2004) when referring to the “historical cultural processes” experienced through teaching of the next generation through “transforming and creating their environment; they also create and constantly transform their lives, consequently changing themselves in fundamental ways and, in the process, gaining self knowledge” (p. 483). Third was the psychological interpretation and perception of the learned cultural processes intersecting with the individual’s experiences.

Through the integration of these three components, identity development was based on learned knowledge and the introduction of new information that was evaluated, synthesized, and infused within the beliefs that affects the current identity. Stetsenko and Arieivitch (2004) found that,

...in the course of human evolution, the tools come to reify the collective experiences (e.g. knowledge, memory, skills) that can be passed to

subsequent generations, not through genetic mechanisms but by means of specially organized teaching and learning processes in which these tools are re-introduced to and re-discovered by each succeeding generation. (p. 482)

This does not only integrate these three components through learned tools, it is the introduction of these tools to proceeding generations that assists in creating identity and developing the cultural lens of a person. It also forms and establishes the foundation of how people view the world from a personal or group perspective. Cole and Engeström (1993) built on Vygotsky's cultural mediation to expand the vision of mediation by adding time and expressing that "cognition requires analysis and synthesis of (at least) two sources of information in real time" (p. 6). Although the mediation between individuals and communities is based on their relationships, it is the rules that create accepted norms that are followed by the participants.

The conceptual framework for this study (found in Figure 1) demonstrates the connection of the components to the development of the student. The student is at the center of the intersection of the cultural negotiation, experiential, and psychological circles influencing schooling. The overlapping of each area and the factors existing within each area affect the others while establishing individual beliefs. Through these experiences, the student develops the lens used to view, understand, and interact in their environment.

Cultural Negotiation

The cultural processes create the cultural identity and establish the view used by the student to understand his/her role based on cultural norms. The focus in this circle is on what was brought with the student upon entering school. The cultural development of the individual and shared knowledge through individual and group interaction contributes to the cultural negotiation of the family and the individual identity. It is through the cultural processes and the developed identity, as it relates to the community context, that relationships are formed. The individual or group identities are influenced by numerous experiences encountered. These cultural experiences of guidance, academic knowledge and cultural modeling create or hinder access to economic and social capital. According to Holland & Quinn (1987), culture permeates all aspects of what we know and think through our experiences.

Experiential

As illustrated in Figure 1, the circle focuses on factors in school that coexist with factors found in cultural negotiation and psychological perceptions. This experiential area consists of four contributing factors to the lived experience. These factors are cultural modeling, mentoring and guidance, academic knowledge and the structure of school. These interactions also create experiences that shape the student's identity. Experiences in connection to cultural modeling found within the family, community and significant others, strengthen the cultural identity of the individual.

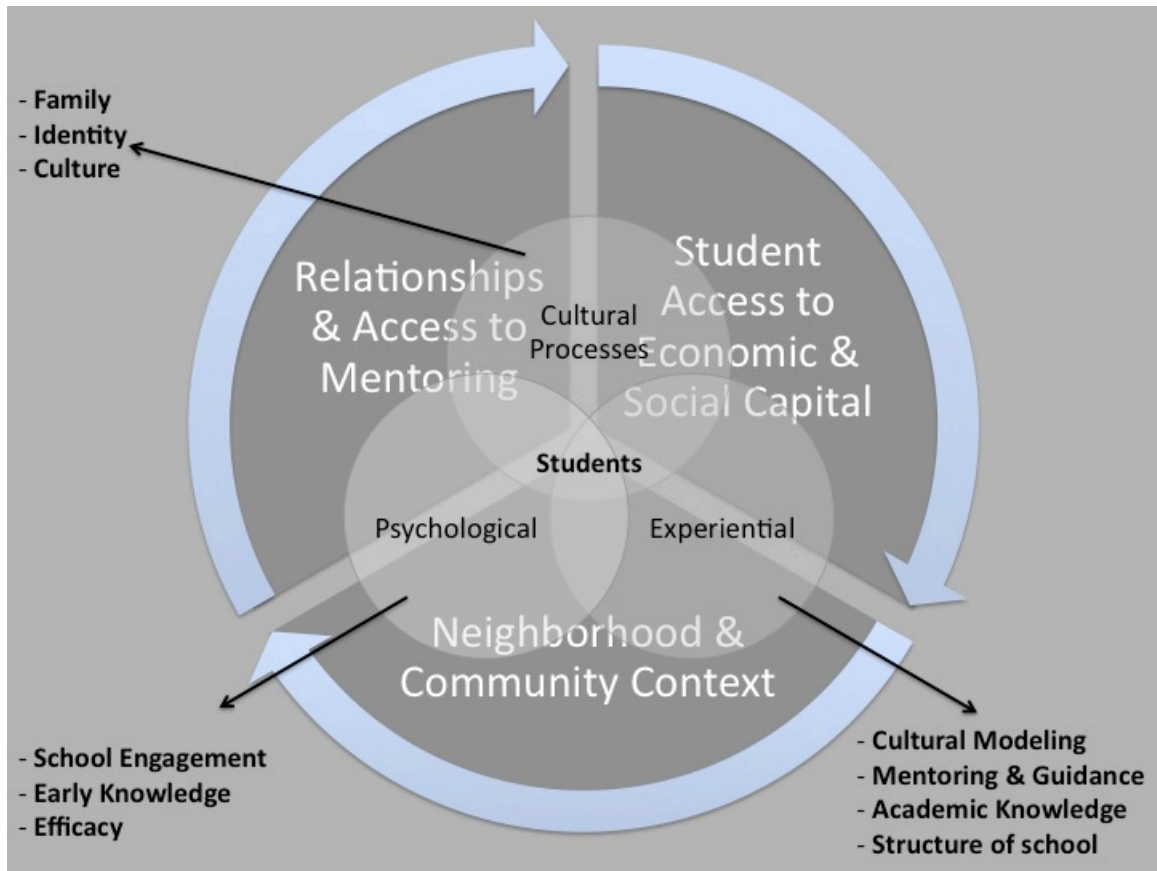


Figure 1. Interactive Influencing Factors on Schooling Framework.

Psychological

The psychological area focuses on the interpretation and perception of the student and becomes the identified reality through their view of school engagement, early knowledge, and efficacy. This view of reality effects how the students engage school based on the access to the social capital needed to navigate the cultural environment. Connection to the psychological component of the conceptual framework, the efficacy of the individual is enhanced by the positive interactions and guidance located in the experiential area, which transforms all areas. It is the experiences encountered that transform identity, as

well as the lens used to view and understand the cultural processes that gives meaning to their identity.

As found in Figure 1, the dark gray area established in the background exists throughout each area and focuses on the outside factors of school that are working in agreement or counter to the developed beliefs. While these factors exist outside of the school structure, they directly affect all three areas of the development of the student. These areas consist of student access to economic and social capital, neighborhood and community context, and relationships and access to mentoring.

Implications

The findings of this study may benefit the educational community as it relates to K-12 education. Educators and administrators may be able to utilize these data to develop programs and practices to assist students in staying in school while breaking down barriers students may encounter throughout their educational career. The literature will show that the barriers affecting a student's choice to drop out or stay in school affect students of all backgrounds and unless changes are made in addressing early warning signs, the high number of students dropping out of school may continue.

Delimitations

The study delimitations encountered included the collection of interview data from students who dropped out or had graduated and left no forwarding information to allow for contact, and students that did not want to participate. To address this issue, a large population was evaluated and seven students who met a

profile described in Chapter 3 were selected to obtain two to three strong candidates determined by the researcher per group for the study. This number was selected to assure at least two participants for each group for the final data evaluation.

Operational Definitions

Absence or status unknown: Withdrawn before scheduled end of school year for 10 consecutive days of unexcused absence, status or location is unknown to the school or school district (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 19).

Attended: Concluded high school education and not expected to reenroll. Student (a) NEITHER met course study requirements or Individual Education Plan NOR received a passing score on the AIMS test, or (b) turned 22 years of age, or (c) was a twelfth grade foreign exchange student (used only in grades 11 and 12 or the equivalent in ungraded secondary). Attendees have concluded their high school education and are not expected to re-enroll (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 21).

Completed (AIMS): Students have completed course of study requirements for high school or an Individual Education Plan but DID NOT receive a passing score on the AIMS test (applied to mid-year completers). Completers have concluded their high school education and are not expected to re-enroll (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 19).

Dropout: School received verification that student has withdrawn from school before scheduled end of school year; student does not intend to complete requirements for a high school diploma (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 19).

Event dropout rate: The proportion of students who drop out in a single year. The rate is the number of students who drop out of a given grade divided by the number of students enrolled in that grade at the beginning of that school year (Stillwell, 2010, p. 1).

GED: Student withdrew before scheduled end of school year expressly for the purpose of obtaining a GED. Students of high school age must withdraw to take the GED test (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 19).

Summer dropout: Student dropped out during the summer. (Same criteria as Dropout) (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 22).

Summer absence or status unknown: Students who are enrolled at the end of the prior school year but fail to show at any time during the next school year and whose status or location is unknown to the school or school district (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 22).

Summer GED: Student withdrew to receive a GED certificate during the summer (same criteria as GED) (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 22).

Summer transfer - vocational school: Student withdrew to attend a vocational school during the summer to continue studies at a technical or vocational school; this includes ALL schools or education programs that DO NOT meet Arizona requirements for obtaining a high school diploma (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 22).

Vocational school: Student withdrew before scheduled end of school year to continue studies at a technical or vocational school; this includes ALL schools

or education programs that DO NOT meet Arizona requirements for obtaining a high school diploma (McGoldrick, 2006, p. 19).

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Students, teachers and other staff members by way of how cultures are developed, experienced, and interpreted bring different cultural identities to the classroom. This chapter includes the literature review corresponding to the three main areas of the Interactive Influencing Factors of Schooling. The first area focuses on the development of cultural identity and the role family, societal norms and learned process plays in the negotiation of school. The second area addresses how experiences in the four areas of cultural modeling, mentors and the guidance received, academic knowledge, and how the school structure effect school going culture. Finally, the Psychological area reviews the interaction of school engagement, early knowledge and the efficacy of individuals in conjunction with the two other areas and the student perceptions of school and the importance to continue.

Cultural Negotiation

Within this literature review, organizational structure of schools and the supports experienced by individuals especially those at risk was a thread that runs throughout. In a study by O'Connor (2002), she looked at educational risk, which she defined, "as statuses that increase the probability of school failure and limited educational attainment as a consequence of the imposition of structured constraints" (p. 857). Understanding the structures that may contribute to the possible risks students face in dropping out of school must be investigated.

Studies have also shown how different supports have positively affected minority student achievement. With the possibility of differing opinions on what social supports are, be it personal or the structural factors of an organization, the positive influences they had on student achievement were usually addressed in relation to the group and not the individual (O'Connor, 2002). The definition of social supports according to Malecki and Demaray (2002) "is an individual's perceptions of general support or specific supportive behaviors (available or enacted upon) from people in their social network, which enhances their functioning and /or may buffer them from adverse outcomes" (p. 2). This was an important area in the literature due to the types of support that were associated with positive achievement of minority students in a high school setting and whether they drop out or stay in school. As we unpack the literature, we must be cognizant of how both of these areas affect student identity and how they may be a barrier or an asset to the student's academic achievement.

Identity Development

According to Rogoff and Chavajay, (1995) "cognitive developmental processes are inherently involved with the actual activities in which children engage with others in cultural practices and institutions and that variation is inherent to human functioning" (p. 871). She builds upon this statement by expressing how patterns were intimately involved in the creation of cultural processes and the forming of human relationships that were developed through social interactions (Rogoff, 2003). Cole and Engeström (1993) also express this through the interactive ways "relations between subjects and community are

mediated” within the cultural historical approach as well as being based on the established rules set forth by the group (p. 7).

Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, and Harris-Murri (2008) elaborate by stating “in addition to cultural practices that individuals and groups learn and use to mediate their actions, social institutions also embody historically grounded cultural practices that regulate peoples’ behaviors” (p. 313). It was the developmental norms that individuals or groups follow that were continually infused with the new information introduced by the next generation that created processes that were inherited. Within the hierarchical organization of groups, as in families and communities, there was a clear delineation of power within the structure and, according to Arzubiaga, et al. (2008), “these hierarchies have deep historical roots as they are reproduced (though often challenged) across generations” (p. 313). There was an official order of responsibilities as well as a determination as to who was the ultimate decision maker. In a hierarchical structure, power was officially given/taken or it is implied through actions and known to all (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995).

Within the school environment, students most resembling the dominant culture seem to have a higher overall status. In a study by Valenzuela (1999) when comparing students of Mexican American (U.S. born) heritage and Mexican immigrants, those who were immigrants seemed to accept their lower status in the power structure based on the mastering of the English language. Valenzuela (1999) ties this together as she expands on how “immigrants accommodate to the mores of the school’s informal status hierarchy—a pecking order that is on the

privileging of English as both the medium of instruction and the ticket to participation in faculty-sponsored school activities...” (p. 186). It was through the power structure that the cultural processes were learned. Rules within the cultural structure were established and norms understood which can be found throughout the world. Examples of this were apparent in the roles men and women played in different societies as well as the responsibilities given to children (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Rogoff, 2003).

According to Rogoff (2003), “communities may expect children to engage in activities at vastly different times in childhood...” (p. 4). This brings to question, when is it too early for children to participate in a task that would be considered an adult’s responsibility? The depth of child participation would be based on the needs of the family to sustain the necessities of life. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) stated,

...in some cases their participation is central to the household’s functioning, as when the children contributes to the economic production of the home, or use their knowledge of English to mediate the household’s communications with outside institutions, such as the school or government offices. (p. 74)

The role of translator for family members becomes very important because the parents may not have the understanding of the English language. This becomes more and more the norm when the parents are disconnected from the English language due to their traditional way of communicating in Spanish (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

The reciprocal of the hierarchical pattern was also true in cultures with no designated, appointed or implied individual or group having control over others or being subservient to others. In this cultural state, the individual lives to be a part of the larger group and follows the developed structures and rules established by the community (Rogoff, 2003). Respect for the beliefs of each individual are acknowledged but the expectation is that each individual operates within the structure developed by the group and will not work in opposition to the existing norms (Rogoff, 2003).

Gonzalez, et al. (2005) expressed that the “concepts of culture emphasized in schools has focused on how shared norms shape individual behavior and on discovering standardized rules of behavior” (p. 40). She then extends the thought with the clarification that because “as we, moved in and out of our encounters with culture, we adopt processual approaches to culture that takes into account multiple perspectives that could reorient educators to consider the everyday lived experiences of their students” (p. 40-41). This was also expressed through the social distribution of the funds of knowledge, which were the strengths and resources possessed within a group. According to Gonzales, et al. (2005)

...maintaining good relationships with its members. In the form of ...family rituals: birthdays, baptisms, confirmations, 'coming out' rituals (quinceaneras)...brings members of one's network together ritually to reaffirm their solidarity, but staging them also requires members to cooperate by investing their labor or pooling their resources. (p. 59)

Patterns were not only found in the social structure of learning but it played a large role in the developed norms of survival. According to Rogoff (2003), “managing survival” was a strategy that created many patterns of “...cultural similarities and variations in infant care and attachment, families’ roles, stages and goals of development, children’s responsibilities, gender roles...” that must be examined when exploring culture development (p. 9). Erickson (2006) points out that even though we can be participants in the same event, what we learn from the experience can be different because of our different cultural backgrounds. It was through the implications of how students learned in relation to cultural differences that created the necessity to establish connections and open pathways to learning. An example of this would be two different students in the same class having polar opposite opinions of the same teacher. The willingness to suspend initial judgment as different cultures were encountered was necessary to gain an understanding of unfamiliar cultural processes as well as to recognize similarities to their own (Rogoff, 2003).

To explore the cultural process within the context of the Socio-cultural-historical perspective, we must unpack the cultural aspects mentioned in the previous section. According to Rogoff, (2003) “people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people” (p. 51). Stetsenko & Arievitch (2004) also concur with Rogoff’s findings when saying “that people always contribute to social practices, rather than merely participate in or sustain them..., the self appears as an activity and instrument of transforming the world, as an instrument of social change” (p. 494). Culture is

not static. Artiles (2003), when referring to how some researchers portray cultural norms within large groups based on a smaller sample population, states,

It is paradoxical that, in their attempt to affirm cultural diversity, these suggestions end up advocating for essentialist and more static views of culture and cultural history. Furthermore, the risk of stressing a cultural historical view of minorities is that it might implicitly suggest that group traits are immutable features with no previous histories — that is, cultural reproduction is stressed. (p. 184)

This would suggest that taking a general stance on cultural findings of specific populations based on data gathered on a subgroup of the population and assigning the results to the entire population would be in error (Artiles, 2003). When this occurs in the classroom, it was evident to the students that the staff determined that all of those in their race are the same and if one does not do well then they all will not (Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2008). Arzubaiaga, et al. (2008) clarified this through how an “example of, discursive practices of African Americans are distributed as if these practices never change and are used in the same fashion by all members of this group” (p. 311). Utilizing this train of thought may cause a disconnect between teachers and students due to a breakdown in communication and misunderstandings. To assume all children of the same cultural heritage would learn, understand and react in the same manner would perpetuate stereotypes. According to Gonzalez, et al. (2005), educators must understand that culture throughout all groups was constantly changing as well as within their own. Gonzalez, et al. (2005) continues on to say “just as the culture an individual

teacher practices will be a mix of old and new, traditional and modern, so is the culture of other groups in the country” (p. 131). When traditions are passed down from generation to generation, these practices become norms and these norms become processes that change based on the individuals engaged at that particular time and space (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Although social interaction changed culture over time, there were individuals that were able to change with the environment while keeping their culture. Marta, a Latina student in a study conducted by Mehan, et al. (1994), expressed the importance of keeping her cultural identity while successfully achieving academically.

Relationships and Identity

The inherent cultural processes found in families and society, which can be the basis for the development of cultural identity and learning have been explored. While the culture a person is born into has great influence on their individual development, it is the numerous experiences each person encounters that frame how they interact with others. Individual experiences coexisting with the cultural process guide the development of an individual’s cultural identity. Cole and Engeström (1993) suggested that “culture is patterned, but there is also no doubt that it is far from uniform...” because of the many constraints that effect who and how life is experienced (p. 15). As a child develops and interacts with its environment, the hierarchy of the family and group power structure determines the individual’s place and responsibility they have to their surroundings. According to Cole and Engeström (1993) in following the function of mediating artifacts and the rules established in the community, the developed community

norms “imply a ‘division of labor,’ the continuously negotiated distribution of task, power, and responsibilities among the participants of the activity system” (p.

7). Setsenko and Arieviditch (2004) stated,

The patterns of endeavors and activities that the child engages in, although initially influenced by the presence of a certain inborn feature and by diverse social forces and affordances, gradually evolve into a complex ongoing reality *sui generis* with its own logic and internal dynamics that ultimately gives rise to and shapes the child’s emerging self. (p. 486)

While experiences are encountered and evaluated by people of different ages,

Holland and Lave (2007) also expressed it creates “intergenerational differences...” such as views shaped by “age associated struggles, genres, and identity”, which can create divides between and within groups (p. 17).

Valenzuela’s (1999) writing demonstrates this separation based on cultural differences when speaking of how Chicanos were viewed by Mexican immigrants in her study, stating that “...attitudes towards Chicanos may be linked to how recent the immigrants arrived in the United States; the more recent, the more negative” (p. 186). A study by Mehan, et al. (1994) focused on Latino and African American students participating in the high school Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program with the focus on their ability to be successful academically while not losing their ethnic identity. The results of this study showed students were able to develop “strategies for managing dual identities...affirming their cultural identities, while acknowledging the necessity of academic achievement for occupational success” (p. 108).

It was also important to note that research by Ogbu has explored whether the individual usually of a minority group was seen as a voluntary or involuntary participant to change, which can affect how they look at learning. Ogbu (2004) calls this an

involuntary incorporation into society; usually these minorities do not become minorities by choice. Rather they are forced into minority status against their will by conquest, colonization, enslavement (e.g., Black Americans) or arbitrary subjection to the status of a pariah caste (e.g., the Burakumin of Japan). (p. 6)

As an example, in the early 1920s, students at Rough Rock Indian reservation were not allowed to speak the Navajo language and were required to speak English only or be punished. According to McCarty (2002), the Navajo people “faced penalties that left emotional as well as physical scars. Such practices lasted well into the latter part of the 20th century” (p. 45).

Although minority students find difficulty in holding on to their culture while acquiring the dominant culture, some students work to take on the new culture while putting aside their own cultural identity to be accepted through assimilation. Ogbu (2004) explains the difficulty for African Americans after emancipation by expressing how,

...some Black people, after emancipation, chose to assimilate in culture and language. They tried very hard to emulate White people in behavior, speech and thought because they believed that their chances of success in education, employment in the corporate economy and in being socially

accepted by White people would be better if they abandoned Black frames of reference and emulated White people. (p. 15)

This was not only found in the African American community, some Mexican students found themselves in a struggle with the structure because the expectation of the system was assimilation. Not only does this create confrontation between students and the adults of the school, it implies that if a student does not assimilate to the dominant culture, they were rebelling against the system and not that they were holding true to their cultural beliefs (Espinoza-Herold, 2003).

Experiential

Cultural Modeling

Family. Experiences gained through the family structure had an effect on the cultural perspective students displayed inside and outside school. Lee (2007) shares,

...if a person is African American, but grew up and lives in a white upper-middle-class community in which African Americans are a distinct minority, and ceases to have extended family and peer social networks with black community, that person is not likely going to speak African American English. (p. 13)

This is language based on vocabulary that is unique to the African American culture that was derived from those enslaved in the United States (Lee, 2007).

Modeling within the family, the interactions that occur within their environment and the supports received appear to be what strengthens their cultural identity.

Within the Mexican immigrant community, parents prefer their children to

associate with other immigrants to keep them from becoming Americanized. This may be the parents' attempt to hold on to their cultural identity through their children as they get older and seek the freedoms afforded to the Americanized students. Over time, the younger generation may begin to change their views on their U.S. born Mexican counterparts and desire the same freedoms (Valenzuela, 1999).

According to some of the immigrant students interviewed by Valenzuela (1999), their parents were too strict when it came to the amount of freedoms they had in regards to with whom they could associate. Other students within the same study felt their parents' views were too strict because this did not allow them to express themselves in a loving way like the American born Mexicans could. This parental control was not only found within the Hispanic structure, parents of African American children also had a high degree of control while parent control of Anglo children was much lower (Heard, 2007).

Many immigrant parents hold education to be important but this may not be the perception of immigrant parents of their U.S. counterparts because these students did not appear to appreciate what they have regarding education because they mainly focused on having girlfriends and boyfriends, being a part of a gang, and because academics didn't hold a high priority (Valenzuela, 1999). It was necessary to note that parental support may not always be in the form of assisting with schoolwork. According to Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008), the most significant predictor of academic achievement of student attitudes toward learning for African American student is parental expectation. Although expectations was

not a direct support, it was through these expectations that cultural modeling becomes reality which helps “students make sense and impose meaning on their pursuit of academic task” and gain understanding of the importance of education (Lee, 2007, p. 27).

As students engage in academics, some parents impose their own cultural beliefs upon their children and what they feel is important, thus a priority may not be educational attainment. This is not to say there is a disbelief that education is important, but for some parents, getting married or having a family may be more pressing. Through a conversation by Mehan, et al. (1994) with a participant, one student expressed her belief that she was able to succeed academically because of her friends within the program and being able to separate the two environments of school and home. She shared that “at home they expect me to get married. Here they expect me to go to college” (p. 111). This was a prime example of how the beliefs modeled by the parent to marry over attain an education can change through the experience of an individual.

Achievement and cultural modeling within the family continued to have an impact on student academic success. In the study by Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn (2007), the child’s classroom and school level factors that influenced student learning were examined. For this study, data from the “Early Childhood Longitudinal study of Kindergarten Cohort” was used to select their sample population (p. 311). This sample included 3,501 students in 246 schools and reading skills were used as the measurements throughout the study. Data were collected using three types of variables: child and family variables, classroom

variables, and school variables. Although there were a number of variables studied within this research, for the purpose of this conversation, child and family variables were focused on, which were divided into child variables and family variables. The child variables consisted of gender, race and age while family was defined by the mother's years in school, family socioeconomic status (SES), single parent household, and if the mother gave birth as a teenager. Findings of Fram, et al. (2007) suggest,

...the prevalence of growing up in a single-parent household and of having a teenage mother also represents potential barriers to these children's educational achievement – to the degree that these conditions may reflect less parental time and know-how for supporting children's learning. (p. 316)

As single parent homes appear to be prevalent in some ethnic groups, a study conducted by Heard (2007), showed of 10,606 teens in a longitudinal study that “black adolescents have lived about one half as long in two-original-parents, father-stepmother, and single father families as have white adolescents..., while Hispanics have spent more time with single mothers than whites” (p. 331). This study not only connected single parent homes to low achievement but it further suggested that the duration of time the student lives in a single parent home also had a negative effect.

As a result of low educational attainment, parents tend not to get involved in the educational process of their children because at times they may feel they do not have the background to place themselves in the educational discussion (Lee &

Bowen, 2006; Mehan et al., 2007). Studies have shown that mothers with low education also tend to be of low (SES) and are found in higher numbers at schools consisting of a large population of minority students (Fram et al., 2007).

Peers and significant others. While family structure was an important factor in the development of cultural identity, peer relationships are continually changing and molding the beliefs of the individual. Regardless of background, social supports from peers have been correlated with achievement as strong as parental supports (Somers et al., 2008). Many students experiencing academic difficulty in class still attend school because they want to see their friends (Lee, 2007). The importance of having a connection with their peers can be an enhancement or a deterrent of the students' learned norms from their family.

According to Valenzuela (1999) Hispanic female students appeared to be the primary "provider of academics-related supports" (p. 143). These supports come in a number of forms such as homework help, encouragement, and in some cases; the girls completed the homework or translated the assignments for their friends. In most cases it was a boyfriend or a close male friend that received the help and support and the female students do not appear to have any issues with the amount of time they gave up to assist others. These young ladies take on this responsibility although their own grades may suffer because they felt if they don't, their boyfriends will drop out of school or fail (Valenzuela, 1999).

According to Valenzuela (1999), she did not see this reciprocated from the male perspective of helping their girlfriends.

Although these students may not be doing their own work, those appearing in the Gonzalez, et al. (2005) study relied on support from each other to stay in school. The strength of female ties was not only seen in the academic assistance they gave to the opposite sex, it was the connections they were able to make with others like them that allows them to encourage each other. This encouragement was not only in the area of academics but also in the keeping of their cultural beliefs that they felt was important and necessary to maintain (Gonzalez, et al., 2005).

According to Mehan, et al. (1994) students spoke of their “love for their cultural heritage and the desire to succeed” as well as speaking of “college plans” as they encourage each other (p. 106). The connections of these students and the cultural modeling they demonstrated for one another builds on the necessary supports needed for future success. There were many examples of students who expressed that they associate with specific groups of friends because they hold each other accountable to be at school and if they were with other friends, they may ditch school or even get into trouble. This can be found when students attend school outside of where they live or are in programs that separate them from the main population of the school because of the nature of the program. To be successful, students needed to understand how to navigate between the two cultures modeled by the different groups they associated. Mehan, et al. (1994) gave an example of this when writing about a conversation with an African American male and a Latina student that had to manage a double identity.

Chris said he really wants to go to college and that AVID provides him a place where his academic pursuits are encouraged and where he has academically oriented peers. But he has street friends, too. While he feels they are ‘wasting their lives’ because ‘they are into being bad,’ he still hangs out with them. (p. 107)

While,

Laura wants to be a lawyer, and she knows the only way to achieve that goal is to ‘put forth the effort and go to college.’ But she also wants to keep her friends. So she is active in AVID during school hours and continues to date boys from her neighborhood and go to the movies with her girlfriends who live on her street. (p. 107).

Through both examples, one can see that cultural modeling learned at an early age and the introduction of new ways of looking at how they identify with themselves and their culture continues to change with the experiences encountered by each individual.

Research has shown African American students with positive peer associations with others that were committed to the values of education have been significant to student achievement (Newman et al., 2000; Stewart, 2008). The study by Newman, et al. (2000), focused on high and low performing student perceptions of transitioning to high school and the significant role of motivating factors. The significant motivating factors to be studied included peers, school, teachers, parents, and neighborhoods. The findings of this study suggested that both high and low performing students believed their peers played a small role in

motivating them. Although this was a contradiction to other studies that suggested peers were a positive factor through their positive interactions and modeling, high and low performing students in this study felt that some peer interactions must be limited. If their peers were a bad influence, they felt it was necessary to limit the amount of time spent with them. This was not confined to peers who were bad influences; it was also expanded to thinking of boyfriends/girlfriends and not associating with gangs (Newman et al., 2000).

When examining cultural modeling and the effects from individual peer groups on identity and school, socioeconomic status (SES) was addressed in a study conducted by Caldas & Bankston (1997) where the relationship between SES of peers and a student's academic achievement was investigated. One of the areas of focus questioned whether "poverty status and family social status of peers have an independent effect on achievement" (p. 271). To examine this question, researchers utilized the following factors to determine their findings:

1. Family income and its connection with education and the influence it has in school,
2. Educational background of the parents,
3. Family occupational background that the students may bring to the educational environment, and
4. Teacher perception of peer group abilities.

Caldas and Bankston (1997) found that "going to school with classmates from relatively high family social status backgrounds does make a strong and significant contribution to academic achievement" (p. 275). It was also found

that, minority youth would benefit from contact with more socially advantaged students but there was a relatively strong tendency for poor students to associate with other poor students. They contributed this finding to the resources and educational influence families of higher educational status and school influence brings to the environment (Caldas & Bankston, (1997).

Socioeconomic status and access to capital. It is the social supports from family, schools and significant others that have the potential to overcome the affects of poverty on achievement. Support was a significant factor to the achievement of students, and achievement of minority students has been affected on many levels in our society. Poverty in urban communities has been linked to low achievement across racial and cultural lines. Research has shown a positive relationship between (SES) and student learning (Lee & Smith, 1997). According to Rumberger (1983), there were strong connections with SES in that “the probability that a young black woman from a lower social class background is a high school dropout increases by 40 percentage points if she had a child within 9 months of leaving school” (p. 209). Through both studies, students raised in poverty had higher odds of not being successful academically. Lee and Bowen (2006) found that,

Relative to parents whose children did not take part in the lunch program, parents whose children received free or reduced-price lunches at school reported less frequent involvement at school and parent-child educational discussions at home, as well as lower educational expectations for their children.” (p. 204)

Mentors and Guidance

Research has shown that student social capital or relationships with adults as defined by Croninger and Lee (2001) have a significant impact on students dropping out of school. These interactions can take place within or outside of the school setting. Not only were peers significant in social support for minority students in urban settings, mentors/sponsors have also been effective in pushing all students to achieve. When investigating “significant others” as in a study by O’Conner (1997), mentors that can be found outside the school can have a strong impact on student achievement. According to O’Connor (1997), the sponsor’s cultural and social capital aiding students in navigating the financial and educational system played a large role in the academic achievements of the students who were resilient and succeeded despite the odds against them.

This study demonstrated the importance of significant others and their ability to give student access to the resources they would not have had otherwise through the sharing of knowledge. The mentors in this study also gave the students the tools to navigate around the barriers that seem to be inherent in the system, especially for minority students. Social interaction with individuals outside of the family becomes increasingly important for students. When the immediate family does not have the resources in regards to knowledge or associations with other individuals needed to successfully navigate the educational system, it was the social capital that was transferred to the students through their interaction with others that assist them. The connection developed between the students and the significant others within the study may have been

built and enhanced on the “level of education and occupational attainment” the individual was able to accomplish and how closely it aligned with the students’ aspirations for the future (O'Connor, 1997, p. 616).

This was also apparent in another study by O’Conner (2002), which focused on the life stories of 19 African American women who were the first to attend a secondary institution in three separate cohort years and the barriers they faced along the way. The cohort groups were determined by those who were “born between 1922-1931 pre-civil rights, between 1946-1955 post-civil rights and attended school in the mid 60s and mid 70s, and between 1964-1970 post-Regan and attended school after 1984” (p.859). The focus of the study was to examine why individuals were successful in school even though they experienced risks in school. Of the 19 women in the population studied, three were chosen to investigate deeper. The women in cohort one and two found it was necessary to rely on peers and others outside of the family support structure to gain access to information needed to prepare to attend college.

Guidance and adult relationships were also exhibited by family members that fell under the ‘significant others’ category and may be the main sources of guidance and support for students within their social network. Within this social network, social capital was gained through interactions within and outside the family. Gonzalez, et al. (2005) expresses this through the example of the uncle who may be “the person from whom the child learns carpentry...and who the child’s family regularly celebrates birthdays or organizes barbecues, as well as the person with whom the child’s father goes fishing with on the weekend” (p.74).

This was different from the social network within the school because this type of interaction allows for the uncle to know the whole student. Gonzales, et al. (2005) continues to suggest that teachers only get to know students on the classroom level through their interaction within the immediate school setting and not outside of the school. Although teacher guidance and support has been shown to be a predictor to student success, in most cases it does not encompass the child's needs outside of the classroom and in the community context (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Croninger and Lee (2001) found that positive relations with teachers reduced the odds of dropping out of school. The relationships with teachers, although school based, have shown to have an impact on students dropping out or staying in school. According to Croninger and Lee (2001) "the greater students' access to teacher-based social capital, the greater the probability that they will complete high school" (p. 569). Guidance through support and the relationships developed with adults contributed to the academic success of students but should be further investigated in relationship to school staff such as counselors, teachers, etc in the high school setting and the outreach necessary to understand the whole child.

The amount of guidance and support students received or did not receive from their family is a strong predictor of student success. As in the study conducted by Gonzales, et al. (2005) to gain a clear understanding of the "cultural experience" of the students, one must be able to grasp the true feelings of the participants through direct contact. Through the funds of knowledge of the family, students were able to accomplish more than some would expect because,

“researchers often focus on knowledge and cultural practices that families may lack rather than appreciate the extensive knowledge and practices to be found in working class, minoritized, and immigrant communities” (p. 132). Family support and guidance affected student achievement on many levels. Newman, et al. (2000) found high academically performing students reinforced the importance of family support factors that students contributed to their success, such as educational support from parents. Highly performing students within this study frequently named their mother as an important supporter to their educational success while low performing students also named their mother but at a much lower rate (Newman et al., 2000). As previously discussed, parent support within and outside of school was significant to student success (Malecki & Demaray, 2002; Rumberger, 1995).

Academic Knowledge

Research has addressed many aspects of education and the factors within academics that contributed to students dropping out or staying in school. A student’s ability to academically navigate school may affect their educational path. For the purpose of this study, academic navigation was the comprehension of the value of course selection, the effects of failing courses, and how students cope with barriers they encounter (Lee, 2007; Neild et al., 2008). Grade point average (GPA) relates to successful completion of a course and the degree of learning, although connecting learning to grades was not consistent from school to school (Heard, 2007; Lee & Burkam 2003; Suh et al., 2007). Academics also include the importance of math in regards to its predictability of remaining in

school or dropping out (Lee & Burkam 2003; Neild et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2007). It is the many academic variables that are expanded upon in this section as student academic knowledge encompasses many facets of education including literacy, family background, and the effect this has on student performance.

Course completion. A study conducted by Suh, et al. (2007) focused on identifying and comparing different factors that contribute to school dropout rates among three groups of at-risk students. Within this study, at-risk was defined as “the aspect of student background and environment that may lead to a higher risk of academic failure” (p. 196). The study investigated the most significant factors to school dropouts by students that were categorized according to membership in the following at-risk groups: low SES, poor achievement, and suspensions from school. Utilizing a national survey of nine thousand youths ages 12 to 16, and identifying 4,327 for the study, a number of conclusions were drawn from the data. The results of the study showed students with a higher GPA demonstrated the strongest relationship to the probability of students not dropping out and was the most significant predictor in reducing dropouts. Griffin (2002) also found GPA to be a significant predictor to dropping out or staying in school. Although the findings were significant, Asians and Anglo students’ results were much stronger than Hispanic and African American students. The findings suggest that African Americans and Hispanics show more detachment from academics. Research has also shown the important connection GPA has in student success in regards to math and predicting students staying in and dropping out of school. The average GPA in math courses of students that dropped out of school was

below a C average. In comparison to those students who did not drop out, the posted average GPA was a C+ (Heard, 2007; Lee & Burkam, 2003).

According to Neild, et al. (2008), students with large percentages of Ds and Fs in their academic course work had higher odds of dropping out. As students continue to fail courses, the majority of students that drop out of school were behind in credits. It was also found that the students within the dropout group earned “no more than three credits during their entire time in high school, and three quarters had earned no more than two credits” (Neild et al., 2008, p. 552). Lee and Burkam (2003) also found that twice as many students not dropping out were over age for their grade level compared to those that did dropout. They felt the discrepancy between the dropouts and the non-dropouts was possibly due to a number of dropouts leaving before their 10th grade year that would not have been included in the study. This also showed the number of students that remained in school but had not accrued the proper number of credits. When investigating classes failed, Neild, et al. (2008) determined “an increase of 20 percentage points in the percentage of courses failed would increase the odds of dropping out by about 40%” (p. 557).

As students progressed into the 9th grade, their initial success in their course work may establish the basis for future success or failure. According to Neild, et al. (2008), the number of ninth-grade courses failed tends to be a significant predictor of student dropout and can make it difficult to recover later in their educational career. Neild, et al. (2008), also found “when the variable for math achievement is measured in scale scores; then, the 80-point increase in the

math score...would result in a 10% decrease in the odds of dropout” (p. 557). According to Lee and Burkam (2003), of the total number of students that dropped out of school, 18% of them did not take a math course their first two years of school as compared to non-dropouts that only accounted for 5% of the population that did not take math. Within these data, students with stronger math skills were also found more likely to stay in school (Neild et al., 2008). It was important to note that not all students with low academic achievement drop out of school. According to Neild, et al. (2008), over 60% of the students involved in the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS) graduated. Understanding that some students drop out under academic pressure while others in similar situations do not, was important and one of the driving forces in this study. Other research, such as, Stearns and Glennie (2006), have also addressed students that have experienced nonacademic pressures such as discipline and the need for employment that were contributing factors to dropping out of school.

Organizational Structure

Structure of School

As students and teachers enter the classroom, we unpack the many variables such as culture, teacher interaction and expectations, stereotypes as well as school cohesion that are working within the school structure. The structural framework of urban schools, as an example, is affected by the poverty in the community where the school is located. Therefore, student achievement and school poverty had a strong relationship as addressed in previous studies (Meyers et al., 2004). According to Bryk and Thum, (1989), there was a positive

relationship between at-risk students and dropping out as well as the effect social class had on student achievement. This study found when the social class of the school increased, dropouts decreased and when the social class decreased within the same setting, the number of dropouts increased.

Teacher interaction. Individual achievement and school characteristics have a significant influence on student achievement (Caldas & Bankston, 1997). There are many support factors in a school setting that have been shown to be contributors to dropping out. It is the interaction within the classroom setting that is important because research has shown the positive or negative interaction the student may encounter with the teacher can reduce or increase the odds of students dropping out (Heard, 2007). In some cases, educators treated students differently in the school setting for many reasons, such as race, background and ability to name a few. This may also be based on the belief of the teacher that the student did not have the ability to achieve, which could have a negative effect on student success (Myers et al., 2004; Patterson et al., 2008).

Although stereotypes can have a detrimental effect on student success, research shows that students with no academic problems upon entering high school and who have established a relationship with a teacher have significantly reduced the odds of dropping out for this group. The same cannot be said about students and teachers talking, but for students with academic problems, the research has determined that these students with academic problems benefit more from “teacher talk” but any teacher interaction with students within both groups was significant to decrease dropout rates (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Student

connections and relationships with teachers impacted student success whether the teacher initiated the relationship or not (Valenzuela, 1999). This might suggest continued research must be conducted to find ways to increase positive teacher interactions within and outside of the school setting.

Student behaviors. Student behavior as it relates to discipline has also been found to be a factor related to student poor achievement and dropping out of school. According to Stearns and Glennie (2006), African-American males tend to drop out because of disciplinary reasons in school rather than academic reason. Further research needs to be conducted in the area of African Americans males and the probability of dropping out at a higher rate than other ethnic groups for disciplinary reasons. African Americans were more likely to be suspended or expelled as well, while Anglo and Hispanic males were more likely to leave school for employment reasons but tend to drop out at a higher rate due to academics as their grade level increases (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Discipline not only effects achievement, it contributes to the amount of students missing school. It was said that absenteeism was higher in a school when there are greater incidences of discipline problems (Bryk & Thum, 1989).

Upon entering class, students must feel they are in a safe environment in order for learning to occur, it was also stated that most urban schools serving minorities with little income “are neither physically nor intellectually and socially safe places” (Lee, 2007, p. 31). If students feel they cannot come to school and learn, they may not come to school, which will create more problems. This

becomes more important as one looks at the educational structure of school because absenteeism was found to be lower when,

1. Students feel safe,
2. When discipline is perceived to be fair,
3. There is a strong press toward homework, and
4. Students are interested in the school's academics (Bryk & Thum, 1989).

Espinoza-Herold (2003), through interviews with young Latino students, demonstrates how students felt they were treated unfairly by administration, which created discipline problems and established stereotypes. Through this exchange, students made reference to the administration's "emphasis on controlling and expelling youths considered disobedient or dangerous, and the seeming acceptance that ethnicity or its symbols were automatic indicators of affiliation with problem groups..." (p. 55). This would suggest that students of Latino or African American ethnicity would be targeted based on their appearance and race.

Throughout the research by Espinoza-Herold (2003), the students' perception of the administration centered around the expected problems minority students bring to a school and the unwillingness of the administration to acknowledge the students' cultural background to see the richness it could bring and not just the stereotypes that have been perpetuated over time. This can also contribute to the pushing of students out of school by administration "with little discussion of student rights" as found by Fine (1991, p. 79).

Stereotypes. When stereotypes are used to make decisions, it subtracts from the student's potential to succeed. As shared by Valenzuela (1999) when referring to educated immigrants from Mexico, those that had the ability to achieve but having to navigate in "a system that is insensitive to their cognitive and linguistic competencies unfairly narrows their educational opportunities" (p. 31). When educators elicit this type of view, it makes it difficult for students to develop connections to learning because the students can't relate, especially when the "teacher and curriculum designers must overcome deficit assumptions" of minority groups (Lee, 2007, p. 35). If the assumption is that the students can't succeed then they will design curriculum and teach at the lowest level. Patterson, et al. (2008) stated, "deficit thinking refers to the belief that low income and/or racial minority students do not perform well in school because of deficits or defects in either the students or the family" (p. 6). Students' social capital can be lost due to the practices and policies established within the structure of school that can "subtract resources" from students or groups of students based on unfounded beliefs (Valenzuela, 1999).

Stereotypes within society affect the cultural identities that were brought into the classroom and were based on the cultural norms found within the environment of each person introduced into society. According to Noguera (2003), when addressing how African American male students reacted to the pressures of stereotypes, "the challenge is to find ways to support their resistance to negative stereotypes and school sorting practices and to make choosing failure a less likely option for them" (p. 447). This would suggest that individuals

manage the pressure placed before them based on societal norms, which makes it difficult to navigate the system. This was also presented by Espinoza-Harold (2003) when sharing excerpts of a conversation with a student named Manny who felt he was being stereotyped and the school did not focus on his academic abilities only that he was “a dangerous influence and destined for academic failure” (p 55). Manny states,

It’s already made up in their minds. By their first two sentences you can already tell what they think of you. They would always be observing me, they would always take away my pager. My mom got it for me. I work as a D. J. so thought I was a drug dealer. I was tired of being stopped and harassed. (p. 55)

Patterson, et al. (2008) looked at the perceptions of teachers regarding students and parents. The staff within the study continued to stress throughout the research that their low-income parents did not value education and were not involved in their child’s education. The staff attributed the high dropout rate to the Latino family culture and background, and the belief was reinforced by the administration commenting on the student’s home life and the belief that what the family felt was important may not be the same as the school (Patterson, et al., 2008).

School cohesion is significant to student achievement and “a global measure that assesses the extent to which there is trust, shared expectations, and positive interactions among students, teacher, and administration” (Stewart, 2008, p. 25). According to Somers, et al. (2008), students are more positive when

school culture promotes values, respect, and collegiality. This collegiality could come from the high expectations of the teachers as well as reaching out to the families to get them involved. Family interaction with the school staff may create dialog to enhance relationships and decrease stereotypes.

Psychological

School Engagement

Even though studies have shown that African American families felt education was valued to be successful in society (Somers, 2008), they may not have felt they had built up enough social capital, due to their little involvement in school and the lack of knowledge to understand how to assist in the process. Parent involvement in school may include parent teacher conferences, attending programs featuring their children, and engagement in volunteer activities. School involvement and parent educational expectations were highly correlated to student achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). In a study by Rumberger & Larson (1998), where they tried to address students leaving, two dimensions of student engagement were evaluated; these dimensions were academic and social engagement. The data collected consisted of grades, test scores, behavior, and attendance. The student information collected was merged with data gathered through phone interviews with parents and students. Findings suggest that good 8th grade attendance (social engagement) and grades (academic engagement) decreased the odds of dropping out, but when predictors associated with dropouts were controlled, dropping out could not be predicted. An area noted was the

ability of students in special education that continued on in high school had less odds of dropping out because of their possible attachment to school.

According to Lee (2007) individuals can participate in group activities from the outside perspective, but to be viewed as a member one must have “both a sense of identity as well as a level of acceptance by other members” (p. 12).

Many times this was accomplished through adapting to an environment that was different than the norm. Students must learn to negotiate the classroom rules as well as have the ability to code switch when interacting inside and outside of the academic setting. Lee (2007) gives an example of code switching when explaining the interaction of a working class Harvard businessman that will speak to his colleagues at Harvard one way and when returning to his old neighborhood, speak in the language that was native to the people he previously associated with at a young age. For example, when a student steps outside of the cultural norm such as a race that was stereotyped as being athletically inclined focuses on participating in academic areas of school and not athletics, Noguera (2003) states that,

...activities are out of bounds not just because Black males may perceive them as being inconsistent with who they think they are but also because there simply are not enough examples of individuals who manage to participate in such activities without compromising their sense of self. Even when there are small numbers of Black males who do engage in activities that violate established norms, their deviation from established patterns often places them under considerable scrutiny from their peers

who are likely to regard their transgression of group norms as a sign of ‘selling out’. (p. 445)

Engagement would include academic clubs, student activities like sports, music, the arts, and counseling services and/or a personal connection with teachers and their peers, as previously discussed. Engagement can become difficult based on the size of the school. Research has shown larger schools with students of low SES are more likely to have an increased number of drop outs (Bryk & Thum, 1989), thus increasing the need to create student connections.

Early Knowledge

The ability to read and write was the foundation for future academic success and must be at the forefront of educational research. Literacy skills in the primary years must be evaluated to capture those variables contributing to student success or failure. In a case study conducted by Barone (2002), two at-risk kindergarten classrooms, including some second language learners, focused on observing literacy teaching and learning through interaction in the classroom setting. Classroom observations, student work, and teacher and parent interview data were collected to see how students interacted with students and their teachers regarding literacy instruction. Even with extensive professional development, student test scores were still poor. When addressing kindergarten teachers about their expectations of at-risk students in this study they expressed that students should be able to “recognize the alphabet letters, colors, shapes, and numerals to 20” (p. 428). The same group of teachers also acknowledged that students at other schools would meet these expectations but they only expected a few of their

students would be able to do the same (Barone, 2002). It was this contradiction of teacher talk and actual expectation of the student that must be addressed. If teachers are inconsistent in their expectations, the students may not achieve. These contradictions were also found when teachers expressed the diversity in their school as a strength that they were proud of and then later expressing the students were needy and they did not have the personal or family resources to be successful (Patterson et al., 2008). Once the success that was expected did not materialize, the diversity in the school was blamed for the lack of academic success. Teachers within this study also stated these students made a conscious effort to fail (Patterson et al., 2008).

Although the teachers in the Barone (2002) study previously discussed had established expectations for their students and professional development to support them, the optimism of these teachers was lacking. Building student academic success begins early in their educational career. Found by Fram, et al. (2007), reading gains of 1st grade students was significant when connected to the length of time a teacher had been teaching and the positive relationship they had with their students. It was important to note that early knowledge was also affected by parent background and environment. Research has shown for example, students who repeated kindergarten made smaller gains in reading, as did students of single parent homes and students from teen mothers (Fram et al., 2007).

Efficacy

When students were able to have success in school academically, they were motivated to succeed. This thought was not consistent among all races, according to Heard (2007), although African American and Hispanic adolescents were attending school and “reporting fewer absences than whites”, their belief in self was low in comparison to Anglo students. This same demographic of students were also “less likely to report high expectations of going to college, and Hispanics rate themselves as somewhat less intelligent than do Whites” (p. 333). Research has already shown that at-risk students have increased odds of dropping out and the lack of belief in self compounds this problem. With the increase of social capital and the belief from others, students may be able to offset the disconnect they have with their ability to succeed. Heard (2007) extends student efficacy by expressing how “adolescents whose parents convey high aspirations that their children will graduate from college and are involved in their school activities report higher grades” and “those who set high educational goals and have confidence in their abilities report higher grades” (p. 337-338). This research suggests the optimism by the student and parent can increase the odds of success. Increased optimism displayed by educators can also increase the odds of student success. Through positive teacher relationships and interactions, the odds of dropping out of school for students that were considered academically at-risk would decrease (Croninger & Lee, 2001). On the opposite end, if educators feel students cannot succeed, it could increase the difficulty for the student to be successful. Educators may have lower expectations of students living in

impoverished communities because they feel the students are not capable of doing more (Patterson et al., 2008). Teachers may assume students did not have a strong educational background to achieve at a higher level and this may cause teachers to not challenge their students with little to no reaction from the parents.

A study by Somers and Piliawsky (2004) showed African American ninth-grade students from a low SES background who were involved in a pilot drop out prevention program which provided tutoring and enrichment showed no increase in the students' GPA, but had a significant impact on decreasing dropout rates. This study also found that GPAs were higher when students felt good about their education. Somers and Piliawsky (2004) used a 20-item questionnaire pre- and post-intervention that specifically addressed attitudes towards education, such as, "If I finish high school, I will feel proud about myself" (p. 4). Although the focus was not on intervention programs, it was important to address the supportive aspect of the programs that were utilized to assist in student achievement and increasing the efficacy to succeed.

All students living in poverty are not low achievers. Necessary supports needed for student academic success, specifically social supports, can be found in their homes, schools, and in the interactions they have with other individuals outside of their immediate family. Previous studies suggested minority students were not motivated, schools were not equipped with effective teachers, and families were not involved in their child's education, but it was evident that some students still had the ability to succeed in spite of the odds against them especially when they are optimistic and had aspirations of college and professional jobs such

as becoming a doctor or lawyer (O'Connor, 1997). It was in this context that it was important to compare the findings in studies with positive student achievement in urban schools and indicators connected to students dropping out or staying in school. As expected, academic achievement was a strong predictor of students dropping out of school but the student's optimistic view of the future was an important factor that must be further investigated.

Conclusion

This literature was a portion of a larger scholarly and policymaking conversation related to students dropping out of school and the relationship to identity development, social supports, and the organizational structures students encounter as they navigate the educational system. Student achievement has been shown to be a significant factor to students dropping out or staying in school. It was important to address the factors that affect student achievement such as a student's academic and social engagement in the educational setting. Support from family, school, and other positive role models outside the immediate family have made significant contributions to students staying in school.

Social supports were only one of many factors affecting students' ability to navigate the educational system. There is growing literature on the effects the organizational structures of the educational system have on students dropping out or staying in school. When investigating school structure as it relates to courses taken, teacher interaction, and ways of addressing student engagement, it is shown that some students are at a disadvantage because they do not understand how to navigate the educational system. It is through this ability to navigate that the

student learns of the existence of resources be it financial, emotional, or social, which are available to all and how to acquire them. Social supports and school structure have both been shown to have significant effects on students choosing to drop out or stay in school, but the conversation and investigation into the relationship of how students navigate both areas must continue.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research Perspective

This chapter presents the methods used to conduct the qualitative research study while focusing on the selection of the participants and the manner in which the data were collected. While there was little change in the methodology utilized to collect participant data, it was important to note the assistance of the school administration was needed in the process used to select participants.

This interpretive research study utilized qualitative viewpoints. Although not an ethnographic study, the study of culture in connection with this research study connects to the Sociocultural Theory. This theory looks at the patterns and mediating activity while interviews utilizing qualitative methods can capture the insider or “emic” perspective of youth and their view of high school. The research question guiding this methods section was: how do high school students who have graduated, dropped out, or were still attending school, negotiate social supports, organizational structures, and cultural identity and stayed in school or dropped out?

School District

This study was conducted in a suburban city located in a county that had grown by 1 million people over a 10 year period including the late 90s and early 2000s due to the low property costs and the continued development of farmlands and dairies (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Hispanic and Asian populations were the fastest growing demographic in the area demonstrated by the school

district's increased enrollment of the aforementioned populations. The school district selected for this study was established in the early 1900s and thus was more than 100 years old. Although the district existed for many years, the majority of its growth occurred in the last 12 to 15 years.

Eastside Unified School District (EUSD) (pseudonym) located on 80 square miles had an enrollment of 38,500 students in 2010-2011. Located in the heart of the city of Foxdale (pseudonym), the district's demographics closely matched that of the city: Anglos, 57%; Hispanics, 26%; Asians, 9%; African Americans, 7%; and Native Americans, 1%. The district consisted of four, grades 9-12 comprehensive high schools with an enrollment ranging from 2,200 to 3,400 students; seven, grades 7-8 junior high schools with an enrollment ranging from 900 to 1,200 students; 29, kindergarten through grade 6 elementary schools with an enrollment ranging from 450 to 1,000 students; and three alternative schools. Of the three alternative schools, only two were managed by the district and had enrollments ranging from 85 to 200 students. The third site, with an enrollment of 35 students, was managed by an outside contractor with a specific program focus of recapturing students who had dropped out or planned to drop out.

The school district's mission is to prepare all students for career and college readiness. Although the district has grown rapidly in a short period of time, the culture exhibits a community with a family feel. The leadership structure was one of collaboration modeled by the shared vision found throughout the organization. This culture of collaboration was encouraged by the community outreach established by the school district. Through this outreach, parents were

encouraged to participate on school advisory committees as well as offer feedback to assist in improving district operations. To gain parent perspective, the district surveyed its parents each year and when asked, what letter grade they would give the district, 91% gave the district an A or B grade. This feedback was also encouraged through the monthly parent, student and employee advisory meetings with the superintendent.

The district governance consisted of a five-person school board. The board members are members of the community elected by the community. The school board has been very stable, which was evident by its cohesiveness and non-adversarial interactions. Over the past 20 years, the average board member has served 3 terms. During this same time period, the board has been diverse in regards to gender but has had low minority representation. The central office structure was lead by the superintendent who answered to the school board and was the conduit, to the other administrators.

The strength of the EUSD was the tenure of the district administrative team. The majority of the superintendent's cabinet has worked together for the past ten years. This longevity could also be found throughout the district. The philosophy of the district has been one of preparing those within the organization for future positions with a balance of hiring new employees from the outside to increase the collective knowledge and ideas. District employees consist of: 75 administrators at the district, site and middle manager level, 1,990 support staff and 2,250 certified staff members working directly with students.

The overall goal and the highest priority of the district was student achievement in conjunction with preparing all students for post high school. This was demonstrated by the district's performance on the state assessment by consistently exceeding the state in all subject areas. Students also scored among the top students in the state on college entrance exams. Although, there was great success within the district, minority students continued to struggle on the state assessment and were the largest populations entering the district's alternative school.

The EUSD dropout population pattern mirrored the state. Based on dropout reports compiled from the Arizona Department of Education Service Management System (2010), minority students accounted for 68% of the dropouts in 2007, 2008, and 2009 although they comprised only 50%, 51%, and 51% respectively of the district population. In ESUD, the minority populations consisted of American Indians, Hispanics, and African Americans, which made up 59% of the dropout population in 2007, 59% in 2008, and 54% in 2009 yet only accounted for 36% of the total population (ADoE, 2010).

The dropout rate of the district increased from 0.9% in 2006 to 1.0% in the 2008 school year, although the district's dropout rate was low in comparison to Arizona's rate of 4.1% in 2006 and 3.6% in 2007. Preliminary district dropout data were examined in the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years and respectively showed 279 students dropped out of school before graduating. There had been a disproportionate number of Hispanic students who dropped out of school as compared to the rest of the student population (ADESMS, 2010).

Although Hispanic students made up 22% of the district population during the study, they accounted for 109 or 39% of the students who had dropped out. A gender review also showed female students dropping out of school consisted of 126 of the 279 total students (45%).

This study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year. This research study focused on high school age students in grades 9 through 12 who were attending school, students who had graduated, and students who dropped out without completing graduation requirements. Because of the researcher's relationship with the unified school district, the study was conducted with the district's approval (see Appendix A). As well, the Approval Protocol was received by ASU (Appendix B). To construct a comprehensive dropout profile for this study, the researcher had full access to the district's student information management system, which allowed for data collection and cooperation from all staff members.

Participants Overview

The seven participants in this research study were selected based on a dropout profile developed from three years of data collected from EUSD. For the purpose of understanding the makeup of the participants, this section gives a general perspective of the students selected for the study. Participants are individually introduced in Chapter 4 to establish their background gained from data collected from school documents and interviews. The participants selected ranged in age from 16 to 19 years old; four were female and 3 were male. Of the seven participants selected, three were Anglo and four were Hispanics. Three

participants dropped out of school; two were currently enrolled and two had graduated. For the purpose of group affiliation as it relates to this study, the dropout group consisted of Angela, Mike and Teresa while those who were currently enrolled, consisted of Scott and Sarah. Luis and Vicky were members of the graduation group and should be noted that they were married although they each lived at their respective parent's home with siblings. All participants had difficulty with academics, attendance, and family issues that created difficulties at home and in school.

Researcher

The researcher was the participant researcher because of his position as a district level administrator within EUSD where the study was conducted. His responsibilities within the district, as they related to this study, included supervision of all secondary and alternative schools, and evaluation of and approval of all alternative school student placements. All participants were informed that their information would remain confidential and each participant had the opportunity to leave the study at any time with no repercussions or consequences. Throughout the study, it was clearly communicated that the researcher's role was not that of an administrator, and the participants were not obligated to participate due to the researcher's district position. The researcher was well aware that his position could have affected what the participants could have said so he spent time establishing a relationship with each of the students interviewed.

Methods and Instruments

Sampling Procedures

The dropout profile developed by utilizing student data compiled from the district's student information database, and found in research to be predictive in student school leaving and low achievement as found in Chapter 2, was used to select the participants for the study. Janosz, et al. (2000) utilized similar data as they investigated the trajectory of students who dropped out based on four distinct areas. Within the study, school experience, school factors, and support were analyzed to predict dropouts. The student data were collected in the following four categories:

1. Demographic Data,
2. Student Behavior,
3. Academic Data, and
4. Established Arizona codes for reasons students left school prior to completing graduation requirements.

The data collected to satisfy each category included:

1. Demographic Data: Student age, ethnicity, gender, and grade level in school when they dropped out.
2. Behavioral Data: Student discipline infractions and attendance referring to the total number of absences year. (Discipline was counted as one incident regardless of the type of infraction).
3. Academic Data: Total credits earned by each student when they dropped out of school.

4. Student Status: Reasons for leaving prior to graduating consisted of dropout, earned a GED, status unknown, summer dropout, summer status unknown, summer GED, completers, expulsion, or long term suspension.

These data were extracted from the unified school district's student information management database (see Appendix C) and used as the profile to select participants.

The district database was designed to manage all student information. In order to protect all data, the system was backed up each day and archived at the end of each school year. The data compiled from this comprehensive system only included students who had been coded as not completing graduation requirements prior to leaving high school. The number of students that left prior to graduation was 451. The student data utilized to develop the dropout profile was also recognized as dropouts by the state's Department of Education in which the unified school district was located. Three years of individual student data were collected; 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and the 2007-2008 school years.

Sampling Data Analysis

Pre-participant selection. Student dropout data compiled from the EUSD student information management system was analyzed to develop a dropout profile. Demographic, behavioral (discipline and attendance), academic credits, and reason for leaving school were categories that were analyzed to identify similarities between students coded as dropouts. These data were displayed in tables to show each category and the total number of students in each category.

The data were evaluated to determine how it fit in the dropout profile used for participant selection. Students were selected for the study based on the profile established from the data and how they fit into one of the three groups to be interviewed. Data from each category was used in the data analysis in the following manner.

Demographic factors. Grade level was assessed to determine grade classification of the large sample of dropout students. The student's age was evaluated to see if it matched their grade level; this allowed the researcher to determine if any students were retained prior to high school. Gender was evaluated as it related to the profile. Analysis of student ethnicity was critical in determining if one group appeared to be affected at a higher rate than another as previous studies have shown (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

Academic factors. Student transcripts from grade 9 through their current grade level, or when they last attended, were used to evaluate the total number of credits earned.

Behavioral factors. Discipline history was analyzed to identify the number and types of discipline infractions presented by students who had dropped out of school. This analysis helped explain the severity of the violations. Attendance was analyzed to determine the total number of days absent.

Reason for leaving factors. A comparison was made of the data establishing why students left school before graduation versus the reasons reported by the school system and demographic, behavioral, and academic

categories. Data tables were developed to illustrate the reasons students left school.

Post-participant selection. Individual data were analyzed based on the dropout profile established from the district information system. Student responses were compared to questions throughout the interview process. Attendance was calculated to evaluate the amount of class time missed in comparison to students within the same and cross groups. Grade point average was used to see whether there was a relationship between those who dropped out, those who graduated, and those who were attending school. This analysis reviewed GPA of participants each semester to compare student academic performance over time. Transcripts from 9th grade through the current grade level for each student chosen was used to calculate grade point average, identify courses passed, and any core subjects (English, Math, Science and Social Studies) failed. Discipline history was analyzed to determine if there was a difference between the students in the three identified groups. The data were compared within groups and across groups (i.e. dropouts and students who graduated).

Selection Process

The number of individuals selected for this study was consistent with the distribution found in the four categories analyzed. Based on historical dropout rate data, minority students represented the highest percentage of students selected for the study. Anglo students accounted for the most dropouts represented with over a third of the total population being female. For this study, seven high school aged students who met the historical dropout profile criteria

developed from three years of dropout data compiled from the study school district were selected and assigned to one of three sample groups and interviewed. Research by O’Conner (1997) demonstrated participant selection of students for open-ended interviews “provided a unique opportunity for exploring the biographical factors that may have buffered them against meanings of interpretations which led other, similar youth to give up and lose hope” (p. 605). This aspect of understanding the participant experience through in-depth interviews within this study through participant responses offered the opportunity to utilize qualitative methods to “seek to understand the insider view” of the participant in how they have experienced the organizational structure and supports in school (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95). Each group consisted of two to three participants who voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were selected and assigned to one of three groups according to the following criteria:

Group one consisted of two participants who were enrolled in the unified school district and closely matched the dropout profile. The initial sample of participants was selected through a data search of the district’s student information management system. The dropout profile was used to extract a smaller sample of possible participants with assistance from the school administration that narrowed the selection to account for each criterion in the dropout profile. Administration from six secondary locations serving high school aged students utilized the dropout profile to select four students from the larger sample. After a sample population of at least ten participants was selected, they were ranked from 1 to 10 with 1 representing the closest match to the dropout

profile. Selected participants and guardians of those selected not of majority age (below 18 years old) were contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study.

Group two consisted of two participants who graduated yet matched the dropout profile. In other words, they graduated when their peers dropped out. The initial sample of participants was selected through a search of the district's student information management system for those who met the profile but graduated within two years of the study. Two years was selected to increase the chances of the participant still having a connection to the school and district. The dropout profile was used to extract a smaller sample of possible participants with assistance from the school administration that narrowed the selection to account for each criterion in the dropout profile. Administration from six secondary locations serving high school aged students utilized the dropout profile and selected four students from the larger sample. After a sample population of at least ten participants was selected, they were ranked from 1 to 10 with 1 representing the closest match to the dropout profile. Selected participants and guardians of those selected not of majority age (below 18 years old) were contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study.

Group three consisted of three participants who dropped out of school without completing graduation requirements. The initial sample of participants was selected through a search of the district's student information management system for individuals who had been coded as a dropout and were not attending any school. The dropout profile was used to extract a smaller sample of possible

participants with assistance from the school administration that narrowed the selection to account for each criterion in the dropout profile. Administration from six secondary locations serving high school aged students utilized the dropout profile and selected four students from the larger sample. After a sample population of at least ten participants was selected, they were ranked from 1 to 10 with 1 representing the closest match to the dropout profile. Selected participants and guardians of those selected not of majority age (below 18 years old) were contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study.

Once the participants selected in each group responded to the invitation, final participants were selected for each group by their profile rank. When the number of participant responses in favor of participation was less than three in any group, the next possible participant was evaluated and invited into the study with a goal of at least two participants per group.

Qualitative Data Collection

Prior to conducting interviews, a consent form (Appendix D), parental letter of permission (Appendix E), and child assent form (Appendix F) were provided to and signed by participants and their parents as appropriate. To ensure the parents, guardians, and participants' understanding of the research documentation, the researcher reviewed and responded to all questions in regards to the research study.

Method of data collection. Data were collected from each participant through three in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted utilizing Seidman's

(2006) three-part interviewing model. The data collection model had a specific focus for each interview and was implemented in the following processes:

1. The first interview focused on the participants' life history and experiences from as far back as possible to the present time. During this interview, the participants were asked questions to help them reconstruct past experiences in the context of the study. During this interview the participants had the opportunity to share their personal story (see Appendix G).
2. The second interview included video clips (see Appendix H) and was used to "concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study" (p. 18). Questions can be found in Appendix I.
3. Finally, the third interview (see Appendix J) was conducted to allow each "participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience" (p.18). This type of interview addressed "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" or for the purpose of this study, school and life experiences (p.18).

In utilizing Seidman's (2006) method of interviewing, each participant's interview was conducted separately and in three parts. Each interview session was conducted within a week of each other to maintain the connection between the researcher and participant. Interviews were conducted in private conference rooms located in the main administration building of the high school nearest the participant's home and one in the library located next to the school. Interviews

were conducted in person, and in one case, the participants mother chose to observe the second and third interviews. Participants were reminded of their right to end their participation in the study at any time as well as not responding to any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for text analysis. Interview questions were open ended and participant interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

The interview instruments were developed, evaluated, and administered by the researcher. Open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to share their life history in a non-restrictive environment. Open-ended interview questions allowed for in-depth interviews focused on “understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” which was in line with the Sociocultural Theory, the focal point within Seidman’s (2006) research study. Follow-up questions were introduced during parts of the interview to clarify responses and gain deeper understanding into what the participants experienced (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). These types of questions were utilized when the participants’ responses lead to new questions in a chain of information-gathering exchanges. Throughout the interviews, questions followed the interview model and focused on the participants’ perceptions of how they negotiated the organizational structure of school and social support as they stayed in school or dropped out.

Through each participant’s in-depth semi-structured interviews, data were collected in the following areas:

1. cultural background;

2. how they perceived themselves;
3. family background;
4. perceptions of school from their primary years to present;
5. social and academic engagement;
6. supports, mentors and guidance;
7. modeling;
8. school structure; and
9. factors outside of school.

Interviews focused on each participant's decision to stay in school or drop out based on personal experiences.

Interviews

Interview one. This interview focused on the life history of each participant, through questions generated in connection to the Interactive Influencing Factors on Schooling (Appendix G). The first set of questions focused on the student and the cultural experience each student brought to school. The second set focused on the factors within the school that influenced the student through their own experience; and the third set examined the factors outside of the school such as environment, SES, and support structure that affected the student. Each question was established based on the research introduced in previous chapters connected to school leaving.

Interview two. This interview was conducted within one week of the participant's first interview and began with follow-up questions generated from the first interview to clarify responses. The time was used to summarize the

researcher's interpretation of interview one and gave the participant an opportunity to clarify incorrect data.

The second interview focused on a 10-minute video compilation of seven film clips from age appropriate movies. The name of each film clip, how it connected to the specific areas of the conceptual framework and a summary of the selected scene can be found in (Appendix H). These clips were selected to elicit responses to questions focusing on the participant's perception of what was occurring in the video. The questions related to selected areas of the Interactive Influencing Factors on Schooling Framework developed in Chapter One and how they viewed school through their cultural lens. Digital videodiscs (DVDs) were selected based on areas recognized in research regarding school leaving or staying. Each clip corresponds with the interview questions developed and posed in part three of the second interview. Movies were selected and reviewed by the researcher to extract appropriate clips that aligned with the developed questions and each clip was edited to thirty to ninety seconds in length by the researcher. Video computer software was utilized to edit all clips and participants viewed all clips on a laptop computer, which allowed for viewing at any location. The open-ended questions (Appendix I) focused on the student experiences that influenced them as well as questions generated by the researcher from participants' responses to the video clips.

Interview three. This interview was conducted within one week of the participant's second interview and began with follow-up questions generated from the second interview to clarify responses. This time was also utilized to

summarize the researcher's interpretation of interview two and gave the participant a chance to clarify incorrect data. Then, the participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of the experiences they shared in connection to school structure and the supports they had encountered. The three open-ended questions (Appendix J) focused on the second and third set of student influences as well as questions generated from participant responses.

Reflective interviews were conducted at the beginning of the second and third interview for accuracy of data collected in previous interviews. The second and third interviews began with clarifying questions to ensure the researcher had accurately captured and interpreted the participants' previous responses to enhance the credibility and rigor of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). During these interviews, it was necessary for the researcher to ask new questions generated from themes and patterns that surfaced as the researcher reviewed the participants' responses from the previous interviews.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, each audio transcript was evaluated by the researcher for recording errors and transcribed into a word document format by an independent company in preparation for analysis. Each participant interview transcript was coded by name and independently reviewed for accuracy in comparison to the audio transcription and individually imported into INVIVO9, research software designed to organize, review, and analyze large documents and

data sets. Within this research software, each participant's transcript was collated into the following group affiliations:

1. Dropouts (participants that dropped out before graduating),
2. Graduates (participants who graduated), and
3. Current Students (participants who were attending high school).

The data from each interview was initially categorized (coded) by interview questions from interviews one, two, and three, which were designed to gather data in each area of the Influencing Factors of Schooling. These questions were used as general areas to chunk data by question to be analyzed by participant, group affiliation and the group as a whole. The data were then narrowed into subcategories and themes that surfaced from the interview data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Throughout the data analysis, new categories were added and compared and continually narrowed as themes developed from the similarities found.

Coding Process

The data for this study were analyzed and coded based on the first two of the four stages of the Constant Comparative Methodology introduced by Barney G. Glaser. According to Glaser (1965), the four stages consist of "(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (p. 439). As this research study was based on the existing Socio-cultural-Historic Theory, the use of the first two stages of the Constant Comparative Method was utilized in categorizing the data through a series of analysis of the data collected. Based on

the first two stages of Glaser's Constant Comparative Method of analysis (1965), the data were first categorized based on similar findings throughout the study. Each new "coding incident" was then compared to previous coding in the same category (p. 440). Secondly, through integration "as the data coding continues the constant comparative unit changes *from* comparison of incident *to* incident with properties of the category resulted from initial comparison of incidents" creating themes (p. 440).

Through the utilization of stage one, the data were analyzed and coded utilizing the following process. Each transcript was reviewed in its entirety to gain an overall perspective of the participants' interviews and coded as similarities were found within each and collectively between interview participants. Responses to each interview were evaluated and categorized by individual, group affiliation and as a whole then narrowed by introducing new categories and comparing to previous categories as each participant responded to the interview questions as a whole and individually. All transcripts were then scanned for frequency of reoccurring words and phrases utilizing the research software and analyzed to create new categories developed by the context in which the words were used by the participants; individually, by group affiliation, and as a whole. Word frequency was used to find exact words as well as similar words within each transcript. Each review of the word frequency produced new codes to be further analyzed and combined to the existing category groups. The data were constantly analyzed to investigate possible connections that appeared throughout all participant interviews. The process of organizing and analyzing interview data

were not only conducted after all data were collected, analysis was also conducted throughout the research.

As data were collected during each interview, analysis of the collected data were used to develop interview questions for the next interview, which was used throughout this study. Data analysis of follow-up questions proved to be of major importance as the data created new codes as well as it allowed for fact checking of participant responses in comparison to the meaning perceived by the researcher. Each time the data were reviewed new categories were formed through the coded data by individual, group affiliation, interview question, frequent terms, and word usage to determine new categories and themes.

Upon the completion of numerous passes of data analysis of word frequency, individual interview questions, and follow up questions developed during the interviews, stage two of the comparative analysis focused on category integration and themes that developed from the data. The analysis of data moved from surface coding to the properties of each category showing connections to each other and “because of the constant comparative – readily starts to become integrated...resulting in a unified whole” (Glaser, 1965, p. 440). Due to the large amount of data collected through participant interviews, categories to be investigated were narrowed to those relevant to the research.

Themes from categories integrated were organized based on participant responses in relationship to group affiliation and whole group response when applicable. The themes created rich connections to participant responses and enhanced the larger picture that appeared in the data regarding students that

stayed in school or dropped out and their ability to navigate supports and the organizational structure. After the initial review of data, reoccurring categories and themes arising through the analysis process were reviewed with participant interviews individually, as a whole group, and by group affiliation (dropout, current and graduate). The overall categories were analyzed and coded according to individual responses, group affiliation, and responses as a whole. Similar response categories were interpreted with other categories for further review of similarities and differences while connected to memos and annotations within the data to capture connections, new questions, and links found between categories.

CHAPTER 4

Findings and Results

Introduction to Findings

As declared in chapter one, this study investigated how students negotiate school structure as well as the social supports and cultural identities of students who chose to stay in or drop out of high school. As the researcher, I bring a number of perspectives to this research study. I am an African American man who understands levels of racism that create barriers for minority students through the subtle denial of access and organizational tracking based on assumptions. I came from a close family of seven children being the 6th child in-between two sisters and the youngest of five boys. I was the first in my family to attend college and soon after, my younger sister, nieces, and nephews followed. While gaining an understanding of the lens the participants used to understand their world, my experiences as a student and as a young child created the identity and the biases that I bring to my daily life and this research. My bias developed from the difficulty I had in reading and growing up around drugs in the neighborhood and my home. Through this experience, I was fortunate to have had sports and the strong support of individuals in and outside of school that made it their goal to help me succeed. Growing up in an area of low SES, I also encountered the racism from teachers who did not like me because of the color of my skin or because I was an athlete. As an adult and educator, I also bring the perspective of a school district administrator directly connected to the district's dropout efforts as well as charged with evaluating those students who attended

alternative education program within the district. Because of these responsibilities, I have taken an active role in questioning the past practices of a high number of minorities sent to the alternative school as well as accounting for the highest percentage of dropouts. Through these experiences, I have the ability and opportunity to create change at the district level.

The interviews left me with some strong impressions that seemed to pertain to all participants. The themes that surfaced would suggest that all of the students were not afforded the same opportunities in school because of their lack of capital and school engagement. The structure of school limited the students' ability to navigate the system while the role of the teacher mediated student learning and determined their access to education through instruction. The data also showed how the teacher's initial judgment of the student created a perception that affected how they engaged the student. Although the students possessed a wealth of knowledge, their potential was overlooked because teacher connections were not made. The themes showed little difference among the students but it was how each student managed the experiences and interactions that determined their outcome.

None of the students seemed to view school simply as an occasion for learning. Instead school seemed to have an instrumental purpose. School seemed to be a vehicle or a means to achieve specific outcomes that ranged from a mental state, stability in life, attainment of something, or acceptance. I also perceived that "school" and the structure of education held different meanings to the participants although many of their school experiences were similar. This chapter

describes how the participants made meaning of school and the role it played in their lives through the introduction of the participants and their backgrounds, laying the foundation of the findings through the themes uncovered in the data as well as sharing the findings through the themes gleaned from the participants.

Participants

Here, I introduce each of the seven participants by a pseudo name and by summarizing their biographies. Selected from the Unified School District, the participants were identified by their age at the time of the interviews along with their ethnicity and the group they were affiliated with (graduated, currently enrolled in school, or dropped out). The biographies include information about where the participants grew up, family composition including birth order, gender, and family members' ages, genders, and birth order was described and presented next. The challenges faced by the students including the number of credits each was able to earn through high school were also discussed. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Angela

When I met Angela, she was a seemingly shy 16 year-old Anglo girl who had already decided to drop out of school and earn her GED. When Angela decided to leave school, she had only earned 10 credits although she needed 15 credits to be on track to graduate. She was born and raised in California until she was six years old. She moved a number of times throughout her childhood starting with her first move to Arizona when she was six and then to Montana when she was in the seventh grade. Over this period of time, she attended at least

three elementary schools. She later moved back to California in the 8th grade but returned to Arizona to start high school. She not only moved from state to state, but she attended three different high schools, one of which was back in Montana. At the time of her interview, Angela lived with her mother and siblings but this was not always the case. During her high school years, she lived with the following people: her mother and stepfather, stepfather and younger siblings, older sister, and her biological father for a short time in Montana. Angela had three little sisters ages 5, 7 and 9 and two older sisters ages 18 and 20. Although Angela dropped out of the study after the first interview because she was once again moving out of the area, her initial interview was rich and moving.

Luis

When I first spoke to Luis, we had trouble finding time to meet to conduct the interviews. He was already working everyday and we had to work around his busy schedule because, as he explained, he just started a new job and did not want to make a bad impression with his new boss. Luis was a young Hispanic male who graduated high school at the age of 17. He was born in Mexico and moved to Arizona at the age of five with his mother and older sister. Spanish was his first language and it was the language spoken with his family. His parents divorced when he was two and from that time on, he had little relationship with his father. His relationship with his mother and sister eventually became strained to the point that there was little communication. He lived with his mother, sister, niece and nephew. Luis attended at least three elementary schools as his family had to move for financial reasons. Because his attendance was below the

acceptable level, his grades suffered and he had to take an alternative path from the traditional high school. Luis had a little boy with his wife Vicky who will be introduced later in this chapter. Although they are married, they both still lived at home with their parents and were looking to move out together in the near future. As Luis attended the alternative school, he completed the necessary courses needed to graduate on time with 24 of the 22 required credits. Although Luis only needed 22 credits, he failed numerous required classes that had to be retaken and successfully completed prior to graduating.

Mike

When I met Mike for the first time, he seemed to be an energetic 18-year-old Anglo young man not afraid to express himself. He had a raspy voice and coughed throughout the interviews, which seemed connected to his smoking habit. Mike was selected because he had recently dropped out of school although the administration tried to talk him out of leaving. Mike was born and raised in Arizona and has lived in the same house the majority of his life. He was an only child although he stated that his cousins used to spend a lot of time with his family when he was younger because their mom, his aunt, would leave for extended periods of time. In the fifth grade, Mike's parents were still married but experienced some struggles in spending time apart due to his mom's incarceration. Both of Mike's parents had substance abuse problems and his mom spent four years in prison. At the time Mike dropped out, he had only earned 16 credits and was considered a junior although he should have been classified as a senior (age-wise). He spent most of his high school years selling drugs and his

attendance was inconsistent. Not only did Mike grow up around drugs while watching his parents use them, but his grandmother also had similar drug problems and served 10 years with her release coming during the time of this interview. As Mike grew up, he had to take care of himself making the decisions he felt were necessary for his own survival needs.

Sarah

Sarah was a current student when I met her, who was very quiet and at times difficult to understand because she talked very low or mumbled her responses. As the interview continued, she became more confident and relaxed in the conversation. Sarah was born in Mexico and lived there until she was 7 years old and the family moved to Arizona. She has lived in a number of homes, attended at least three elementary schools, but has lived in the same house since the sixth grade. Sarah was an 18 year-old Hispanic female who liked to shop and hang out with her friends. Spanish was her first language and was what she predominantly spoke at home. She felt she had a supportive family and her parents were still married. Sarah was the oldest of three children and had two sisters. Sarah was a senior at an alternative school because she felt she could not complete her graduation requirements in the traditional setting. Sarah requested to be sent to the alternative setting and her home school granted the request. Her parents approved of this change although they were initially reluctant. When Sarah transferred to the alternative school, she only had 13.5 credits. She decided in order to have an opportunity to finish school she needed to complete the

required credits to graduate. At the time of the interview, Sarah needed only a half credit to graduate on time.

Scott

When I met Scott, he was a nice personable young man who had a confidence about him and was currently attending high school. Scott, an Anglo, was 17 years old, born and raised in Florida until he was 6 years old when he moved to Arizona. He lived with both of his parents in a wealthy neighborhood and had a brother and sister. As he grew up, Scott attended the same junior high school and high school as well as lived in the same home for many years. He was in his junior year with 16 credits and was on track to graduate although he had earned some low grades. Scott had spent a lot of time participating in competitive sports and expressed he enjoyed his childhood. Although Scott saw his sister and brother battling addiction, he was successful in not following in their footsteps until his eighth grade year in junior high. During this time, he began to experiment with friends, which later resulted in his parents sending him to rehab on two separate occasions. Scott will move on to the twelfth grade and prepare to graduate.

Teresa

Teresa was a 19-year-old Hispanic young lady who dropped out of school when she was 18. She grew up in Georgia and was the youngest child in the home until she moved to Arizona at the age of 10. Teresa has five older siblings, three girls and two boys who did not move to Arizona instead continued to live with their dad from her mom's previous marriage. She also had four younger

siblings, three boys and one girl from her mom's new marriage. She attended at least three elementary schools and during high school she was sent to an alternative school by the school administration. When Teresa initially dropped out, she then enrolled in another alternative school outside of the district and then dropped out of that school as well only earning a total of 11.5 credits. Although she attempted to attend a number of schools, she ultimately dropped out to stay at home with her son and to help her mom. Teresa lived with her boyfriend and the father of her baby boy who she gave birth to during her junior year in high school. Although she lived outside of her parents home, she spent a lot of time helping her mom because her younger brothers and sister depended on her although their ages were 14, 15, 17 and 18; the oldest having special needs. Teresa's parents were still married but unfortunately, her dad had not been around for the past year due to an incarceration.

Vicky

When I first met Vicky, a young female who had graduated from high school, she shared, "I'm 18 years old, I have a kid, and I like school." As she shared this with confidence, I could not help but think how sure of herself she was while expressing who she was. She grew up in Arizona and moved a lot which caused her to attend many elementary schools but was fortunate to have attended the same junior high school. She became pregnant during her junior year of high school and was married to Luis who was also a participant in this study. Vicky had two older sisters and a younger brother. Her family attended church twice a week and Vicky felt this was the basis of how they lived. Her parents divorced

when she was younger and her mom and dad had since remarried others. Because her parents were not on speaking terms, at times she found herself in the middle because she was interacting with each of them. Over the past three years, Vicky has moved back and forth between her mom and her dad's homes because she has been told to leave for a number of reasons. Vicky moved from her mom's home because of the relationship her mom had with Vicky's husband, Luis, who was Vicky's boyfriend at the time. She moved from her dad's because her stepmom did not like her and she felt she was jealous of her relationship with her dad. After moving back with her mom, Vicky had to move back with her dad because her mom was not happy that she had met her dad at the mall to purchase a new phone. With the constant problems between her parents, she planned to move out with Luis and her child in the near future.

Function of Failing

In this next section, five themes that arose from the data and shaped the responses of the participants and brought life to the individual and group experiences are presented. Theme one, "Is school for everyone?" introduced school as an activity system, noted by Engeström (1998), and the effect of the concept of school regarding its ability to work for some students and not others. Within this theme, the participant belief in who had an advantage in school, as well as how these beliefs compared to the participants was investigated. Theme two, "Who holds the knowledge within the school setting?", investigated the teacher as the keeper of knowledge needed for students to graduate and the hierarchical structure that exists within the school setting that determined access

to education. Theme three, “Our values are not the same”, examined the misconceptions and contradictions found in the school setting demonstrated by what the participants experienced in school. The view of this theme was also expanded to how the participants who dropped out saw themselves as well as digging into the funds of knowledge demonstrated and brought to the school environment by the participants that may have been overlooked or devalued. Theme four, “School as an experience”, showed the interactions encountered by all the participants with adults and other students that may have contributed to pushing them to drop out of school. Theme five, “Differences were marginal, outcomes were not”, summarized the marginal differences among those that made it through to graduation and those who decided to drop out.

Is School for Everyone?

Within the participants’ school district, the historical perspective and cultural process of going to school with the goal of gaining an education and ultimately graduating was the objective and the basis of the activity system. According to Engestrom (1998), “an activity system contains a variety of different viewpoints...layers of historically accumulated artifacts, rule, and patterns of division of labor” (pg. 78). Engestrom (1998) suggested “the activity of school to students may be called schoolgoing” (pg. 78) and for the purpose of this study the terminology will also be used. There were many objects that could have been identified and selected within this system. The components of this activity system, as conceptualized by Engeström (1998) and Cole (1995), included graduation as the object while the students were the subjects. The tools within the

schoolgoing activity system consisted of students' prior knowledge, teacher pedagogical methods and school engagement mediated the students' academic performance in the areas of mathematics, reading, and other subjects that created barriers to reaching graduation.

Although difficulties for the participants can be found early in their educational career, the transition from elementary to junior high did not appear to be as difficult as the transition from junior high to high school, especially for at-risk students (Newman et al., 2000). Vicky described how she was affected by the changes she encountered when she transitioned to high school:

... you're like in a elementary because you have like one teacher for like every subject. And then like you get to high school and it's like seven different classes, seven different teachers, seven different students, seven different homework's it's just, it gets crazy. It's like, hard to keep track of some stuffs sometimes

And like you get to school, "Oh I didn't get my English because I was too busy doing this." Like sometimes for me, Math would take up half of my day just trying to figure that out when I was done I would be like, "I don't want to do anything else." Like that by the end of that you're just tired so it's like a lot.

It's new, it's just like...Probably, yeah. Getting used to like everything like, learning how to be organized, learning like, how to use my time to get to do everything. (Int. 2, pg. 12, Vicky data)

Vicky's conflicts were echoed by other participants. This structure of school appeared as early as 1907 in the Gary Indiana School District where it shifted from a one-room school house focused on personal learning and development to the curricular organization of elementary and secondary to achieve efficiency and economics in order to serve more students through the rotation of multiple classes and teachers (Willis et al., 1994). Vicky's experience demonstrated the lack of connectivity with teachers, which created other obstacles within the activity system such as understanding the content.

Participants identified math as a persistent barrier because of the difficulty that some participants had mastering the subject. Performance in math was a barrier to graduation. Mediating factors included how math was taught, the skill level that students brought to the subject, and its perceived relevance to students' visions for what they would do after graduation. Sarah explained, "I'm going to go to cosmetology school. Not so much college because then there's math and English" (Int. 1, pg. 24, Sarah data). Sarah's experience in math caused her to limit her options. Sarah based her goals on her belief that "I am dumb... I don't like math or English". She sums up her thoughts on why she felt she was dumb in math by stating, "...it's just numbers, it never ends" (Int. 1, pg. 4, Sarah data). Vicky also compromised her childhood goal because of the difficulty she encountered in math. Vicky shared:

I always wanted to be an astronaut, but that's not going to happen. [laughs]
Because it's too late. I don't know. I'm not good at math. I'm not good at anything. So I don't think I can be an astronaut. I was good in history and

English. Well, I sucked at science and math, really. (Int. 1, pg. 3, Vicky data)

Because Vicky did not believe she could improve in math, it became an obstacle to her dream. Like math, the skill level possessed by the participants in language was also a mediating instrument in “schoolgoing” such that comprehension of what was read created additional barriers for Sarah, Teresa, and Luis. Sarah previously stated that she did not like English and according to research conducted by Neild, et al. (2008), barriers encountered while in school have affected students remaining in school. Sarah expressed the difficulty she encountered in language, was due to her lack of understanding the English language and vocabulary, which caused frustration due to the different meanings of the same words as she read in school. She acknowledged what could have assisted her reading comprehension as she read and took direction in class was,

...I guess in the words, in a way. Some of them seemed boring. It’s like confusing. It’s like “are you serious?” I guess confusing. I guess like the words, how everything is said. Like it’s suddenly different and I’m like, “What is that?” Probably, they might say it in a different way... (Int. 1, pg. 8-9, Sarah data)

Math and reading created difficulties for the participants as demonstrated above but there were other mediating instruments found in the system. Although graduation was the central focus of the activity system, it was also important to note that, “the social mediators of activity-rules, community and division of labor” were also major contributors to the activity but were underlying

instruments in the structure (Engeström, 1998, p. 78). As an example, the language levels each child was expected to have mastered upon entering school was a rule that mediated the students' ability to participate in class.

Attempts have been made to change the structure of school, such as virtual classrooms, but according to Engeström (1998), "significant and sustainable change in the nature of schooling may not be attained by means of manipulating any single component or isolated group of components..." within the activity system structure (p. 80). As introduced in chapter one, student dropout rates have shown a minimal decrease with the numbers of minority students still dropping out at a higher rate than others (Stillwell, 2009; Stillwell, 2010; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). All the participants within this study performed poorly in their 9th grade school year, which was reflected in the number of classes they failed. The research by Neild, et al. (2008) showed students that fell behind had difficulty recovering, which could lead to them dropping out. Teresa encountered difficulties upon entering high school as she failed half of her classes during 9th and 10th grade although she had success in elementary and junior high school. Teresa acknowledged, "I was smarter than anybody... I wanna get good grades. I was like that through junior high but when I started my freshman year, I was kinda changing then" (Int. 1, pg. 10, Teresa data). Teresa stated "I don't know what changed...I think I used to be a good kid. I use to care about my grades..." (Int. 1, pg. 10, Teresa data). Teresa was unsure as to why she had difficulties in school, but it appeared that patterns of participant struggles in the 9th grade year of high school were consistent with the research on students' difficult transition to

high school such as adjusting to a new school and negative teacher interaction (Newman et al. 2000).

Norms established by teachers may cause difficulties within the system interconnected with instruction and student interaction. Research by Rogoff (2003) and Artiles (2003) has shown cultural processes to be transformative and not static. Transformation occurs as the mediating artifacts act upon the activity system changing it from its initial state. Such as the example where what occurred in the classroom itself became the mediating activity to graduation, Vicky's English teacher approached her class as if every student learned the same content and developed at the same pace under the same structure. The teacher failed to determine the students' prior knowledge, which created difficulty in Vicky's cognitive development due to the teacher moving on although Vicky did not understand. Vicky expressed the disappointment she felt, which was also noted by other participants, related to the expectations the teacher had regarding their background knowledge. The following excerpt appeared to be a pattern found among participants,

...we were in the classroom, we were talking about like the Odyssey, like who wrote it and I was like, 'I don't know', she's like 'Why don't you know?' Because I'm like never read, I've never heard about it and stuff like that. It's just pressure. Sometimes, you get yelled about for not knowing something. It's because we didn't all come from the same school, we didn't have all the same. Because like sometimes in English, they'd be like, you guys should have all read like, all you guys should

have already read it. It was like something like that just know like I'm not ready, it's just I don't know. (Int. 2, pg. 7, Vicky data)

The teachers' pedagogical approach to student learning was only one of the many mediating instruments the students encountered that affected graduation. The teacher expected the students to possess the necessary baseline knowledge, which created the barriers the students encountered. When the rules developed in the community of teacher, such as progression of student learning does not account for differentiation of students prior knowledge, they are placed at a disadvantage.

Although the participants were the subject in the activity system they were also members of the classroom community as noted by Cole (1995) because they "shared the same object", which, in this case, was to graduate from high school. The "rules refer to explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system" that must be navigated by the participants within the community (pg. 141). The rule established within the community of students for some of the participants was in conflict with reaching graduation. This became apparent when Scott shared his view of what was deemed important at school such as his hierarchical position with his peers. As Scott encountered difficulty in "schoolgoing", the following showed the objective of establishing his position as a leader in the community of his peers took priority over the object of graduation.

I met so many people and the majority of these kids used to smoke weed so I got into the right crowds. Everyone knows me here. It's like I kind of was put on a kind of pedestal, not to sound stuck-up or anything but I seriously, me and my friends were all at the top. Everyone knew who I

was the older class and stuff like that because we were smoking weed so young and it does mature you in a way because you're always hanging out with these older kids. You think you're mature and all this stuff but I got in with all the popular people and stuff like that right away so high school was awesome. (Int. 2, pg. 14, Scott data)

Again, the system was setup to reach graduation but the situations encountered by the participants were not always in line with accomplishing this endeavor. As with Scott, Teresa's view of the activity systems was based on the patterns within the community of students. Teresa expressed that,

Yeah. Like, upstairs I remember all the Mexicans would be up there, literally, all of them and like, downstairs would be the other Mexicans that didn't speak English. And then, like, next would be all the black people and other side of us it would be all white people. (Int. 2, pg. 21, Teresa data)

This pattern of separation between Hispanics born in the U.S. and those who migrated to the U.S. created difficulties because it changed the environment due to race and culture mediated the relationships in a negative way. As previously stated by Valenzuela (1999) in chapter two, the pattern of separation weakens the relationships between the groups that could have been beneficial to both groups establishing a strong school environment or creating difficulties. This again was where the environment changed due to the rules established in the hierarchical structure within the community of students. As previously stated by Engestrom (1998), in regards to mediating instruments, this environment was mediated and

changed by the instrument of race. Teresa expanded this view by her reflection on a time when,

...I was always with the Mexicans, but in ninth grade when I started school I had a black friend. But she wouldn't hang out with no black people. She would only hang out with white people. That's when we kind of separated because like, I never had white friends in high school, so she would go with them after school. (Int. 2, pg. 22, Teresa data)

Patterns found within the community were not the only structures that needed to be navigated by the students. Students must also engage in the rules established by the larger community of Anglo individuals that historically have controlled the mediating instruments that advantage society such as financial capital and the access to social capital that was not as readily available to individuals marginalized by station. As demonstrated earlier, there were many mediating instruments that affected student performance and success. Students at a disadvantage will continue to be disadvantaged as long as the dominant culture/community establishes the rules and patterns required to reach the objective of graduation. According to Arzubaiaga, et al. (2008) "institutional cultural practices have histories that create structures of advantage or disadvantage for different participants" (p. 315). An example of this was found in how this school system grouped students in classes based on language or continued to advance students to the next grade although they may not have demonstrated the ability. As shared by Spring (2004) in chapter two, the dominant culture did not allow students to use the tools of language because it

was feared it would become the new dominant language. Similar to the students in Rough Rock, some students were punished for using their home language (McCarty, 2002). Sarah shared the following experience from junior high school. She stated,

...like, everybody has the same class. We would all travel to different class, the same people. Because we were in EL. And it was fun. And then eighth grade, was when they separated me. They're like, 'Go you're smarter.' I guess I knew more than all of them and then yeah. We cannot speak Spanish in seventh grade or else we would stay after school. Yeah, we stay after school...I guess there was a rule in school because they were trying to make us. (Int. 1, pg. 22, Sarah data)

It would appear that Sarah's skills in English although marginal, improved enough to be moved into a regular classroom but it did not appear the school system prepared her to reenter the mainstream environment to succeed. This was also demonstrated by Sarah's recollection of an interaction her mother had with her sixth grade teacher in her elementary school. The rules established by the teacher and school district from the participant's perspective appeared to allow students with low performance to continue on to the next grade level although they were not ready. Sarah stated,

I remember my sixth grade...And my mom thought... She wanted to make me retake the sixth grade again because I was dumb. I guess I was doing bad and she's like, 'Do you think it's good for her to take the sixth grade again?'

As her mom spoke to her sixth grade teacher,

She was like, ‘No.’ the teacher said no...Because every year you have to pass. You automatically pass the sixth grade...I guess I wasn’t learning enough...I guess you automatically pass even though you failed all your classes, all your class, you pass anyways. You move on to junior high.

(Int. 1, pg. 21, Sarah data)

It would appear that it was more important to move Sarah on to the next grade rather than make sure she was prepared.

On a larger scale, how a student performed in the classroom can be a mediating instrument to schoolgoing, yet its own activity system on a smaller scale. With the students as the subject within the activity system, the successful completion of the class becomes the object. Sarah expressed her frustration with the difficulties she encountered navigating the classroom structure because many times in class, the division of labor became uneven and at times unfair. Sarah shared,

Because of the teacher, actually she is strict like if you can’t talk, nobody can talk. If you can’t talk you can’t have fun. You have to communicate with others...Like you talk, please stop talking. But if you want to ask questions to your neighbor, please don’t talk. (Int. 2, pg. 13, Sarah data)

The teacher in this example established rules that mediated classroom behavior. The division of labor and the roles in the classroom controlled the students’ access to knowledge that could have been acquired from others to mediate class completion. The hierarchical structure and the rules and patterns

established by the teacher did not appear to be in line with the objective of successfully completing the class or graduation by the participants. Angela expressed this through her view of the rules the teacher enforced that seemed to be focused on obedience not teaching and learning. Angela shares,

...the work was really hard. If you didn't turn in an assignment, you'd have to stay after school, and it was really stressful. Because if you'd get a page of homework from every class, and you forget one, or even leave it at home, it's like oh, well now you're here until four, and I have to stay with these people that I don't like already. You know, it's just not... (Int. 1, pg. 7, Angela data)

Each participant found difficulties navigating the activity system of schoolgoing but also believed there were others that did not encounter the same problems, which ultimately allowed their success.

Who has an Advantage in School?

Within this theme of “is school for everyone?” the participants shared their perspective regarding students who they felt had an advantage in school. The participants appeared to view advantage in two general areas. One area was the individual’s social and academic engagement in school and; two, those students that had the external means of the social and financial capital needed to aide in their success. Although the majority of participants expressed those with advantages in school fell in the area of social engagement, which will be discussed later, it was necessary to first address the advantages through external means.

Scott discussed those students with social capital, which was the ability to accomplish something that one could not have without the assistance from an outside source (Coleman, 1988), were at an advantage in school because of the individual assistance they received from staff. This was demonstrated through Scott's interpretation of athletes given preferential treatment and being allowed to do less work academically because of their membership in a specific group. Scott shared his belief through the following excerpt regarding the assistance he felt football players received,

I know their grades are getting messed. Their grades are always—there are kids, I know they don't do crap. They just sit there and don't do anything in class. They get good grades. Yes. Jocks always have the upper hand in the class. I'm a jock but I don't play school sports so that's the thing. (Int. 3, pg. 7, Scott data)

Although Scott also saw himself as an athlete, he was not affiliated with the school's athletic program and so did not receive the advantages. As previously examined by Coleman (1988) in chapter two, social capital expressed in this context gave the football players in Scott's view an unfair advantage because they were given a higher status in the school's hierarchical structure, which gave them access to things others did not have.

In Luis' case, he believed individuals with financial capital had an advantage because they possessed the money necessary to create a better environment at home. His belief suggested families with high SES would

perform better in school (Lee & Smith, 1997). Luis expanded on this belief through the following view,

...this society teaches how money can buy you anything. One thing it can't buy you is love but money will reach you a lot of places. Yes, there are some advantages for some people. Some people are okay. 'I'm at ease. I have peace of mind, just go to school, do my homework, just have fun with the family', I guess. I go home, I got to deal with this, I got to deal with that. I don't want to go home because of this and that. Yes, because it stresses you. (Int. 3, pg. 13-14, Luis data)

In both instances, society has placed individuals in a hierarchical system shown to be historically rooted, as suggested by Arzubaiaga, et al. (2008). This was demonstrated by the disparity found in potential earnings of minorities, which has been historically lower than Anglos (Crissey, 2009, p. 9). Both Luis' and Scott's views suggested students were placed at a disadvantage because they did not have the social or financial capital needed to be successful in school.

Taking from Rumberger & Larson's (1998) definitions, social engagement refers to student attendance and behavior, while academic engagement focuses on performance expectations and class participation. The majority of the participants believed the advantages in school came from the social and academic engagement students had in school. Sarah felt those who had an advantage in school were, "Just smart people. They always do their work, pay attention, go to school, and never get in trouble. They're smart" (Int. 3, pg. 16-17, Sara data). Although this statement could have pertained to many types of people throughout Sarah's

schooling, she felt students of a certain race also had an advantage. Her beliefs surfaced as she expressed her surprise when she encountered various students at the alternative school she attended as she reflected on her first day of attendance.

Like I see Chinese, if you see Chinese they're really smart. I was just like, 'Wow' it's just like I guess, not everybody and not every Chinese is smart...he comes here and then I was like, 'Uh oh, he does.' I thought white people are smart too, it's like, and they're here too. (Int. 2, pg. 18, Sarah data)

Mike also believed those who had an advantage in school were engaged and those who chose to attend school on a regular basis. As with Sarah's acknowledgement of "smart people", Mike explains,

Yes... just all about your ability to want to learn. If you don't have any drive to do what toward in anything, you're not going to do good in anything at all...I went to school every day. I pay attention. I'd be row sponsored in class. (Int. 3, pg. 5, Mike data)

Mike recognized the need to be engaged as he reflected on a time when he exhibited the same characteristics while he was in elementary school. He also offered an example of his childhood friend that although their backgrounds were similar, he believed her success was attributed to school engagement. Mike stated,

The only person that I really know that had a positive outlook...She has the same kind of life I did...She never touched a drug in her life. She barely even drinks now, you know. She went to school every day. She'd

[you know] the only time she isn't going to school is when she was really sick with mono. And she missed school for a month, but she made it all up so she came back. (Int. 3, pg. 6, Mike data)

This again was a prime example of Erickson's (2006) belief that "even though some of us show up at what seems to be the same event, how we experience it is never quite the same across the various individuals..." (p. 41). Mike reflected on his family life mirroring his friend's and how they took different paths in school. Teresa and Vicky had similar opinions as the group in regards to those who were advantaged in school. Teresa felt a student with an advantage was,

...a strong person because you know, most of my friends they have kids and two of them they graduated and they're going on to college. And you know, they have problems like me, you know, they have a baby. So like, I think you got to be a strong person and really not be weak.... (Int. 3, pg. 15, Teresa data)

Vicky expressed "...anybody could do well if they really wanted to" as she took time to think about who had an advantage (Int. 3, pg. 12, Vicky data).

The consistent theme throughout the group was the individual's ability to have success in school if the choice was made to engage in school by attending and doing the work. Through the many interviews with the participants, it became apparent that, as expressed by Lee (2007), those individuals that were successful, found meaning in school and the function of education that created the drive to go to school every day and do the necessary work. According to Rumberger (1998), students with low absenteeism were three times less likely

than those with high absenteeism to drop out of school. All three participants that dropped out of school reinforced the belief of the group; expressing those students that came to school and did the work could be successful. The responses of Angela, Mike and Teresa suggested the skills needed to be successful were to apply yourself, pay attention, and dedicate yourself to school. According to Suh, et al. (2007), with increased academic engagement students were less likely to drop out of school during their high school years.

Angela felt that, “definitely, you need, what's that word? To apply yourself, like, and just listen, like, if you're there every day, it's really easy, you know?” (Int. 1, pg. 4, Angela data). Mike says,

It’s really just paying attention. If you show up, be on time, pay attention, that’s all you really need, that’s how you'll learn. To sit someone listen to someone talk, you know, and they say the same thing pretty much saying the same thing, you grasp what they're saying.... (Int. 1, pg. 8, Mike data)

Teresa expanded on input from Angela and Mike by expressing,

...you need to be dedicated to school. I think that’s something I don’t have, I do not know how to be dedicated to school. I think if you’re dedicated you could do it coz I’ve seen kids that you know I’m thinking of my head, whatever they’ll gonna fail when I was in school and you know I’m the one who ended up failing. They’re the ones who succeeded and they graduated so I think that has something to do like they will mess around but you know they would do their stuff. And me, I would mess

around and I wouldn't because I would get distracted. So I think that is really big. (Int. 1, pg. 9, Teresa data)

Unfortunately, the system was always changing and according to Cole & Engstrom (1993),

...transitions and reorganizations are constantly going on within and between activity systems...Consequently, activity systems are best viewed as complex formations in which equilibrium is an exception and tension, disturbances, and local innovations are the rule and the engine of change. (p. 8)

This can be found when the participants' schoolgoing activity system and family activity system converge but life's chances of poverty, single parent homes and unsafe neighborhoods created difficulties in reaching graduation instead of expansive learning toward the objective.

How do they Compare?

As previously discussed, the participants believed success in school was possible and it took effort and responsibility from the individual to be socially and academically engaged in school. Unfortunately, the majority of the participants initially did not perform well in school. This next section introduces the general backgrounds of the participants in comparison to those students they felt had an advantage in school. The academic performance noted by the grades the participants received, followed by the overall view of the type of students they believed they were, was looked at first. Second, how life's chances affected the activity of schoolgoing such as school mobility and the social capital needed to

mediate the goals of course completion and graduation through their academic performance was presented. Many of the participants were unable to meet the expectations in school to be successful they believed those with advantages possessed.

The majority of the students within this study encountered difficulty in attending school and when they were in school, they did not consistently complete their work. All but one participant failed most of their classes during the 9th grade year in high school, which made it difficult for them to recover the credits lost. Based on the number of courses failed and their poor performance, research would predict the likelihood of dropping out of school to be high (Neild et al., 2008). Unlike the students previously described by the participants as having an advantage in school, the majority of the participants could be categorized as disengaged socially and academically in school. Academically, for the majority of the participants, disengagement manifested itself in the form of failing grades and/or poor attendance. As an example, Angela shared, “my freshman year, I failed pretty much everything. I had like one and a half credits for that year” (Int. 1, pg. 5, Angela data). Teresa also shared,

I got good grades. I think I had pretty good grades. It wasn't like in high school. In high school, like, I got all Fs. They even thought I was special because I wasn't trying. They asked me, like, ‘Are you special?’ and I was like, ‘No.’ (Int. 2, pg. 6, Teresa data)

Both Teresa and Angela dropped out of school but Sarah who was a continuing student encountered academic difficulty as well. According to Sarah

she “got three Fs probably, and then they started going down and down” as she referred to starting the high school experience (Int. 1, pg. 17, Sarah data). For many of the participants, this appeared to be common and after falling behind, their grades in most cases continued to slip because it became difficult to recover. Sarah’s difficulty in English was a prime example of how students became disengaged academically. According to Sarah,

I’d get like a 13%... I guess because I would be like, in class the teacher would be, ‘Do this,’ and I will forget and, ‘Oh I forgot.’ Then my grade they keep going lower and lower. I’d be like, ‘What’s the whole point of doing the work if it’s going to give me an F still?’ Because a 13 is really low. And I just think, ‘I won’t do it. I think I’ll just fail the class.’ (Int. 1, pg. 11, Sarah data)

This excerpt demonstrated the dilemma the participants must navigate because the performance the student exhibited on the assignment was not only an instrument to reach the objective of successful course completion but was also a mediating instrument to graduation. This pattern of giving up was exhibited by many of the participants because they believed there was no way of recovering.

Although the participants encountered academic difficulty, the data suggested their disengagement was connected to external influences in their life that were not in their control. When the participants were asked, what type of student they were, their overall response was they were distracted, lazy, as well as not giving the effort that was needed. This was in complete opposition to their beliefs in the characteristics exhibited by those students they felt had an advantage

in school. The data showed low academic engagement connects directly to low social engagement, which manifests itself through high absenteeism (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). The participants were missing school for a number of reasons but the data showed four out of the seven missed school because of drug use and spending time with friends while four of the seven also had to address family issues that hindered their ability to attend school from time to time.

As with the other participants, Luis and Angela were examples of the majority that showed they socially disengaged from school as demonstrated by their low attendance. Luis stated he would start the semester with As and Bs “before I started to absentee some of them, which is like low percentages, like, you would go once. I used to get 16 percent; at the highest was like 26 percent. That's not even close to D [laughs]” (Int. 1, pg. 5, Luis data). Luis expressed his grades were low because he “used to ditch two to three days a week”, and didn’t see the purpose in school (Int. 1, pg. 9, Luis data). Although it would appear Luis did not care about school, his later statement, “nobody cares if I do good in school, so why would anybody care if I did bad” reflected the stressed relationship he had with his mother and sister. These were some of the types of life chances the students encountered as they navigated poverty and single parent homes as did some of the other participants within the study (Fram et al., 2007; Heard 2007; Rumberger 1983). These life chances affected the student’s ability to remain in school or drop out. Attendance was also affected by the needs of the student not being met by the school such as teacher quality (Bryk & Thum, 1989),

which will be discussed later in the chapter. Angela gave a brief example of her difficulty with attendance when she shared,

My biggest problem was attendance, but I'm pretty good at listening and focusing and stuff, but...I'm like, a more personal, hands on student, so it was hard for me to get the attention that I needed, you know....waking up for school and just, like, making it to the bus, or you know, like if I didn't want to see somebody that day and, you know, stuff like that. I just couldn't go. (Int. 1, pg. 4, Angela data)

Angela's need for direct attention from teachers became a hindrance to her attendance because she needed more one-on-one instruction. School mobility also affected school engagement. As previously demonstrated through the participants' introductions, many found themselves in a number of new homes, switching schools and even at times these moves occurred during the middle of the school year. This type of mobility caused poor attendance and low achievement while it increased the chances of dropping out of school (Lee & Burkam, 1992; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Angela moved a number of times throughout her education, as did many of the participants. As an example of what mobility brought to a student's life, Angela shared,

...so we started out in this really bad apartments. And then my Mom met my step-dad, and he, like, he had a lot of money, so, he bought us this gorgeous house, ...and it was a really nice neighborhood. ...after their divorce, ... we ended up, on ...Palomino, ... so yeah, a lot's been going downhill since then, so...it's pretty ghetto. Like, I don't know, I heard

gunshots the other day, that's not good. So, you know.... (Int. 1, pg. 3, Angela data)

Like Angela, many of the participants changed schools. Vicky shared “Well, we were always moving. I went to like seven different elementary schools” (Int. 1, pg. 1, Vicky data). As well as changing junior high schools during the year, the more schools a student changes during the middle school years, the chances of dropping out of school increases (Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

The participants in this study were also affected by the social capital many of them did not have at the beginning or throughout their educational experience to assist them in school. Luis, who came from a single parent home, as did Angela and Vicky, explained his mom and sister could not help him with his school work nor go to the school because, “they only came in when my grades came in. But other than that, I was stuck alone... They both went to school in Mexico and they didn't stay there long” (Int. 1, pg. 12, Luis data). Luis’s mom completed elementary school and his sister finished junior high but did not go any further because she did not have the money to attend high school in Mexico. This type of family interaction in education was not uncommon, as research by Lee & Bowen (2006) found Hispanic parents appeared to engage in their child’s education mainly when they were not doing well in school. Luis later expressed that because his mom and sister had little schooling, they were unable to help him with homework so “I would have to either cheat or... because I didn't want to go to school with an empty paper... pull numbers out of my butt” (Int. 1, pg. 12-13, Luis data). With a lack of the capital needed, students engaged the system with

the expectation they will receive the knowledge needed from the adults in the school system because many times they did not have the support system in the home.

Who Holds the Knowledge Within this School Setting?

The activity system of schoolgoing as it related to the classroom was addressed as students engaged in learning to reach successful course completion. It was the division of labor and the rules established in the system, as in this study, where the teacher relationships and pedagogical style was the mediating artifact used by the student to gain access to the knowledge necessary to be successful. The way in which the teacher presented the information mediated the importance to how the students saw the teacher and the role he/she played in the distribution of knowledge. Through the hierarchical structure, the teacher was the individual with the power and control to enforce rules established within the classroom, and the teacher's role was to mediate knowledge and the student's was to receive. Learning through a cultural-historical approach,

...examined the relations between subject and community are mediated, on the one hand by the group's full collection of 'mediating artifacts' and, on the other hand, by 'rules' (the norms and sanctions that specify and regulate the expected correct procedures and acceptable interactions among the participants). (Cole & Engestrom, 1993)

From the student perspective, the data suggested the teachers in this structure were the keeper and facilitator of knowledge needed for student learning. Unfortunately, the mediating artifact of instruction was perceived by the

participants as inconsistent, disrespectful and at times lacked the care that would be expected. As Scott reflected on his classroom experiences, it appeared that the learning in the classroom was not conducted in a manner that would exhibit a joint activity to include the “teacher, pupil, other artifact, and the cultural artifacts...around teaching/learning” as discussed by Cole & Engestrom (1993) as it related to the reading and learning processes not only involving a single individual (p. 23). Based on the following excerpts, Scott felt the teachers did not treat students with respect, which caused difficult relationships between the student and the teachers. The teachers appeared to believe the students were wasting their time. Scott states,

I think it's because they're getting frustrated that they're taking their time out of their day to teach some—to teach a class. And I can see the frustration in them but I think that teachers these days don't approach it the right way. They do it in a really disrespectful way and they don't think that what they're doing is embarrassing the student. It really is and it doesn't make a good feeling for the student. It makes a really crappy environment, too, because that kid right when he's done answering the question, he goes around talking crap about that teacher and it's just like— It's not good. I wish teachers would be more understanding because these days, it's a lot different. It's weird. (Int. 2, pg. 12, Scott data)

Through the interactions experienced by the majority of participants, there appeared to be minimal attempts to gain student trust that would aid in the engagement of the students in the classroom (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Teachers determined access to knowledge. Throughout the research, the data suggested access to education was affected by teacher instruction and support, established expectations by perceived deficits of the participants, and barriers created by language. These areas were investigated in the study. Classroom interaction encountered by Scott and other participants in the study showed the teacher failed to engage the students in the learning. The instructional approach consisted of direct instruction with little dialog to check for understanding. The lack of connections to previous knowledge and the new information introduced during instruction created difficulty (Lee, 2007).

According to Vicky,

Everybody just come in, the teacher is just on the desk and then everybody would just talk for the longest time. And when they're ready to teach, they get up; teach what they have to do then be like, 'Okay, let's do this tomorrow.' And go back and sit down and everybody just start talking now just doing their own thing. Just talking and texting and stuff, yeah. It's fun but you're not really learning nothing. Feels like if you passed, you passed because the teacher just want to pass us and next set of student like to pass like, 'Hey, I earned this A or I earned this B by my work.' (Int. 3, pg. 8-9, Vicky data)

The teacher's approach to instruction withheld student access to the learning necessary to be successful because the students were left to acquire the information on their own. As previously discussed in this chapter, student social engagement in relationship to the quality of the teacher could increase student

dropout rate (Heard, 2007). Grades assigned by the teacher as connected to the teacher's objectivity and not the knowledge gained by the student was a concern expressed by Vicky and diminished the importance of school. Luis expanded on classroom structure through his perception of a video clip of a teacher's pedagogical style in questioning techniques which garnered no response from any of the students to answer the questions posed. Using this example, Luis reflected on his own experience in the classroom and the number of teachers he had like the one he viewed in the video, Luis responded,

Half and Half. A lot of teachers are just like, like order what to do. What they wanna be done there. And some teachers who don't even like teach the things that they say. Learn from examples from the books and that's it and you just got to do on your own and probably maybe sometimes to say, 'Oh you can use a partner.' You can have two or three partner at the most. That's it.

Sometimes some teachers just sit in the desk and waste time. Some teacher's helps others are just like I said sit back at their table and just do nothing the whole day. (Int. 2, pg. 11, Luis data)

This perspective suggests access to information was denied because the lack of teacher engagement in learning with the participants. These participants become stuck in a classroom which appears to have minimal learning unless they have the social capital, as expressed by Valenzuela (1999), to seek the assistance needed to change the teacher's behavior or move to another school. The division

of labor in the classroom and the power structure established by the teacher caused students to feel little control as shown in the following excerpt,

There is a lot of students that move from like, different states and stuff and they like, feel out of place and when the teachers just like, talking without caring if anybody has learned about or did not. They could feel bad like, ...they could feel loved with them, which they shouldn't because not everybody learned it. Treat some bad like – like, she just keeps moving on and at the end or she keeps moving at the end and she'd be like, 'Oh if you don't know about it, like talk to another students and I'll tell you' instead of them, themselves teaching, you know what they say, 'Talk to a classmate, so they can tell you' just, okay. (Int. 3, pg. 7, Vicky data)

The data suggested the teachers were unwilling to support the students as shown by Patterson, et al. (2007) in regards to students' feelings. The teacher's beliefs were "you either get it, whatever they said to you or you don't" (p. 10). The lack of support or the confidence, from the teacher, in the student's ability to do the work could hinder the student's ability to access the necessary learning held by the teachers. This was apparent as Luis reflected on a video clip of two teachers speaking of the prevalence of students dropping out and one of the teachers not appearing to care exhibited by his lack of concern for the high numbers of students leaving,

Some teachers don't like students. They give up. Some students need more motivation than others. More help than others from some teachers. Some teachers aren't willing to give their help just there in who's there.

That's what they teach. They don't try to help the students that are falling behind or they really don't care. I mean they just do, they just are there.

And kids who ask them for help or some kids who like are there whatever who seem like they wanna learn and the stuff. That's what they teach other than that they just let him be. (Int. 2, pg. 11, Luis data)

Not only could a student's access be affected by support but the teacher's low expectation of the student also created issues of access. When a teacher relinquishes their responsibility to educate based on the belief a student was not capable of learning as shown in research by Diamond, et al. (2004), the teacher's deficit view stifles the student's ability to achieve more. Examples of this were found in the following excerpts from Teresa and Angela. Teresa reflected on a time when her teacher used popsicle sticks to randomly select students in class. Teresa recognized her name on the stick that was initially pulled, but the teacher would call on another student.

She would just say some other name. I think it's because she knew how I was already. They put me in her class the year after that. So, that was, like – that was it. She wouldn't pick me no more. Well, for me it was positive. Well, she was probably thinking, 'Ah, this girl doesn't know anything. I'm not even going to try.' (Int. 2, pg. 18-19, Teresa data)

Although Teresa perceived the teacher's actions as being nice, neither the teacher nor Teresa was accountable for her learning although this should have been a collective effort (Cole & Engestrom, 1993). Angela's experience revolved around low teacher expectation, as did Teresa's. This belief was magnified by Angela's

perception as she stated, “I think that they kind of judge you if you are not doing good in school or you haven't done good in school, they expect you not to. That's kind of the vibes I got” (Int. 1, pg. 11, Angela data). Due to the low teacher expectation and negative interaction, student social engagement was lowered due to the lack of trust exhibited between the teacher and student.

Access to knowledge was hindered by teacher expectations as demonstrated by Teresa's and Angela's experience but language also created issues of access. Four of the seven participants who spoke fluent Spanish at home encountered difficulty navigating the activity system of schoolgoing. Luis gave a brief look into how language from the student's perspective became a barrier to learning as he reported he never participated in English Language classes in school.

Nope. Just regular classes and then I had to find out definitions of words from other people or had to ask the teachers constantly what that word means and... I still chop some words up like the plywood? There you are. And then the car - Plymouth or whatever. I thought it was Plymouth. Because it has a P-L-Y it's also plywood. So just because it has the same letters. I thought it would be pronounced the same but it's different things like that.

The more time I concentrate on my English, the more I'm starting to forget my Spanish so I got to concentrate on my Spanish as well but I'm starting to forget my English like I chop it up. It's hard. People say it's good to be bilingual but it's get hard. (Int. 3, pg. 10-11, Luis data)

Luis then expressed the difficulties he encountered in the classroom as he tried to comprehend the material he found in the textbooks used in class.

The different ways, I mean some books like the slang that they use or the type of words they use. It all mixes up in my head, and sometimes I'll talk like something in one of the books. And then I'll talk like I'm talking now. It stays in my head and it comes out when I least expect it. (Int. 1, pg. 7, Luis data)

Luis's prior knowledge mediated his ability to comprehend what he was reading and created barriers to learning.

Although the objective of the activity system of schoolgoing was to graduate, students and families encountered issues that affected the priority they gave to education. According to Scott,

The most important thing in school would probably be like learning life skills, I'm not too big on like taking math class and stuff like that because I feel like I'm not going to use it, you know, for my job, you know and I think that like life skills would be good to learn and like stuff like science and stuff like that. I think that's good stuff to learn. (Int. 1, pg. 3, Scott data)

The values exhibited by the families of the participants may suggest education was not as important to them as it was to educators as suggested by Patterson, et al. (2008). For the majority of the participants in this study, education may not have been the most important but the data suggested parents in this study gave it more value than the research would suggest.

Our Values Are Not the Same

This section presents the misconceptions and contradictions the participants encountered within the school system. The contradictions and value judgments made from the perspective of the students were first looked at, which were then followed by how the students saw themselves as it related to school. Finally, the funds of knowledge possessed by the participants were examined. Through the lived experience of each participant that dropped out, the data show the rich knowledge each had gained that could assist their success in school. The data also showed how the participants' knowledge was devalued because it appeared to be overlooked by the teachers and administration within the system. The participants' experiences could have been used to connect school to real world application if the teachers would have taken the time to engage in understanding the students' lives outside the school setting.

Contradictions and value judgments. The misconceptions by staff regarding students and families appeared to be attributed to the staff focusing on what an individual or group lacked instead of the possible strengths they could have contributed (Gonzales et al., 2005). Within the activity system, the interactive relationship between the students and the community, as it related to the teacher's role in the community, were mediated by the rules established by the dominant group, which in this case would be Anglo teachers (Cole & Engestrom, 1993). Research suggested the cultural development of teachers was formed through their interaction within the system as well as being influenced by previous generations (Rogoff, 2003). The development of these cultural

processes forms beliefs on the patterns accepted by the dominant group, which historically consisted of Anglo teachers and was based on prior knowledge and the interaction of an individual or a group of people.

The following excerpts demonstrated the difficulties encountered by the participants due to the value judgments placed on them by school staff. Scott and Luis were examples of how individuals, regardless of group affiliation, were treated by teachers. Scott's difficulty with teachers stemmed from the judgments they made although they did not know him. Because of the judgment they made, he felt the teacher singled him out based on his appearance and those individuals he associated with. Scott believed that if the teachers took the time to know him outside of his appearance, they would see what he had to offer and they would have treated him with respect. Scott reflected on his view of the teachers he encountered through the following,

It brings me right back to class. Last year, that's pretty much—all teachers do that to me. They'd say, 'Scott, what's the answer?' And I'd be like, 'I don't know.' And they'd be like, 'How don't you know?' I don't know. They'd always single me out. And the whole class, they always pick on me.

I still ask myself that today but honestly, it's probably because I look like a rebel and they probably think that I'm just one of these druggie kids that are always bad. They just want to make me feel like crap. I would do the same thing if I was the teacher, too, if I really thought some kid was up to bad things like that, I would do the same thing.

They don't even know me. If I told them half the things I've done in my life, they'd probably be like, 'Okay because he's not...' Like if I tell them all the stuff I've done with my sports and stuff like that, they'd probably go, 'Wooh, okay. Maybe we shouldn't do that.' But I still get it today. To this day I still get these teachers that think...

Because maybe the look I put off? My dress wear, long hair, people I hang out with, who I associate myself with and they see me around the school with...I got that all the time. I still get it from teachers today. To this day, it happens to me all the time. (Int. 2, pg. 9-10, Scott data)

Although, the teacher's interaction would suggest Scott was choosing to fail (Patterson et al., 2008), when questioned about his beliefs on education, he expressed, "it is everything, like my parents are really strict on going to school" (Int. 1, pg. 2, Scott data). Scott also shared that when he got older, the choice his parents painted for him was "...like you either go or you just be a loser and not go, you know" (Int. 1, pg. 2, Scott data).

Luis experienced similar treatment as Scott but he reacted by assimilating his behavior to the teacher's expectations. An example of this was when Luis believed the teacher did not think he could do the work, he would not do it. The classroom activity system, regarding the school structure found in relation to the experiential component of the conceptual framework, could increase or decrease the chances of student dropout due to teacher interaction (Heard, 2007). The importance of teacher expectations placed on the student as shown with Luis, created low social engagement manifested by his negative behavior, which

increased his chances of dropping out (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). The intersection of school engagement and school structure shown in the conceptual framework, affected one another through culture not existing in a static state but constantly changing the individual and the activity system in which the individual was located. The following excerpt from Luis, demonstrated a sample of what he and other participants encountered with teachers who exhibited low expectations,

No. They always just tell me like my recent years had—or a year or two back before that and how I used to walk around other people and stuff like that so I would just be like, ‘Okay. Well, you have me. In your mind, I’m like this person so that’s the way I will act.’ I’m not the same person in all my classrooms. In one classroom I’ll pay attention and I’ll be taking notes. In another classroom, I’ll be a jokester, I’ll be joking around. In another class, I’d do completely nothing, just sleeping, talking or whatever, but...

Like I said like how the teacher thought I was. There are a lot of teachers there how they try to get to know you and then some of the teachers know you from your history, what you had done, look at your background and stuff and so if you categorize me as being a troublemaker and that’s how you think I’m going to act, then I’m going to act like that on purpose so you can have that in your mind (Int. 3, pg. 5, Luis data)

Luis acknowledged his mistakes but also expressed his belief that he had changed, although the research suggested “minority and low-income students...lacks the persistence in school” which created the difficulties they faced (Patterson et al., 2008, p. 6). This judgment was also made by researchers

assigning labels to large groups based on sample populations not taking into account differences found in people (Artiles, 2003). Although the number of minority dropouts would be in line with the research, as demonstrated and presented by Patterson, et al. (2008) in chapter one regarding the high dropout rate of minority students, the data suggested with opportunity and support, at risk students could succeed. Luis stated,

Okay, I'm not a bad kid. I can do work, I can do my homework, I can do everything but if you already judge me without even letting me do something by myself first or without letting me have a chance just because you judge me on an accident I had a year before or how I was before and stuff. We change in that—during the month and a half in summer, of summer break you can change a lot you can really get on your butt about school and stuff but some teachers just charge me for how I was before so that's how it's ever been. (Int. 3, pg. 5, Luis data)

When students felt unfairly treated as mentioned previously, the chance of dropping out due to low social engagement increased.

You Don't See Our Strengths

Participants affiliated with leaving school (dropping out) prior to graduation, accepted a lot more responsibility for their family than demonstrated by the other two groups in the study. Two of the three participants affiliated with dropping out were caregivers to their siblings while the third contributed financially. Mike, Teresa and Angela all had some responsibilities in the family that appeared to have created a barrier to school through their lack of social

engagement in school. While some of these responsibilities appeared to be directly given, others were indirect. Similar to the voluntary and involuntary incorporation into society (Ogbu, 2004), these students appeared to have found themselves in positions where they were needed to help the family whether it was an expectation or, in Mike's case, something he felt he needed to do. In all three cases, the students' efforts to assist the family transformed their lives and created their environment. It was important to note that individuals existed in more than one activity system (Engestrom, 1998). For these students, their home environment consisted of family survival as the object while the difficulties encountered became the mediating instrument, such as caring for family, task oriented responsibilities and financial need (Gonzalez et al., 2008). All three of these participants possessed valuable knowledge gained through the roles and responsibilities they had. This next section investigated the strengths gained by each participant who dropped out, how the knowledge gained could have been utilized in the school setting and how the knowledge gained in school did not fit the immediate need of the students. The cultural processes the participants engaged in created the environment that transformed their lives through gaining self-knowledge (Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004).

“I Am Pretty Much an Adult”

According to Rogoff (2003), the patterns of survival can be found in families as responsibilities, and roles given to children in order to obtain what was needed for the family to survive. When Teresa moved to Arizona at a young age, she became the oldest and as a teenager, took responsibility to help her family,

which she stated was one of the reasons she left school. Teresa saw the family expectations as, “I guess they depend on me to take care of everything since that’s what I’m always doing” (Int. 1, pg. 4, Teresa data). It was Teresa’s knowledge and her ability to drive that drew her away from school because these skills were required to mediate the family’s need to complete day-to-day responsibilities. Teresa’s knowledge of the English language was also needed to assist her mother who only spoke Spanish. Teresa utilized English to mediate the “household’s communication with outside institutions” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, pg. 74). During this time, Teresa already had a baby and her new role in the family was one of taking responsibility to help her mom and siblings, which became a priority over school, because of her father’s inability to be home. Although Teresa, like many students, had difficulties in school, the wealth of knowledge she obtained through her experiences gave her the ability to accept the parent role. An example of this was evident when Teresa reflected on the expectations of her family responsibilities,

You know, I have a sister, she’s 18 but she’s special, so obvious she can’t do none of that. And then my other brothers are 15 and 14. And also, yeah, her and my mom they have a lot of doctors’ appointments to go to so also that, I got to call and take them. ...Sometimes I do cook for my brothers too. Like when my mom’s not there. I guess, but they don’t appreciate it. (Int. 3, pg. 13, Teresa data)

Teresa utilized the skills she learned to organize and complete tasks that many adults would have difficulty completing. An example of Teresa’s ability could be

understood through the following excerpt regarding the impact her responsibilities had on school. She stated,

Well that affected me a lot since now I have to do everything. I used to just, you know, take care of my son but now I have to go help pay the bills. I'm the only one who drives so I have to, when I lived with my mom, I took everyone to school and I did everything, so it's affecting me a lot. I never knew how like hard it was, I think it's hard, doing all that like about the cars going to the MVD like it's annoying and it's stressful, so like now I understand why my dad was in a bad mood a lot. Like I didn't use to get it but now, I'm like 'Oh, he did all this, so it's stressful'. (Int. 1, pg. 5, Teresa data)

Teresa realized as the adult, the weight she carried required a large amount of time, which made it difficult to attend school. Although Teresa stated in a conversation with the researcher, she did not want all the responsibility, it was necessary to help her mother. Through all of her experiences, the negative interactions she encountered with school staff did not allow them to see the responsibility she carried nor the ability she possessed.

“I Pretty Much Have Raised My Three Little Sisters”

Similar to Teresa, Angela saw herself as the main caregiver for her siblings because her older sisters were no longer in the home and there was no one else to fill the role due to the amount of time her parents worked. For some families such as Teresa's and Angela's, it was necessary to care for siblings to allow the house to function (Gonzalez et al., 2008). She stated on a number of

occasions that, “I pretty much have raised my three little sisters or have done my fair share [laughs] because my mom works nights and my step-dad works all day. They have shared custody” (Int. 1, pg. 2, Angela data). Due to circumstances, it was determined at a young age that family should come first, which took the form of responsibility for the group. When Angela’s mom and stepdad divorced, instead of moving with her mom or someone else, Angela felt her place was with her siblings. School may not have been a priority but Angela showed she had the skills needed to be responsible and was organized enough to take care of her siblings. These qualities she possessed could have been used in school. She expressed the following regarding her daily routine.

I was living with my step-dad, because I stayed with him, because he had my little sisters, and I don't want them to be alone. So I stuck it out for a while, until I went up to Montana. My step-dad would work from six in the morning until eight at night. And, I just ... would get them up for school in the morning, I'd brush their teeth, do their hair, get them to school, and then come home, feed them dinner, get them to bed. You know. And I'd solve the problems in between there. (Int. 1, pg. 7, Angela data)

It was evident by Angela’s belief in the importance of family that she demonstrated the commitment that did not manifest itself in school. This skill set could have been used to academically engage in school but it was not maximized by Angela or the adults around her.

“My Grandmother Would Have Lost the Home”

Mike also left school before he completed graduation requirements and became a contributor to his family because he felt the responsibility to assist with the financial needs of the home (Gonzalez et al, 2008; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Although Mike liked school, he used the mediating tool of money he acquired by selling drugs to help his family pay the bills. As a young boy, Mike grew up with his parents and attended school every day with the expectation established by his parents to get good grades. Although Mike’s initial introduction to school recognized it as a priority established by his parents demonstrated by the reading his parents required of him, he began selling drugs in junior high and felt,

If I was not selling drugs, my Grandma would have lost the house; because I was helping pay the electricity bill, pay the mortgage stuff like that. I was helping out a lot. They kept asking questions and stuff but I am pretty sure they had a good idea. (Int. 1, pg. 6, Mike data)

Although Mike’s family did not know where he was getting the money, the amount of financial support he was allowed to contribute as a younger member of the family, appeared to be based on need (Rogoff, 2003). Unfortunately, Mike did not acquire the money needed through appropriate means but “when the funds of knowledge are not readily available within the household, relationships with individuals outside the household are activated” (Gonzalez et al., 2008, p. 74). What Mike learned over this time period from the person whom he sold drugs with was accountability and commitment. His level of commitment was demonstrated through the following excerpt,

If you're going to do this, you got to be committed and get up 6 in the morning, drive around your car. If you're going to be committed...if you want to be committed to it, and then be committed to it. That guy we were just talking about, I know him since I was like 15 when I met him. I rode around with him every day for a couple of year, every single day. Got up 6 o'clock in the morning, drive around, get me a breakfast. I got to meet my people, he go to meet his—he's the kind of guy with a routine. (Int. 1, pg. 14, Mike data)

School for all three dropout participants was affected by the roles and family responsibilities they accepted as their own which mediated their view of school. According to Rogoff (2003) the power structure where all must work together to accomplish the goal of the group was found in all three cases. As expressed by Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004), people are not just participants but become change agents within the system they are interacting. Mike, Angela and Teresa possessed skills that could be utilized in school from the family experiences they encountered. Although Teresa had some difficulty with school staff and felt they did not care for her, the following progression exhibits the skills she learned and used to care for others such as her mother and siblings, her own child, and the teacher she felt needed comforting in class.

Well everything since mom had a tumor that's why she was sent to a hospital. So she's in bed right now. So even before I don't know, I cooked for them, I help them in their homework and everything, they come to me for that and if they need to go to the library for homework I take them. I

take them pretty much anywhere and I help them. (Int. 1, pg. 8, Teresa data)

Playing with him. I love everything like I don't mind doing anything. I don't mind changing his diaper, I don't mind cleaning after him, I look at everything but I was helping with him. Talking to him and trying to teach him how to talk, how to walk, since he can't walk still even if he's one. I felt every single moves he does. When he turns I wake up. I didn't used to be like that but, yeah, I know I'm dedicated to him. No, that's why I say, that's what I think most best is being a mom. (Int. 1, pg. 27-28, Teresa data)

...because all of the kids in there – she was kind of a pushover so nobody listened to her. And, I remember when she thought she wasn't a good teacher because she was like, everybody's failing my class. And then I told her, 'No, you're a good teacher.' I hate math. That's why I didn't do my work. (Int. 2, pg. 20, Teresa data)

In all three situations, Teresa was able to use the social skills learned through assisting others that was not reciprocated by the school staff.

Through Angela's academic history, she has shown her academic strength as she passed all her courses prior to her difficult freshman year and through the following excerpt it was evident she was capable of graduating but was unwilling to commit to the time needed. Angela planned and prepared to take the GED exam and after she completed and passed the exam, Angela shared,

It was really easy. I didn't study for it at all, actually, and I passed it. Well, I did while I was here, and transitions from my last couple days, I studied online, I did a couple practice tests. I did a couple practice tests, but the math was really easy, the reading was easy, the writing was my only like, faulty one, but the science was just common sense. (Int. 1, pg 13, Angela data)

Well, I kind talked about it with my mom, because Bell does graduate this year. So, I was like, well we want to get a new place in June, and kind of start our own thing. Because my house is really crowded, and I have a job now, so I can pay my own stuff. (Int. 1, pg. 8, Angela data)

Because of Angela's pursuit of other goals, she did not see the need to complete high school. Her lack of connection and purpose of school contributed to leaving school before graduation.

School Is an Experience

Why Should I Care if You Don't?

Student interaction in school as it related to teachers and other students played a large role in how the participants viewed school. When investigating the structure of school, located in the Experiential area of the conceptual framework, participant engagement with teachers was found to affect the way they navigated the school system whether it be in or outside of the classroom. The objective of graduation within the activity system of schoolgoing was mediated by the student's academic performance. As demonstrated in chapter two, school cohesion in regards to positive interaction with teachers was associated with high

GPA's, which in turn converted to course completion (Stewart, 2008). The next section examines the effects of difficult interactions between student and teacher that kept students out of school as well as how the interaction impacted the student's ability to ask for help when they encountered difficulties in school.

Difficult Interactions

The data suggested that students who dropped out of school encountered difficult interactions that pushed them out or limited their access to school, based on the perceived beliefs the participants had regarding not feeling wanted in class. Interactions between students and teachers have been shown to decrease the likelihood of dropping out when the interactions were positive. Although some of the participants had positive interactions, many times they shared; teachers treated the students disrespectfully (Croninger & Lee, 2001). All three students who dropped out appeared to have engaged in relationships with teachers whom they felt did not care. This ultimately decreased the chance of relationship development with the teacher (Valenzuela, 1999). From Teresa's point of view, the following excerpt states her perception of a teacher she encountered for whom she felt did not care about the students. She stated,

I was not gonna make it there or whatever. I feel like you know I'm proving it to them but I don't know...not a lot of them but most of them didn't care but like a couple. Like they never talk about it (homework) or whatever. They will just ask if, do you have your homework and if you didn't they'll not gonna say anything. Like you know it's just their job. The same like the teachers who put me down they would put like other

kids down too that were bad or whatever. Words like I wasn't gonna make it. I would be smiling but I would think deep down is that true? Like their teachers. (Int. 1, pg. 16-17, Teresa data)

This appeared to make Teresa feel unimportant because she felt if teachers cared, they would,

probably not tell their students that they're going to fail. I think, that's what I think. ...to me that's a caring teacher. One that will motivate you I guess. Like say you can do it instead of telling you, 'No, you can't, you're going to fail. Don't even try.' (Int. 3, p. 10, Teresa data)

The data suggested that these participants encountered teachers that contributed to the creation of an environment that increased the chances of students dropping out. Research has shown with increased positive interaction between students and teachers, their chances of dropping out decreased (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). Similar experiences of negative interactions with teachers have been found in research as students felt teachers played favorites in school (Patterson et al., 2008). Angela also encountered negative interactions as she attended two separate high schools and received similar treatment. According to Angela,

The first day of school, I got dress-coded for my shirt. The back of it was like the designs. And then here, I would get dress-coded a lot. And I'd see other girls walking around with the same thing, and it's just like, 'Why am I only getting in trouble?' I just felt singled out. (Int. 1, p. 6, Angela Data)

The negative teacher interactions the students who dropped out experienced hindered their ability to socially engage in school, which then effected their academic engagement. This was based on their lack of attendance and poor performance. Although the participants struggled academically, many students did not seek help from their teachers because they did not have a personal relationship with an adult that they believed cared (Valenzuela, 1999). Mike and Angela shared they attempted to ask for help in the past but the responses they received from their teachers created access issues because they did not appear to want to help them. Although Angela wanted to improve her grades, the negative interaction she encountered in school caused her to accept failing grades rather than seeking help. This was evident when Angela stated,

I usually asked for help. Or, I mean, if I was really lost, if I'd missed a couple days or something, I would just fail the lesson, because I didn't want to try and catch up on it all, because the teachers would get annoyed with me asking because I missed so much school. (Int. 1, pg. 6, Angela data)

Angela stated the teachers made her feel like “Just don't come to my class, kind of feeling, you know” (Int. 1, pg. 11, Angela data). Mike also encountered similar situations although he felt the majority of the teachers would help,

...in high school here, if they think I didn't give a damn, they didn't give any damn about me. They said, why do you keep on trying, you don't show up this time, and you come now, why help you out when you'll be wasting my time. (Int. 2, pg. 9, Mike data)

As Mike interacted with teachers without encouragement to continue, his apathy toward school guided his decision to leave before completion.

How They Feel They Are Valued

Teresa believed the lack of support at school became more evident because school did not appear to be a caring place for her as she shared her apprehension of asking adults for help. Her thoughts as she viewed a video clip of two teachers discussing students who had dropped out with little to no care about them leaving school affected her. As she spoke of the teacher and reflected on her own experience, Teresa stated,

That he reminds me of all the uncaring teachers I had. All the uncaring ones. Because like, that's kind of how they were. They would do their job you are going to drop out so you're going to get kicked out. Like, I think a lot of teachers are like that. They aren't like the other teacher that actually cares. Yeah. Like they're just there to do their job. They don't really care about if you graduate. (Int. 2, pg. 24, Teresa data)

Teresa did not believe she received what she would have considered caring interactions from teachers. As previously shared, Teresa's view of caring was developed by her cultural beliefs in family, which ultimately created her feeling that school was not a caring place. "I remember when I came here I wasn't asking many questions cuz I don't want to feel stupid" (Int. 1, pg. 15, Teresa data). As Teresa referred to high school in her comment, she expanded on the video clip of the two teachers discussing dropouts and she stated,

They'll teach you to do your homework but they don't really mean it. They're really thinking – well, actually whatever, I'm just here to teach. They would be like, 'I'm not here to be your friend. I'm here to motivate you' (Int. 2, pg. 24, Teresa data). 'I remember in high school everybody, all the teachers said I was going to fail and they say that there's nothing I can do with it... cuz they got mad since I wouldn't turn in their work.... (Int. 1, pg. 14, Teresa data)

Although Teresa knew she was having difficulty in the alternative school, she attempted to return to her home school and did not succeed,

I don't even think I had a percentage, it's probably zero but I remember the principal told me, he was always nice to me but I remember he told me, 'yeah just stay over there, nothing you gonna do here,' he was nice about it but just say 'don't come back.' (Int. 1, pg. 6, Teresa data)

The school stance in not allowing Teresa to return was an example of the system following cultural norms as Arzubiaga, et al. (2008) expressed “cultural practice” established within the school system that was put in place to mediate the student's behavior (p. 313). Vicky also acknowledged the lack of assistance from some teachers. She reflected on her experiences after she viewed the video clip of the two teachers speaking of students who had dropped out of school and did not appearing to care,

It's just like, I don't know, I've heard a lot of it, like teachers say like, “Oh this person dropped out.” Like that's their choice and stuff or they say, “Oh that's sad.” But like, that's what they say, like they don't do anything

about it...Because like it's something they do like every day, so they probably get discourage at one point and just stopped caring like, 'If it happens, it happens. I'm going to keep doing my job.' And it's like people don't want to come, they don't come, like they get discouraged.

(Int. 2, pg. 10-11, Vicky data)

Through this exchange, Vicky demonstrated the lack of expectations developed by teachers, which appeared to create negative perceptions of students that may be generalized to groups as previously stated by Patterson et al. (2008).

Stereotypes Encountered

Although Scott has had difficulties in school, unlike the rest of the participants, he has been able to keep up with his work and was only a half-credit short of graduating. This was possible because of the support he received from school and his parents. However, Scott has also had negative encounters with teachers as well. Espinoza-Harold (2003), shared an example of a student who was stereotyped based on his appearance and not his academic ability, which made school difficult. Scott has had similar situations with teachers who stereotyped him as he expressed the interaction through the following excerpt.

The first day I walked in the class, she's like, 'I don't like kids that wear black baseball caps, wearing tank tops. All of a sudden she is describing everything I was wearing and then all my other friends in the class and she just picks us a little bit out of the class, and said she doesn't like us.

It's sad. It made me not like her right away. And I always -- she always tries to like get on my case all the time. She, is always like, "I need

to go talk to you in the hallway.’ And I always call her out too like, ‘Well, you disrespect me like to my face in front of the whole classroom.’

She said, ‘Well, I’m just kidding.’ I’m like, ‘You’re not kidding, that’s not joking because you don’t say it to any other kid in the class but us,’ you know. And just because I have this group here and they all think all we do is just smoke weed. I don’t even do drugs, you know, I don’t do drugs. She doesn’t like me because I look like one of those kids that just, the little hoodie kids that do that kind of stuff, you know. She doesn’t even know me, so it’s like she never met me. She doesn’t know anything about me, and she decides to just take it out and just say it right away. OK, that’s fine with me. Suit yourself.

Honestly, I think all the teachers know that she’s just crazy. I mean every kid thinks she’s crazy. I mean I don’t know one kid that likes going to her class, but honestly, that sucks. She’s an unhappy person. I mean if she’s going to act like that, that sucks for her. She can be really, live a really crappy life. (Int. 1, pg. 7, Scott data)

Although Scott has shared that he believed school was important, the teacher may have treated him negatively based on her perception that his appearance expressed he did not care about school (Valenzuela, 1999).

Scott’s relationship with this teacher was an example of the negative interactions students encountered with teachers who showed little respect for students based on stereotypes. Scott perceived this teacher to be unhappy and

believed she created an uncomfortable environment in the classroom. As Scott reflected on the teacher's behavior, it was apparent he felt others also had a negative experience that had not been resolved by the school.

Connections

Unlike those students who dropped out of school, the participants that graduated and continued in school found support in and/or out of school, which increased their chances of staying in school. Through the positive relationships they established, they were able to identify individuals that mentored and offered guidance as they navigated school. Although these students experienced negative interactions with adults, as did those that dropped out, these students expressed the caring interactions they encountered made a difference in how they viewed adults in school. The positive interactions not only improved the participants' social engagement, it also improved their academic engagement, which then appeared to have increased their chances to graduate (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Although negative behavior has been linked to low social engagement, the data would suggest when personal connection were made between the student and the teacher or adult at school, it increased the school cohesion for students, which opened opportunities to dialogue. This was evident for Vicky as she interacted with office staff at her junior high school. While she was having difficulties at home, this translated to problems in school. She stated,

I actually had a desk up in the front office where I would sit there. [laughs]
That was my desk. Yeah, that was in junior high. They had a desk right next to the office. I became such good friends with the people that they

would bring me lunch from Panda Express and stuff. No, the teachers in the office. [laughs] But it wasn't like, 'Oh my God, she's out of control!' It was most like little things I'd do to catch attention, which some I don't want to say, but it was just things. (Int. 1, pg. 9-10, Vicky data)

Although Vicky was getting into trouble at school, the office staff recognized the difficulties she was encountering at home and they supported her. This type of caring interaction was found not only with Vicky but also with Scott. This appeared to be present with the students that dropped out but in a less frequent occurrence. Scott's outlook on the support he received helped him to continue in school. He did not allow the negative interactions he encountered to hinder his access to education. Scott expressed,

I get really good support. I mean everyone here is really supportive people; all nice people. They all know like stuff I've been through and stuff like that. So it's pretty cool. All the people here are really cool. (Int. 1, pg. 5, Scott data)

Like they all know that I've been through a lot of stuff in my life. Like I've been going in and out of like rehabs and all these institutions and stuff like that, and they all like -- they all see that I'm trying as hard as I can to like do something about it because, you know, I don't want to end up like all these other kids where they drop out. Because I never -- that's never been an option to me. I never thought of dropping out. I never think of it because I don't want to be like those people, because they never end up in the right place, you know. (Int. 1, pg. 5, Scott data)

Students that stayed in school attributed it to the positive relationships and access to mentoring and support from the caring adults who took the time to know them, not only as a student but a person as well (Gonzalez et al., 2008). After Vicky moved from the first high school where she had little connections with adults on campus, she believed the new school had counselors and staff that showed they cared. Vicky, reflecting on all her teachers at Power Alternative School (pseudonym), expressed,

They're the ones that really helped me a lot. They didn't only care about the school with the person. They also cared about things that were going on in your life, and they would talk to you about it and just help you. (Int. 1, pg. 11, Vicky data)

The relationships exhibited by the participants that stayed in school and those that graduated all had connections with an adult who was able to provide them access to the social capital needed to navigate the activity system of schoolgoing. With access to positive mentors to guide them, such as a parent or significant other, Luis was able to use the consistent interaction with his cousin as a guide because his cousin had achieved his high school diploma, which was one of Luis' own desires (O'Conner, 1997). Unlike the participants that dropped out, Luis had an individual in his family who established expectations for him that decreased his chance of dropping out. The following was an example of the guidance Luis received.

My cousin, he supports me a lot. He's not that much older than me, he's 25. He graduated seven, eight years ago, and he had gone through the

same things that I did, with bad grades and everything, but he supports me. He used to tell me, ‘dude, get your crap together and start doing your work.’ He would get angry when I used to come with Fs and Ds, and like he would care.

He knows when report cards come in, so he would text me or he would call me when they'd come in and go, ‘hey, read me your grades, read me the class and then read me the grade, you got man.’ Then he'd tell me, ‘why did you fail in this class,’ or, ‘why did you do better in this class than the others? He was always there to...pick me up. (Int. 1, pg. 4, Luis data)

Student access to guidance or lack of guidance can be connected to school size as it related to the positive interactions encountered and the SES of the school (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Vicky expressed she rarely saw a counselor in school unless she was in trouble. Like other participants in the study, Vicky did not feel she had access to guidance until she moved to a smaller alternative school where she encountered individuals that she believed cared about her. Vicky explained the difference between the two high schools she attended,

I think it's because they have too many students, and they don't really take the time to ask you stuff. But when I was at Power, they really helped me, because the teachers actually focus on you, and they'd even pull you aside when they see something was wrong and they'd ask you, ‘OK, what's wrong?’ You have a chance to really talk to them, and they want to communicate with you, and you talk to them. They tell you, ‘Hey, I believe in you. You can do this,’ if you need help and stuff. So I think I

had pretty good guidance at power. They helped me finish, and they really did everything possible to help me. (Int. 1, pg. 4, Vicky data)

The positive relationships encountered in school by those participants who stayed in school and graduated increased their chances of graduating because of their personal engagement with adults in and outside of school. Increased social supports bring an increase in student achievement, which was evident with the participants who did not drop out (Heard, 2008). It was the participants' encounters with individuals that gave them the cultural tools to engage the activity system of schoolgoing that allowed them to gain the knowledge needed to adapt and navigate the structure of school through the zone of proximal development. This was demonstrated through the following, 1) Luis and Vicky both worked with counselors that showed them how to talk through their relationship, and 2) Sara connected with her teachers that encouraged her to get involved at school and she became a member of student government. These were tools they did not possess prior to the guidance they received and the relationships they developed in school. The positive interactions appeared to create a feeling of value for participants that were not exhibited by those participants that dropped out. Vicky expressed the open communication she had with the adults at school increased her belief in herself that she could do well in school. With the high expectations found by all the participants that stayed in school, it appeared their learning increased and their chances of dropping out decreased (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Vicky, who was one of two graduates in this study, expressed the

satisfaction she felt when many of her family members and school staff expressed their pride in her success, which translated to Vicky's pride in herself.

It's so good. Because I get attention but it's not like attention getting in trouble or – or something that I'm going to feel bad for, just makes me feel good like, 'Oh they notice what I'm doing,' like, 'They really care about what I'm doing' and stuff so... Yeah. My counselors would always be like, 'Oh my God, you have a baby and you're still at school like, That's great!' ...It made me feel like, 'Yeah.' Like, 'I can do it.' Like, 'I did do it.' Like, it made me feel proud and happy like, 'Yeah, I did do it.' Like, I don't know. (Int. 3, pg. 5-6, Vicky data)

Through positive connections and support, these participants were encouraged to succeed, which created positive attitudes and optimism toward the future.

Differences were Marginal, Outcomes were not

Participants in all three groups encountered difficulties they had to overcome as they negotiated the structure of school and their home life. The interactions at school along with life events affected the participants' paths to either stay in school or drop out. Although, all groups encountered struggles, life's chances created opportunities for some and not others. The data suggested that how the participants engaged and managed the struggles they encountered was dependent on their ability to access the cultural resources needed to mediate their circumstances and created meaning and understanding of their environment (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004).

I Don't Have Time for This

Although all students that dropped out had experienced negative interactions and low academic engagement, they all believed they possessed the ability to complete the work in school. Even though they all believed in their ability to finish school, they were not committed to the time necessary to successfully engage socially and academically. Their low engagement contributed to leaving school prior to graduation (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). The conflict found early in this chapter demonstrated the cultural mediation of family and the negative interactions in school that played a role in their poor attendance. Mike stated, "I could've done better and I always knew I could've. I just never choose to" (Int. 3, pg. 5, Mike data). Angela expressed, that as long as you go to school you can do well, while Teresa felt "...I did think I could do it. It was easy. I just didn't do it" (Int. 1, pg. 22, Teresa data). Their desire to graduate mediated by the instrument of time intersected by life struggles subsequently lowered the priority of the activity system of schoolgoing. Graduation was the objective of schoolgoing, and the new activity system objective was life outside of high school with dropping out of school being mediated by poor attendance, incomplete work and the lack of school connection.

All the participants encountered challenges, but it was the inability to overcome the struggles by those students that dropped out that contributed to their leaving school. These struggles included, low grades, poor attendance, negative school interactions and family responsibility, which caused them to drop out. Angela, for example, was unable to complete all three interviews and it was

evident that she was not optimistic about a positive future if she stayed in high school as she dropped out to earn her GED. Angela shared, "...I've never really been focused in school, and that for me...like, it would be too much for me to just try, all of it next year. You know, and not even just try, but like do it" (Int. 1, pg. 8, Angela data). As Angela planned to leave school, her mom expressed, "I don't want you to go unless you have your GED or graduate. And you know, I obviously I couldn't graduate, and so I just decided it would be easier to start my own thing" (Int. 1, pg. 8, Angela data).

Angela desired to move on and begin her life outside of high school because she did not see how graduating benefited her later in life (Rumberger, 1995). She planned to leave school and enroll in a community college. Although dropping out was not her initial goal, the lack of optimism as well as the difficulties she encountered in school became overwhelming. Angela expressed,

I actually kind of made it harder at one point, because I wanted to be the first one to graduate, you know, and prove a point that it's easy for my little sisters, and set an example, but I don't know ... things just got really stressful, trying to balance out work and school, and I was already slipping behind. Once again, boyfriends, friends. It was just kind of ... just was too much. And I was like the equivalent. So, I was like, well, I mean, if I just pay for it, I'll just do it. Get it over with, kind of thing. (Int. 1, pg. 8, Angela data)

In Teresa's case, she dropped out of school because she needed to help her mother with family duties and obligations, but she was also not optimistic about the

motivation she felt she needed to finish school based on her past experiences of giving up and the lack of help she received in school. Teresa stated she dropped out and had not returned because,

I felt like I wasn't ever going to be done. I'm being slow. I'm slacking. ...I just felt like I was wasting the teacher's time. There's probably somebody that really does want to finish. So, that's why I decided to leave. Maybe there's girls out there that say, oh, I'm a mom, but that's not an excuse because I have my mom. My mom is happy to take care of him, and so is my boyfriend's mom, so, I don't have an excuse. (Int. 2, pg. 30, Teresa data)

As the previous data suggested, Angela and Teresa expressed confidence in their ability to graduate if they committed themselves, but they were not optimistic about the effort it would take to do so. As previously noted, Suh, et al. (2007) expressed the lack of optimism about the future influenced the likelihood of dropping out of school. Mike reinforced this view with his reason for leaving school. Mike expressed,

...Basically I got tired of running on the wheel. I got tired of running on a wheel and even if I did try to get my act together, I still won't be coming to school...trying to catch up on what I have missed. And if I can't do that, I just give up a lot of classes' I'd just give up like that like on 23% in some classes and make it a zero because I was already behind. (Int. 1, pg. 10, Mike data)

Mike defined running on a wheel to be working hard but not getting anywhere.

He later expanded on this notion of why he dropped out when he stated,

Because of my own stupidity I should say you know. I messed up my high school so I took the best the next thing like GED you know. When I get my GED you and it's probably not going to get me far, I'm slowly realizing that probably not going to get into a decent college if anything, I'm probably going to have to go to Apollo College.

I did it just because I felt like if will dropout that will be done. You know, I start working and get my life going coz like what I've said it works. It will work you know 25% of your life you're not working and the other 75% is working you have to provide for something you know. (Int. 2, pg. 18, Mike data)

It was apparent through Mike's response that he had doubts about leaving school. Before he left, Mike was approached by an administrator that tried to talk him out of leaving school. Angela also received help from a counselor that requested she stay to no avail, while Teresa felt the alternative school administrator was the only person who tried to help her even after she had already dropped out but she could not bring herself to return. Despite these efforts, they all chose to leave school before graduating. The lack of gaining an education due to the constraints put on individuals by the educational structure (O'Connor, 2002) contributed to the lack of connectivity the students had with the teachers they encountered. The inability of the school system to connect with the students may have been due to the possible inability of the teachers to "take into account multiple perspectives that

could reorient educators to consider the everyday lived experiences of their students” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 40). The three participants that dropped out appeared to be in opposition to the structure established in school. According to Arzubiaga, et al. (2008) organizations have established institutional practices that mediate the individuals within the structure, which would cause the individual to conform to the structural expectations. The data suggested all three dropouts saw school as important but how it fits in their lives was based on the meaning they placed on it. Mike stated,

It wasn't until I dropped out in school. I then realized, I should've stayed but I can still go back, I haven't got my GED yet, I said, I want to get my GED, I wanted to just be done with school because I realized it not like I am done with school in general. I still want to go to college. (Int. 1, pg. 14-15, Mike data)

Teresa also expressed her advice to those thinking of dropping out would be to stay in school because,

I would tell them to try hard because when you are out you'll feel like a failure. I felt like a failure because I mean I think that's all I had to do, you know, I don't have a job or anything and you know I had help with my baby. I think that's all I had to do. So just to like stay because you know, you'll regret it. (Int. 3, pg. 12, Teresa data)

Mike and Teresa saw the use for education but felt they needed to bypass high school because it did not fit into their current circumstances. Although, the school system attempted to assist them, it was too late. The data showed both

Mike and Teresa were conflicted in staying in school or leaving as they expressed their desire to go back to school, which was followed by their lack of optimism to finish if they did.

Overcoming the Struggles

All participants that stayed in school and graduated, encountered struggles, but it was the support and the optimistic view in how the participants managed these difficulties that set them apart from those that dropped out of school. Before these students overcame similar struggles encountered by the participants that dropped out, they also had low social and academic engagement in school that created difficulties and barriers to graduation. Through their lack of attendance, low grades and recommendation to alternative settings, the majority of the participants were on the path to dropping out of school. Scott shared

Because I was doing a lot of bad things at that time and I was using school time for other times and wasn't doing the right thing. I was just ditching school all the time, didn't really care. I told my mom don't wanna go to school and stuff like that, you know. I didn't want to face reality pretty much because there's so much work I had to make up. So I was like, 'Screw it,' you know? (Int. 1, pg. 4, Scott data)

The struggles the participants encountered were also family generated such as Luis's lack of belief in himself. It was the Cultural Processes connected to family and culture within the conceptual framework that effected his cultural belief. Luis stated,

Before I felt like I wasn't a good enough person, a good enough son to have as a son, to have somebody proudly call their son. I didn't feel that way. I was—I don't know—I guess I always thought of taking my own life because of it. And it's hard to get past it but now I—it made me grow up faster. It made me grow up sooner. I'm barely 17 but I feel like I got everything like an adult now. I can't be thinking like a 17-year-old who's still going to school, the main concern is graduation.

Right now, it's work, provide for—be there for my son, protect my son; be there for my wife, protect her, and then graduation. (Int. 3, pg. 8, Luis data)

Unlike the dropout participants, Luis and Scott's data demonstrated the optimistic view they possessed and how it was used to overcome the struggles they encountered. Luis shared that his optimism came from the “support from my wife and my son. I have their love and with them, I can't be stopped. And I won't be stopped” (Int. 3, pg. 12, Luis data). Scott expressed his view as “just be the best you can be, do everything to your fullest extent; like don't ever give up...” which was the belief impressed upon him by his mother (Int. 1, pg. 1, Scott data). The participants that stayed in school or graduated had an optimistic view of their future and their ability to overcome circumstances and life's chances. This optimistic view appeared to be driven by the meaning realized by the participants of the role schoolgoing played in their lives. Sarah, who was currently enrolled, expressed that she wanted “...to make my parents proud like, ‘Oh, she did it’... I want to feel proud of myself like I actually graduated when I was like behind

credits and everything and yeah prove people wrong” (Int. 2, pg. 19, Sarah data). Sarah stayed in school and wanted to graduate “...because if I don’t finish, it’s like what am I going to do with my life? Can I be a bum, like what am I going to be doing?” Sarah determined finishing school would allow her to be a cosmetologist (Int. 2, pg. 20, Sarah data).

Luis stayed in school because the birth of his son mediated graduation.

Luis expressed,

The reason why I live I mean. Over him there’s nothing. It’s him before my wife. ...it’s because of him I have done so much, like kids cuz for me, I wouldn’t of cared, ...It doesn’t matter anything bad because of him I always saw a good solution too, I will find a good solution for now just like leave it alone or whatever. (Int. 3, pg. 12, Luis data)

Through this “life changing” event, Luis’ optimism for the future appeared to have contributed to what school meant to him.

No matter how bad things may look, in your past or in your present, your future will always be better. It won’t always be bad. Yes, I guess that I went from wanting to take my own life to keep going with it to exceeding my limits, every time - I set up a bar, I would jump over it. Every time I set up a higher bar, I jump over that. That’s life and you got to deal with it no matter how hard it is. (Int. 3, pg.15, Luis data)

Luis came full circle and became the provider for his family and was the dad to his son, something that he did not have himself. He expressed that he may not know how to be a good dad but he knows what not to do to be a bad one. Vicky

also expressed why she stayed in school when it could have been easier to stay home after having her baby. It was more than coming back to school for education, it was her optimistic outlook as well as she believed that she could do it. She expressed,

I wanted to feel accomplishment for myself like I wanted to feel like, ‘Oh I finished school’ like I did it, like something for me. Like I’ve always – like I still want to like experience the whole you walking and like being in front of... Because every time I go to graduation, I was like, ‘Wow I want to be that person’ like I want to be sitting there, I want to graduate, I want to have people feel proud of me like it’s just for myself that I pretty much did it. (Int. 2, pg. 14, Vicky data)

This realization of what school meant and why it was necessary to finish, gave Vicky the meaning of school she needed to return. Vicky stated,

I went back to school for me because after every mistake that I had made, I wanted to make the right choice for once and accomplish something. Even though I had made a lot of mistakes, I wanted to just not stay stuck in the mistake and just move on and just finish school and do the right thing, just keep going with my life. (Int. 3, pg.13, Vicky data)

Through her reflection, Vicky shared the meaning school had for her,

It wasn’t just school anymore for me, it was just someone where I can get help, somewhere I can talk to people, someone – somewhat that I can get away sometimes so, it just made me realize that it wasn’t just school. (Int. 3, pg. 13, Vicky data)

Through the meaning given to schoolgoing, graduation was no longer the objective but the new mediating instrument needed to obtain the goals they wanted to reach beyond graduation. It was important to note this group differed from the dropouts in that they still saw graduation to have a purpose in reaching their objective.

Like the students that dropped out of school, Luis, Sarah, Scott and Vicky all experienced academic and family difficulties as they grew up. A noticeable difference between the two groups was the focus each participant had as to why they continued in school and graduated. Although their choice in staying in school did not appear to be for the sake of school, each utilized the structure of school for their greater purpose. This then created the optimism for the future and appeared to be the drive for each individual. Luis continued because school became the mediating activity to strengthen his ability to provide for his wife and son while establishing the pattern of being a good dad. Sarah appeared to be motivated by making her parents proud. As the oldest, she also took on the responsibility of setting good examples for her younger siblings. Scott expressed school was a step to get to the next thing in his life. It was school as the activity that allowed the participant to reach the goals they had established. Finally, Vicky realized school as a place that could assist her in creating a better life for her son while the act of finishing school gave her the ability to correct past mistakes. It was the use of school as the mediating instrument by each participant that stayed in school or graduated. It appeared that for each participant who

realized their purpose in school, the act of schoolgoing became the mediating activity between their current state of being and where they were going.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the insider perspectives of high school students (past and present) about their experiences with support systems, organizational structures, and learning opportunities that influenced their decisions to stay in school or dropout before graduating high school. The following question guided this study: How do high school students who have graduated, dropped out, or currently attend school, negotiate social supports, organizational structures and cultural identity in their decision making to staying in or dropping out of school? The analysis of individual and video recall interviews uncovered the prominent role that the structure of public education played in determining who would stay and leave. Five themes surfaced that encapsulated the ways in which study participants navigated the activity system of schoolgoing:

1. Is school for everyone?
2. Who holds the knowledge within the school setting?
3. Our values are not the same?
4. School as an experience, and
5. Differences were marginal, outcomes were not.

The themes exposed the difficulties that participants encountered while negotiating schooling because of the mediating roles that relationships and connections with school served in either creating barriers or assisting students to graduate.

The themes presented, represent the ways in which schoolgoing failed students as they navigated the school system. Historically, schooling outcomes have shown little change over time, particularly in minority student dropout rates. Schoolgoing was believed to be a right for every student, however, school structures advantage some students who do succeed but creates barriers for others, which was well noted in the theme “is school for everyone”. For some students in this study, it became too difficult to persist because of barriers such as teacher instruction, recovering credits for students who fell behind and students transitioning from 8th to 9th grade. These barriers show the strong connection found in the effect the structure of school has and how student access the needed knowledge possessed by the teacher. Acknowledging that teacher instruction mediates student learning demonstrates the connections found in the theme, “who holds the knowledge within the school setting?” that surfaced in the data.

The theme “our values are not the same” demonstrated how cultural expectations created barriers for the study participants. Through misconceptions made by adults, the cultural norms the participants encountered in school could be understood if the funds of knowledge of the participants were recognized. Moreover, the meaning that surfaced from the theme “school as an experience” demonstrated the many connections and interactions that affected the participants’ ability to engage in school. It was through this theme the meaning of connections and supports was made. In conjunction with this theme and “differences were marginal, outcomes were not”, both gave meaning to the differences that surfaced

regarding school leaving. The remainder of this chapter explores the meaning and implications drawn from the five themes.

What do we know now?

Pedagogical and Policy Barriers

The themes represent the ways in which school contexts failed students. Historically, schooling outcomes have shown little change over time, particularly in minority student dropout rates. Access to school has been viewed as a right for every student; however, school contexts advantage students while creating barriers for others. For some students, persisting became too difficult because of barriers such as teacher instruction, recovering credits for students who fell behind and students transitioning from 8th to 9th grade.

I define school system contexts to include teacher instruction and expectations as well as the ways in which student learning is supported. These three elements of school context seemed to determine student access to learning. One, teacher instruction is key to all students learning. When teacher instruction is inflexible and is perceived as uncaring, both rigidity and lack of caring create difficulty for students, particularly when they fall behind in class. Students reported choosing to give up rather than ask for assistance, thus decreasing their chances of graduating. Second, teacher instruction focuses on teaching the standards mandated by the state. This results in a narrow focus on specific standards introduced sequentially within a specific time frame. It does not ensure students have the prior knowledge before instruction of new material begins.

Because of this, context deficits create barriers for students as they struggle with the content with little support and fall behind.

How teachers manage the classroom environment also affects student engagement because of the disrespect they perceive from their teachers. At times, there is no focus on student ability, only completing teacher instructional tasks. Teachers begin instruction by introducing new content without assessing prior knowledge. Students are assigned to work in groups, pairs or individually to practice the new material. In some cases, there is little guidance from the teacher and the students are assessed. They are then given homework with some not fully comprehending the lesson and are expected to continue to the next level of learning. And in the end, schools fail students by pushing them through before they are ready for the next level.

Last, language barriers magnify the lack of access to education for students whose first language is not English. English as a second language (ESL) students have difficulties comprehending what is taught in class because they may not understand the vocabulary, nor the content of what is being said. Instead, teacher instruction should accommodate language and culture by embedding support in the structure of lessons. Neither schools nor the state recognize the assistance that ESL students need. For example, although ESL students may meet the state's criteria for English proficiency their instructional English may not be sufficient to learn at mastery levels. Students who fall just above the proficiency criteria experience no instructional support. Teachers need to continue to support ESL students with vocabulary along with sensitivity to the need for explaining

new content in multiple ways. Policy dictates that ESL students are to participate in the same manner as the native English speaking population. Even with services in place for the neediest ESL students, ESL students continue to struggle.

These policy barriers along with pedagogies that fail to account for differing levels of prior knowledge and understanding convey that students with learning challenges are not important to teachers or schools. This lack of sensitivity and concern disadvantages large numbers of students from minority and underserved groups. The results continue to be demonstrated by the high numbers of students from minority and low SES groups who fail and drop out of school. These educational discrepancies must be addressed (Anyon, 2005).

These persistent pedagogies and policies must be questioned. Is the function of school to ensure that all students reach academic levels sufficient to graduate or is school merely for those with the cultural and social capital to engage and navigate the system? Many students do not have access to the social capital needed to succeed in connection with the conceptual framework and the ability of the participants to use it to gain mentors and the guidance necessary to navigate the structure of schoolgoing. The current design of high school has been in existence for many years. Its built in deficiencies decrease opportunities for students to build relationships with students, teachers and the community, which has shown to increase achievement “when educators work with community residents” (Anyon, 2005, p. 181). The current system does not ensure that all students are aware of the services available to help them navigate the system. For

example, some students are not aware of possible scholarship opportunities, health services, family assistance and tutoring opportunities.

The transition from 8th to 9th grade creates difficulties for many students. Changes in routines like moving from class to class, understanding the expectations of high school teachers, meeting the increased expectations for homework, conduct, and the assumptions that students know how to learn place unaccustomed demands on students. Success depends on social capital to navigate, interpret, and problem-solve difficulties. Stress created by the volume of students, the number of classes, and the lack of connection to the increased numbers of teachers mounts. Students familiar with developing relationships with a few teachers now encounter many teachers who use contrasting instructional styles and whose diverse cultural backgrounds make interpreting their demands and classroom processes difficult. Adapting to new people and subjects in a short period of time without explicit skill development on how to navigate all the variance places students at risk.

Culture of Success

I expected cultural identity to play a larger role in determining whether students stayed in school or dropped out because research has shown that minority students drop out at a higher rate than any other group (Stillwell, 2010). Reasons for dropping out or staying in school in this study were not always connected to race, gender or station. Regardless of student background, if student behavior does not conform to the dominant cultural norms of schooling in the United States, which are historically connected with the White, middle class majority

population, students are viewed as being defiant (Losen & Skiba, 2010). For example, school rules demand that students attend school every day and complete their homework. But for many of the students in this study, there were family responsibilities that were integral to the functioning of the household and thus, the cultural norms of the school were not met. School authorities, teachers and authorities, interpret non-compliance as defiant behavior and will not want to engage or help the student. Non-compliant students are viewed as non-conforming and un-invested in their education and by extension, in school.

The cultural expectation for particular kinds of school participation impacts student engagement, which in turn shapes students' ability to navigate. School culture can shut some students out by merely how students are perceived. For example, some students are taught to be submissive as a form of respect that can, in turn, be viewed negatively by teachers steeped in a culture that values earnestness and forthrightness. Reserve can be viewed as disinterest and can negatively affect teacher/student relationships and access to mentoring. Thus access to social capital that can be mediated by teacher mentors can be compromised by cultural patterns (Valenzuela, 1999).

Through social engagement, the cultural mindset of "I can accomplish my goal" transforms student's beliefs. Students that connect with adults and develop positive relationships develop a more positive outlook on school (Croninger & Lee, 2001). These supports are critical for sustaining and continuing throughout high school. The need for supports is crucial because students gain social capital due to positive relationships created with adult engagement. Students that are

able to connect with adults possess the social capital that allows them to navigate the organizational structure of school (O’Conner, 1997). Through this engagement, students become participants through understanding the cultural norms necessary to be successful in navigating the system of schoolgoing.

Connections and Supports

With little difference between the student groups, installing supports for all students is critical in sustaining and persisting throughout high school. How students engage and navigate the school system is determined by the interactions they encounter. Teacher engagement and relationship building is necessary for student learning. When relationships extend beyond the classroom, students feel important and believe the teachers know who they are as a person.

Although the dropout students’ did not believe many of their teachers did not care for them, those who stayed in school, expressed they connected with adults who wanted to know all about them, which they believed showed they cared. It is this type of interaction with adults that assists students in navigating school and creating access (O’Conner, 1997). Those students that graduated and were currently attending school expressed the positive experiences improved their social and academic engagement in school. Student commentary was clear that the adult connections they made encouraged them to continue in school. Adult interaction is key, which has been shown in research that teacher relationships and student access to teacher based social capital increases the chances of students graduating (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Reasons adults may not connect could be linked to their feeling of being overworked or they are too occupied to show they care. We understand teachers struggle to make connections, but why? Do they have too many students, too many mandates requiring an unrealistic timeline? Inversely, many teachers do not create the time to form relationships with students if students don't put forth the effort expected to show they want to learn. If teachers engage students outside of the academic perspective, they could have insight into the difficulties students encounter inside their homes and outside of school. Through guidance, teachers can play a pivotal role in their success. The dropout students had an emotional disconnect which caused them to have little hope and give up. Hopelessness and giving up was found throughout the study regardless of group affiliation. The school system must have the capacity to connect with all students to demonstrate the value school brings to their daily lives. This demonstrates how the organizational structure of school will enhance positive social supports.

The structural design of the school system is not conducive to establishing relationships and accessing the supports needed to navigate schooling. Student mentoring is critical to aiding the structural design because it allows student connection with individuals they can go to for guidance. These relationships also establish and increase access to individuals with the knowledge to guide them through school. An example of this is LINK Crew. LINK Crew is a program utilized in many high schools to assist in transitioning incoming 9th graders by introducing skills needed to navigate school while connecting them to an older student as a peer mentor. Financially, this is a cost effective program in that it

trains teachers to train student mentors while establishing the connectivity to school for incoming students.

Poor academic performance and difficult interactions with students, teachers and administrators resulted in low social engagement. Therefore, students who don't engage have lower grades in school, high absenteeism and decreased participation. With the lack of support, students' chances of dropping out increases. The majority of student interactions they encounter affect the way they socially engaged in the school structure. The needed supports would assist the students in seeking assistance when they felt they were being treated unfairly or not connecting with the teacher. We could install supports by ensuring every student had a mentor they could talk to who could direct them to the appropriate counselor, administrator or social worker. If students believed they had "people on their team" to help them in any area regarding school, it may be more inviting for them to seek assistance. As an example, at registration for all students, small orientation groups would be held to distribute information on all of the supports available to students and parents. Sign up sheets would be available for those interested with the possibility of forming students groups in high need areas.

Although all three groups experienced school in similar ways, one of the main differences was the supportive relationship found with adults on campus and outside of school that contributed to their success in sustaining and persisting in high school. This demonstrates the importance adults play in mentoring and guiding students in school. This is not void of adults understanding their role and the impact they have on each student on campus. Students that choose to stay in

school find encouragement from teachers, administrators, and counselors that increased their belief and efficacy that they can succeed. Interestingly enough, social supports were the main force in determining whether students stay in or drop out of school. Regardless of race, gender and station, social supports was a constant thread affecting all three participant groups.

Implications to education

As we embark on improving the organizational structure of school, it is necessary to take a well-rounded approach to supporting students. The services available to the most advantaged children should also be available to the most disadvantaged children. Berliner (2006) made this point as he spoke of the United States,

If the educational opportunities available to white students in our public schools were made available to all our students, the United States would have been the 7th highest scoring nation in mathematics, 2nd highest scoring nation in reading, and the 4th highest scoring nation in science. (p. 963)

There has been extensive research on poverty, equity and access to improve student achievement presented by authors such as Jean Anyon, David Berliner and Jonathan Kozol and yet disadvantaged students in school and society can still be found with the charge of solving the problem placed at the doorstep of the school system. When questions are raised regarding low student achievement, the societal norms seemed to react by trying to change the ways in which schools operated without addressing the factors outside of school such as family structure

and the community in which the school was located (Berliner, 2006). It is evident that although the school system plays a major role in the development of students, the services needed to develop a well-rounded child should come from all aspects of society with strategic coordination from the education system. To develop the whole child, the following services should be wrapped around every student: quality education, family and life skills, physical and mental health needs, financial capital and continuous guidance.

When done effectively, I believe opportunities are created for every student because it would allow the student to focus on school. This would also be a means to create opportunities for those students that were disadvantaged in school as well as in society. If the data presented in this research study were utilized to improve the educational experience of all students to enhance learning, the following services would be implemented to improve the students' ability to navigate the structure of school, connect to needed supports while increasing students' engagement and achievement. These services would include providing mentors and guidance to students to navigate the activity system of schoolgoing, increased access to a good education for all, real world skills development for students and parents including post high school opportunities to engage all students in learning and provide well trained teachers in pedagogical and interpersonal skills.

Guidance for Life and Education

The research data showed the lack of connectivity the participants exhibited throughout the research study, which may have been improved with the

implementation of a program by schools that would assign mentors to a small group of students who would stay with them throughout their high school careers. Mentors could receive training to prepare them to engage the student and their families while enhancing the student's educational experience. Through continued engagement with students, the mentors should be required to develop a quarterly report describing individual student progress to the senior administrator overseeing the mentoring program. To gain a well rounded picture of each student, the mentors would collect data in the areas of: grades, attendance, difficulties encountered in and out of school, successes, involvement outside of class, further assistance needed to be successful, and family dynamics. This data would be utilized to coordinate services in and out of school.

Mental health teams could be an example of services that would provide support to mentors to ensure their students get connected with services the school cannot provide. By wrapping services around the child, partnerships with outside agencies in the community could be utilized to offer health services to students and their families to create a healthy environment for learning. Students struggle to learn when they are drawn away from their studies to focus on issues outside of the classroom. Luis demonstrated this when he expressed students in school with advantages did not have to worry about money and other issues at home which made it easier for them to learn. In the district where this study was located, programs in an attempt to address health services had already been initiated. Implementation of programs developed through a partnership between the schools and the local municipality provided health care for students and families along

with other family needs in an effort to improve student health and academic achievement.

Strong mentor programs could be utilized to connect school with families in order to offer parents the skill needed to support their child academically at home or offer tools needed to develop healthy relationships. These services could be used to offer the needed tools to parents through education to enhance life skills. These tools could give families the social capital needed to engage the school system, which could increase their participation in their child's education as well as open opportunities for future dialog.

Access to Education

Education has been a-one-size-fits-the-dominant culture approach, and must be addressed in order to create access for all students. The data suggested in order for the participants to engage in school, the school system needs the capacity to connect with students to demonstrate the value school brings to their daily lives. Those participants that chose to stay in school found encouragement from teachers, administrators, and counselors that increased their belief and efficacy that they could succeed which appeared to be silent for those students who dropped out. The participants in this study missed school and had difficulty overcoming the deficits in learning and the lack of credits due to family responsibilities, caring of a child, need for employment and content in school moving too fast. In order to ensure access, all courses required for graduation could be offered online and in person to give students every opportunity to attend school. These courses would be offered in morning and evening blocks, in a

hybrid model consisting of a combination of online and direct instruction as well as off-hours including weekends. This would give the student the opportunity to pick and choose their schedule around work and family responsibilities. Schools could also offer alternative models of instruction to assist students that have fallen behind by giving them the opportunity to recover the credit and learning they've lost. Finally, the responsibility of having a child also hindered access. Programs could include childcare at no cost to allow students to continue their education. This service would not only keep students in school, it would offer an opportunity to teach students parenting skills.

Access to education for students would include opportunities for real world training that would include internships and vocational training. Students would engage in different internships based on their career interest and the mentor would utilize this information to develop an individual learning plan for them. Through this type of program, students could incorporate job skills that could be used and counted toward graduation. This would give students the ability to earn credits for the skills they utilize at work.

Real World Learning

As students access the needed education, it is also important to connect what they were learning to real word application. This could be done through the implementation of human development teams established to teach students life skills needed to navigate school as well as everyday society. These teams would be connected with the school mentors and would be one of the services wrapped around the students. Each team would consist of 10 to 12 students that would stay

together throughout the course of their high school career. Throughout the year, different units could be explored such as project based learning in and outside of school centered on identity, adulthood skills and transition planning from 8th to 9th grade as well as life and career post high school. The data gathered in this dissertation showed those completing school saw the relevance of attending and finishing school. Early in the educational experience, post secondary plans establishing the importance of finishing school should be developed to provide students the opportunity to establish goals to work toward. Post high school planning would include attending a two or four year colleges, vocational programs and work-studies. For other students, the goal would be job attainment upon completion of high school. Through real world learning in conjunction with individual supports through mentors, each student would have an adult they could connect with and access the social capital needed for academic and life success (O'Conner, 1997).

Professional Development to Enhance Learning

Through the analysis of the data, some of the teachers appeared to have difficulty differentiating instruction based on the students' prior knowledge. The difficulty in this finding lies in whether the teacher's instructional style lacked the skill needed to recognize the student's learning level or the time needed to differentiate the instruction. Did little time due to the large classes and high expectations of teachers established by the local and federal entities play a role in the lack of connections with students? Continuous professional development must be required to train teachers in the development of assessments to evaluate a

student's prior knowledge and build lessons to differentiate instruction. The teacher's ability to take the student's prior knowledge and connect it to instruction was important. When working with at-risk students, it was important to know where their level of knowledge lies. According to Barone (2002), when a student's prior knowledge was considered in preparation of instruction, this draws on the strengths of the student. When this does not occur or when the consistency of instruction was low, students had trouble grasping concepts.

Instruction must not be based on a static map of learning that does not take into account student differences in knowledge and ability. Professional development should not only consist of training to enhance teacher instruction, it should also include interpersonal skill development with students. This data appeared to show some teachers did not create relationships with students because they felt the students didn't put forth the effort expected of them to show they wanted to learn. If the teachers increased their thinking outside of the academic perspective, they could have engaged the students from a personal perspective and seen the difficulties they encountered inside their home and outside of school. Through guidance, teachers could have played a pivotal role in their success. This data offered an important aspect of professional development for teachers that must be addressed. When students enter school without the social capital needed to navigate the educational system, it is necessary to make sure the adults within the school system possess the skills to assist all students and develop ways to connect. The tools would help to not only educate students in academia but also assist in training teachers in the skills needed to socially engage students and

develop relationships. The education system spends numerous hours preparing teachers in the pedagogical skills in their content area, but it appeared that little time was spent on understanding different cultures when approaching teaching to enhance students learning.

Educating staff on the cultural norms found in the culturally diverse populations found in their community would assist teachers in understanding the students in their classrooms, which would allow opportunities to get to know their students. This would also assist teachers and administration, as expressed by Kozleski & Smith (2009) in “*understanding* the ways in which their own values, beliefs, and practices contributed to the organization’s cultures and habits” effecting the classroom and school environment (p. 20). Through this interaction, teachers would be able to make connections by opening dialog and gaining perspective on the difficulties affecting the student.

Reflection and Recommendations

Based on the data, it appears necessary to make sure teachers and counselors get a comprehensive picture of each student, to understand the difficulties they are having academically in and outside of school. There needs to be a positive mentoring practice to connect with the students to open communication. One recommendation would be to have flexible time lines for students so they’re not pushed through the system before they are ready. For example, individualized learning plans for every student would help identify students that are having difficulties. Programs that would constantly be looking for students that were struggling in class and missing school could connect

supports around that student. Another recommendation would be a program that would have services in and out of school to connect with the student and the family. It would identify students struggling in school through an alert mechanism that would assess the student needs and evaluate the assistance necessary. This program would then teach the student how to navigate the system and seek support that would enhance their lives in and out of school.

With the teaching staff, professional development would help teachers be the front line so they could be the first responders to those students who struggled. Teachers would receive training that would allow them to recognize teaching practices detrimental to student learning. This would help the teaching staff to further understand why students are failing and teach the concepts that could be utilized in the classroom setting to support students. A recommendation at the school level would be to increase the number of counselors in the school setting to gain a deeper understanding of the student so the assistance given would be comprehensive in nature. Unfortunately, schools do not have the resources to handle the difficulties each student will have and “if we want to primarily hold our teachers responsible for increasing their students educational attainment, then we need at a minimum to provide those teachers with children who enter their classrooms healthy and ready to learn” (Berliner, 2006, p. 986-987). It does take a village to raise a child and it will be necessary to develop partnerships within the community agencies to find the experts in each area of support and develop a system to connect the services needed to the student and their family. Teachers,

parents and students cannot do it alone and this must be recognized before the high dropout rate can be addressed.

Limitations and Future Research Studies

A limit of this study was that although there was a good cross section of participants, it may be difficult to categorize the findings to all schools because some of the participants in this study also attended alternative schools and thus the data may not be applicable for students only attending a traditional school setting.

Another limitation was finding students willing to participate who had dropped out. During the selection process, a number of participants agreed to participate but didn't follow through with the initial interview. Locating students who dropped out was also a challenge due to not having current addresses and telephone numbers. To extend this research, one could conduct a longitudinal study on the academic engagement of students that have dropped out, specifically addressing their performance from kindergarten to the date of their last attendance.

Further research should also collect more evidence on the factors of those students that returned to school to earn a diploma after dropping out. Further research questions could be, what was the reason for dropping out and why did you return? Further research could investigate students ages 15-18 and ask questions of why they drop out of school to gain a GED. What were the factors contributed to them leaving school?

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APPENDIX A

DISTRICT PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

EUSD Institutional Review Board

Date: January 3, 2011

To: **Craig Gilbert**

Cc: IRB file
Director of Curriculum

From:

RE: Acceptance of research project/proposal

Dear Craig,

This letter is notification that your research proposal for “Negotiation of Organizational Structure and Supports” has been approved with parental consent required. You may conduct your research in the Eastside Unified School District as outlined in your study.

Please note that the Principal Investigator is responsible for 1) complying with human subjects research regulations, 2) retaining signed consents by all subjects unless a waiver is granted, 3) notifying the IRB of any and all modifications (amendments) to the protocol and consent form and submitting them to the IRB for approval before implementation and 4) supplying a final report to the district.

Sincerely,

Associate Superintendent

APPENDIX B
ASU IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Elizabeth Kozleski
SST

From: Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 01/14/2011

Committee Action: Expedited Approval

Approval Date: 01/14/2011

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 1101005889

Study Title: Stay in School or Dropout: Negotiation of Organizational Structure and Supports

Expiration Date: 01/13/2012

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

APPENDIX C
DROPOUT PROFILE

Dropout Profile is based on the 451 students that dropped out over a three-year period of time (2005- 2008)

Demographic Data

Gender

- 53% Male and
- 47% Female

Age

- 32% of the students were 18 years old
- 24% of the students were 17 years old
- 16% of the students were 16 years old
- 16% of the students were 19 years old

Ethnicity

- 45% of the students were White
- 39% of the students were Hispanic
- 7% of the students were Black
- 4% of the students were Native American
- 4% of the students were Asian

Grade

- 44% of the students were 12th grade
- 22% of the students were 10th grade
- 21% of the students were 11th grade
- 13% of the students were 9th grade

Academic Data

Credits

- 36% earned 6 credits or less
- 32% earned 6.5 – 12 credits
- 22% earned 12.5 – 18 credits
- 8% earned 18.5 – 21.5 credits

Behavioral Data

Discipline Infractions

- 58% of the population had **one** discipline infraction
- 27% of the population has 2-6 discipline infractions
- 26 students had 10 or more discipline infractions

Most frequent discipline infractions (percent of the dropout population)

- 30% Failure to meet expectations
- 16% Defiance of authority
- 11% Disruptive behavior – classroom/campus
- 6% Excessive tardies
- 5% Disrespect
- 4% Profanity – directed/non-directed
- 3% Fighting

Attendance (based on average number of days per year)

- 77% of students missed 15 days or less
- 50% of the students missed 8 days or less

State of Arizona Withdrawal Reason Codes

Reasons for leaving prior to graduating consist of

- 10.64% dropout,
- 13.97% earned a GED,
- 30.60% status unknown,
- .89% summer dropout,
- 10.68% summer status unknown,
- 3.10% summer GED,
- 11.31% completers, and
- 5.10% expulsion and long term suspension.

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCHERS

Craig L. Gilbert, Director of Secondary Education and doctoral student at Arizona State University, has invited your participation in a research study. The study is part of a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth B. Kozleski, a professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University.

STUDY PURPOSE

Several studies have been conducted looking into the subject of students choosing to dropping out or staying in school. It is with this knowledge that the current study will investigate how high school students negotiate social supports and organizational structures in their decision making to staying in or dropping out of school.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study of how high school students choose to stay in school or drop out. The study involves interviews that look into the influence of family, your perceptions of school starting in your primary years, social and academic supports, and your ideas on what has helped you or created barriers in choosing to stay in school or drop out. The interviews will be conducted in person, in three separate sessions, and audio-taped and transcribed.

The second interview will be based on a 10-minute video of age appropriate compiled movie clips that relate to influencing factors that have been found in research to school leaving.

At the beginning of the second and third interviews, follow-up questions generated from the previous interviews will be used to clarify any responses from the participant. This time will also be utilized to summarize the researcher's interpretation of interviews and give the participant an opportunity to clarify any data they feel is incorrect.

If you say YES, then your participation will last for about four weeks. The interview will be conducted at the participants current or previous high school, library connected to the school or a district school located near the participant. You will be asked to participate in three 60- to 90-minute interviews. Five to seven young adult participants of 18 years of age or older will participate in this study locally.

RISKS

There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research are the results of the study may assist schools in developing programs to address student's needs as they encounter situations in school that may create barriers to their completion of high school.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Craig L. Gilbert will change names and the location of the study. All data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. Names of participants will be coded on documentation and audiotapes and videos will be secured in a private safe.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is OK for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Eastside Unified School District and your participation is voluntary; nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

There is no payment for your participation in the study.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by Craig L. Gilbert phone number 000-000-000 (Craig.Gilbert@asu.edu). You can also contact Dr. Elizabeth B. Kozleski at 000- 000-0000 (Elizabeth.Kozleski@asu.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at 480-965 6788.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw

your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature. These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by Arizona State University to the Office for Human Research Protections to protect the rights of human subjects. I have provided (offered) the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document."

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student completing my dissertation under the direction of Professor Dr. Elizabeth B. Kozleski, professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to investigate how high school students negotiate social supports and organizational structures in their decision making about staying in or dropping out of school.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will last for about four weeks. By accepting, your child will be asked to participate in three 60 to 90 minute interviews that will be audio-taped and transcribed. Interviews will focus on family influences and student perceptions of school starting in your primary years. Each interview will also explore social and academic supports as well as their ideas on what has helped or created barriers for them in choosing to stay in school or drop out. During the second interview, questions will be based on a 10-minute video of age appropriate compiled movie clips that relate to influencing factors that have been found in research to school leaving.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Eastside Unified School District nor will it affect your grade. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation may assist schools in developing programs to address student's needs as they encounter situations in school that may create barriers to their completion of high school.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Craig L. Gilbert will change names and location of the study. All data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. Names of participants will be coded on documentation and audiotapes and videos will be secured in a private safe.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at (000) 000-0000 or Dr. Kozleski at (000) 000-0000.

Sincerely,

Craig L. Gilbert

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____
(Child's name) to participate in the above study

Signature

Printed Name

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.

APPENDIX F
CHILD ASSENT FORM

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate in a study concerning how high school students negotiate social supports and the organizational structures in their decision making to staying in or dropping out of school.

If I decide to participate, then I will be joining a study of how high school students choose to stay in school or drop out. The study involves interviews that look into the influence of my family and my perceptions of school starting in your primary years, social and academic supports, and your ideas on what has helped you or created barriers in choosing to stay in school or drop out. By accepting, I will be asked to participate in three 60 to 90 minute interviews that will be audio-taped and transcribed.

The second interview will be based on a 10-minute video of age appropriate compiled movie clips that relate to influencing factors that have been found in research to school leaving.

At the beginning of the second and third interviews, follow-up questions generated from the previous interviews will be used to clarify any of my responses. (This time will also be utilized to summarize the researcher's interpretation of interviews and give the participant an opportunity to clarify any data they feel is incorrect).

If I say YES, my participation will last for about four weeks. The interview will be conducted at my current or previous high school, library connected to the school or a district school located near me. The three interviews will be 60- to 90-minute long.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, there will be no consequences to me in any way.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX G
FIRST INTERVIEW

Culture (Open the conversation)

- Will you please tell me about yourself?
- Tell me about where you grew up?
- Can you tell me a little about your family?
- What were some of the most important lessons you learned from your family as you were growing up?
- What is the education level of the members in your family?
- How is education viewed in your home?
- Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Efficacy

- What skills do you feel you need to be successful in school and why?
- What type of student do you think you are?

Academic knowledge

- How do you think reading played a role in your life?
- How do you feel you learn from reading?

Mentoring or guidance

- Tell me about the types of guidance you receive at school and how it affected you?
- What type of grades have you received in school?
- If you needed help in school, what would you do?

Cultural modeling

- While in school, whom do you feel most comfortable with?
- Who were some of the most important people who influenced how you make decisions?

Early knowledge

- Can you tell me about your experience in elementary and junior high school?

Identity

- Found in first set of questions

Family

- How is your family involved in your school as it relates to you?
- Found in first set of questions

Structural of school

- Have you very been in trouble at school? When? What were the consequences?
- What type of support do you feel you get at school, home and by whom?

School Engagement

- Can you tell me about the teachers at your school?
- Do you have a favorite teacher? Why
- Do you have a favorite subject? Why
- How do you feel you fit in at school?
- How are you involved in school?

APPENDIX H
VIDEO CLIP DESCRIPTIONS

Video clips based on areas recognized in research regarding school leaving or staying. Each clip corresponds with questions posed in part three of the second interview. The following addresses the name of the movie, the connection to the framework and a summary of the scene selected to be viewed by the participants.

- a. Movie Clip 1: Stand and Deliver –
 - This clip focused on school structure within the experiential area of the framework. The video clip begins with students being notified by a letter read from their teacher that national testing organization felt they all cheated on the test. Investigators were sent to the school to talk to the students and they asked them to tell the truth because they did not believe them. Students from this low SES area were not expected to perform as well as these students did.

- b. Movie Clip 2: Real Woman Have Curves –
 - This clip focused on family relationships and access to mentors. The video shows a high school teacher and mentor coming to the student's home to let her parents know their daughter was accepted and received a full scholarship to attend a prestigious university. The family was happy to hear the news but did not approve of their daughter leaving the family to go to school. Her parents believed the family should stay together and used this to make the daughter feel guilty for wanting to leave. The teacher reminds the family that they came to the country for a better opportunities and their daughter should have this opportunity.

- c. Movie Clip 3: Finding Forester –
 - This clip focused on school structure and school engagement within the Experiential and Psychological area respectively of the framework. This video shows a teacher poses questions to a student in front of the class that appears to suggest the teacher was demonstrating his superiority over the student. As the student has trouble answering, the teacher continues to belittle him because he does not know the answers to the questions that the teacher implies the student should know.

- d. Movie Clip 4: Freedom Writers –
 - This clip focuses on Neighborhood and Community as well as Identity of the framework. This video shows the landscape of a school where students are sitting around campus at lunch in different groupings. This clip was narrated by a student introducing the groups on campus and the rules and boundaries within and outside the established communities.

- e. Movie Clip 5: Mr. Holland's Opus –
- This clip focuses on School engagement and school structure within the Psychological and Experiential areas respectively of the framework. This video shows the first day of a music class. The teacher attempts to begin the class by asking questions to introduce the topic but the students make no attempt to answer any of the questions posed by the teacher and he moves on without any interaction.
- f. Movie Clip 6: Freedom Writers –
- This clip focused on school structure within the experiential area of the framework. This video shows the exchange between two teachers after one had difficulties in the classroom. The first teacher tries to encourage the second teacher by expressing once she put in her time, she could teacher upper level classes and many of the problem students will have already stopped coming to school. The second teacher responds by stating if she does her job students would come to class.
- g. Movie Clip 7: Mr. Holland's Opus –
- This clip focuses on relationships and access to mentoring as well as efficacy within the Psychological area of the framework. This clip shows a student having difficulty playing an instrument and begins to cry. Through the teacher student exchange, the student expresses the many accomplishments of her family members while she is unable to find something she could be successful at on her own.

APPENDIX I
SECOND INTERVIEW

1. Member check and clarifying questions to be determined from first interview
2. Questions based on themes that surface in previous interview
3. Questions conducted after participant views video clips based on areas recognized in research of school leaving and staying.
 - a. Questions conducted after participant views video clips based on areas recognized in research of school leaving and staying.
 - b. When thinking about your school experience, describe what this clip makes you think about? Why?
 - c. When you view this clip, what do you think students on your campus would say family interaction looks like?
 - d. When reflecting on your own experiences in the classroom, share what this clip makes you think about.
 - e. From your experience, what is your impression of this school and why do you feel this way?
 - f. From your own experience, describe how this class makes you feel. Why?
 - g. When you view this clip of teachers interacting and expressing their views about students, describe the thoughts that come to mind? Why?
 - h. Why do you think the girl is upset and can you see how students could feel this way? Share why or why not.
4. General questions
 - a. Can you share your high school experience?
 - b. When you think of school, what are the things that come to mind?
 - c. What made you decide to stay/dropout of school? (based on group)

APPENDIX J
THIRD INTERVIEW

1. Member check and clarifying questions to be determined from second interview
2. Questions for participant reflection
 - a. Based on what you have shared about school, what can prevent students from doing well in school?
 - b. Are there people you feel have an advantage when it comes to doing well in school?
 - c. Who are you outside of school and what does that look like?
 - d. If you had it to do over, is there anything you would change in your actions or decision-making about (leaving/staying in) school? (Based on group)
 - e. What kind of advice would you give other young people about staying in or dropping out of school?
 - f. Now that you have had time to reflect through these interviews, what meaning have you been able to draw from this experience?

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Craig Lamont Gilbert was born and raised in San Jose, California. He was the second from the youngest in a family of seven children. As a student-athlete, he was awarded a full scholarship to play football at the University of Arizona. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Health Related Professions, he began his teaching career in Tucson. In 1998, he moved to Phoenix to support his wife in her educational pursuits and accepted a position teaching and coaching at Willis Junior High School in the Chandler Unified School District. The following year, he joined the staff of Chandler's Hamilton High School as a classroom teacher and coach. Upon completing his master's degree in Educational Administration in the fall of 2000, he joined the school's administrative team as Dean of Students. The following spring, his role was expanded as he was selected as the Assistant Principal in charge of freshmen. He subsequently was appointed to the Senior Assistant principal position of Hamilton High School. In the spring of 2005, he was named principal at Chandler's brand new Payne Junior High School. He was also the first African American principal in the Chandler Unified School District. In the spring of 2007, he was selected to the position of Director of Secondary Education. After a rigorous and invaluable four years, in the fall of 2011, he was then appointed to the position of Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education.

As a student that some would have considered at risk, it was the experiences as a student and an athlete that motivated Craig. He truly believes in the potentially powerful role the classroom teacher plays in the life of a child. It is with this belief that Craig strives to treat others regardless of age or status, with respect and dignity. His goal is to positively influence those around him to maximize their skills and realize their dreams.